UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

Employer Concerns with the Quality of the Skills and Knowledge of Recently Employed Graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for Tertiary Education, Public policy and Practice

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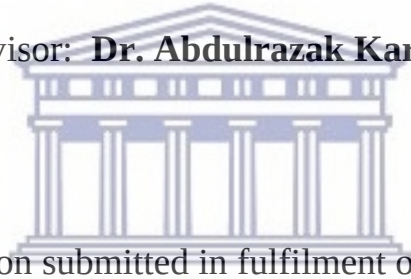


A dissertation by publication submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophiae in Development Studies* in the Institute of Social Development, Faculty of Economic and Management Science, University of the Western Cape.

10 November 2022

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the nature and significance of current employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates. Employers require graduates who are able to perform the tasks expected of them in the workplace. However, the study found that most employed graduates in South Africa lack the ability to perform tasks due to universities struggling to suitably equip them for workplaces. The study focused on how graduates transfer their university acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace to establish whether employers considered graduates workplace ready.

The contribution of universities to labour market requirements was examined from the perspectives of graduates employed in different industries nationally, and management teams and employed graduates of a case organisation. The research goals were: (1) to establish whether the skills and knowledge required by the labour market are reflected in the advertised degree programmes of universities; and (2) to assess whether the skills and knowledge shortcomings could have been adequately addressed by universities during the graduate's course of study. Against the background of employed graduates' experiences and employer concerns, the regulatory influences on university teaching and learning practices and workplace employee relationships were assessed.

Several qualitative data collection tools were employed that included an online open-ended questionnaire, focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews with different stakeholders as well as a review of primary and secondary literature sources such as documents and the electronic media. The study recognises two types of skills' issues that are relevant to employer concerns and these are identified as type 1 and type 2 skills. **Type 1 skills** describe the production of skills that are irrelevant or for which there is little demand within the labour market. **Type 2** skills describe the tasks and/or jobs expected within the workplace that graduates cannot execute. This research specifically focused on **Type 2 skills**. In this regard, the study examined whether employers and employer bodies, universities, graduates and governments should address *some* or *all* of these concerns and, if so, what should be done by the relevant parties to address these shortcomings. The signalling theory, the certification theory, the matching theory, the moral hazard theory, the agency theory, the adverse selection theory and the economics of trust, reputation and information theory informed the study. The use of multiple theories guided the data collection and interpretation to produce new

perspectives on graduate workplace readiness (Cairney, 2013). Empirical alternatives were explored using Deweyan pragmatism that advocates responding to teaching and learning preparedness by cancelling constructs of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The research reveals that employer concerns are justifiable and that the processes of university skills and knowledge production are not contributing effectively to graduate productivity at workplaces. The study also confirms that the issue of who holds autonomy amongst stakeholders gives rise to constructs of “us” and “them” – a challenge that is exacerbated by regulatory influences that stifle stakeholder flexibility and creates dependency. Proposals for the reform of university teaching and learning practices and revised regulatory considerations complete the study.

Keywords: (addressed in three articles)

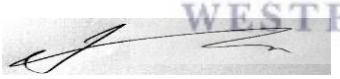
Workplace readiness, employed graduates, skills and knowledge, teaching and learning practices, labour market requirements, quality of skills and knowledge, university contribution, regulatory implementation influences, university graduate development, workplace conflicts, moral hazard theory, economics of trust and information theory, adverse selection theory, signalling theory.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Student name: Kaashiefa Mobarak

Student number: 2052853

I understand what plagiarism is and declare that this dissertation by publication titled: "**Employer Concerns with the Quality of the Skills and Knowledge of Recently Employed Graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for University Education, Public policy and Practice**" is my own original work. Where literary sources have been used from print or electronic media or any other additional sources, this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with the requirements of the respective journals in chapters three, four and five, and the Harvard referencing requirements as prescribed by the Institute of Social Development in chapters one, two and six. This dissertation ascribes to the University of the Western Cape's policy in this regard. Work previously produced by another person have not been handed in as my own.

Signature:  **Date: 8 November 2022**

DEFINITIONS OF PHRASES

Workplace readiness	The process/es of equipping oneself with the skills, knowledge, self-sufficiency, reliability and capability to perform jobs and tasks expected by employers (Campbell, 2019).
Employed graduates	Graduates who graduated between the period January 2010 and March 2017 who have been employed for a minimum period of 6 months.
University graduate development	A 'skill' means that you are able to do something; 'knowledge' is information, facts and skills acquired in the form of theory and/or practice through experience and/or education (Bandy, 2021).
Labour market requirements	The environment where employers interact with employees to hire the best in order to compete and service the demand and supply of its business and the economy within which it operates (Kenton, 2020).
Regulatory Implementation Influences	Set of statements in the form of rules, principles and guidelines that seeks to structure and shape specific areas in order to achieve particular goals (Bartels, 2018).
Quality of skills and knowledge	The standard and ability of converting theoretical knowledge to the scope and relevant skills of expected jobs and tasks.
Teaching and learning practices	The creative and effective environments that influence student learning to achieve desired outcomes with methods and activities for best intended preparation (DeJaeghere, Duong and Vu Dao, 2021).

Workplace conflicts	The workplace frictions of graduate against experienced non-graduate employees.
University contribution	Increasing the productive proportion of educated workers who can operate efficiently and competently in an economy (Myklebust, 2017).

DEDICATION

All praise is due to Allah who instilled in us principles of humanity that are designed to seek knowledge for the greater good. May I continue to be guided on a path of knowledge acquisition for the greater good as intended by this study and may I never forget to be thankful for His guidance.

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. You may have left the physical world but your principled footprints and wisdom are cemented in my existence. You continue to live in four generations of offspring who fondly remember your life lessons.

Thank you for teaching me to put Allah above all else.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- My sincerest gratitude is extended to my supervisor, **Dr Abdulrazak Karriem**, who supported me on this PhD journey by allowing me to hold my own and trusting my commitment to complete this project.

- **Professor José Frantz** – there are truly no words to describe your selfless commitment to the development of others on this PhD journey. Your Developing the Scholar (DTS) programme is the vehicle that allows individual academic development and the UWC's organisational growth. Thank you for your commitment to scholarly access and redress without discrimination against age, race or gender. You will transcend in the many souls you continue to affect. *Blessings to you – Always, God willing*.

- **Leon Poshai** – thank you for allowing my arguments and guiding my thoughts and writing as my writing coach. You contributed to my sanity and focus on this PhD journey. I will always value your contribution to my success.

- **Dr Doug Blackmur** – you have shown faith in me since the first year you started lecturing in South Africa. Thank you for leaving Australia and moulding my transition from the corporate world into academia. Thank you for tolerating my opinionated topical stances and arguments. You will always be treasured as my mentor.

- **Jacqueline Manuels** – many thanks for your kind and patient administrative assistance. Thank you, Jacqui, for going the extra mile when it was so greatly needed. May you be blessed wherever your path takes you Godwilling.

- **Cyril Clarke** – where do I begin to thank you for your kind and efficient editing services. May you never experience a student like me who had turnaround times that would maybe be refused for any amount of money. Sincere thanks for your commitment to my success.

Figure A: Research Pathway (Source: Author's construct)

PUBLICATIONS AND DISSEMINATION

This PhD in Development Studies followed the format of a dissertation by publication as outlined in the University of the Western Cape, PhD by Publication Guidelines document. The results of the different phases of the study were progressively presented at national and international conferences and published in reputable accredited journals. The phase one and phase two articles submitted for publication to both the South African Journal of Higher Education and SAGE International Journal of Higher Education, were reviewed and published within four and six months respectively from the date of submission of the manuscripts. The respective reviewers had none to minimal requests for editing of the submitted manuscripts. As an early career researcher my confidence received a boost that will definitely result in increased post-doctoral publications. The interest shown in this study by conference participants and the reputable, accredited journals confirms the importance of the research topic and the problem being addressed by this research.

The findings of the different phases of this study were presented at the following conferences:

- HELTASA (Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa) 20-23 November 2018. Nelson Mandela University: Port Elizabeth.
- ICERI (12th International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation) 10-13 November 2019. Seville, Spain.

Published articles:

- Mobarak, K. (2019). Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace readiness. *South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE)*, 33(4), 186 – 202. Accessible at https://www.journals.ac.za/index.php/sajhe/article/view/3337. DOI: https://doi.org/10.20853/33-4-3337.
- Mobarak, K. (2020). Exploring the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective. *Industry and Higher Education*. SAGE Publications, 35(2). Accessible

at. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0950422220935784. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220935784.

Article under review for publication:

Mobarak, K. (2022). Regulatory implementation influences on university graduate development and graduate against non-graduate workplace conflicts. Industry and Higher Education. SAGE Publications

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Figure 1.2: Dissertation Framework

ABBREVIATONS AND ACRONYMS

HRDS	Human Resource Development Strategy of SA (2010-2030)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework Act No 67 of 2008
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SABPP	South African Board of Personnel Practices
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
SDA	Skills Development Act No 97 of 1998
SDLA	Skills Development Levies Act No 9 of 1999
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
WPSP	Workplace Skills Plan
CHE	Council for Higher Education
NACE	National Association of Colleges and Employers
NPC	National Planning Commission
NDP	National Development Plan

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction and Background to the Research

This research focused on the alleged lack of skills and knowledge of employed graduates in South Africa. The study examined the nature of employer concerns with their recently employed graduates' skills and knowledge with the objective of establishing how employers perceive graduates' skills and knowledge within workplaces. It was important to examine the processes of teaching and learning at universities, especially in light of continued employer concerns about the production of skills and knowledge, that result in ill-prepared university graduates (Master, 2014; Vollgraaff, 2015; Hansen, 2017.; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). The responsibility and accountability of stakeholders in the processes of teaching and learning impact on the ability of graduates to meet the requirements of workplaces and consequently the labour market. Employer concerns with their recently employed graduates who cannot do the jobs expected of them in workplaces negatively impact on the sustainable growth and competitive ability of companies and, consequently, the South African economy (Genetzky, 2011).

Empirical alternatives embedded in the accountability and responsibility of stakeholders in university teaching and learning practices were explored with Deweyan pragmatism. John Dewey's pragmatic views on experiential learning advocates for educators to facilitate quality educational experiences so that graduates can obtain relevant work-related skills and knowledge (Elkjaer, 2009). This study draws on the insights of Dewey (1916) by arguing that the balance between practical and theoretical attitudes in learning can positively influence students' futures and consequently the labour market. As an advocate for quality and relevant university education I want this study to remind stakeholders of the importance of a quality and positive education that contributes to social justice as a priority expressed in the principles of the National Development Plan (NPC) (National Planning Commission, 2011). Mesquida, Pereira and Bernz (2017) draw on Soetard (1985) by arguing that social justice is achieved with positive and quality educational experiences as promoted by the father of modern-day pedagogy, Johann Pestalozzi. Pestalozzi favoured education as a tool for social justice to bridge the economic divide between citizens and to avoid economic isolation which was a consequence of the apartheid legacy in South Africa.

There is a long-standing dissatisfaction amongst some employers in many countries with the quality of the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates from tertiary education institutions (Master, 2014; Hansen, 2017; National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), 2017; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). Employers complain about the mismatch between the skills and knowledge possessed by graduates from universities and the labour market requirements. This alleged lack of graduate skills and knowledge raises concerns about the learning outcomes and/or learning standards signalled by university qualifications (Botes and Sharma, 2017). Organisations rely on the messages or signals received about the quality of qualifications awarded by universities that also appear in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Employers trust the reliability of this information when they form their expectations of what graduates know and can do when they are employed (Vollgraaff, 2015). The nature and significance of current employer concerns with the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates raise questions about the quality of university qualifications. The national government's Skills Development Policy frameworks (SDA, 1998) intend university qualifications to contribute to employment and consequently economic growth. These are important implications for South Africa's ability to compete internationally and to achieve the rate of growth consistent with a fair and prosperous society.

This research recognises and integrates the global concerns of employers with the skills and knowledge of graduates. Given the global challenges regarding the uncertainty and complexity of the employability of graduates from universities (Bennett, Richardson, Mahat, Coates, MacKinnon and Schmidt, 2015), and the need to enhance the skills and knowledge of graduates (Tran, 2012), a national stakeholder analysis is presented in this research study. The stakeholder analysis presents commentaries and the influences on the teaching and learning practices and expectations of graduate development for the labour market. The regulatory influence on the production of skills and knowledge in universities resonates with employer concerns at an international level (Gernetzky, 2011; Vollgraaff, 2015; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). This study offers new insights of different approaches to teaching and learning practices, as well as stakeholder responsibility and accountability, thereby contributing to the global agenda of graduate labour market readiness. Stakeholders such as graduates, employers, employer bodies, universities and governments are given importance with the expectation that the re-design of teaching and learning processes can add value to everyone involved.

Ideally, prospective students should have alternative options of education processes that contribute effectively to their future needs, resulting in labour markets being provided with a relevant recruitment pool of graduates. This is only possible if university teaching and learning processes in degree programmes suitably respond to expected quality standards. The continuing employer concerns with the quality of university qualifications and the workplace ability of graduates should clearly indicate to universities that they are not effective in the production of skills and knowledge required by the labour market.

1.2 Framing the Research Problem

Employer concerns with the quality of qualifications, their responses and labour market consequences relate to wider concerns for South Africa's ability to compete internationally and domestically to sustain and grow the economy. If employer concerns are ignored this can hinder the achievement of a rate of economic growth consistent with a fair and prosperous society. Persistent global stakeholder concerns about the skills and knowledge production by universities emphasise the necessity for examining the responsibility and accountability of stakeholders in this process. Scholars such as Gernetzky (2011), Vollgraaff (2015), Hansen (2017) and others concur that the development of workplace-ready graduates requires a review of the teaching and learning strategies currently informing classroom learning. For example, Hansen (2017) argues that the curricula taught in universities should be compatible with labour market requirements and expectations. This would not only ensure the livelihood of graduates, but also their relevance in an increasingly competitive and changing labour market.

As much as universities have argued for many years that they teach to '*think and not do*', they cannot deny that existing teaching strategies are not adequately preparing graduates for the workplace (Hansen, 2017, Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). The survey results of the Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media's Marketplace indicated that employers confirmed that graduates were poorly prepared for employment regardless of technological tools being available as teaching and learning aids (Fischer, 2013). The survey results were critiqued by academics who argued that preparing graduates for workplaces was the responsibility of the employer who hire graduates (Heckman, 2013). In the past curricula content had to be drilled into students' heads but in recent times information is a 'phone swipe' away which should translate into better preparation of graduates (Haber, 2020). However, access to information still requires the ability to think critically about the information that

educators have a responsibility to develop in students if the manifestos of universities are believed. Some universities' mission statements include that they are seeking to foster lifelong habits of careful observation, critical thinking, moral reflection, articulate expression and creativity (Schlueter, 2016). Other universities claim to foster intellectual inquiry, ethical leadership, engaged citizenship, and creative experience and thereby prepare students to navigate a complex global environment (Schlueter, 2016). Teaching critical thinking skills has become synonymous with universities but no evidence has been found that universities actually teach critical thinking skills with any success (Schlueter, 2016). Most universities claim to have made progress in teaching critical thinking skills, yet 75% of employers claim that students lack the ability to think critically and solve problems (Haber, 2020).

This study is informed by increasing media debates about employer concerns with the alleged lack of skills and knowledge of graduates (Gernetzky, 2011; Master, 2014; Vollgraaff, 2015; Hansen, 2017), and the related research surveys, reports and proposals calling for graduate curriculum reform (CHE, 2014; NACE, 2016, DeJaeghere, Duong and Vu Dao, 2021). Continuing debates by various stakeholders on different platforms call for responsibility and accountability in the process of qualifications production as a moral obligation. Considering the extent of the moral hazard that unsuitable qualifications result in (Emons 1988), it becomes questionable whether a graduate should have recourse if the degree quality is not what was expected. Universities have a responsibility to capacitate students for the world of work which they intend to enter. This is so because the admission to degree programmes is in fact a legal contract between the university and the student. The admission of a student into a university to pursue a degree programme constitutes a transaction or agreement between the parties involved in the process of learning. The time and money invested in achieving a university degree equates to the sale of goods and services in the transaction as advocated by agency-theory (Kivisto and Zaleyevska, 2015). The unfairness of the process is consequently experienced when, after having been employed, the graduate is told that he/she had not been suitably prepared for the workplace by their university. Arguments and debates about who is 'right and wrong' and 'us and them' become redundant when university degrees are a requirement for employment, even for employees with existing workplace experience but no university degree.

The research recognised the complex and broader context of the social constructs and relationships in the production of university skills and knowledge for labour market and workplace applicability. Therefore, it focused on merging the responsibility and accountability

of all stakeholders for the greater good. I acknowledge bias emerging from my industry and academic experience in the application of theory in practice as a student and employee. Consequently, I do not discard entirely the need for university teaching and learning practices of graduate labour market readiness. Instead, I explore the contradictions and possibilities for rethinking processes of teaching and learning for practice with the relevant stakeholders. The lived and practical experiences of various stakeholders can assist in broadening and expanding creativity and innovation for the quality production of qualifications – locally and globally. Global debates about graduate workplace readiness reveal the need for collective engagement relevant to diverse societies.

On a broader scale, the ineffective production of skills and knowledge by universities is a social injustice to the labour markets and the societies they serve. Johann Pestalozzi argued that education should be used as a tool for social justice and not to further economic isolation, which is the case if poor quality qualifications result in graduates that are incapable of competing for their personal growth and livelihood (Mesquida et al., 2017). As a stakeholder of the skills and knowledge produced by universities, employed graduates struggle to fulfil workplace demands, and this negatively impact employers. Ironically, employers have to re-train graduates in skills and knowledge that reflect in university degree programmes which graduates are incapable of applying when they are employed. When this happens, it becomes evident that the skills and knowledge production of universities are inadequate and do not contribute meaningfully to labour market expectations, as this study reveals.

Employers are willing to contribute to and collaborate with universities to assist in the processes of teaching and learning practices. They concede to the possibility of power-plays of autonomy in these processes that might cause challenges, but are convinced that students can benefit from a more meaningful stakeholder collaboration. Franco, Silva and Rodrigues (2019) argue that students are eager to work in a practical environment and desire to acquire influences of new knowledge. For this reason, employers are encouraged to contribute to graduate development by giving an input in structuring the degree programmes offered by universities in South Africa. The Deweyan pragmatism philosophy can assist in the design and implementation of such collaborative initiatives.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

1.3.1 Research aim

This study examined the nature of employer concerns with their recently employed graduates' skills and knowledge in order to develop proposals for reforming and improving processes of graduates' skills and knowledge development for labour markets

1.3.2 Research objectives

- To examine employed graduates' skills and knowledge application experiences at the workplace.
- To establish employer perceptions and experiences with the skills and knowledge of graduates upon employment.
- To assess the regulatory implementation influences on university teaching and learning practices and employee relationships in the workplace.
- To develop proposals for reforming and improving the processes of graduates' skills and knowledge development for labour markets.

1.4 Research Questions and Sub-Questions

1.4.1 Main research question

How do employers perceive the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates from universities?

1.4.2 Research sub-questions

1. How do employed graduates experience the transfer of university acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace upon employment?
2. What operational challenges and concerns do employers have with employed graduates' skills and knowledge at the workplace?
3. To what extent do regulatory implementation influence university teaching and learning practices and employee relationships in the workplace?

1.5 An Overview of the Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach is used to examine the extent to which degree programmes offered by universities in South Africa reflect the skills and knowledge requirements of employers. This approach to social inquiry guided me in the analysis of the extent to which universities can sufficiently prepare graduates for the labour market as argued by Bowen (2008). The research was conducted in three phases with each phase constituting a research article presented as chapters three, four and five in this dissertation. Each article answers the research objectives.

Phase one begins with a pilot Google open-ended questionnaire online survey of six employed graduates purposely selected to test the questionnaire. This is followed by a national Google open-ended questionnaire online survey of twenty-four employed graduates from eight South African universities and nine different industries about their workplace readiness upon employment.

Phase two is a case study utilising multiple qualitative data collection methods in a process of naturalistic enquiry where an online survey of thirty employed graduates of the case organisation using the Google open-ended questionnaire of phase one; one focus group discussion with ten of the graduates who participated in the online survey; six focus group discussions with twenty-four managers from nine different business units; and one-on-one interviews with three business divisional heads of the case organisation.

Phase three is a qualitative interview study consisting of one-on-one interviews with commerce lecturers, three from private universities and three from public universities. One-on-one interviews with three business unit senior managers of the case organisation form part of the data collection process for this study. The study assesses the regulatory influence on university teaching and learning practices and graduate against non-graduate workplace relationships. The case organisation is the City of Cape Town, for which research access was obtained from the mayor's office via an official application process over a 6-month period.

An analysis and review of primary and secondary literature sources, including a qualitative content analysis of the degree programme information on the websites of seven South African universities, as well as the opinions of various stakeholders expressed in newspaper articles, informed the initial data collection process for each research phase, respectively. The two

Google open-ended questionnaire online surveys and one graduate focus group session assisted with establishing the experiences of employed graduates in transferring their university acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace. The management focus group discussions focused on the employer workplace experiences with employed graduates and the one-on-one interviews assessed the regulatory influence on university teaching and learning practices and the graduate against non-graduate workplace relationships.

Data was analysed using thematic content analyses, where the coding system was used to develop themes as proposed by Mayring (2014). The thematic content analysis method allowed for a descriptive approach in the coding process and the interpretation of the data. Thematic content analysis enabled the extraction of the views, opinions, knowledge and experiences of the participants from the different sets of data generated by the different data collection methods. The variation in the respondent comments were presented within themes and sub-themes. A detailed overview of the research design and methodology is provided in Chapter 2.

1.6 Significance of the Study and Research Gaps

This qualitative study examines the nature of employer concerns with recently employed graduates' skills and knowledge with the objective of establishing how employers perceive graduate skills and knowledge within workplaces. A review of the literature sources examined was useful in exploring the current debates on the nature and significance of employer concerns with the quality of university qualifications and responses to these. There are many other key factors that may impact on a graduate's lack of skills and knowledge and related employer concerns. For example, flexible demands of industry and economic downturns affecting organisational expectations of employees to multi-task across job functions and/or tasks which graduates are struggling to perform. Two types of skills issues are contextualised within these employer concerns. **Type 1** involves the production of skills that are irrelevant or for which there is little demand within the labour market. **Type 2** captures graduates that cannot do the tasks and/or jobs expected of them in the workplace. This research focuses on **Type 2** graduates who hold what seemed to be appropriate qualifications, but upon employment could not do all the employers were led to expect they could do. The **Type 1** skills issue provides examples and suggestions for outlining the **Type 2** skills issue. Both skills concerns the impact on national government's initiatives of skills development for rebuilding the economy, thereby

contributing to economic growth. These government initiatives include the following regulatory policies and practices:

- Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS) of SA (2010-2030);
- National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS);
- National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act No 67 of 2008;
- Skills Development Act No 97 of 1998;
- Skills Development Levies Act No 9 of 1999;
- Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs);
- Workplace Skills Plan (WPSP).

The above-named listed regulatory policies are not analysed or reported on in this study. The regulatory influences resulting from the implementation of the regulatory policies in the development of graduates by universities and the recruitment of these graduates by employers inform this study. A growing interest in the uncertainty and complexity of the higher education dilemma (Bennett, et al., 2015), and the awareness and enhancement of graduate employability continue (Tran, 2012). However, these studies did not adequately explore the daily lived experiences of the affected stakeholders. Furthermore, literature searches focused on the topics taught in degree programmes, but do not explore the perceptions of employed graduates from different industry sectors, among others, Health, Education, Accounting, Finance, Retail and Sports, to the full extent of transferring the acquired university skills and knowledge into different workplaces.

Due to the evident gaps in this area of research, this study needed to establish the extent of employer concerns and related debates in practice. The guiding interrogative questions below-mentioned informed the online questionnaire and interview schedules utilised for data collection:

- Why was university contribution to skills and knowledge production important to labour markets and workplaces in practice?
- What were the employer concerns with graduates' skills and knowledge after they had been employed?
- Who was responsible for the shortcomings in the skills and knowledge of graduates?

- How are university skills and knowledge developed and aligned to match workplace needs?

Some questions revolved around stakeholder responsibility and accountability and the importance of each in knowledge contribution for the labour market and these are:

- What were the roles and expectations of the different stakeholders in the skills and knowledge production process?
- How can the stakeholders be accessed to assist and/or contribute to the graduates' development process?
- Is it possible to access experiences and skills and knowledge production information and ideas from a diverse group of participants?

This research contributes to the development of teaching and learning practices that links university learning to workplace needs and demands. It considers the pragmatic learning theory of Dewey (1916) for the conversion of theory to practice by envisaging stakeholder participation and the need for a more relevant approach to the production of skills and knowledge by universities. The study employs a theoretical framework that links and integrates the responsibility and accountability of interested parties, such as universities, employers and government (Kivisto et al., 2015) as a starting point to consider the consequences of the current practices of teaching and learning as a moral hazard for the economy, if not re-developed (Emons, 1988). Furthermore, the theoretical framework informs the need for academic staff to stay current in their fields and to incorporate relevant content in their teaching practices to transform theory to practice.

The research reveals the pros and cons of degree programme information that can assist prospective students and employers to consider the signals sent by universities (Frega et al., 2011) in their judgement of what university degree programmes are in truth offering (Spence, 1973). The research methodology assists in demonstrating how pragmatism in social science can enrich teaching and learning epistemology as a broader and ongoing aspect of economic development (Frega, et al., 2011). The research exposes the important need to enrich economic development with a commendably educated South African workforce as intended by the National Development Plan (NPC) (National Planning Commission, 2011). The proposals of this research encourage employers and governments, globally, to consider the realignment of

policy and practice that are relevant to broader choices for universities to consider in the production of qualifications, and for employers in their graduate recruitment requirements. Figure 1.1 below shows the different theories applied in each phase of the research and the theoretical linkages to the context of each article produced by the study.

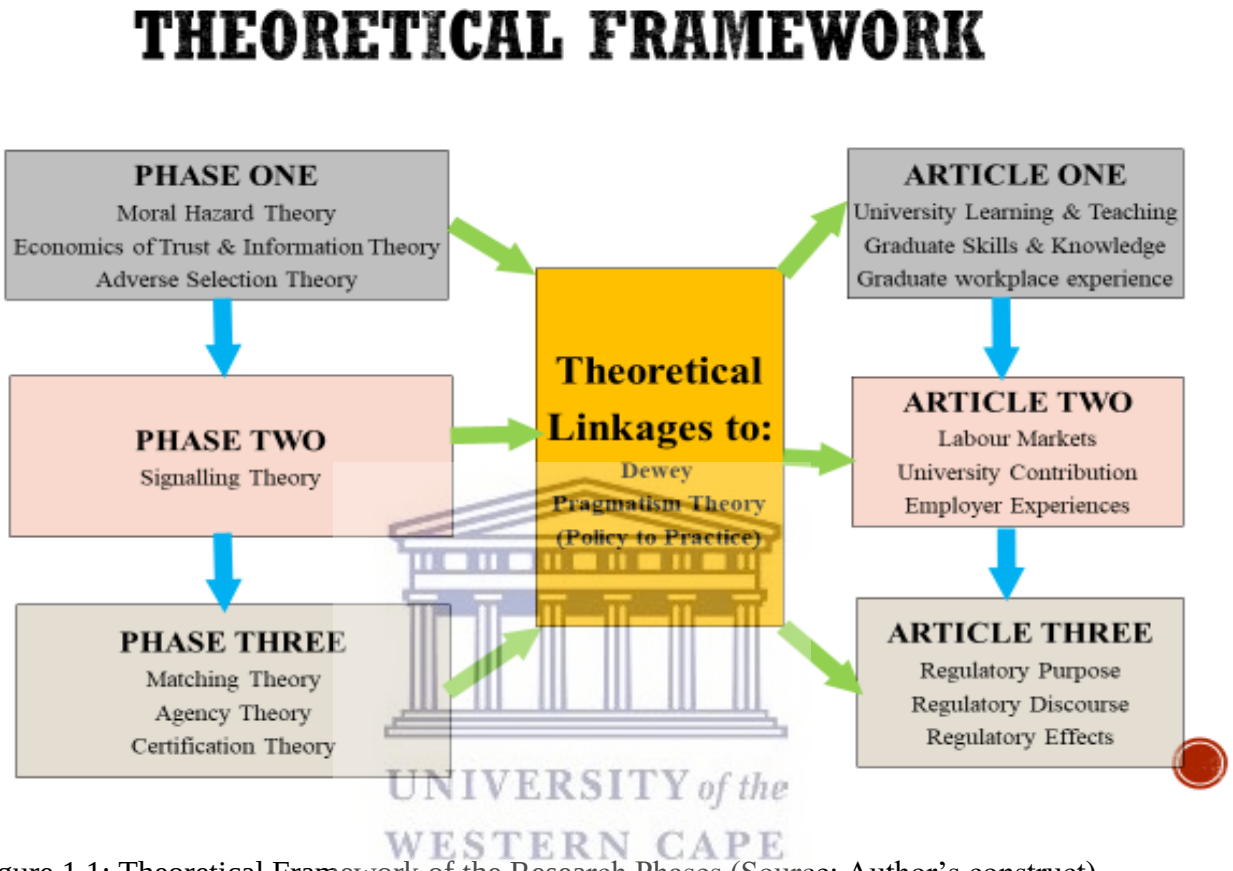

Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework of the Research Phases (Source: Author's construct)

1.7 Ethical Considerations

The Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape granted ethical clearance for this study in 2017, endorsed by the ethical clearance procedure number HS17/8/34. My ethical conduct during this study involved the protection of participants' privacy of information shared during the study. Participant names remain out of the public domain where permission to this effect was not granted. Consent forms that outlined the purpose and procedures of the study were signed by all research participants. The purpose of the study was communicated electronically, in hard copy and verbally before and during the interactive sessions. Issues of voluntary participation, confidentiality, consent, and anonymity were fully addressed

electronically via e-mail as well as before the interview and group discussion sessions started. Participants were informed of the applied observation techniques where, for example, recording was utilised in order to make participants aware that the entire discussion can be recalled.

The published articles relevant to the case organisation were sent electronically to the company representative for recordkeeping purposes. Forwarding details of the progress of the study was part of the agreement with the case organisation. My research participation 'consent request' clarified the terms of participation to avoid participants assuming the organisation is forcing their participation. In my view, the research topic under investigation is not necessarily a 'sensitive' matter as it can be seen as a systematic endeavour to improve and streamline graduate development processes and does not affect organisational operations.

This research has epistemological and ontological foundations that are elaborated in chapter two of this dissertation. I complied with the policies and procedures of the University of the Western Cape that governs ethics in research. The Declaration of Intent: Ethics in Research document served as the baseline for conducting this study and I embraced the ethical obligations and ethical research principles in undertaking the research.

1.8 Structure of Dissertation

Chapter one provided an overview of the following: introduction and background to the research, the research problem, the research aims and objectives, research questions, an overview of the methodology, the significance of the study and research gaps, theoretical assumptions, the dissertation structure. Figure 1.2 provides a diagrammatical outline of the dissertation framework. The remainder of the dissertation is presented in five chapters as described in the below.

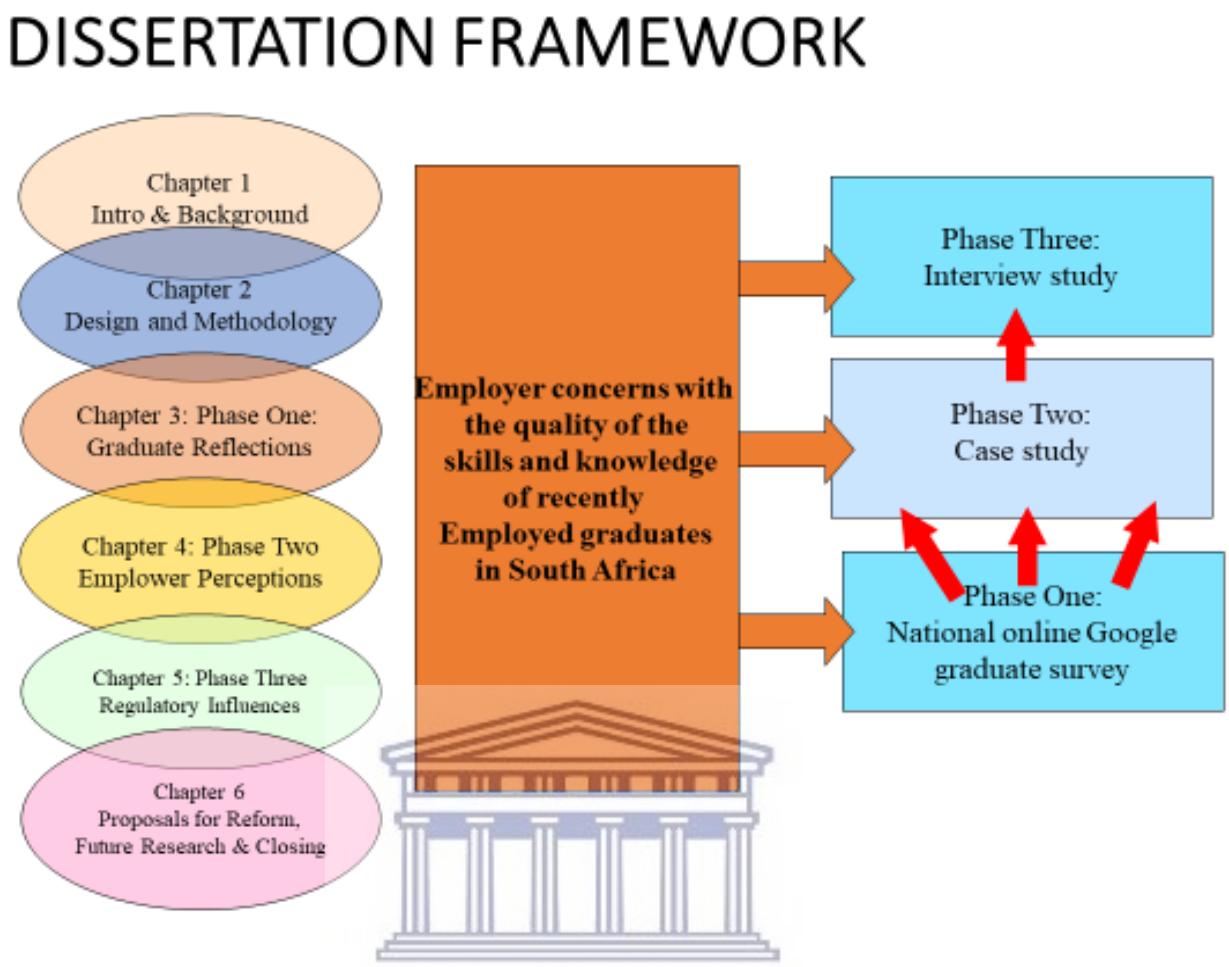

Figure 1.2: Outline of the Dissertation Framework (Source: Author's construct)

1.9 Description of the Content of each Chapter

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology.

Chapter 2 presents the research design and research methodology. This includes the research focus, strategy and methods selected to undertake this study. A brief overview of the case organisation is also provided.

Chapter 3: Phase One: Published article 1 – Reflections of Employed Graduates on the Suitability of Their Skills and Knowledge for Workplace Readiness.

Chapter 3 outlines the research findings, an analysis and the discussion of employed graduates about their university acquired skills and knowledge. This chapter was published as an article

in the South African Journal of Higher Education in 2019. The publishing process forms part of my dissemination strategy committed to in the approved research proposal to the University of the Western Cape. The extent of skills and knowledge production by universities for labour markets is explored. The empirical findings are linked to the conceptual framework and the literature reviewed. The theoretical contributions made to teaching and learning practices are also presented, analysed and discussed.

Chapter 4: Phase Two: Published article 2 - Exploring the Contribution of Universities to Labour Market Requirements in South Africa: An Employer's Perspective.

Chapter 4 provides the research findings, an analysis and the discussion of the contribution of universities to the skills and knowledge requirements of the labour market from a large employer's perspective. This chapter was published as an article in the Industry and Higher Education: SAGE International Journal in 2020. The article was also published as part of my dissemination strategy committed to in the approved research proposal document submitted to the University of the Western Cape. The concerns and experiences of employers with their recently employed graduates are reported. The empirical findings are linked to the conceptual framework and the primary and secondary literature sources reviewed. The theoretical contributions made to employer concerns with university graduates' skills and knowledge are presented, analysed and discussed.

Chapter 5: Phase Three: Article 3 Under Review - Regulatory Implementation Influences on University Graduate Development and Graduate Against Non-Graduate Workplace Conflicts. (Article under review with the Industry and Higher Education Journal, a SAGE International Publications Journal).

Chapter 5 focuses on government and university regulatory implementation influences on the teaching and learning practices of private and public sector university lecturers; and employer workplace graduate against non-graduate conflicts. The regulatory policies and frameworks are not analysed as the study focuses on the inconsistent implementation practices of universities and employers. Primary and secondary literature sources, including debates and comments in newspaper articles inform the data collection process. The matching theory, agency theory and certification theory guide the data collection and analysis processes using thematic content analysis. The findings, analysis and the discussion are provided from an employer and university lecturers' perspectives. The empirical findings are linked to the conceptual

framework and the literature sources reviewed. The theoretical contributions made to graduate development processes are presented, analysed and discussed.

Chapter 6: Dissertation Conclusion

Chapter 6 presents a summarised discussion of the overall findings, main contributions to new knowledge, proposals for reform, future research and the limitations of the study. The proposals frame the reform of the skills and knowledge production of universities and employer graduate recruitment practices. Implications for non-reform and stakeholder responsibility and accountability are also presented.

Important Note:

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are presented in the different language and referencing formats required by the publishing journals. The published articles were converted into Microsoft Word without changing the aforementioned language and referencing styles and the published articles are appended. This is a requirement of the University of the Western Cape PhD by publication.

Chapters 1, 2 and 6 are formatted per the Harvard referencing style as prescribed by the Institute for Social Development department, housed in the Economic and Management Sciences Faculty of the University of the Western Cape where this PhD by publication is registered.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter provides the orientation for the dissertation and offers a rationale for why active change in the processes of university skills and knowledge production for workplaces and labour markets should be attained. The research gaps are presented and clarification is given for the focus of this study. Main concepts and theories are provided and explained. The following chapter addresses the research design and methodology for the study.

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CHAPTER TWO - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology, which captures the research approach, the research philosophy, the research strategy and the techniques used by the researcher in sampling participants, the data collection methods as well as analysing and presenting the data. Further, the chapter discusses the ethical measures upheld by the researcher in the entire research process.

In terms of methodological configurations, the dissertation comprises three interrelated studies that translate into three separate research publications as presented in chapters three, four and five. The findings of each study serve as a pre-phase for conducting the study that follows. **Study one** begins with a pilot study with six purposely selected employed graduates from UWC (University of the Western Cape) and the UNISA (University of South Africa) to test the Google open-ended questionnaire. A national Google open-ended questionnaire online survey of twenty-four employed graduates from eight South African universities, employed in nine different industries, completes study one. **Study two** is a qualitative case study employing multiple data collection methods as follows: a Google open-ended questionnaire online survey of thirty-five employed graduates of the case organisation; a focus group discussion with ten purposely selected employed graduates who participated in the online survey; six focus group discussions with management teams; and one-on-one interviews with three divisional heads. **Study three** is a qualitative interview study of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with six commerce lecturers from two private universities and one public university; and three business divisional heads of a large organisation. A brief overview of the organisation is provided below. It is important to understand that the organisation's business operations are not primarily relevant to the study.

2.2 Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach that examined the perceptions and experiences of research participants that a quantitative research design would not have suited. Coldwell and Herbst (2004) argue that studying human behaviour such as perceptions, motivations and experiences is more appropriate with a qualitative research design, as was the case in this study. The qualitative methods applied in the different phases of the research

process facilitated a flexible data collection approach where one completed phase informed the next phase. Data collection techniques were interlinked. The results of the analysed data collected with the Google open-ended questionnaire informed the subsequent focus group discussions. The results of the focus group discussions informed the one-on-one interviews with the respective lecturers and managers. A qualitative approach enabled the collection of non-numerical data that focused on the perceptions and experiences of both employed graduates and the employer with the production of skills and knowledge by different universities in South Africa.

I wanted to collect data on the situational lived experiences of the research participants, deeming the qualitative methodology more appropriate to conduct the study. An in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons for such behaviour by the respective stakeholders due to the ongoing concerns of employers about the poor quality of university graduates could be obtained. The 'how and what' questions could be explored, thereby facilitating a descriptive process of data analysis. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001 as cited in Schurink, 2005), the meanings participants contribute to an interactive qualitative data collection process using one-on-one techniques assist with the formulation of a complex holistic picture of the phenomena being studied. Different experiences and opinions of participants about their respective business units could be engaged and clarified during the one-on-one interview sessions. Schurink (2007) cautions that qualitative researchers should be broad-minded in their research choices from the beginning of the study as they do not normally know what they are going to find. The interactions with participants in a natural setting allowed for my biases and preconceived ideas to be explored and clarified.

The adoption of a qualitative approach for the study was based on my experience and knowledge with particular points of view and theoretical approaches within the corporate and academic environments. At this stage I must acknowledge that before the research I had subconscious biases that changed during the course of the study, because I examined my beliefs, judgments and practices while conducting the research. I hail from both academic and corporate environments and had to caution that my individual perceptions and experiences do not influence the contributions of the research participants. While I committed to the possibility of different opinions and experiences of participants, the research design is a personal choice based on my previous research experience as well as my ontological and epistemological views that are explained below. Fendt and Sachs (2007) argue that the fit between the chosen

approach, the selected research design and method is essential to enable a quality research output by the researcher. In this research, the process of naturalistic inquiry contributed towards an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study within its natural setting. Thus, the qualitative descriptive data generated in this study resulted from encouraging respondents to share their own experiences and interpretations on the research topic freely in a process of naturalistic inquiry.

This qualitative research is informed by the argument that the curricula taught at universities should be compatible with employer requirements and expectations to ensure the viability of graduates in an increasingly competitive and changing labour market. Consequently, this viability of relevant graduate skills and knowledge for employment will safeguard the graduates' suitability for employment. The qualitative methodology approach assisted with examining experiences of how graduates transfer their university acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace after employment; as well as establishing whether South African universities are producing graduates considered to be workplace-ready by their employers. The influence of regulatory implementation on university lecturers' teaching and learning practices and employer graduate recruitment requirements are also reported.

An inductive approach to data analysis started with the collection of data to examine the nature and significance of current employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates. An inductive approach to research is generally undertaken in qualitative research that begins with the collection of data to explore a phenomenon and generate theory (Thietart, Girod-Seville and Perret, 2002). The inductive approach facilitated the development of proposals for the reform of university teaching and learning practices, as well as a revised regulatory influence for the improvement of graduate labour market readiness as presented in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Thietart et al., (2002) argue that qualitative research starts with a basic research question with theories emerging before or during the data collection process. In this regard, this study questioned how employers perceive the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates from universities. To answer the research question, multiple theories provided guidance for a systematic inductive process of data collection and analysis to detect themes and patterns in the data. Different theories were employed in all three phases of the research and were aligned with the development of themes from phases one to three. The inductive

approach assisted with the generation of proposals to reform the practices that influence graduate labour market readiness. An inductive approach begins with an immersion in the social process and not with existing theory, and guides the empirical enquiry (Burden, 2008). The pilot study with the six employed graduates facilitated the initial process of data collection and analysis. The subsequent data collection and analysis processes guided the achievement of the research objectives presented as chapters 3, 4 and 5 of this dissertation. Each research objective is conceptualised with different theories that accentuate the purpose of the respective empirical enquiries of graduates' opinions, employer perceptions and regulatory implementation influence on the graduate development processes for the labour market.

2.3 Research Philosophy

In the section below, I describe and explain my ontological and epistemological stances.

2.3.1 Ontological position

Mouton and Marais (1996) explain that the term "ontology" refers to the study of 'being' or 'reality', among others, the reality that is investigated in the social sciences. My ontological stance is constructionism aligned to objective realism as propounded by Burrell and Morgan (1979) which is defined as a philosophy of research where knowledge is constructed by humans, partly through social interactions. In this study, importance was given to the lived experiences of the research participants and their realities during the three phases of the data collection process. Mouton and Marais (1996) argue that supporters of constructionism do not strive to uncover a universal set of laws that underpin reality, but rather attempt to understand the intangible constructions or perspectives that individuals form about their environments. In this study, this process is applied to extract the individual and collective perceptions and experiences of the research participants on the subject of graduate labour market readiness. The perspectives formed by humans include local, specific places, events and issues (Ross, 2014). Constructionists do not evaluate whether constructions are true or false, but strive to facilitate informed and sophisticated perspectives – an ontology that is referred to as relativism (Ross, 2014). I considered the varying experiences and perceptions of all the research participants being employed graduates, management teams and lecturers, including the perspectives contrary to my biases and preconceived notions. Participant responses and realities were acknowledged and considered for informed constructions of the research themes relevant to the study objectives.

Burden (2006) argues that from a social research perspective construction refers to whether social reality exists independently from human conception and interpretation, and whether or not social behaviour is governed by laws that can be seen as unchangeable and generalised. This research provides the varied experiences and understanding of participants and how they attach meaning to the skills and knowledge produced by universities for transference to workplaces. My ontological position will unfold further in this dissertation through the act of contextualisation and theme development applying Mayring's (2014) steps of coding, examining and collating of the data collected for the study. It is possible to integrate the richness of people's individual experiences even though they are very specific. This integration of experiences assists in creating a 'reality that is out there', which is aligned to Burrell et al.'s (1979) argument of objective reality reflecting different views of the social realities of the participants. This is a reality formed by linking the different stakeholder realities together via the contextual features of their natural settings, for example, the graduates from different universities working in a variety of industry sectors; the case organisation's employees from different business units; and lecturers from different universities. The regulatory implementation influences on stakeholder behaviour is governed by laws that can be seen as unchangeable and generalised thereby impacting the processes of graduate development and labour market expectations.

2.3.2 Epistemological position

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with a general treatment of the nature, origins, scope and limits of human knowledge, its presuppositions and basis (Dick, 1999 in Burden, 2008). Epistemology therefore investigates the methods of inquiry by the knowledge that is required (Burden, 2008). Furthermore, Burden (2008) explains that epistemology is traditionally devoted to the study of the justification or the evaluation of the beliefs we have on the basis of some given body of evidence. In this study my epistemological philosophy is interpretivism focusing on an objective positivism approach (Burrell et al., 1979). The data collection process did not focus on 'true and/or false' responses but rather on the lived experiences and perceptions of the research participants. This philosophy of objective positivism informs the belief that an effective and quality process for graduate labour market readiness can be developed if consideration is given to the social reality of all the stakeholders. The experiences of different stakeholders can be captured, described and valued through different methods of inquiry. Epistemological questions assisted me in considering what is

acceptable evidence or knowledge of the topic under study to explain the reality of participant experiences and perceptions.

Mason (2002) argues that the method of collecting evidence and creating knowledge about social phenomena has to be aligned with the particular ontological perspective and components identified by the researcher. Thus, my constructionist ontological philosophy where knowledge is constructed through the participatory involvement of participants in different research phases allowed for the interpretivism philosophy in considering acceptable evidence about the phenomena of this study. Ontological and epistemological perspectives were therefore counterbalanced in the process of generating descriptions and explanations about participant workplace experiences regarding the subject under investigation. The multiple data gathering methods used in this study assisted with capturing the richness and thick descriptions of participant experiences (Burden, 2008). It is therefore important to describe my epistemological and ontological stances to give the reader an insight of how the gathered data was analysed and presented in this dissertation.

2.4 Research Design and Strategy of Inquiry

A qualitative approach informs the research design and is influenced by the above-mentioned ontological and epistemological stances, and this, in turn, informed the selection of the different data collection methods and instruments utilised. The strategy of inquiry was generally mapped out as follows:

2.4.1 Research setting and role of the researcher

Phase one was a national Google online survey that started with a pilot study of six employed graduates who were previous students of mine. The research setting was online and the researcher was dependent on referrals from the initial six employed graduates and other contacts to forward the Google open-ended questionnaire to qualifying respondents. My role involved checking that respondents fit the qualifying criteria to complete the questionnaire, that all questions were answered, to eliminate incomplete questionnaires from the collected data for analysis. No interaction with participants were held in the online environment over the period the questionnaire was made available. Twenty-four participant responses were used for this study that excluded the initial six responses used for the pilot study.

Phase two entailed a case study with the City of Cape Town as the large organisation from whom I gained access via the mayor of Cape Town's office over a period of six months. Burden (2008), drawing on Taylor (1976), argues that the researcher normally gains access to an organisational setting by requesting permission from those in charge or the gatekeepers. Guided by this principle in my research, the City of Cape Town, through the mayor's office, approved my request to interact with participants from its different business units. The City of Cape Town is classified as a large organisation with 70 business units of which the head office is situated in the city centre. The participating business units were: Engineering, Engineering Projects, Public Works, Safety and Security, Human Resources, Water and Sanitation, Disaster Management, Municipality, Local Government, Health (hospital), Technical Services, Human Resources and Information and Technology.

The Principal Professional Officer for Talent Management, Organisational Effectiveness and Innovation Department as well as the Corporate Services Directorate assisted me with the arrangements regarding access to venues through the human resources administrative staff at the respective venues where the focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews were conducted. I received support and participation from the senior managers responsible for graduates in their respective business units. The role players had keen interest to utilise the findings of my research to assess and improve their employed graduate processes.

Burden (2008) argues that it is important to define the researcher's role as an insider, a research participant or an observer during the research process. He argues that the researcher can have a combination of these roles. In the light of this argument, my role in this study was that of a facilitator and observer. It is important to indicate how the researcher's role affects his/her participation in the research (Burden, 2008). Guided by this principle, the participants were informed in advance of my role, as well as how the focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews would be conducted. Participants were also allowed to interact with each other, as well as clarify expectations for the sessions with the facilitator. Researcher subjectivity was managed by allowing all participants to contribute to the discussion instead of having one person dominate the conversations. I ensured that the organisation representatives and research participants understood my role as a researcher.

Written consent was received from all participants in order to operationalise the research. This process enabled me to obtain participant permission and support for the research process to be

successful. During the interactions with participants, my ability to adopt a neutral role as a facilitator and observer enabled me to encourage participation by all research participants and not only the dominant voices during the focus group and interview sessions. It was important that the participants were comfortable with the confidentiality of the information that they were sharing. This dual role of facilitator and observer was effective in allowing participants the opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences freely. My stance with the research participants was flexible, non-judgmental and I was grateful for the richness of the data they provided. My role as an observer allowed me to embrace an insider's perspective that informed the data collection process in a naturalistic setting. This role as an observer simplified the awareness of my own subjectivity and biases. To enhance objectivity in my role as a researcher, I solicited peer de-briefers to assist me with critical self-examination. Fellow academics, skills development providers and practitioners and fellow students assisted in this purpose.

Phase three involved one-on-one interviews with the commerce lecturers from one public and two private sector universities who taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Three business divisional managers from the phase two case organisation participants were selected because they operated at the strategic level of the organisation and were therefore better equipped to comment on regulatory implementation influences on graduate recruitment practices. Lecturers were recruited via the faculty administrator of the universities where I taught as a permanent and part-time employed lecturer, respectively. The business divisional managers were recruited via the human resources administrator of the case organisation. The one-hour interview sessions with the individual participants were informed by the research outcomes of phase one and two. The researcher role was that of facilitator who contextualised the discussions around specific themes derived from phase one and two outcomes influenced by regulatory practices. I could use my academic and corporate experience to probe for more detail when participants provided generalised comments. Probing allowed for deeper meanings and specific examples to better understand participant situational lived experiences.

2.4.2 Sampling procedure

Phase one employed purposive sampling, as a non-probability method to select the initial six online participants for the pilot study to test the Google open-ended questionnaire. The initial six participants were employed graduates from UWC and UNISA who were my students during their undergraduate studies. Following the completion of the pilot study the purposely selected

six participants and other individual contact persons were asked to forward the Google open-ended questionnaire online link in a snowball sampling process, also known as a chain referral sampling, to participants who met the criteria specified in the questionnaire. By using the snowball sampling technique, the pool of respondents could be increased in an easily accessible manner online during the period the questionnaire was available on the Google platform (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). Twenty-four completed participant questionnaire responses were selected on completion of the survey. Participants had to provide their university student details to ensure that they qualify to complete the questionnaire as a graduate from a South African university. Glaser and Strauss (1967) first introduced theoretical or purposive sampling that was subsequently modified by Strauss and Corbin (1998) which falls into the strategic sampling idea introduced by Mason (2002). Ritchie and Lewis (2004) define purposive sampling as the process of selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, the researcher's theoretical position and analytical framework, his/her analytical practice, and most importantly, the argument that is being developed. Purposive sampling allows for the judgment of the researcher when selecting participants in a study (Crossman, 2017). In addition, non-probability snowball sampling was also used because the sampling frame could not be predicted as the availability of the questionnaire online would determine the number of responses. The twenty-four respondents were selected from twenty-nine completed questionnaires of which five were incomplete responses. The initial six responses from the pilot study were not included with the twenty-four responses used for the phase one study because the questionnaire was edited based on the feedback from the six participants.

In **phase two** convenience sampling was used to select thirty-five employed graduates of the City of Cape Town with the assistance of the human resources administrator. Thirty-three graduates responded but only thirty responses were used for the study because three questionnaires were incomplete. The administrator forwarded the Google link to the selected graduates' email addresses. A sample of ten employed graduates who completed the online Google link questionnaire was selected to participate in the graduate focus group discussion session that followed the completion of the data analysis of the online process. The convenience sampling strategy allowed for the selection of a sample of the employer's graduates who completed the online Google questionnaire to participate in the graduate focus group session.

Convenience sampling allows for the selection of participants in a process that does not give all individuals in a population an equal chance of selection (Saunders et al., 2012). The City of

Cape Town employs graduates from different higher education institutions. However, this study was only concerned with graduates from universities. In my research, convenience sampling proceeded until the required number of participants responded as was argued to be the procedure by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012). The convenience sampling technique enabled a speedy delivery of the questionnaire to graduate participants; cost-effectiveness in collecting data; and availability of the participant sample.

Purposive sampling was applied in the selection of the management teams to whom graduates report, as well as the participating business divisional heads with the assistance of the human resources administrator. In **phase three** the same purposive sampling strategy was applied to select the six participant lecturers from private and public sector universities whose teaching practices were affected by professional bodies and those who were not affected by professional bodies. Purposive sampling was used to select the three business divisional heads from the case organisation for the one-on-one interviews to inform about workplace compliance with the regulatory requirements of graduate employment.

2.4.3 Data sources

Secondary and primary data sources such as recruitment policy documents, job descriptions, vacancies, newspaper articles, questionnaires, focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews, university websites and journal articles were used for data collection. The emphasis during the evaluation of the data sources was on extracting details to assist with the construction of themes for clustering participant responses relevant to the research aim and objectives. Cooper and Schindler (2001) argue that emphasis on detail provides valuable insight for problem-solving, evaluation and strategy. The emphasis on detail also allows for the verification of evidence and avoids missing data. Mayring's (2014) coding system of (1) coding the data in a theme system; (2) examining common occurrences of themes; and (3) collating and interpreting the participant comments were used to develop the themes. The three main themes were awareness of workplace requirements and graduate workplace readiness; graduate preparation by universities; and employer expectations in relation to university graduates' workplace requirements.

2.4.4 Data collection process

The initial data collection process was informed by an analysis and review of extant literature, including content analysis of the degree programme information on the websites of seven selected South African universities, as well as the opinions of various stakeholders expressed in newspaper articles. The qualitative methods used for data collection included a Google open-ended questionnaire, focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews in a process of naturalistic inquiry. Eckerdal and Hagstrŏm (2016) argue that qualitative questionnaires generate material that is potentially valuable for a wide range of scholarly disciplines. Data collection started after receiving approval from the University of the Western Cape where the PhD study is registered under the Ethical Clearance Reference No. HS17/8/34. In this study, a Google open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data from smaller participant sample groups with the aim of generating qualitative descriptive data. Respondents were encouraged to share their own experiences and interpretations on the research topic freely as advised to be the procedure (Eckerdal and Hagstrŏm, 2016). The one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions took place in a process of naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry contributes to an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its natural setting (Bowen, 2008).

2.4.4.1 Google Open-ended Questionnaire Online Survey with Employed Graduates

Two sets of data were collected with the Google online open-ended questionnaire as follows:

- **National Survey of Employed Graduates from Different Study Disciplines**

Initially six respondents were purposefully selected from employed graduates who graduated from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of South Africa (UNISA). The pilot study to test the Google open-ended questionnaire was followed by a national Google open-ended online survey of twenty-four employed graduates. These twenty-four surveyed employed graduates graduated from eight South African universities between January 2010 and March 2017. No particular geographical area was specified for participation in the research other than respondents having graduated from a university in South Africa.

I requested that the six pilot study participants and other individual acquaintances of mine forward the Google open-ended questionnaire link to their qualifying contacts via email and other social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. A total of twenty-nine responses were received of which twenty-four questionnaires were completed and could be

used for the study. The remaining five questionnaires that were excluded were spoiled as not all questions were answered. The employed graduate respondents were employed in different industry sectors and graduated from eight different universities in three provinces in South Africa. This sample size was deemed sufficient as a phase one study due to the varied representation of industries and the spatial geographical locations of universities from which participants were drawn. The same data collection instrument was sent to the case organisation's employed graduates at the phase two stage. The two sets of collected data from the national surveyed graduates and the City of Cape Town graduates afforded me an increased pool of employed graduate respondents and an opportunity for an in-depth comparison of responses. The dual data collection process assisted with the principles of validity and reliability of the analysed data from the total of fifty-four respondents, because lived experiences and perceptions in different contexts could be compared for consistency in graduate development by universities for the labour market. These contexts are employed graduates from scattered university and workplace environments through the national survey and employed graduates from the case organisation.

- **Employed Graduates of the Case Organisation**

A total of thirty-five graduates, employed in nine different business units within the case organisation, received the Google open-ended questionnaire link. Only thirty returned questionnaires were used for this study, because the remaining five were not completed in full. Consideration was given to the time constraints and the impact on the productivity of the employees' participation in the research. In adherence to research ethics, the open-ended questionnaire was cleared and approved by the University of the Western Cape and was endorsed by Ethical Clearance Reference No. HS17/8/34. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The criteria for participation in the study were specified in the questionnaire and participant confidentiality was assured by electronic settings that automated responses are returned directly to me on its completion, and not to the human resources officer, who had forwarded the questionnaire to the participants. An analysis of the data collected from the employed graduates informed the selection of participants for the management focus group sessions.

2.4.4.2 Focus Groups with City of Cape Town Employed Graduates and Management Teams.

The focus group sessions are categorised as Focus Group 1 and 2 to cluster the different employee groups, being employed graduates and management teams. A sample of ten of the thirty Google open-ended questionnaire online survey participants were selected for the Focus Group 1 discussion with a duration of 45 minutes. The selected participants were purposely chosen from the group of employed graduates of the case organisation who participated in the Google open-ended questionnaire online survey. The inclusion criterion for participation of this group discussion was that participants should be representatives of the nine business units from which online survey responses were received. Graduates from other business units were excluded, because they did not respond within the period for which the Google open-ended online questionnaire was available. The main purpose for conducting this focus group discussion session was to clarify the online responses of the completed questionnaires in a natural setting in order to enhance the validity of the collected data and the reliability of instruments used.

The second cluster of six focus groups, categorised as the Focus Group 2, was held with different management teams. In total, twenty-four managers participated in the focus group cluster discussions, consisting of four participants per session. The duration of these focus group discussions was 45 minutes each and were held with management teams representing the business units in which the participant graduates were employed. These business units included engineering, engineering projects, public works, technical services, water and sanitation, safety and security, finance, human resources, information and technology. The focus group discussion sessions were held at three different venues to facilitate the availability and travel of the managers. There are different opinions about the minimum number of participants required for a focus group session and, therefore, the number of participants is best determined by the purpose of the focus group (Bigby, 2018). In this research, the purpose was that managers would share experiences, opinions and perspectives about the graduates employed in their respective and cross-functioning business units or departments. The small groups enabled an easier flow of collective conversation as confirmed by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2011). They also encouraged honesty and valid feedback, which contributed ideas and views to help resolve the employer's concerns with the research problem. The managers selection for focus group discussion were not focused on the business unit they represent but

rather the important criteria that university graduates were employed in their respective business units.

2.4.4.3 One-on-One Semi-Structured Interviews

One-on-one interviews of one hour per session were held with business divisional heads and final year university lecturers from the commerce stream. Firstly, one-on-one interviews were conducted with six university lecturers who teach at the final year level of a university degree programme in the commerce study stream. The participating lecturers are employed by two private universities and one public university. I note that the names of the universities are not important as the focus of this study is on the lecturer experiences. Participant lecturers were recruited with the assistance of the respective university's faculty administrator. The selection categories of teaching and learning were (1) professional body regulated, (2) non-professional body regulated, and (3) lecturers teaching in both categories simultaneously. Two lecturers teach in the accounting and engineering departments that are informed by professional body regulation, two lecturers teach in the general commerce stream and are not affected by professional body regulation, and two lecturers teach in both professional body and non-professional body regulated streams, simultaneously. Further criteria required that lecturers teach in study streams that represents business units from which the majority of the case organisation's surveyed employed graduates hail. Secondly, the one-on-one interviews were conducted with three business divisional heads. The human resources officer was requested to assist in the identification of divisional heads to whom the participant managers of focus group 2 reported. Data collected from the graduates and managers through focus group discussion sessions informed the questions scheduled for the one-on-one interviews with the divisional heads. In addition, further discussion with these participants gave them an opportunity to provide their own views, thereby contributing to an understanding of the internal and external influences on the research issues from a higher level of the organisation's management. The one-on-one semi-structured interview format enabled discussion and open-ended questioning of participants. I simplified the questions and probed, where necessary, to ensure that participants clearly understood the questions. Participants were also encouraged to seek clarity in case they misunderstood questions as encouraged by the authors Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010). The results of the data collected from phase one, two and the lecturers informed the one-on-one interviews with the divisional managers. The one-on-one interviews allowed participants to share their individual experiences objectively and neutrally (Eckerdal and

Hagstrŏm, 2016). The three main themes generated for phase one and phase two informed the data collection process of phase three. The themes are: awareness of workplace requirements and workplace readiness; graduate preparation by universities; and employer expectations with regard to university graduates. Sub-themes were generated from the data collected for phase three using the coding steps of Mayring (2014).

Final year lecturers were selected, because they teach exit level (final year) modules that require experiences and/or knowledge that lower-level lecturers may not necessarily teach to the practical extent of workplace requirements. Interviews with lecturers enabled me to have a comprehensive understanding of the research topic with a particular focus on the fairness towards all stakeholders involved in the process of graduate development for labour markets. As Eckerdal and Hagstrŏm (2016) confirm, a small sample was sufficient to avoid repetitive data that was evident after the fifth lecturer was interviewed.

2.4.5 Documents review

Newspaper articles provided secondary data on recent debates by various stakeholders on the contribution of universities to the labour market and employer experiences with employed graduates. The content from the newspaper articles served as additional information to assess and compare the research participants' experiences and perceptions. Mouton (2002) argues that unlike the reactive nature of direct or indirect participant observation methods, data sources such as physical and archival documentation does not really allow the researcher strong measures of 'control'. Mouton (2002) argues that in a certain sense the data is already given and that a thematic content analysis of newspapers articles, organisational reports, and other related documents can be made. The content from the newspaper articles does not pose a big threat to the eventual validity of the findings, because the study reports on the actual participant data collected and analysed. For this research, newspaper articles published between 2012 and 2015 provided public debates on the failure of universities to produce workplace-ready graduates.

Yin (2003) argues that documents play an explicit role as sources of information in case study methods, and that systemic sources are important. The writer further cautions researchers about the importance of being observant of deliberate editing of the considered documents by authors. In addition to the newspaper articles, organisational and public regulatory documents served as important secondary sources of data in this study. Yin's (2003) argument regarding caution

to be taken about "authors" deliberately editing documents was clarified with the relevant participants to ensure that organisational documents' content utilised during the focus group discussion sessions were agreed upon. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that authors may want to present themselves in a favourable light, or have 'an axe to grind' with the organisation and could misrepresent information. Participant scrutiny and confirmation of unbiased document content ensured consensus and relevance of using the information provided. The organisational documents such as recruitment policy documents, job descriptions and vacancies yielded rich descriptive data that provided valuable information to corroborate participant responses obtained from interviews and focus group discussion sessions.

2.4.5.1 Field Notes

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe field notes as the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study. The transcriptions were generated from the electronically recorded data and the field notes are my written notes and the flipchart notes of the participants. Tessier (2012) argues that the use of a combination of recording methods for data collection safeguards against issues of loss of data, reliability checks and cost effectiveness. Written and recorded data was also checked for quality data management purposes using the OneNote and SmartPen technological tools. These technological tools expedite the process of conversion from especially recorded or written notes to typed text (Tessier, 2012).

Field notes provided the study with a personal log that helped to keep track of the development of the project, to visualise how the research plan has been shaped by the collected data and to remain aware of how the researcher was influenced by the data. The field notes for my study consist of diary notes, notebook writing including diagrams that are stored in date order relevant to the respective sessions held. Mason (2002) argues that it is important to decide the format of recording field notes, ensuring that they are appropriately indexed and annotated. Burden (2006) argues that field notes consist of two kinds of materials which are:

a. Descriptive – the concern to provide a word picture of the setting, people, actions and conversations as observed, and
b. Reflective – it captures more of the observer's frame of mind, ideas and concerns. My descriptive notes helped with the clarification of the meanings of participants during

the sessions and my reflective records and they log my personal interpretations to avoid subjectivity.

Furthermore, Burden (2006) argues that descriptive materials are by far the most extensive part of the field notes and represent the researcher's best effort to objectively record the details of what has occurred in the field. On the other hand, reflective materials are a more personal account of the course of the inquiry with emphasis on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions and prejudices (Burden, 2006). The quality of the field notes is enhanced by the content being accurate and reliably presented as a true account of the reality to which it pertains (Mason, 2002). In my research, I diligently constructed a written account of all my observations in both the focus groups and the interviews. Thus, recording ideas generated and contextualising them with the appropriate theories and postulations encountered in the literature review served as an important part of making the field notes. This activity ensured the quality of the research and enhanced the content of the data to accurately capture the social reality of the participants.

2.4.6 Recording and of data

Data recording is important for subsequent analysis, since it is through combined transcription and preliminary analysis that the efficiency of data analysis can be increased. In support of this view, Thietart et al. (2002) argue that one of the most complex challenges to overcome in dealing with qualitative data is how to communicate, in a systematic and honest manner, research findings to a readership who may not be very familiar with the detailed context of the research. For this study, the focus group discussion process involved electronic and written flipchart recordings of participants' responses. The interview transcriptions are stored electronically and printed copies are in a filing cabinet in my home office that is locked and to which only I have access. This helps to safeguard the anonymity of all the research respondents.

The data captured were transcribed for easy analysis. Burden (2006) quotes Bogdan and Biklen (2003) in arguing that it is important to transcribe sections on a tape that specifically addresses the concerns of the research. Burden (2006) recommends that even the very first interview should be transcribed in order to learn what to transcribe in subsequent interviews. Guided by this principle, in this research, electronically recorded data were processed into transcripts as raw data in Excel spreadsheets clustered under themes generated with Mayring's (2014) coding system. OneNote and SmartPen technological tools were used to convert the data into text

transferred onto the Excel spreadsheets (Tessier, 2012). The availability of advance technology storage options made managing data over long periods of time easy using Google cloud and electronic storage equipment such as external hard drives that simplify the storage processes of electronically recorded data.

All transcribed one-on-one interview data and focus group discussion data reflect the full narrative of the interview, which includes insights about the concepts of the research, and subjective accounts of the research topic. Patton (1990) suggests that researchers should record additional written notes during the one-on-one interviews, as ideas often flow based on the researcher's interpretations of the interviewees' responses. In this respect, I kept these notes together with the flipchart notes and this served an important part of idea generation relevant to my insights during the analysis process. After the transcription process, the notes I took during the interview were re-checked against the participant inputs, before being recorded.

2.4.7 Data analysis

Thietart et al. (2002) argue that the big problem with qualitative data is how to condense highly complex and context-bound information into a format which tells a story in a way that is fully convincing to the reader. Thus, a clear explanation of how the analysis was done and conclusions reached, and a demonstration of how the raw data was transformed into meaningful conclusions is required.

In this study, data was analysed using thematic content analysis, where the coding system was used to develop themes (Mayring, 2014). Thematic content analysis allowed for a descriptive approach in the coding process and the interpretation of the data. Thematic analysis assisted with extracting the views, opinions, knowledge and experiences of the participants from the different sets of data collected. The variation in the respondent comments were presented within these themes and sub-themes. Mayring's (2014) steps for qualitative thematic content analysis were useful to bring out the essence and meaning of the data collected. The steps were applied as below-mentioned:

- *Coding*, that involved working through the material with the aid of a theme system;
- *Examining* the common occurrences of themes, and establishing the contingencies, requirements and constraints mentioned by participants; and

- *Collating and interpreting* the participants' comments under the three main themes and listed subthemes.

The electronically recorded data, the flipchart data and my notes from the management team focus group discussions were captured in an Excel spreadsheet. The same themes were developed from the Google open-ended questionnaire responses and provided guidelines for the analysis of the data collected from the focus group sessions and the one-on-one interviews. The reflections and experiences of the managers were also juxtaposed against the reflections of graduates where this was applicable. One-on-one interview recordings and written responses were captured in an Excel spreadsheet guided by Mayring's (2014) coding system with the same themes developed previously being applied. The main themes applied in the same qualitative process assisted with the reduction of subjectivity in interpreting the findings.

Finally, randomly selected degree programmes specific to the qualifications held by the participating employed graduates were sourced from the websites of seven universities. These programmes – as advertised – were analysed to compare their content and learning outcomes with the data collected about degree programmes from the respective participant groups. The focus of the comparison was on the programmes' content and outcomes in relation to labour market needs and on *how* the required skills and knowledge were achieved during the graduates' study years. Thus, the comparative analysis concentrated on the signals that employers receive about qualifications and their interpretation of the acquired skills and knowledge of graduates on employment. The strategies used for ensuring quality of the research findings are discussed in the next section.

The thematic content analysis method allowed for a descriptive approach in the coding process and the rigorous interpretation of the data. My focus was also to gain novel perspectives on the topic of employer concerns with university graduates' skills and knowledge on which much is already known. The 'proposals for reform'– which is the outcome of this study – convey details of the phenomena that are descriptive and not quantitative in nature as my intention is to convey human perceptions and experiences from a natural setting.

Schurink (2005) argues that in qualitative research, it is important to know the underlying assumptions underpinning people's actions within their context. This is the case in my research, where university graduate development for workplace readiness is also explored as a case study

after the online Google survey. Furthermore, Schurink (2005) argues that qualitative methods involve a thick or exhaustive description when investigating, describing, analysing and interpreting the findings. Using a thematic content analysis is also useful in the presentation of descriptions of arduous processes in practice in an organisational context (Schurink, 2005). In my research, the City of Cape Town is the case study organisation providing the natural setting for respondents to participate in focus group discussions and interviews that allowed for the freedom of sharing perceptions and experiences in a qualitative manner.

2.4.8 Strategies to ensure quality in the research

Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that all research should adhere to the rules that stand as criteria against which the trustworthiness of the study findings can be evaluated. Furthermore, these scholars argue that these criteria are credibility, transferability and applicability, replicability and reflectivity. Rowley (2002) also concurs that it is necessary to decide what data is relevant to support or demolish propositions and to reflect on the criteria for interpreting findings.

The four criteria for judging trustworthiness within a naturalistic inquiry setting are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In this study, these were established through the progressive and integrated processes of data collection linked to the relevant research themes. Contextualising and linking the data collected from one participant group to inform and guide the data collected from the next group with the same coding system until saturation of data was achieved confirmed the achievement of the four criteria (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln's (1994) four criteria were fulfilled in terms of: confidence in the truth of the findings; the applicability of findings in different business units; the consistency and reproducibility of the findings; and the degree of researcher impartiality achieved by allowing participants the comfort of a conducive and safe environment in which to interact without the researcher's influence.

An important measure for assuring quality of the research methodology is through *triangulation* which is a technique that is closely associated with confirmability (Denzin, 2003). Furthermore, Denzin (2003) argues that triangulation and its application to qualitative research is confirmation that a phenomenon exists utilising multiple methods, as well as different sources in data collection. Accordingly, it raises researchers above their personal biases that stem from single methodologies. Triangulation in this study constituted the

application of a variety of data collection methods and the clarification of sense-making and interpretation of research participant meanings. This was achieved with the assistance of peers and other practitioners in the field of skills development from an academic and industry perspective. Comparing data collected from all stakeholders involved in the process of graduate development for the labour market, such as graduates, employers and lecturers enhanced the credibility of the research findings.

2.4.9 Data reporting

The writing style of this study is mainly scientific as my main focus was on meeting the requirements of a doctoral dissertation examination. However, I ensured that my writing style is suitable for important stakeholders within industry to grasp the essential content of the dissertation, which the proposals as outcomes of this study are anticipated to impact on positively.

2.5 Ethics Statement

According to Rugg and Petre (2005) everyone has a different idea about what is ethical. In the view of Rugg and Petre (2005), the focal concept in research ethics is 'duty of care'. Mouton (2002) argues that the "ethics of science concerns what is right and what is wrong in the conduct of research" and because it is a form of human conduct, it has to conform to generally accepted norms and values determined by the scientific community. Bryman and Bell (2007) concur with the argument raised by Diener and Crandall (1978) that ethical principles in social research and the transgression thereof, concern certain issues that manifest ways, namely whether there is a lack of informed consent, an invasion of privacy, if participants will be harmed in any way, and finally, whether deception is involved during the research process.

An ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape in 2017 and endorsed by the ethical clearance procedure number HS17/8/34. My ethical conduct during this study ensured that information collected from respondents about their experiences is treated with confidence to protect the privacy of these respondents. This includes ensuring that their names remain out of the public domain if they don't give permission to that effect. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) qualitative research always presents issues that are not always anticipated, and requires of the researcher to 'negotiate' the relationship with the participants and ensure that the outcome is part of a

reciprocal relationship. Research about humans involves finding out about how they work and people don't often have an accurate image of themselves, for various reasons (Rugg and Petre, 2005). Through research findings it can be profoundly disturbing for participants to become aware of aspects of themselves which had previously been unsuspected.

In the context of the above outline, and to counter potential transgressions of my ethical behaviour, I obtained informed written consent from all participants. The purpose of the study was communicated electronically, in hard copy and verbally before and during the interactive sessions. The extent of the respondents' expected participation and contribution, required timelines as well as how the outcomes of the research will be used, were communicated by me. The published articles relevant to the case organisation were sent electronically to the company representative for recordkeeping purposes. Forwarding details of the progress of the study was part of the agreement with the case organisation.

My research participation 'consent request' clarified the terms of participation to avoid participants assuming the organisation is forcing their participation. In my view, the research topic under investigation is not necessarily a 'sensitive' matter as it can be seen as a systematic endeavour to improve and streamline graduate development processes and does not affect organisational operations. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the 'regulatory compliance' framework could be a sensitive matter to some participants and this position resonates with the observation by Brewer (1993) who advises that the different situations that can be encountered must be handled sensitively.

Issues of voluntary participation, confidentiality, consent, and anonymity were fully addressed electronically via e-mail as well as before the interview and group discussion sessions started. Participants were informed of the applied observation techniques where, for example, recording was utilised in order to make participants aware that the entire discussion can be recalled. Transparency was ensured at all times during the process. Consideration was made to the likelihood that participants did not volunteer to take part in the research, but were invited or possibly at times instructed, based on their role and function, by gatekeepers or promoters at higher levels of authority within the organisation. Therefore, participants were informed prior to the session of their choices and were given the consent forms to complete. In this manner, their confidence was gained and their privacy concerns were also alleviated. Discomfort of participants was monitored, and where this was observed, the participant's

disposition to continue involvement in responding to the questions were evaluated and amicably addressed. Deception was not used in this study, because participants were made aware of what is being studied, as well as their voluntary role in the data collection process. Byman and Bell (2007) argue that it is the duty of the researcher to ensure that the human values and sensibilities are honoured.

As stated earlier on, this research has epistemological and ontological foundations. I complied with the policies and procedures of the University of the Western Cape that governs ethics in research. I adhered to 'good practice' standards set by the ethics committee of the university regarding the objectivity and integrity of the research process and findings, the recording and disclosure of data, adherence to ethical publishing principles, accountability to society, as well as familiarising myself with research and reporting methodologies. I have considered the content of the Declaration of Intent: Ethics in Research document and embraced the ethical obligations and ethical research principles in undertaking my research. Continuous awareness of the Declaration of Adherence was well considered and I am willing to sign this declaration upon submission of my doctoral dissertation.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research design and the methodological framework implemented in this study under the headings: research approach, research philosophy, research design and strategy of inquiry and concludes with an ethics statement. The research employed a sequential three-phased approach. In summary, Phase One begins with a pilot study that progresses to a national online Google survey of employed graduates; Phase Two is informed by the outcomes of Phase one and employs a case study of a large organisation; and Phase Three is guided by the results of phase two and uses an interview study of university lecturers and senior managers of the case organisation.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 – are written in an article format and provide the results of the Google online survey, the case study and the interview study.

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CHAPTER THREE – PHASE ONE OF THE STUDY

REFLECTIONS OF EMPLOYED GRADUATES ON THE SUITABILITY OF THEIR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR WORKPLACE-READINESS

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the combined research design and methodology of the three articles presented in this dissertation by publication. Chapter two is followed by the three articles presented as chapters three, four and five of which two are published and one is under review. Each article represents a research objective of this study. Chapter three presents *phase one* of the study in the form of a published article on the examination of employed graduates' skills and knowledge application experiences in the workplace. Sections 3.2 to 3.7 below follow the requirements as prescribed by the UWC PhD by publication requirements. The actual article commences from the abstract that appears immediately after section 3.7. The format of the article is in the writing style of the South African Journal of Higher Education, converted into Microsoft Word format as required by the UWC PhD policy for inclusion in this dissertation. The actual article is appended listed as Appendix 18.

3.2 Publication Details

Title	Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace readiness.
Author	Mobarak, K.
Journal	South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE)
Volume	33
Issue Number	4
Pages	186 – 202
Journal Details	Peer Reviewed Accredited by the Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET)
Impact Factor	Still computing
Status	Published

3.3 South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE)

The South African Journal of Higher Education is an independent, fully accredited open access publication, and serves as a medium for articles of interest to researchers and

practitioners in higher education. The Journal provides a focal point for the publication of educational research from throughout the world including research done by members of prominent education associations in the country. It is a referee-assisted publication and enjoys the professional support of an International Advisory Board as well as the assistance of Consultant Editors. The journal is interdisciplinary in approach, and its purpose is to provide institutions of higher education and professional readers with scholarly information on major innovations in higher education, research projects and trends. The SAJHE is also in the process to be registered on the **International Bibliography of the Social Sciences'** (IBSS) international list of accredited journals.

3.4 Publication Record

This publication contributes to a PhD by publication completed by the research candidate. The article was prepared and submitted for review and publication to the South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE) by the candidate on 20 February 2019. It was then accepted for publication on 22 March 2019 and subsequently published on 14 October 2019.

3.5 Contribution Record

This is an individual author publication contributing to the PhD candidate's academic publication record as indicated below.

PhD Candidate's Contribution to Publication

Author	**Contributions**
Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak (Candidate)	100% manuscript design and completion contributed to the research candidate. The individual researcher identified the journal, was corresponding author, and communicated with the Editor-In-Chief and reviewers.

3.6 Citation for Appended Article

Mobarak, K. (2019). Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace readiness. South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE), 33(4), 186 – 202. Accessible

at https://www.journals.ac.za/index.php/sajhe/article/view/3337.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.20853/33-4-3337.

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Word Format of Appended Article – Sections 3.8 to 3.13

3.8 Abstract

There is broad consensus amongst scholars and policy makers that the development of workplace-ready graduates requires a review of the teaching and learning strategies currently informing classroom learning. It has been argued that the curricula taught at higher education institutions should be compatible with industry requirements and expectations: this would not only ensure the livelihood of graduates, but also their viability in an increasingly competitive and changing labour market. Accordingly, academics have a duty to revise their approaches to teaching and learning to ensure that the graduate output will service graduate workplace-readiness. In light of the aforementioned realities, this study explored the opinions of employed graduates with regard to their workplace-readiness upon employment. The primary objective was to establish whether South African universities are producing graduates considered worthy and capable by the employment sector. The study is guided by the following three theories: *moral hazard*; *economics of trust and information*; and *adverse selection*. These theories elucidate the importance of inclusive stakeholder responsibility and accountability for the development of workplace-ready graduates. Twenty-four responses of employed graduates from eight South African universities were obtained by means of a questionnaire administered via a Google link. The study found that graduates generally did not feel adequately prepared for the workplace. The article concludes that considerably more effort is required to align higher education curricula, and teaching and learning strategies with labour market requirements.

Keywords: moral hazard, economics of trust and information, adverse selection, workplace readiness, employed graduates, skills and knowledge, teaching and learning strategies.

3.9 Introduction

Employers have expressed concerns about graduates who cannot do the job due to a lack of knowledge and skills (Hansen 2017; Botes and Sharma 2017, 110). Academic skills are a primary requirement for employers, but most employers are looking beyond these skills for work experience combined with a qualification. Therefore, it is important to establish whether degree courses sufficiently prepare graduates for the work they are employed for (Hansen 2017; Botes and Sharma 2017, 110). A survey of 400 organisations across different countries conducted by the NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2016), for instance, found that only three of every ten employers considered recent graduates to be proficient in their application of knowledge and skills in the work environment.

Employers seek candidates who have experience gained through internships or cooperative programmes (Hansen 2017). Workplace-focused skills in high demand are communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning, and technology (Brown 2013). These skills continue to be relevant across various fields in different economic sectors (Bowley 2018). Bowley (2018) argues that the evidence in the datum collected from a survey of 2000 business leaders shows that so called "soft skills" are in higher demand than hard skills. She adds leadership, strategy, management, collaboration and time-management to the list of important soft skills required by organisations (Bowley 2018). It is thus evident that the responsibility for the development of these skills must be reconsidered.

Ultimately the transfer of skills and knowledge in formal classrooms occurs with the purpose of developing the graduate to provide for their livelihood, and perhaps, to achieve a level of independence as an individual in future. The responsibility for the production and transfer of skills and knowledge is a process that involves many stakeholders. It is widely acknowledged that each stakeholder in this process has a level of accountability in the development of the graduate for the labour market.

The convergence of stakeholder responsibility and accountability should lead to the development of a holistic graduate who is prepared to embrace their future with confidence.

Similarly, academics should be encouraged to find ways to present their subject content in ways that consider graduate workplace-readiness. The graduate attributes embedded in teaching and learning have to contribute to converting theory into practice. As far as could be ascertained from the literature, no recent study has focused on asking employed graduates across various economic sectors about their individual experiences in their respective workplaces since they graduated. Against this background, this study assessed employed graduates' individual experiences regarding their workplace-readiness after employment.

3.10 Literature Review

3.10.1 Theoretical overview

A possible reason for the continued debates about graduate workplace-readiness is frictions amongst stakeholders and insufficient collaboration between higher education institutions and the labour market. Given this context, the three theories may assist with creating awareness of the consequences of not improving the education process of graduate workplace-readiness, namely: moral hazard theory (Emons 1988); economics of trust and information theory (Dranove and Jin 2010); and adverse selection theory (Michaely and Shaw 2015, 280). *Moral hazard* refers to situations where one party has the opportunity to take advantage of another and instead of doing what is right, they do what benefits themselves instead of the party they should serve (Emons 1988). The *economics of trust and information theory* posits being accountable to, for example, stakeholders such as students who trust higher education institutions to provide them with correct information and for being accountable in that relationship (Dranove and Jin 2010). Dranove and Jin (2010) argue that disclosure of information is not regulated leaving the "sellers", in this case higher education institutions, at an advantage. Adverse selection, as proposed by Michaely and Shaw (2015, 280), refers to information asymmetry that may lead to a moral hazard because "investors", which in this case constitute students, are uninformed and end up being less successful. The authors' argument is viewed as part of a three-way interaction among stakeholders, i.e., students, higher education institutions, and the government, where a lack of relevant information and ineffective programmes may adversely affect a student's success (Michaely and Shaw 2015, 280).

The following three headings: *employers*; *workplaces*; and *student skills and knowledge* contextualize the environments for which skills and knowledge transfer are important. The literature focuses on the viewpoints of different parties that are linked to these environments

showing the significance of an effective and efficient participatory stakeholder contribution to the skills and knowledge development requirements.

3.10.2 Employers

Employers in South Africa and internationally want work-ready graduates. The continuing debates that graduates from higher education institutions lack skills and knowledge lead to increased mistrust among employers in the ability of graduates to perform effectively in the workplace once they are employed (Klebnikov 2015). These concerns are further influenced by ongoing debates and accusations by different stakeholders on many platforms about employed graduates' shortcomings after employment. The accusations are mostly directed at higher education institutions for delivering graduates who cannot fulfil the needs of the workplace (Klebnikov 2015; Hansen 2017).

South African stakeholders in education such as Nedbank chairperson, Ruel Khoza, believes that higher education institutions are failing the country with the mismatch between skills and qualifications that are not servicing the needs of employers and labour markets (Barron 2012). The issue is also highlighted by Klebnikov (2015) who claims that employers are experiencing difficulty when trying to find job-success qualities in graduates. Some graduates end up working in lower skilled jobs that are not relevant to the degrees that they obtained (Klebnikov 2015).

3.10.3 Workplace

The workplace is a flexible environment where micro- and macro-economic factors influence responsiveness and diversification by companies that are different from the structured environment of a classroom. There are, however, commonalities in the skills and knowledge produced in a classroom setting required by workplaces to respond to the economic environment. Employers recruit graduates to service their need to be sustainable and to grow in a highly competitive labour market environment.

Higher education institutions list the skills and knowledge developed in their degree programmes on various platforms used for marketing their study programmes. With many of these degree programmes, higher education institutions commit themselves to the development of skills and knowledge comprising, amongst others, soft, technical and theoretical skills in

different fields of study. Of the skills in high demand for employers are also listed in degree programme module content, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning, and technology (Brown 2013). How these skills are taught in classrooms must be explored as employers are not satisfied with the ability of graduates to transfer these skills to the workplace setting (Hansen 2017).

The challenge in transferring skills and knowledge to the workplace occurs when theory has to be converted into practice (Hansen 2017). Brown (2013) argues that skills and knowledge teaching and learning often take place theoretically in the classroom resulting in a mismatch between practice and theory. This discrepancy is an important factor that needs to be addressed given that 95 per cent of employers internationally want new graduates with work-related experience (Hansen 2017). This percentage is a leap from the previous year's 64.2 per cent (NACE 2016). Furthermore, workplaces require hands-on decision-making and problem-solving abilities from graduates due to workplace operational processes being dependent on flexible turnaround times and other influences such as productivity to remain profitable and sustainable. Case scenarios are provided in classrooms as practice examples for students, but in some instances these case studies are outdated. The workplace expectations cannot be taught in theory without grasping the actual and recent practical application and implementation requirements of industry (Jackson 2013, 776).

3.10.4 Student skills and knowledge

Selecting an undergraduate programme of study at first-year level can be a daunting exercise for a student. They may have an idea of the field they wish to enter after graduation but they still need guidance on how the skills and knowledge taught in classrooms are relevant to the workplace requirements. Furthermore, students rely on academics to know to what extent what is taught in classrooms will develop their ability to succeed in the workplace. Undergraduates are often not aware of the importance of gaining work-related experience before they graduate even though studies show that it will enhance their chances of securing employment (Jackson 2013, 776). It is therefore important for academics to be aware of these realities to inform and better prepare graduates for the workplace.

Students, on the other hand, should be able to trust that the skills, knowledge and information provided by higher education institutions will hold them in good stead for accessing the employment sector and their future growth. This would not only ensure the livelihood of

graduates after employment, but also their viability in an increasingly competitive labour market.

This study explored the reflections of employed graduates about their workplace-readiness after employment. Awareness and consideration of graduate experiences and comments should guide academics towards more appropriate teaching and learning strategies and practices at higher education institutions. The next section provides an overview of the literature on higher education institutions' responses and the expected contribution by academics to the process of developing workplace ready graduates.

3.10.5 Higher education institutions responses to workplace requirements

The awareness of workplace requirements can guide academics towards more appropriate teaching and learning strategies to adequately prepare graduates for the workplace. Continuing debates on the responsibility for producing workplace-ready graduates are not solving the problem. Considering the extent of the moral hazard consequences (Emons 1988) of ineffective teaching practices on the recipients, questions on whether a graduate should have recourse if the degree quality is not what was expected is inevitable. The aforementioned may affect graduates who have completed a study programme and on employment find that they were not holistically prepared for the workplace by their higher education institution.

The responsibility of "reasonable disclosure" of relevant information in a relationship of trust (Dranove and Jin 2010) about course content to prospective students during or before enrolment in degree courses must be a duty of higher education institutions. Especially if there is an awareness that learning programmes are not able to produce workplace-ready graduates.

Prospective students, as customers, intending to invest in their future will not adversely select to invest their time and money in a process that will serve them minimally, or not at all, in future. The responsibility for the matching and alignment of skills and knowledge production of workplace-ready graduates should be addressed to ensure an output of productive graduates. The graduate leaves the higher education institution with a degree that was advertised by the higher education institution to have outcomes of what the graduates will be able to do on completion of the degree programme. The question of who is responsible for graduate workplace-readiness should be addressed considering that graduates enrol at higher education institutions to provide them with the prospects to eventually be suitably employed.

The role of academics at higher education institutions is to strive to provide solid, relevant preparation at the baccalaureate and other graduate levels (Harrison 2017, 8). Yet, employers argue that graduates are not adequately prepared for the changing world of work (Botes and Sharma 2017, 110). Traditionally, higher education institutions produced thinkers and intellectual elites, but due to the complexity of the global society nowadays, higher education institutions have to move away from outdated paradigms towards meaningful progress (Crow 2014). At higher education level, meaningful learning and student development is the responsibility of the individual academics in classrooms. Institutional teaching and learning frameworks and policies are the foundation of the structure of learning processes, but teaching and learning happens when learning content and contact time with students add value and also become a footprint that graduates can take with them into their future.

A study conducted by recruitment consultants McKinsey and Company (2014) involving nine countries including India, Turkey and Brazil reported that the lack of workplace-directed training compounds the shortage of employment opportunities. The report further states that workplaces should be more involved in academic courses which, in my opinion, may result in academics losing ownership of teaching and learning, or having to up-skill themselves with workplace practical needs. The latter should not be an option if academics realize how important their roles are to individuals, society and a country's economic growth, sustainability and competitive advantage particularly in a global context.

3.10.6 Expected contribution by academics

Linking education to workplace needs require an adjustment of the way knowledge is transferred by educators in the classrooms. In this respect, attempts are being made in the academic environment to assess the needs of employers and labour markets (Hansen 2017).

Viviers (2016) reported on a study that explored the level of pervasive skills of South African accounting students. The study established that educators are aware of the skills development responsibilities to be incorporated into course modules but that this process needs improvement (Viviers 2016). Higher education institutions have a responsibility to their students and the public at large to provide relevant teaching and learning that will add value to the growth of the economy. In the case of the accounting field, education institutions are regulated by the policies and processes of the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA) that prescribes course content requirements and alignment to industry requirements. However, employers also

require pervasive skills development (Viviers 2016, 245). These skills are soft skills such as leadership skills, teamwork and communication skills that do not necessarily form part of the traditional accounting course content academics would teach in the field of accounting (Viviers 2016, 245). Academics are therefore required to adjust their content to also incorporate soft skills development. By disclosing the positives and negatives of degree programmes, higher education institutions can assist students with selecting a study programme from a variety of skills and knowledge acquisition options and institutions available at different levels of the South African skills development frameworks, which may serve them better in their future economic participation and livelihood.

In recent years, higher education institutions have been encouraged to incorporate the concept of work-integrated-learning in the higher education landscape (Harrison 2017). Lecturers should include work-integrated-learning in the curricula but the process should have a multiple stakeholder approach that should include students, businesses, government and the education sector (Harrison 2017). A foreseeable challenge can be the difference between the structured approach in a classroom and the flexibility of labour market needs and its environment. Higher education curricula content incorporates theory that might have to be adapted to practice.

This convention is not impossible, but might entail re-training of some academics who are not suitably developed, or employing academics with a combination of workplace and lecturing skills, knowledge and ability, and thereby replacing lecturers who have not progressed to a level required to produce capable graduates. If the economy needs suitably qualified graduates with both academic and workplace experience, as indicated by Hansen (2017), this matter should be addressed urgently. Academia should be capable of responding timeously to the markets they serve, as what is taught should facilitate the required outcome of suitable workplace-ready graduates. The notion of work-integrated-learning as part of the curricula resulting in revised teaching and learning strategies might be construed as unfair because higher education institutions are traditionally and/or debatably [*my opinion*] expected to teach and produce research and thinkers (Harrison 2017).

The attempted responsiveness by higher education institutions in recent years in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) confirms the recognition of the need for change. It is therefore important for academics to continually revise and/or enhance

existing teaching and learning strategies and/or implement new strategies to commit to the development of workplace-ready graduates.

3.11 Research Design

A qualitative approach to data collection was followed using a thematic content analysis strategy. The qualitative methodology was useful to discover and describe employed graduates' reflections on the suitability of their academic qualifications, skills and knowledge for workplace readiness. The aim was to compare employed graduates' comments with various texts from the literature that could contribute to the revision of teaching and learning strategies at higher education institutions (Flick 2013, 5).

3.11.1 Population and sampling

The population consisted of participants who were employed graduates and who graduated between the period January 2010 and March 2017. The minimum period of employment was 6 months so respondents can provide informed feedback. Non-probability, snowball sampling was used because there was no sampling frame (Saunders and Lewis 2012, 139). There was no exact indication of the population size as the initial six participants selected were asked to forward the questionnaire link to their contacts who would suit the specified criteria. These six respondents were selected from previous students of the UWC (University of the Western Cape) and the UNISA (University of South Africa) and on referral from other known contacts. No particular geographical area was specified to participants other than respondents having attended a university in South Africa. Participants were employed in different industries and graduated from eight different universities in three provinces in South Africa.

The snowball sampling technique allowed for new participants to be recruited (Ochoa 2017) from the initial six participants selected to participate in the study. By using the snowball sampling technique, the pool of respondents could be increased (Saunders and Lewis 2012, 139) in an accessible manner. In this case the Google questionnaire link was forwarded electronically via email. The respondents could also use email and other social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to distribute the questionnaire link to their contacts. The questionnaire link for this pre-test study was distributed between 15 November 2017 and 22 December 2017. A total of twenty-nine responses were received of which twenty-four

questionnaires were completed and could be used for the study. The remaining five that were excluded were spoiled questionnaire responses as not all questions were completed.

3.11.2 Data collection instrument

Google forms was used to design the questionnaire for the collection of the primary data. Standardized qualitative questions were used in a specific order (Saunders and Lewis 2012, 139) that allowed for more precise comparison of the responses. The advantage of applying this method was that the data could be collected in a cost-effective manner over a short period of time (Crossman 2017).

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: *biographical information* consisting of nine questions; *higher education institution and qualification selection* consisting of fifteen questions; and a *skills and knowledge* section with a combination of twenty-seven open-and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire link that was distributed using Google docs allowed for the responses to be recorded automatically in a linked Excel spreadsheet. The snowball sampling process was impersonal as the researcher could not assist and/or influence participant responses by clarifying questions. To ensure validity, the readability and understandability of the questionnaire was pre-tested with three graduates. Adjustments were made where necessary before forwarding the link to the initial six respondents. The three pre-tested questionnaire responses were excluded from the sample as their purpose was to ensure that the instrument is error-free and technically sound to a snowball participant. To ensure individual participant data trustworthiness and confidentiality, no participant had access to the responses of others, thereby confirming a true reflection of individual views. Public access restrictions were set on the electronic Google form feature.

3.11.3 Ethical considerations

The questionnaire was cleared by the University of the Western Cape and endorsed by the ethical clearance procedure number HS17/8/34. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary. A paragraph stating their voluntary participation with no compensation was included in the electronic questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire confirmed consent and a short paragraph to this effect was added in the introduction section of the questionnaire. To ensure anonymity, participant email details were not electronically tracked and/or recorded.

3.11.4 Data analysis

The electronic participant responses were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis. Mayring (2014) states that qualitative content analysis is a mixed-method strategy because the frequency of respondent comments about a certain category or theme is recorded numerically. However, the focus of this analysis is on the qualitative comments of the respondents. The variation in participant responses was categorized against the main themes and questions posed in the questionnaire. Three main themes were presented with more precise sub-theme codes for each main theme. Participants' comments and thoughts related to the themes and sub-theme codes were provided as extensively as possible and a short explanation was given to describe the comments. The following steps for qualitative content analysis were applied (Mayring 2014, 25):

- Coding, i.e., working through the material with the aid of a theme system;
- Examining the common occurrences of themes, and establishing the contingencies, requirements and constraints mentioned by participants; and
- Collating and interpreting the employed graduate comments under the three main themes and listed sub-themes.

3.12 Results and Discussion

The conceptual framework to present the findings is focused on the suitability of academically acquired skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness under the following main themes: (1) awareness of workplace requirements and workplace-readiness; (2) graduate preparation by higher education institutions; and (3) employer expectations vis-à-vis higher education graduates.

3.12.1 Background information

Respondents had mixed views on the extent to which higher education institutions contributed to their workplace-readiness. Factors such as lecturers having relevant workplace experience; making sure that theories are relevant to contemporary workplace needs; and changing teaching and learning strategies into relevant practical approaches featured prominently in the graduates' feedback. The thematic presentation of the data assisted with showing the employed graduates' workplace challenges from a broader perspective across industries and occupations.

Approaching employed graduates from different higher education institutions, degree programmes, industries and job functions endorsed the argument that the challenges experienced by employed graduates are applicable to degree programmes in *different* disciplines and fields of study.

3.12.2 Awareness of workplace requirements and workplace-readiness

This theme was divided into two sub-themes, namely (1) *Lack of information;* and (2) *Qualification-employment compatibility.*

Lack of information

Responses varied but the feedback was generally similar. Fourteen participants said that they had not received any information from their respective higher education institution on labour market needs. Others mentioned that some degree programmes provided more specific labour market requirements, while a number of graduates took the initiative to explore labour market requirements in their field of study. Examples of respondent comments include:

> "Very few of my module lecturers informed me about the needs of the labour market."

> "There was not much information on the labor market demands. However, before I even started the course, I had researched job availability in my field and what employers looked for when hiring graduates."

A pertinent factor mentioned by respondents is the insufficiency of the labor market information received from higher education institutions.

Qualification-employment compatibility

The overall feedback was that graduates *were* working in their field of study. Only one respondent was working in an unrelated field. The following examples reflect the participants' comments:

> "I completed a BCom Finance degree and I am currently employed as a finance assistant – my main function is to pay invoices and do intercompany billings."

> "I use my qualification on a daily basis – Personal trainer, help people get fit and healthy."

> "I am not currently doing what I studied to do – I have a BCom degree and work as a sales consultant in retail. However, I did other jobs as well – also worked as a chauffeur."

Providing relevant information to students during degree courses corresponds with the views of Dranove and Jin (2010) that higher education institutions are obliged to create awareness when learning programmes cannot produce workplace-ready graduates. Correct information assists students to invest time and money in programmes that will serve them well in future. Although the responses about information received differed, twenty-three of the twenty-four respondents were working in their field of study and were thus reaping the benefits of studying towards a suitable degree.

3.12.3 Graduate preparation by higher education institutions

Theme Two consisted of three sub-themes: (1) *Qualification-job requirements compatibility assessment*; (2) *Curricula and labor market requirements – compatibility assessment*; and

(3) *Student perspectives on lecturer competence*.

Qualification-job requirements compatibility assessment

The comments were predisposed to the theoretical inclination of degree programmes that should be more practical. Herewith some of the participant comments:

> "A substantive portion of the undergraduate learning is strictly theoretical. Shifting from a [theoretical] mindset to a practical mindset is something my degree did not prepare me for."

> "So much more can be done with students. Preparing students for the world of work is vital and students should have a curriculum vitae when they leave the higher education institution. They should be finding jobs in their final months at the higher education institution with the help of their lecturers."

> "Students should also be placed in vacation programmes which will provide experience on what to expect. They need to be made more workplace smart and technology savvy."

> "More practicality could have been illustrated in classrooms by lecturers."

The emphasis on the word "practical" by many participants implies the need for degree programmes to have less theoretical value, or more theoretical articulation with workplace practical application.

Curricula and labor market requirements – compatibility assessment

Graduate comments varied as some participants acknowledged the flexibility of workplace environments and the related challenges it holds for classroom teaching and learning. The need

for academics to make theory more relevant to practice was expressed by graduates from all disciplines. The following comments present the views of the respondents from diverse industries and job functions:

> "Higher education institutions should partner with employers and government and offer programmes that enable higher education students to gain work experience while studying. A degree nowadays is no longer worth the paper it's written on if one does not have experience of some sort. However, I believe that focused programmes aimed at giving experience to students in their field of study would go a long way."

> "It is possible to teach a student how to perform certain duties especially if learning is more authentic."

The matching and alignment of skills and knowledge for producing workplace-ready graduates is important for the development of well-rounded graduates as is evident from the participant comments. The pre-test survey data for this research were collected over the period November to December 2017. The graduates' comments are generalized views of the skills and knowledge obtained in their job contexts as a result of their formal studies.

Student perspectives on lecturer competence

Twenty-two respondents relayed the importance of lecturers having workplace experience in order to make the classroom learning more relevant to the workplace. Two respondents commented that lecturers should at least be aware of the relevance of the theory they taught to the workplace environments. The following comments were made:

> "Lecturers can use their workplace knowledge and bring [it] into the content taught and the student can understand not only the content but how it can be in the real world. And the student can be made aware of the expectations that lie ahead for a graduate to prepare in advance."

> "In this way lecturers can convey knowledge to the students in a well-rounded way – not just from an academic perspective. Working in the labor market is multi-dimensional and they should have the multi-faceted experience."

> "It is one thing to know the theory from prescribed textbooks from which lecturers get their course content. However, it is a completely different issue to teach a course when you also understand the practical aspects of the theory you teach."

The respondent opinions expressed the benefits of teaching and learning that incorporates the participation of and integration with practice as important requirements from lecturers in preparing better-equipped graduates.

3.12.4 Employer expectations vis-à-vis higher education graduates

This theme is discussed under two sub-themes: (1) *Towards addressing skills and knowledge gaps at employment stage*; and (2) *Assessing the viability of a revised pedagogical approach for a balanced theoretical-practical perspective*. Respondents were required to provide actual examples of their workplace experiences after graduating. Comparing workplace skills and knowledge demands with academically acquired skills and knowledge, allowed for the reflection on what higher education institutions are reasonably capable of producing for workplaces.

Towards addressing skill and knowledge gaps at employment stage

The respondents placed more emphasis on soft skills and practical knowledge they needed for the workplace. Below are respondent comments on the skills and knowledge that employers had to develop among graduates after employment:

> "Perseverance, self-control, time management, positive attitude, hard-working selling skills, skills in business processes."
> "Practical marketing skills; skills in social media, graphic design, computer programming, data analysis and networking."
> "How to professionally engage with people from all walks of life; how to manage difficult conversations with clients."
> "How to acquire the skill of being adaptable, as things change on a daily basis so you have to learn to keep up with these changes."
> "Practical communication, organisational and people skills."
> "Technical skills."
> "Employers need their employees to be hungry to learn, to see opportunity and build something new from it; they need people that can identify risk from a mile away and strategise on possible solutions. They also need people who will be accountable for what they do."
> "Employers seek people who will solve particular problems within their companies."

Although respondents acknowledged the need for theory-in-practice, they pointed out that the focus and development of degree programmes should shift towards becoming more real world oriented.

3.12.5 Assessing the viability of a revised pedagogical approach for a balanced theoretical-practical perspective

Participants provided suggestions of how this can be achieved based on what were expected from them in the workplace. Graduates' suggestions and comments were as follows:

"Lecturers could have hosted certain "how to" sessions or provide recent workplace case studies."

"The institution only taught about the existence of processes and procedures and how they work. But there was never an opportunity to experience how the [processes and procedures] worked practically."
"Lecturers provided the theoretical part but more practical scenarios would have better prepared me."

Respondents seemed confident that higher education institutions can prepare them more sufficiently for workplaces. The greater majority of participants stated that they would choose the same learning programme if the teaching and learning processes could be adapted to suit workplace-readiness and/or labor market needs.

Participant concerns about workplace-readiness were evident across different economic sectors and jobs. The fact that participants graduated from different higher education institutions shows that the problem is experienced nationally, which in turn points to the need for a broader conversation and action among stakeholders. Although graduates gained skills and knowledge from higher education institutions that were transferable to workplaces, it is apparent that there still are shortcomings in the teaching and learning process that hinder workplace-readiness. The request and need for practical application and labor market relevance in teaching and learning is evident from this group of participants.

3.12.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Initiatives for graduate workplace-readiness improvement have been implemented as shown in the literature, but the debates from various stakeholders still reflect negativity in this regard. Employed graduates are stakeholders in the education processes of higher education institutions with important experiences that can add value to the initiatives by academics to improve teaching and learning strategies. The comments and observations by employed graduates in this study provide suggestions that could be valuable in rethinking how graduates should be prepared and developed in classroom contexts.

It is clear that predominantly theoretical approaches towards teaching and learning do not strengthen graduates for the workplace. Investment in learning and development after graduation that should have been done effectively during degree programmes is unfair if the initial teaching and learning processes could have addressed the shortcomings. Graduate comments reflect the deficiencies in their development after employment. Although graduates

confirmed that they were not *directly* informed by employers that they lacked skills and knowledge, employers had to re-train them in skills and knowledge, which the higher education institution could or should have addressed in the first place. They also felt inadequate in their ability to effectively respond to workplace needs. This resulted in employers having to train and/or re-train them in soft skills, hard skills and technical skills that could have been addressed to some level in the degree programme.

An important concern that needs to be addressed is that academics should take responsibility for their own development in making their teaching and learning relevant to the needs of labor markets and adequate preparation of the graduate who will have to participate in a flexible workplace environment. The graduate comments resonate with the need for lecturers to provide, for example, simulated examples of converting theory into practice. The repetitive learning content taught in classrooms must be aligned with the flexibility of the workplace in the form of case studies that have occurred more recently. Contemporary study material might be better suited with content and techniques that are currently utilized in the labor market. In the same way that students are responsible to expand their knowledge beyond the classroom, lecturers have a responsibility to renew their knowledge and teaching techniques to keep teaching and learning current.

Producing workplace-ready graduates is a key factor that could affect labor markets and the graduate adversely if not done properly. This study provides valuable guidelines from employed graduates with regard to skills and knowledge requirements, which in turn could help to improve both module content and teaching and learning strategies in classrooms. The literature indicates that some of the shortcomings in skills listed by employed graduates in this study were mentioned in previous studies, but that it is still not sufficiently addressed in classrooms. Participants employed in different industries and work situations echoed these shortcomings, which denote that the problem is not discipline-specific. An interesting and important finding is that 22 of the 24 respondents confirmed that they did not choose the wrong degree programme, but that the teaching and learning practices during their studies did not prepare them sufficiently for the practical world of work (Botes and Sharma 2017, 110).

The inadequacies in both teaching and learning practices and programme content happen at different higher education institutions, affirming the need for review and adjustment of teaching and learning strategies. Graduates compete at various levels in the labor market that is highly

flexible and competitive. Consideration of the employed graduates' suggestions may guide academics in their own development by staying current in their field. All stakeholders thus have a duty to commit responsibly to developing workplace-ready graduates as it is a moral hazard to know that a system is wrong yet allowing it to continue to the disadvantage of others**.** The need for employers to engage more pro-actively with the higher education sector with regard to curricula formulation, will help ensure that the graduate output by higher education institutions meet labor market requirements. This could partly be achieved through collaboration between curricula developers at higher education institutions and the relevant parties of the labor market sector.

In the same manner as is expected of individuals to be competitive for their own growth and livelihood, so must a country be competitive and sustainable. Higher education institutions have a moral obligation and responsibility to ensure that the educational investment that they are contributing to will enhance the country's economic growth over the long term.

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CHAPTER FOUR – PHASE TWO OF THE STUDY

EXPLORING THE CONTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITIES TO LABOUR MARKET REQUIREMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

4.1 Introduction

In chapter three the results of *phase one* of the study is presented, in which I examined the experiences of employed graduates in the application of their university acquired skills and knowledge at the workplace. Phase one addressed objective one of this qualitative research as a pre-test study that was published as an article in the South African Journal of Higher Education. The results of the pre-test study revealed the need for a change in university teaching and learning strategies as indicated by the challenges experienced by graduates at workplaces after their employment. The outcomes of the phase one study informed *phase two* of the research presented as chapter four in this dissertation. Section 4.2 to 4.7 below follow the requirements as prescribed by the UWC PhD by publication policy. The actual article commences from the abstract that appears immediately after section 4.7. The format of the article is in the writing style of the Industry and Higher Education Journal – SAGE International Journal, converted into Microsoft Word format as required by the UWC PhD policy for inclusion in this dissertation. The actual article is appended listed as Appendix 23.

4.2 Publication Details

Title	Exploring the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective.
Author	Mobarak, K.
Journal	Industry and Higher Education, SAGE Publishing
Online	sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI	10.1177/0950422220935784
Pages	1 – 11
Journal Details	Peer Reviewed Accredited by the Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET)
Impact Factor	Still computing

Status	Published

4.3 Profile of SAGE Publishing Ltd - Industry and Higher Education

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The *Industry and Higher Education (IHE)* Journal focuses on the multifaceted and complex relationships between higher education institutions, businesses and industry. It examines the processes and enactments of academia-business cooperation, as well as examining the significance of that cooperation in wider contexts, such as regional development, entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems. Practical aspects of academia-business cooperation are emphasised, with the *IHE* also locating practice in theoretical and research contexts, questioning received opinion and developing an understanding of what constitutes truly effective cooperation. The IHE Journal is an affiliate of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

4.4 Publication Record

This publication contributes to a PhD by publication completed by the research candidate. The article was prepared and submitted for review and publication to SAGE Publishing Ltd. –

Industry and Higher Education Journal by the candidate on 4 March 2020. The manuscript was accepted for publication on 4 May 2020 and subsequently published on 25 June 2020, online.

4.5 Record

This is an individual author publication contributing to the PhD candidate's academic publication record as indicated below.

Author	Contributions
Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak (Candidate)	100% manuscript design and completion contributed to the research candidate. The individual researcher identified the Journal, was corresponding author, and communicated with the editor-in-chief and reviewers during the publication process.

4.6 Citation for Appended Article

Mobarak, K. (2020). Exploring the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective. Industry and Higher Education. SAGE Publications, 35(2). Accessible at. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0950422220935784. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422220935784.

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Word Format of Appended Article – Sections 4.8 to 4.15

4.8 Abstract

Organisations function in a flexible and changing environment that requires dynamic responses to diverse forces influencing their sustainability and growth. Employers wish to recruit graduates who can capably and successfully transfer their university-acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace. The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa from an employer's perspective. Signalling theory assists as the theoretical framework to establish: (1) whether the skills and knowledge required by labour markets are reflected in the advertised degree programmes of universities; and (2) whether skills and knowledge shortcomings could have been addressed sufficiently by universities.

Keywords

Labour market requirements, signalling theory, teaching and learning practices, university contribution.

4.9 Introduction

There is a longstanding dissatisfaction amongst some employers in many countries with the quality of the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates (Hansen, 2017). In 2017 the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), a US-based non-profit professional institution, surveyed 400 employers internationally and found that only 30 percent of employers confirmed that graduates were proficient in the workplace application of the skills and knowledge they had acquired academically. The NACE survey results are consistent with the ongoing concerns expressed by various South African stakeholders in newspaper articles sourced by the researcher from 2012 to 2015 concerning the failure of universities to produce workplace-ready graduates. As stakeholders in skills and knowledge production, employers complain about shortcomings in the quality of the skills and knowledge possessed by graduates in comparison to labour market demands (Botes and Sharma, 2017). Employers are also worried about the scope and relevance of graduate skills and knowledge in relation to labour market needs (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018).

This alleged failure of universities to produce suitable graduates for the labour market raises concerns about the learning outcomes and learning standards signalled by degree programmes offered by South Arica's universities. In the context of this study, the word 'signal' refers to the information about the degree programme, learning outcomes and standards marketed by the university to students wishing to enrol in different disciplines.

Against the background of the employers' concerns, these signals from universities are analysed using the signalling theory developed by Michael Spence in 1973. Signalling theory provides a useful framework for understanding that the recruitment of graduates by employers is influenced by the signals received from universities about the qualifications they award to graduates. Employers trust the signalled information in forming their expectations of what graduates will know and be able to do when they are recruited. It is therefore important to establish whether the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa is sufficient in preparing graduates for the work they are eventually employed to undertake (Botes and Sharma, 2017; Hansen, 2017).

Universities are responsible for the learning outcomes of, standards achieved by and qualifications awarded to graduates. Ideally, universities are expected to produce graduates who are proficient in contributing meaningfully to workplace and labour market requirements in different sectors of the economy, but this has not been the case in many countries. Based on the expectation that university graduates are ready for work, employers recruit them to add value to their operations. In this regard, hiring graduates is considered an investment by the employer (Spence, 1973), but experiences around the world have shown that hiring graduates has become an expense for most employers. Thus, a major concern amongst employers is that universities are not producing graduates who are competent in performing the assigned tasks at the workplace. A graduate's inability to meet expected performance requirements hinders the organisation's capacity to be effective and responsive in highly competitive local and international business environments (Hansen, 2017). In light of the employers' concerns, therefore, this study explores the contribution of universities to labour market requirements from an employer's perspective in South Africa.

4.10 Theoretical Overview

Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) suggests that an employer cannot observe the skills and knowledge of an employee prior to employment but that hiring an employee is still an

investment decision. The theory has been adopted in many fields – amongst others, economics and marketing – and in this study it is used to explore the signals sent by universities about their degree programmes to prospective students and employers. In the context of education discourses, it has been argued that such signalling informs the employer that having a degree raises wages simply because the education level is a signal of the employee's ability, even though this ability is unobserved by the employer prior to the employment decision (Tambi, 2018). Gabbert (2015) suggests that degrees serve as a signal to managers that graduates are valuable and that hiring graduates increases productivity and makes the company look good. Employers, then, rely on the messages or signals received about degree programmes or qualifications from universities when recruiting graduates and trust the reliability of this information in their expectations of what graduates will do when they are employed (Vedder, Denhart and Robe, 2013).

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), together with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) database, provide qualifications outcomes and the learning standards of registered qualifications linked to institutions at various levels of education, among which are universities. Employers can access the learning outcomes and standards of registered qualifications on the SAQA website or on the websites of universities when they need information about what graduates should be able to do and what they should know when they have completed their degree programme. According to the graduate participants in this study, prospective graduates intending to be admitted to a study programme will most often access the website of a university to obtain information about degree programmes.

Signalling theory is useful for describing the behaviour between two parties when one party as the sender (here the university) communicates the information it is selling to a receiver (the prospective student or employer) (Connelly et al., 2011). The employer as receiver reviews the learning outcomes of the university qualification a graduate achieved to inform its recruitment and selection processes. The prospective graduate as receiver uses the advertised degree programme as a guide when selecting a study programme. Given these circumstances, the receiver of the information should be able to trust that it will provide the value it promises. In other words, prospective graduate employees send a signal about their skills and knowledge to an employer when they acquire a degree qualification (Connelly et al, 2011). Signalling theory posits that the purpose of most human behaviour is to signal value and status to others (Gabbert, 2015); therefore, employers recruit on the basis of the information signalled by universities

through the qualifications they award about the learning outcomes graduates have achieved. The signals sent by universities, however, seem to have become distorted, given the continuing contentions that many graduates are not adequately prepared for the labour market.

By applying signalling theory, this study aims to establish the impact of that alleged inadequate preparation on graduates themselves and on employers of graduates. The role of universities based on the content of their degree programmes as advertised on their websites is analysed in the context of employers' concerns about graduates' skills and knowledge and their relevance to workplace requirements.

4.10.1 Degree programme information signalled by universities

Previous studies, including those by Brown (2013) and Bowley (2018), focus on scarce and other important skills at various levels of demand by employers. Brown (2013) argues that the skills in demand are: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management and technology. Bowley (2018) notes that a survey of 2000 business leaders indicated that 'soft skills' were in higher demand and adds the following skills among those required by employers: leadership, strategy, management, collaboration and time management.

An exploration of the degree programmes described on the websites of seven randomly selected universities (private and public institutions) in South Africa revealed that the skills listed by Brown and Bowley are covered by the programmes. Universities, however, differ in the ways they present or signal degree programme content. Considering that this description will be the first point of access to information for a prospective student applying for admission to a programme, one could argue that the information should not be deficient in detail concerning expected outcomes and/or the levels of outcomes to be achieved. The programme descriptions on the websites of the randomly selected universities provided the following common threads of information:

- *Programme*: the department offering the degree programme and a list of the modules.
- *Duration*: full-time and part-time study options in years.
- *Admission requirements*: prerequisite knowledge at a particular NQF level with an average of 60% achieved; matric with Bachelor's degree access; and, in some cases, particular courses or modules must have been completed to qualify for admission.

- *Career opportunities*: among others, in finance, working in banks, insurance companies, investment companies, education, industry, journalism, fitness instructor, coach, project manager, business manager.

Of the websites viewed, only two provided a breakdown of the outcomes of the modules offered in the degree programmes from year one to the final year of study. The information extracted for this study focused on the main outcomes and content provided on degree programmes in order to ascertain what the graduate would know and what the employer could expect of the graduate on employment. These two universities provided the following additional information linked to the content that would be taught:

- *Main Outcomes*: (1) Students should be able to calculate, understand, graphically solve, interpret, analyse, or (2) students should demonstrate ability to...; raised awareness of...; the capacity to...
- *Main content*: application of tools; introduction to...; graphically solve; measures of...

The lists are not exhaustive, but for the purposes of this study only the similarities in the information provided were extracted. The word 'understand' appears quite often under the main outcomes section of the descriptions of final-year modules. To 'understand' does not equate to being able to 'apply' or 'do', as would be expected from the terms 'solve' and 'analyse' that appear less frequently in module outcomes and content sections. A prospective student may not fully comprehend what the degree programme outcomes translate to for the labour market at the time of application for admission to a degree programme. An employer may misunderstand or misinterpret the outcomes when the description does not specifically state that a graduate 'will be able to' but rather 'should be able to'.

Prospective students may look at the career opportunities listed in advertised degree programmes to influence their choice of study. Ultimately, applying the signalling theory perspective of human behaviour, graduates may want to signal their value and status to employers because they have a university qualification (Gabbert, 2015) that is deemed to belong to the highest level of education bands on the NQF.

The aim of the above analysis was not to compare universities, but rather to trace the process a prospective student would be likely to follow when selecting a degree programme, and therefore the names of the universities are not mentioned. The degree programme content

analysis, it should be noted, excludes the possibility that the popularity or reputation of a particular university will also inform a prospective student's selection.

4.10.2 Employers' concerns with the qualifications offered by universities

The continuing stakeholder debates about the poor quality of university qualifications suggests a lack of problem-solving mechanisms to address employer concerns and labour market requirements (Franco et al., 2019; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). Yang and McCall (2014) cite Connelly et al. (1973) in arguing that educational investment by an individual in higher education is interpreted as a signal to employers about the future productivity of a job applicant through completion of rigorous university degree programmes. Globally, however, employers are questioning why graduates hold what seem to be appropriate qualifications but, once in the workplace, are found to be unable to do what the employer was led to believe they would be able to do (Franco et al., 2019; Hansen, 2017).

In most cases, the recruitment of graduates is based on the information signalled by universities about the outcomes the graduate of a degree programme will have achieved during their studies (Hansen, 2017; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018; Master, 2014). The career opportunities connected with the qualification from a particular programme as signalled on university websites and/or in other media, such as newspaper advertisements, may also influence an employer's perception of the skills and knowledge a graduate should have on employment if that qualification is relevant to a job vacancy (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018).

Gernetzky (2011) refers to the statement by the then Deputy Performance and Evaluation Minister in South Africa that graduates had to be retrained when they began working. Apart from the retraining commitment required of employers, the Minister's comment is also concerning for graduates, who have already invested time and money in studying. Andrews (2013), a former Dean of Wits Business School, reports on his discussion with business leaders in which they raised the concern that many Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduates were able only to regurgitate outdated theories and applied theoretical formulas to problems. In the same context, Vollgraaff (2015) draws on comments of a senior partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Southern Africa, relaying his concerns about the difficulties experienced by the organisation in finding and keeping the right people due to a lack of talent, linked to the capabilities of employed graduates, which was stifling its ability to expand. Vollgraaff (2015) further reports that 48% of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in Africa

alleged that it had become more difficult to hire workers, and 54% said talent expenses had affected their companies' growth and profitability negatively in the past 12 months.

Master (2014) argues that businesses are faced with the challenge that the quality of education necessary for skills to be transmitted in the workplace, acquired and retained is increasingly lacking. Employers not only employ graduates; they also send their existing employees to complete qualifications they previously have not had an opportunity to acquire. Government and professional bodies' policies and practices prescribe to employers the qualification requirements for particular jobs, thereby impacting the recruitment and selection processes of organisations. In light of Master's (2014) argument for employees to be educated, and that the education system is not relevant to employers' needs, what options do graduates have if their university education does not adequately prepare them to meet job requirements? Master (2014) further argues that employees, in the absence of adequate education, will remain trapped in the realm of functional work and productivity will suffer because those employees will be able only to exercise their skills to the limits of their working knowledge and their imagination. Thus, their ability to be self-directed and innovative is adversely affected – an ability that is increasing in importance with the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in which organisations and economies must compete in an environment of disruptive technologies that will change how we live and work (Schwab, 2015). Employees who are sent to university to study will be disadvantaged if study programmes are not improved to match more closely the needs of the workforce.

It is evident from the literature, media reports and debates sourced for this study that the graduate skills and knowledge challenges for employers persist despite the voicing of stakeholder concerns. Statistics quoted by Vollgraaff (2015) and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2017) further strengthen concerns about the quality of degree programmes and the inability of graduates with the resulting qualifications to contribute meaningfully to the labour market. In light of the increasing global competitiveness and flexibility of economies, employers' concerns across many industries should be a matter of importance to all responsible parties in South Africa.

4.11 Research Design and Implementation

A qualitative approach was used to investigate the extent to which degree programmes offered by universities in South Africa reflect the skills and knowledge requirements of employers.

This approach to social inquiry helps in analysing the extent to which universities can sufficiently prepare graduates for the labour market. As already noted, an analysis and review of the literature, including a qualitative content analysis of the degree programme information on the websites of seven South African universities, as well as the opinions of various stakeholders expressed in newspaper articles, informed the initial data collection process. The qualitative methods used for data collection included interviews and focus group sessions in a process of naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry helps towards an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its natural setting (Bowen, 2008); therefore, all participants were from business units that impacted each other operationally. All were employees in the same organisation at different levels of the hierarchical structure. The selected employer is classified as a large institution situated in one province with 70 business units (such as engineering, safety and security), as well as support services spread across various districts. Naturalistic inquiry allows for the use of various techniques, including online open-ended questionnaires, focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews, applying structured and unstructured processes (Bowen, 2008). All data were collected and recorded in English. The qualitative methodology enabled discernment and description of the employer's experiences with employed graduates, resulting in the employer's perception of the contribution of universities to the labour market (Flick, 2013).

It is important to note that graduate feedback is not reported in this article. The data collected from employed graduates as outlined below, however, informed the data collection process with the management participants. Graduates had qualifications from different universities and had studied in different disciplines – among others, accounting, engineering, sports science, commerce and political studies.

4.11.1 Online open-ended questionnaire with employer's graduates

A non-probability convenience sampling method (Saunders and Lewis, 2012) was used to access the graduates hired by the employer via an online Google questionnaire link sent to the organisation's human resources officer, who then forwarded the link to the graduates' email addresses. Non-probability convenience sampling allows for the selection of participants in a process that does not give all individuals in a population an equal chance of selection (Saunders et al, 2012). Convenience sampling proceeded until the required number of participants was reached (Saunders et al., 2012). A total of 35 graduates, employed in different business units

within the organisation, received the link. The convenience sampling technique applied facilitated speedy delivery of the questionnaire to participants; cost-effectiveness in collecting data; and availability of the participant sample (Crossman, 2017).

The Google Forms application was used to design the questionnaire, which consisted of three sections: (1) biographical information (9 closed-ended questions); (2) university and qualification selection (a combination of 15 open-ended and closed-ended questions); and (3) skills and knowledge (a combination of 27 open-ended and closed-ended questions). The link was made available online for the month of June 2018 to allow participants sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. Of the 35 graduates who received it, 33 responded. Only 30 returned questionnaires were used for this study because the remaining 3 were not completed in full. Employed graduates from nine different business divisions of the employer completed the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations. The open-ended questionnaire was cleared by the University of the Western Cape and was endorsed by Ethical Clearance Procedure No. HS17/8/34. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The criteria for participation in the study were specified in the questionnaire and participant confidentiality was assured by electronic settings that automated responses directly to the researcher on its completion, and not to the human resources officer who had forwarded the questionnaire to participants. The analysis of the data collected from the employed graduates informed the selection of participants for the management focus group sessions.

4.11.2 Focus group 1 – Employed graduates

Purposive sampling, as a non-probability method, was used to select 10 of the 30 online participants for one focus group interview session. The inclusion criterion was that participants selected for the group should be representative of the nine business units from which online responses were received. (Graduates from other business units were excluded because they did not respond within the period for which the Google open-ended online questionnaire was available.) The main reason for this focus group interview session was to clarify the online responses of the completed questionnaires in a real setting to increase the validity and reliability of the analysed data.

Confirmation of completion of the online open-ended questionnaire had to be signed by each participant in the focus group session. This was communicated to participants beforehand and the confirmations were signed at the session. Electronic verification was carried out by accessing the Google responses. The focus group process involved electronic and written flipchart recording of participants' responses. The data collected from the employed graduates informed the themes and questions of the interview schedule and discussion for the focus groups with the management teams.

4.11.3 Focus group 2 – Management teams

Six focus group sessions, categorised as Focus Group 2, were held with management teams representing the business units in which the participant graduates were employed – among others, engineering, water affairs, safety and security, finance, human resources, information and technology. Purposive sampling was applied in the selection of the participants with the assistance of the human resources consultant based on the managers to whom the graduates reported. The focus group sessions were held at three different venues to facilitate the availability and travel of the managers. In all, 24 managers participated, with 4 at each session. There are different opinions about the minimum number of participants required for a focus group session and, therefore, the number of participants is best determined by the purpose of the focus group (Bigby, 2018). In this case, the purpose was that managers should share experiences, opinions and perspectives about the graduates employed in their respective and cross-functioning departments. The small groups allowed for an easier flow of collective conversation (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011), encouraging honesty and valid feedback which contributed ideas and views to help resolve the employer's concerns with the research problem.

An interview schedule consisting of guiding questions related to the themes developed from the analysed graduate data informed the semi-structured focus group sessions with the management teams. The primary aim was to reflect on common perspectives of the data collected from employed graduates and the experiences of managers with these graduates in the workplace.

The sessions encouraged a range of responses that provided a broader appreciation of the attitudes, behaviour, opinions and perceptions of the participants concerning the research issues (Hennink, 2007). It was important to appreciate how managers saw their own reality and hence

to obtain richer data. The sessions provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore the gap between what managers say and what they do or how they respond in workplace settings to the alleged lack of skills and knowledge of employed graduates. Permission to record the sessions electronically was granted in advance and, in addition, managers were asked to write their responses on a flipchart during the session. The researcher also made written notes of comments when probing for clarification of points made. No challenges were experienced in getting consent for participation and confidentiality from participants. Consent forms were signed before the focus groups started.

4.11.4 One-on-one interviews – Division heads

Purposive sampling was used to select the 3 divisional heads for the one-on-one interviews. The human resources officer was requested to select heads to whom managers participating in the focus group sessions reported. Data collected from the focus groups with the graduates and managers informed the questions scheduled for the semi-structured interviews with the divisional heads. In addition, further discussion with these participants gave them an opportunity to provide their own views and contribute to an understanding of the internal influences on the research issues from a higher level of the organisation.

Qualitative interview formats allow for discussion and open-ended questioning of participants. I simplified the thematic questions to ensure that they were clearly understood by all the participants, but participants were also encouraged to seek clarity in the case of misunderstood questions (Ary et al., 2010). The divisional heads operate at a strategic level of the organisation and provided comparative feedback on the respective business units reporting to them. They were probed about collaboration with universities and the extent to which this was encouraged in order to ensure that degree programmes were responsive to the needs of the labour market. Consent forms were signed and the same processes of note-taking, written flip chart responses and electronic recording were used to gather data.

4.12 Data Analysis

Analysis of the respective categories of qualitative data collected varied slightly. The online open-ended questionnaire responses were automatically recorded in an Excel spreadsheet that was linked to the online questionnaire and analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis. Responses by the employed graduates were categorised according to the questions in the

questionnaire from which the aforementioned three themes were developed (the themes are specified below under 'Results and discussion'). Graduate focus group responses were merged with online group responses. The analysis focused on the comments and variations in the responses of participants that were linked to the themes developed. Participants' comments were provided as extensively as possible and a short explanation was given to describe them. Mayring's (2014) steps for qualitative content analysis were useful in bringing out the essence and meaning of the data collected. Important passages could be coded in multiple ways, helping with the credibility of the findings by constantly aligning the process of coding with the research question and the literature reviewed. The steps were applied as follows:

- *coding,* which involved working through the material with the aid of a theme system;
- *examining* the common occurrences of themes, and establishing the contingencies, requirements and constraints mentioned by participants; and
- *collating and interpreting* the graduates' comments under the three main themes and listed subthemes.

The electronically recorded data, the flipchart data and the researcher's notes from the management team focus group sessions were captured in an Excel spreadsheet. The same themes developed from the online questionnaire responses guided analysis of the data collected from the focus group sessions and the face-to-face interviews. The reflections and experiences of the managers were juxtaposed against the reflections of graduates where this was applicable.

One-on-one interview recordings and written responses were captured in an Excel spreadsheet and Mayring's (2014) coding system with the same themes as previously developed were applied. The main themes applied in the same qualitative process assisted with the reduction of subjectivity in interpreting the findings. The four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability for judging trustworthiness within a naturalistic inquiry setting, as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994), were established through the progressive and integrated processes of data collection linked to the same themes. Contextualising and linking the data collected from one participant group to inform and guide the data collected from the next group with the same coding system until saturation was achieved confirmed achievement of the four criteria (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln's (1994) four criteria were fulfilled in terms of: certainty in the truth of the findings; the applicability of findings in different business units; the consistency and reproducibility of the findings; and the

degree of researcher impartiality achieved by allowing participants the comfort of a conducive and safe environment in which to interact without the researcher's influence.

Finally, randomly selected degree programmes specific to the qualifications held by the participating employed graduates were sourced from the websites of seven universities. These programmes, as advertised, were analysed to compare their content and learning outcomes with the data collected about degree programmes from the respective participant groups. The focus of the comparison was on the programmes' content and outcomes in relation to labour market needs and on how the required skills and knowledge were achieved during the study years. Thus, the comparative analysis concentrated on the signals (Spence, 1973) employers receive about qualifications and their interpretation of the acquired skills and knowledge of graduates on employment.

4.13 Results and Discussion

The research findings are contextualised by the interpretations of the management teams of the university qualifications held by employed graduates as signalled by universities and the NQF. The thematic framework in which the key findings are presented is influenced by Mayring's (2014) coding system. The three main themes developed from the data analysis were: (1) degree programme content versus labour market needs; (2) skills and knowledge production by universities; and (3) how universities can improve skills and knowledge production.

4.13.1 Degree programme content versus labour market needs

The findings concerning degree programme content are based on the degrees held by the employed graduates. The influence of stakeholders such as professional bodies on degree programme content is considered in the presentation of the findings (Master, 2014), especially in the fields of accounting and engineering. Management participants thought that relevant content and different modes of teaching should be applied to graduate development in classroom settings, noting that studies influenced by professional bodies should encourage continuous professional development and certification beyond university degrees for quality assurance and up-to-date knowledge.

Managers had different views on degree programme content because of the influence of professional bodies and others on accounting and engineering degree programmes compared to

more flexible programmes (the regulatory requirements of those two fields prescribe what learning content universities should incorporate). Points made by the participants included:

- Workplace accounting utilises software applications; hence there is a need to prepare graduates with these updated skills.
- There is a need to apply, or at least to create awareness of, innovative and relevant digital and software application ability in accounting and engineering as well as other contexts.
- Awareness should be created in graduates of the need for continuous professional development (ongoing professional certification in the field of, amongst others, engineering). A university degree does not complete their development and professional requirements for the labour market.

The more flexible degree programmes, such as commerce, sports science, information technology, education, finance and human resources, afford universities a less structured opportunity for content development. In some of these fields of study certain modules, like psychology in human resources and biokinetics in sports science, are compulsory for students to register with professional bodies. In these cases, universities have less flexibility in content development as professional bodies influence and prescribe content levels and alignment. All management teams concurred that, regardless of the influences of professional bodies, all the degree programmes did signal the content their various business units required in the workplace. Managers, however, had strong opinions about the way content was taught. Comments included:

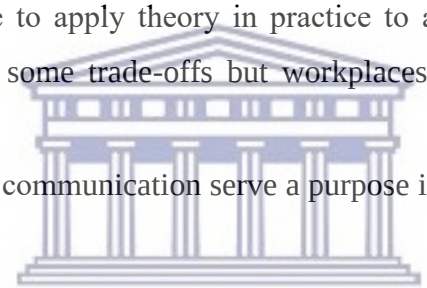
- ‘Soft skills, such as communication skills, should be taught in line with current workplace needs and tools especially incorporating critical and analytical writing and e-communication tools like Skype and other methods’.
- ‘Appropriate business verbal and writing skills are required and not long drawn-out essays that say nothing. When writing, there is a need to be specific because we do not have the time to search for the essence of what is being said’.
- ‘Include soft skills learning such as emotional intelligence; work ethic; effective communication in its various forms of manual and electronic media’.

Managers confirmed that their graduate recruitment processes were influenced by workplace experiences with graduates, the signals of degree programme content and, particularly, the

learning outcomes of graduate qualifications. The qualifications possessed by graduates inform the job descriptions and vacancies employers are filling and relevant content alignment is an important requirement (Franco et al., 2019). Of particular interest to the employer are the outcomes and levels of learning graduates achieve: these are seen as indicative of the quality of the production of qualifications. Vollgraaff (2015) and the NACE (2017) argue that adequate outcomes and levels of learning are not being achieved by universities' degree programmes.

Managers were also concerned that graduates did not have an understanding of or regard for workplace communication turnaround times and the relevance of the organisational structure for the completion of operational tasks. They thought that, while a study programme might include reference to organisational structures and organograms, their importance was not sufficiently accentuated. Dominant views included the following:

- 'Improve graduate knowledge and understanding of organisational structures for relevance and adherence to reporting lines within the workplace context'.
- 'Graduates must be able to apply theory in practice to achieve workplace objectives timeously, there can be some trade-offs but workplaces require outputs in specified turnaround times.
- 'The various methods of communication serve a purpose in the expedience and urgency of workplace operations.



Employers' reliance on the learning outcomes and levels of learning afforded by degree programmes constitutes, according to signalling theory, the investment risk taken in graduate recruitment. Spence (1973) argues that employers do not have an opportunity to observe the applicant's capability of applying skills and knowledge during the recruitment process. This study finds that degree programme content is not adequately taught by universities for graduates to transition effectively into the workplace, thereby making the signals sent by university degree programme descriptions questionable (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018; Vollgraaff, 2015).

4.13.2 Skills and knowledge production by universities

The management teams acknowledged that universities could not develop the skills and knowledge needed by the labour market to the full extent required. They did, however, concur that graduates could be taught in a more holistic manner for workplace readiness. A common

response of all the management participants was that graduates struggled to convert theory into practice. This lack of practical application ability resulted in a mismatch between graduates' and employers' workplace expectations (Franco et al., 2019). Some of the specific concerns of managers in relation to graduates' lack of ability to transfer theory to practice were:

- 'Graduates need better written and verbal skills to address real world issues'.
- 'Preparation of graduates should be improved for appropriate communication responses to situations: the number of words is less important than the relevance of the words'.
- 'Graduates' critical and analytical abilities are not adequate – for example, in the interpretation of instructions'.
- 'Degree programmes need to avoid the use of outdated textbooks or cases, and to make theory relatable to real labour market and workplace problems'.

According to the managers, the above issues affected productivity and graduate motivation, and personal workplace relationships amongst graduate employees, as well as manager–employee relationships. Teamwork, as well as individual contributions, were deemed to be important motivators. A lack of motivation leads to strained relationships that impact productivity negatively. Managers expressed frustration with the graduates' lack of commitment to their own and their team's development. Among the management experiences and concerns were:

- The work ethic of graduates needed improvement to change their attitudes and behaviour in relation to tasks and instructions from managers or others in the workplace.
- Graduates should have an ongoing willingness to learn – companies must be flexible with regard to their operational environments, internal and external.
- There was a need to encourage adherence to turnaround times for task completion – there are seldom second and third chances in workplaces.

The challenges experienced in South Africa in relation to graduates' readiness for the workplace are, as indicated by the literature reviewed for this study, also prevalent in other countries. Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2018), for example, argue that there is a significant difference in the prioritisation of employability skills between employers' expectations and universities' preparation of final-year students in Tanzania. The authors claim that self-awareness, the application of knowledge and teamwork were the top three skills in employers'

ranking of graduate employability shortcomings. These were also among the skills identified by the management participants as lacking in South African graduates:

- Universities, it has been argued, need to develop the graduate's ability to adapt to the world of work through greater self-awareness in the context of the operational requirements of the workplace (Hansen, 2017). Some managers thought that the status of having a degree somehow gave graduates the impression that they did not have much more to learn. This point is echoed by Spence (1973), who argues that degrees are perceived to determine status, and therefore a demand for higher wages. The following issues were highlighted by the managers in this study:
- 'There is a need to develop awareness of the risks of not following or disobeying particular instructions and workplace processes'.
- 'Workplaces do not have memoranda or model answers against which any problem may be compared – graduates must be encouraged to have their own ideas in problem-solving'.
- 'Having a degree without industry experience does not give a graduate the right to expect or demand a high salary'.
- 'The employer has to invest another 12–24 months in retraining graduates for the workplace before they can make a meaningful contribution'.

The managers acknowledged that theory was an important factor but stressed that universities should teach the conversion of theory into practice and develop that way of thinking and learning progressively during the study years.

4.13.3 Improvement of skills and knowledge development by universities

It is important to note that managers at all levels accepted that the worlds of academia and industry differed in their mode of operation. As a stakeholder in university graduate outputs, however, they believed that, for South Africa's employers and economy to prosper, stakeholders should be afforded input into skills and knowledge development in a participatory manner. Suggestions for collaboration included:

- 'Universities should engage with industry specialists/practitioners to maintain a current awareness of workplace requirements'.

- ‘Encourage collaboration between industry, employer representatives and educators to create awareness of classroom teaching and learning challenges in making learning content relevant to employer needs’.
- ‘Recruit suitably qualified industry representatives to teach part of the curriculum, or encourage lecturers to gain industry experience in their field of teaching’.
- ‘The autonomy of the university in the learning process might be a concern in partnering with industry’.
- ‘Encourage mentoring of students by industry representatives during their study years’.

The management teams also offered suggestions regarding how universities could assist graduates to transition to the workplace and so reduce the retraining time currently required. Dominant themes in the context of converting theory into practice as suggested by the participants were:

- ‘Review and adjust curricula based on changing times and labour market requirements’.
- ‘Universities should offer degree programmes for 1 or 2 years: employers have to invest 12–24 months to prepare graduates for the workplace despite programmes with a duration of 3 to 4 years’.
- ‘Move away from outdated theoretical modes of teaching and learning practices and use available technological advances in line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Google is one such tool and is used on many platforms and has many variations and dimensions to assist with the application of technology in teaching and learning practices’.
- ‘Relate teaching and learning to broader societal knowledge requirements’.
- ‘Incorporate real-world issues into teaching and learning and avoid textbooks that discourage adaptability and flexibility in the face of change’.

The participants thought that university lecturers should have workplace experience in their particular fields or, at minimum, should make an effort to involve themselves in workplaces periodically or include industry experts and/or practitioners in their processes of teaching and learning. They recommended on-the-job training with the help of industry coaches and mentors to enhance the production of skills and knowledge by universities.

The managers stressed that lecturers’ knowledge of industry was an important influence on graduate attitudes. They suggested that lecturers should have continuous professional

development as a personal drive so that they could maintain a current and relevant awareness of the requirements of workplaces for which their graduates are destined. The following recommendations were offered for universities to develop graduates more holistically:

- ‘Develop learners’ attitude from entitlement to continuous learning practices’.
- ‘Use Fourth Industrial Revolution technology and tools that are already employed in industry as far as possible’.
- ‘Encourage critical and analytical ability to be responsive to workplace turnaround times and reporting structures required to make workplaces operationally functional’.
- ‘Industry does not operate on stagnant theories and knowledge: it is constantly changing and needs employees who know how to evolve’.

Consideration of the experiences and perceptions expressed by the management teams may result in the more holistic development of students who then, as graduates, will be better equipped and prepared for the workplace.

4.14 Conclusions and Recommendations

The employer’s representatives respected the fact that companies and universities operate in different environments. However, as stakeholders in higher education, employers rely on the production of appropriately skilled graduates from universities and should therefore contribute more meaningfully to the expected outputs of degree programmes. From the research reported in this paper, it is evident that managers are willing to contribute to and collaborate with universities in order to enhance the processes of teaching and learning. The participants accepted the possibility of power-play in such collaboration that might cause challenges, but were convinced that students would benefit from greater cooperation. Franco et al. (2019) argue that students are eager to work in a practical environment and want to acquire new knowledge. For this reason, the implementation in South African degree programmes of the use of industry mentors and coaches for graduate development is offered as a recommendation.

The formulation of Career Advisory Services for the creation of short-term employability programmes at universities as suggested by Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2018), could, with the collaboration of government and industry, make a useful contribution. Stakeholders might contemplate the development of a database of industry mentors and coaches, initially for

particular degree programmes: this could include retired industry experts, thereby avoiding productivity challenges for employers.

The continuing challenges experienced in relation to graduates' skills and knowledge result in efficiency obstacles for business units, whose productivity levels and targets are compromised. Instead of focusing on their organisational operations and outputs, managers have to retrain graduates, investing money and time that could be better spent elsewhere: 1 to 2 years of retraining involves the use of costly external service providers and/or existing employees. Sometimes, there is resistance among employees to involvement in on-the-job training for graduate recruits because some have years of work experience but no degree, and may have to report to these same graduates in the future. This dilemma may lead to a debate on the relevance of a degree to job performance.

Some managers were of the opinion that degrees should be offered by universities for 1 or 2 years only. Some also suggested that the government should subsidise the employer or the industry instead of universities for further graduate training with greater relevance to the economy. Government skills development and related policies are embedded in the organisational staffing policies and practices that inform the graduate recruitment process: many job specifications require not only experience but also a university degree. These specifications are aligned with what graduates with that level of qualification should have learned, as signalled by the NQF and universities' descriptions of degree programmes. As a result, it is difficult for employers to avoid the employment of graduates, even if they question the quality of graduate qualifications. It seems, therefore, difficult to disagree with the contention that the processes of teaching and learning should include employer and industry representatives.

The autonomy of universities might be questioned in the context of partnerships between universities and industry (Franco et al., 2019). If government is committed to investment in university education for the good of the economy, the sovereignty of universities should not take preference over the appropriate development of students for industry. Franco et al. (2019) argue that such partnerships could include student internships as part of the curriculum, leading to a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and innovation. Universities are encouraged to incorporate the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution into their teaching and learning practices to improve their capacity to meet labour market needs (Schwab, 2015).

Nonetheless, most universities continue to lack the ability to meet labour market requirements (Hansen, 2017, Vollgraaff, 2015).

The literature reviewed in this study, together with the employer perspectives and experiences reported, indicate that fundamental aspects of teaching and learning in South Africa's universities are in need of adjustment. The fact that employers are willing to participate in universities' teaching and learning processes offers an opportunity to enhance the global competitiveness of the South African economy. Ultimately, this will reduce the expensive practice of importing labour at a variety of skills levels.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive and very helpful comments. Sincere appreciation to the Editor of Industry and Higher Education, John Edmondson, for his efficient and encouraging feedback.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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(Referencing style retained as per the IHE publication)

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CHAPTER FIVE – PHASE THREE OF THE STUDY

REGULATORY IMPLEMENTATION INFLUENCES ON UNIVERSITY GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT AND GRADUATE AGAINST NON-GRADUATE WORKPLACE CONFLICTS

5.1 Introduction

The results of *phase two* informed the study on the regulatory implementation influences on university graduate development and graduate against non-graduate workplace conflicts. This qualitative interview study examined the regulatory implementation influences on university graduate development and employer graduate against non-graduate workplace conflicts. Chapter five was converted into an article and is under review with the Journal of Higher Education, SAGE Publications. Section 5.2 to 5.4 below follow the requirements as prescribed by the UWC PhD by publication policy. The actual article commences from the abstract that appears immediately after section 5.4. The format of the article is in the writing style of the Industry and Higher Education Journal – SAGE International Journal and appears below in Microsoft Word format as required by the UWC PhD policy for inclusion in this dissertation.

5.2 Profile of SAGE Publishing Ltd - Industry and Higher Education Journal

SAGE Publishing Ltd. is a global academic publisher of books, journals and a growing suite of library products and services. The Journal is driven by the belief that social and behavioural science has the power to improve society and focus on publishing impactful research as well as enabling robust research methodology. High quality educational resources are produced to support instructors to prepare citizens, policy-makers, educators and researchers of the future. Globally, more than 1 000 journals and 900 new books are published by SAGE each year. This figure is in addition to other library products and services that include archives, data, case studies and videos. SAGE is majority owned by the founder, Sara Miller McCune, and after her lifetime will be owned by a charitable trust that secures the company's continued independence. The mission of the Journal is to build bridges to knowledge – supporting the development of ideas through the research process to scholarship that is certified, taught and applied. One of the disciplines of SAGE Publishing Ltd. is industry and higher education that is represented by the Industry and Higher Education Journal.

The *Industry and Higher Education (IHE)* Journal focuses on the multifaceted and complex relationships between higher education institutions, businesses and industry. It examines the processes and enactments of academia-business cooperation, as well as examining the significance of that cooperation in wider contexts, such as regional development, entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems. Practical aspects of academia-business cooperation are emphasised, with the *IHE* also locating practice in theoretical and research contexts, questioning received opinion and developing an understanding of what constitutes truly effective cooperation. The IHE Journal is an affiliate of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

5.3 Contribution Record

This is an individual author publication contributing to the PhD candidate's academic publication record as indicated below.

Author	Contributions
Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak (Candidate)	100% manuscript design and completion contributed to the research candidate. The individual researcher identified the Journal, was corresponding author, and communicated with the editor-in-chief and reviewers during the publication process.

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Word Format of Article Under Review for Publication – Sections 5.5 to 5.14.

5.5 Abstract

Inconsistent regulatory implementation practices at universities do not heed the lived experiences of lecturers in the development of graduates for workplaces. Consequently, employers experience graduate against non-graduate conflicts after ill-prepared university graduates are employed. An example of such conflicts is that graduates struggle to interpret job task instructions and fail to communicate timeously resulting in experienced non-graduate employees despondently completing the tasks and training graduates to do the job. The lack of graduate work ethic results in employer productivity losses or costly extended working hours to avoid losses. This qualitative study examined the regulatory implementation influences on university graduate development and employer graduate against non-graduate workplace conflicts. Multiple theories were employed as different lenses through which the complexities of the lived experiences of university lecturers and workplace employee relationships could be viewed. Matching theory assisted with examining how university teaching and learning practices are aligned to employer needs; agency theory guided the probing of accountability of universities toward graduates; and, certification theory aided with the interrogation of the authenticity of a university degree for employment. The findings confirm that inconsistent regulatory implementation practices compromise the quality of a university education. I conclude the study by presenting proposals for reforming regulatory implementation practices by universities and employers for fair practices toward inexperienced ill-prepared graduates and experienced non-graduate employees.

Keywords

Regulatory implementation influences, university graduate development, workplace conflicts.

5.6 Introduction

The regulation of university education and employer graduate recruitment practices is solid in its rational foundations that inform purpose, consistency and guidance to enable quality in university education and graduate economic participation. Many global public and some private universities are either fully or partly regulated by governments and on a smaller scale by professional bodies (Ballim, Mabizela and Mubangizi, 2014). Professional bodies also influence workplace operations to ensure quality and compliance in many aspects to influence and avoid poor quality, deviation from standards and risk assessment, among others.

Governments influence university teaching and learning and employer recruitment practices with policy objectives and provide subsidies and other forms of funding. Professional bodies influence university practices by accrediting study programmes, prescribing assessment criteria, setting examinations and providing funding (Blaug and Woodhall, 1978; Shih, 2012; De Wet, 2019). The need for the appropriate regulation of university education and employer recruitment practices in South Africa is mainly as a consequence of the pre-1994 apartheid practices of racial exclusion and inequality in economic participation. The post-1994 elected government's National Development Plan (NDP) 2011 to 2030 outlines the regulatory frameworks and policies of fourteen priority areas that are deemed important for the transition to an inclusive democratic society (DoE, 2011). University education and graduate employment are two of the priority areas that are considered as indicators of social progress and economic development and these two priorities inform this research. It is important to note that the NDP 2011 to 2030 is not the only attempt by the South African government to address university education and graduate employment. Other strategic attempts prior to 2011 and some running concurrent with the NDP are also national government transformational endeavors that are not mentioned in this study[1].

The challenge with a regulatory influence is the implementation practices that allow inconsistent interpretations and deviations by universities and employers. Consequently, the quality of a university education is compromised and employers are faced with the dilemma of recruiting ill-prepared graduates that contribute to graduate against non-graduate employee workplace conflicts. The frustration experienced by non-graduate employees having to check and re-check job tasks of ill-prepared employed graduates and/or graduates failing to understand the importance of professional body compliance result in unpleasant workplace environments. The continuing employer concerns and experiences with ill-prepared university graduates are well documented in the literature and media debates (Daniels, 2013; Hansen, 2017; Mobarak, 2020; Shteigman, Levi-Bliech and Reshef, 2022). There are, however, shortcomings in the literature about the experiences of university lecturers with regulatory implementation practices when developing the skills and knowledge of university students. This qualitative interview study examined the regulatory implementation influences on

[1] The content of the regulatory policies and national strategies were not addressed as the focus of the study was on how the respective role players implement the regulatory requirements. The content of the regulatory policies and strategies were not relevant to examining the lived experiences of university lecturers and workplace employees with such implementation practices.

university lecturers' graduate development practices and employer graduate against non-graduate workplace conflicts. The research finds that lecturer experiences with inconsistent regulatory implementation practices impact on the quality of graduates' skills and knowledge for workplace readiness. Employers question the learning outcomes and standards of university degree programmes. However, regulatory prescriptions inform the employer graduate against non-graduate recruitment practices for particular job levels. Jobs that require a university degree are informed by the learning outcomes and standards outlined in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework that specifies the alignment of learning outcomes and standards for particular jobs and careers (CHE, 2013). In professions like accounting and engineering, among others, professional bodies contribute to the regulation of what and how universities teach and the quality assurance and compliance practices in workplaces. Employers trust that university undergraduates and postgraduates are more skilled in, for example, problem-solving skills, teamwork skills and a good work ethic attitude that non-graduates may lack (Nagare, 2021; De Prada, Mareque and Pino-Juste, 2022). This study reveals that inconsistent regulatory implementation practices and arbitrary practice deviations influence university graduate development practices and, consequently, result in the lack of graduate workplace-ready skills of which the aforementioned skills are examples. The preference of ill-prepared graduate recruitment against experienced non-graduate appointments contribute to workplace conflicts.

The matching theory, the agency theory and the certification theory guide the data collection and analysis processes to develop the proposals for regulatory reform that this study promotes. The matching theory assists with examining how lecturers align academic knowledge and skills development to labor market requirements; agency theory contributes to framing the importance of the contractual accountability between universities and students; and certification theory informs the interrogation of the authenticity of the university degree certificate for graduate workplace readiness. This research offers new perspectives and suggestions to evaluate the problematic influences of regulatory implementation practices of universities and employers. Proposals for revised regulatory practices to achieve quality in university education and fairness in economic participation by both graduate and non-graduate employees complete the study.

5.7 Theoretical Framework

A triad of theories from the fields of economics, psychology and management, among others, were utilized for interpretive purposes to inform the new perspectives and proposals for the reform this research offers. The matching theory, the agency theory and the certification theory were employed to examine the regulatory implementation influences on the teaching and learning practices of university lecturers when they prepare graduates for workplaces. The theories guide the interpretation of the data collection and analysis processes. The utilization of multiple theories assisted with framing the existence of problems university lecturers experience with the matching of skills and knowledge with employer needs. The framing of problems guided the reasons for the existence of graduate against non-graduate workplace conflicts when graduates struggle to transfer their university acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace. The reasons for the existence of problems informs the suggestions for reducing such problems and conflicts. The range of suggestions and possibilities that are formulated with the guidance of theories are embedded in the proposals to reform the regulatory implementation practices of universities and employers.

5.7.1 The matching theory

Matching theory was developed by seminal authors Gale and Shapley in 1962 as a 'stable perfect matching algorithm' consisting of inputs, outputs and procedures or processes to compare marriage systems and stable marriages (Kleinberg & Tardos, 2005). The theory has evolved in its application in recent years to find solutions in practical markets, for example, to match interns to suitable organizations for employment (Kojima, 2015; Sharma, 2019). Some examples of matching theory application in education are: choice of school or university, and study courses, among others (Abdulkadiroglu and Sonmez, 2013). This research adapted the standard matching theory into a qualitative matching framework method suitable for examining university teaching and learning practices and regulatory requirements matching. The details of the application of the adapted matching framework method are provided in the research design section of this article.

Constraints in the application of the standard matching theory model has availed opportunities for researchers to generalize the standard model or to introduce new models to address the realities of theory versus practice (Abdulkadiroglu and Sonmez, 2013; Kojima, 2015). Limitations, such as the regulatory influences on lecturer experiences and employer graduate

against non-graduate workplace conflicts are constraints that are too multi-dimensional for the standard matching model to address. The standard model does not allow much flexibility for the interrogation of the lived experiences of lecturers and/or employers, due to its need for stable perfect matching. This research adapted the quantitative roots of the matching theory to a qualitative approach for the purpose of addressing the lived experiences of the research participants. University lecturers who lack industry experience, graduates who cannot do the jobs employers expect them to do, and many other constraints are embedded in the regulatory influences that cannot be measured in a stable perfect matching model. The aforementioned limitations are shortcomings with the features of the standard matching theory model experienced by researchers who want to find practical solutions to problems (Kojima, 2015). The challenge with the standard matching theory is finding a strategy-proof design mechanism that produces a stable matching for every input to the algorithm (Kojima, 2015). Adapting the standard quantitative matching theory model into a qualitative matching framework method facilitated the analysis of documented learning outcomes, standards and assessment practices that were not as flexible as lecturer lived experiences. Stable matching was not possible for examining lecturer lived experiences being impacted on by their public or private sector environments, professional body against non-professional body expectations, socio-economic influences on student academic progress and other institutional regulatory practices.

Theories can be adapted for a more robust engagement with trends in theory and practice thereby adding value to, for example, the proposals this research provides (Roth, Mills, Lee and Jemielniak, 2021). Standard theories postulate the impossibility of finding desirable properties for all given inputs, regardless of many attempts to find a matching mechanism (Kojima, 2015). The impossibility of finding desirable properties for all given inputs does not stunt the possibility of research that adapts the standard matching theory model to fit a particular research purpose. Adapting the standard matching model into a qualitative matching framework facilitated the vigorous analysis process to find reasons for ill-prepared university graduates who, upon employment, cannot do the jobs the employer expects them to do.

5.7.2 The agency theory

The agency theory is informed by both the economic theory of agency and the institutional theory of agency, respectively created by Ross (1973) and Mitnick (1973). Ross and Mitnick used similar concepts under different assumptions in their theoretical approaches to assess the

relationship between the agent and principal in the agency agreement. Ross examined the principal and agent relationship in the context of compensation or fees due to the agent to encourage good behavior as the principal preferred; and Mitnick reported the advantage of imperfections in behavior as a preference for the principal in the context of the agency agreement. Ross argued that the nature of the contracting and incentive systems guides the distribution of risk and information that informs the choices of the parties involved (Mitnick, 2013). Although Ross focused on both organizations and society in his analysis, for example, employer against employee relationships and government against society relationships, he ignored the context of the agency relationship. In Ross' analysis the distribution of incentives guided the outcomes of the agency and principal relationship and suggests monetary value as a determinant of risk assessment and information disclosure by the agent (Mitnick, 2013).

This study employed the agency theory to assess the responsibility and accountability of universities in their agency agreement with students. Students pay a fee to universities for an education that will sustain their livelihood after graduation. The continued debates on various platforms about universities producing graduates who cannot perform the job tasks in workplaces (Mobarak, 2019 and 2020; Shteigman et.al, 2022) raises questions about the principal agent relationship as advocated by both Ross and Mitnick. The application of agency theory in this study focused more on the context of the relationship between universities and students. The context of the agency relationship between universities and students is influenced by the teaching and learning and the regulatory implementation practices that prescribe learning outcomes and standards. Adapting Mitnick's (2013) interpretation of the agency theory presented a more suitable opportunity to clarify the aforementioned relationship and to present new perspectives for employers to consider when employing university graduates. This is not to argue that student fees are not important, but rather that regardless of the non-refundable fees paid by students for a university education, the student performance evaluation while studying is of more significant importance to inform employer graduate recruitment practices.

5.7.3 Certification theory

Certification is used in many contexts to disclose information and the quality of products and services rendered. Institutions and/or organizations that issue certificates do not necessarily report detailed, unbiased and accurate information about the products or services the

certificates represent (Dranove and Jin, 2010). The United States Supreme court adopted the implied certification theory of liability under the False Claims Act for defendants claiming payment for the false representation of goods and services (Hubbard and Reed, 2016). The court argued that a rigorous materiality requirement should be enforced to avoid the misrepresentation of goods and services provided and false claims made by defendants. The implied certification theory was limited to defendants who (1) misrepresented goods and services; and (2) acted with 'actual knowledge' of misrepresentation and 'reckless disregard' for disclosure of information equating to violations of rights. The reputation and/or accreditation assurance of the institutions and/or organizations issuing certificates sometimes represents and serves as validation for the information and quality the certificate represents. In the case of a university degree certificate received upon graduation, the course program learning outcomes and standards represent the skills and knowledge the graduate achieved. These learning outcomes and standards of university degree programmes are publicly available on university websites as well as the higher education qualifications framework (Mobarak, 2019 and 2020). Employers equate the learning outcomes and standards signaled in the aforementioned contexts as information disclosure of what graduates are able to do upon employment.

This study essentially used certification theory and issuing practice to interrogate the authenticity of the degree certificate received by graduates; and the employer interpretation of the certificate for graduate employment. The liability of the university as the degree certificate issuing institution and the employer as the graduate recruiter was interrogated in the context of 'actual knowledge' and 'reckless disregard' about the authenticity of the certificate. The degree certificate awarded to a graduate upon graduation is an educational credential that confirms the level of education, skills and knowledge achieved during the study years. Employers employ university graduates and not non-graduates because they expect that graduates hold a higher quality of skills and knowledge to serve their workplaces better than non-graduates (Nagare, 2021).

5.8 Perspectives on University Teaching and Learning Practices and Regulatory Influences

The credibility and integrity of university education practices at undergraduate and postgraduate levels continue to be a concern of various stakeholders, globally (Moyo & Saidi, 2019; Sefcik, Striepe & Yorke 2020). University education is influenced by government

regulatory policies and education frameworks to serve the economy and its population for economic sustainability and competitiveness, as examples. International governments implement strategies and education frameworks to achieve their national priorities; therefore, the credibility and integrity of university education are so valuable. Professional bodies also regulate university education practices, globally, by accrediting and licensing academic programmes and prescribing assessment processes and criteria that include levels and standards of education. In South Africa, some professional bodies are SAICA (South African Institute of Accountants), ECSA (Engineering Councils of South Africa), HPCSA (Health Professions Council of South Africa), among others. These professional bodies are sometimes the certification bodies in collaboration with universities that issue the degree certificates when students graduate (Engineering Council, n.d.). The purpose for such regulatory interventions is to ensure that university education serves national initiatives like job creation, and that such education is offered with credibility and integrity.

Stakeholders like employers and employer bodies, among others, are questioning the quality and relevance of the collective university education practices of teaching, learning and research outcomes (Nagare, 2021; Hughes & Eaton, 2022). Universities are not producing the desired levels of education required by employers and lack sharing comprehensive information that leads to potential risks to integrity and assessment pitfalls (Moyo & Saidi, 2019; Sefcik, et al., 2020). Unethical practices in research and other domains by faculty members and administrators were reported in a survey conducted at universities in Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Hughes & Eaton, 2022). Academic transgressions in research consisting of falsifying and fabricating data as well as plagiarism resulted in education policy reviews to address academic misconduct and unethical behavior in Canada (HAL, 2009). Between 2010 and 2020 academic misconduct in research at Canadian institutions resulted in 321 research publications being retracted (Hughes & Eaton, 2022). An important consequence of such unethical practices is that although publications were retracted, the funding received for such research is possibly not refunded.

In South Africa, the government has endeavored to transform the higher education sector with regulatory frameworks such as the National Development Plan (NDP) 2011 to 2030, among others, to facilitate the transition to a democratic society. The transformation of university education, in particular, continues to present challenges to achieve the goals prioritized in

regulatory frameworks (Hansen, 2017; Majola, 2019; Mobarak, 2020). The transition from apartheid policies and practices prior to 1994 that resulted in unequal education opportunities and underprivileged economic participation by the historically disadvantaged population groups, continue to pose transformation challenges. The call for an absolute overhaul of social thinking for significant social transition of university education was echoed by Daniels (2013) who argued that the education system in South Africa is too one-sided to make a positive impact on workplace needs and society. It is eleven years since the implementation of the NDP 2011 to 2030 and stakeholder arguments about university contributions not making a positive impact on workplaces, in particular, still holds true. Attempts by the South African government to transform university education has not rendered the desired results of access, redress and equity in university education and improved economic participation by previously disadvantaged population groups. Claims are made that universities struggle with students coming from poor and under-represented social backgrounds resulting in problematic university practices of exclusion and non-participation (Mzwanga, 2019; De Wet, 2019). Some scholars (e.g. Daniels, 2013; Hansen, 2017; Mobarak, 2019 and 2020) argue that university education is embedded in too much theory and do not develop the knowledge and skills that are required by the workplace.

The role and contribution of universities to national and global economies have long been under scrutiny for the poor quality of skills and knowledge university graduates possess upon employment (Hansen, 2017; Mobarak 2020). Universities are not limited to contributing to economic development and individual opportunities, they are also embedded in governments and therefore also shaped by social responsibility. The changing university education landscape in relation to knowledge acquisition and skills development has implications for government policies that require suitably revised university teaching and learning strategies (Marginson 2010; Majola, 2019). Considering South Africa's regulatory focus of an inclusive and fair democratic society, the formulation of such teaching and learning strategies must be informed by the lived experiences of both university lecturers and employers. A broader consideration for the impact of the regulatory implementation influences on the teaching and learning practices of university lecturers can inform the actual knowledge levels and standards achieved by graduates upon graduation. The disclosure and interpretation of the actual achievements of graduates upon employment can assist employers with improved graduate recruitment strategies for fairness toward experienced non-graduate employees.

5.9 Regulatory Influences on Employer Graduate Recruitment Practices

Governments, globally, continue to develop and implement regulatory frameworks, short- and long-term strategic plans, avail funding opportunities and incentives, among other initiatives, to create employment opportunities for university graduates. For many years different university graduate job creation initiatives in China, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom have not resulted in improved university graduate employment (Karcher, 1975; Kopa, 2013; Pollard, 2015; De Wet, 2019). Graduate employment creation initiatives require the skills and knowledge produced by universities to complement these initiatives for such endeavors to be successful. Different graduate job creation initiatives planned by governments, among others, entrepreneurial initiatives, subsidized graduate salaries for employers, and providing funding opportunities for graduate innovative job creation continue to render unsuccessful results. In the United Kingdom debates about graduate over-education and under-employment are fueled by the increase in the number of university graduates and their skills relevance to workplaces (Pollard, 2015). Employers trust that university graduates have been instilled with job-ready skills, therefore, graduates are preferred over non-graduate employees.

Employer recruitment practices are informed by government policies, preferred recruitment sources, organizational recruitment policies and practices that are guided by organizational needs, competitors and financial costs. There are other contributory factors, however, the aforementioned are relevant to this study where ill-prepared graduates cannot do the jobs expected of them in workplaces. Government policies and regulatory frameworks like the national qualification frameworks, employment laws and national employment plans are embedded in employer recruitment practices globally (Ballim et al., 2014). In South Africa the higher education qualifications sub-framework, as an example, provide the levels and standards of qualifications universities produce (CHE, 2013). These levels and standards inform the job levels that require the employment of university graduates and exclude the employment of experienced non-graduate employees from qualifying for such positions. In addition, professional bodies such as SAICA (South African Institute of Accountants), ECSA (Engineering Councils of South Africa), HPCSA (Health Professions Council of South Africa), and other professional bodies regulate the quality assurance practices of organizational processes, among other compliance requirements. In the engineering sector, professional bodies influence and regulate the engineering and manufacturing process with standards like ISO 14001 (Environmental Management), ISO 45001 (Health and Safety Management) and

ISO 9001 (Quality Management). These are important international standards that employer workplaces must adhere to. Employees should not only be aware of the standards but very importantly, comprehend the risk factors of non-compliance to the accreditation and licensing agreements of organizations for professional accreditation. In the same context, the importance of integrity and credibility in the health profession, regulated by international health professions councils, cannot be accentuated enough as recent incidences in this profession speak to the dire consequences in this regard (Van der Vossen, Van Mook and Van der Burgt 2017; Shapiro, 2018; Pavithra, Sunderland and Callen, 2022). In the medical profession consequences such as unprofessional behavior that are harmful to colleagues and patients, fraudulent actions, negligence and/or incompetence are some factors that leads to negative impacts on patient safety and staff safety. These are some of the challenges experienced by workplaces caused by professionally educated and trained medical staff. Employers, consequently, have to address costly challenges of staff anxiety and retention that are not only difficult to overcome, but also affect the reputation of their organizations.

The regulatory expectations of governments and professional bodies inform the employer graduate against non-graduate employment practices for particular job levels. The skills expectations employers have of university graduates equate to graduate premiums and therefore a preference to employing non-graduate employees. One of the assumptions is that a graduate employee will be a less labor-intensive workplace fit in comparison to non-graduates and that their university acquired skills will justify the premium paid by employers, albeit higher wages and increased benefits, among others (Pollard, 2015).

This study does not analyze or report on the regulatory policies of employers but rather focuses on the implementation influences of inconsistent practices and deviations during the implementation processes by employers.

5.10 Research Design and Implementation

This qualitative study examined the regulatory implementation influences on the teaching and learning experiences of university lecturers and employer graduate recruitment practices. The study is informed by the argument that university graduate development practices should be compatible with employer expectations to justify the recruitment of graduate against experienced non-graduate employees. A qualitative research approach was better suited to study the perceptions, motivations and experiences of research participants; moreover,

qualitative methods like semi-structured interviews allowed for probing to clarify participant responses (Coldwell and Herbst, 2004). One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with private and public sector university lecturers and business division heads of a large organization located in the Western Cape, South Africa. The study was two-fold as the findings from the lecturer interviews informed the one-on-one interviews with the business divisional heads. The duration of each participant interview was one hour and data was recorded in writing and electronically in English. The written notes complemented the clarification process with participants.

Three theories informed this study and provided guidance for a systematic inductive process of data collection and analysis to detect themes and patterns. Matching theory guided the process of how lecturers aligned academic knowledge and skills development to workplace needs; agency theory informed the interrogation of the contractual agreement between universities and students; and, certification theory assisted with examining the authenticity of a university certificate for employment. The inductive approach assisted with the development of proposals to reform the regulatory implementation influences on university lecturer teaching and learning and employer graduate recruitment practices.

The adoption of a qualitative research approach was based on my experience and knowledge with particular viewpoints and theoretical approaches within the corporate and academic environments over many years. At this stage I must acknowledge that before the research I had subconscious biases that changed during the course of the study, because I examined my beliefs, judgments and practices while conducting the research (Patnaik, 2013). My background in both academic and corporate environments cautioned my individual perceptions and experiences from influencing the contributions of the research participants. While I committed to the possibility of different opinions and experiences of participants, the research design is based on my previous research experience as well as my ontological view that knowledge is constructed by humans through social interactions; and my epistemological view of objective in-depth discussions that did not focus on true and/or false responses. Thus, the qualitative descriptive data generated in this study resulted from encouraging participants to share their own experiences and interpretations on the research topic freely.

A small research sample for this qualitative study was justified in the contexts of the researcher scientific paradigm of objective in-depth participant engagement; career background over

many years as a lecturer at both private and public sector universities; and facilitator and consultant of corporate human capital development in different labor markets (Boddy, 2016). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is based on small sample sizes in the contexts of conceptualization and practical uncertainty and therefore seldom justified by qualitative researchers (Vasileiou, Barnett and Thorpe, 2018). Small sample justification in this research is explained under each one-on-one interview heading below.

5.10.1 One-on-one semi-structured interviews – Commerce lecturers

A total of six one-on-one semi-structured interviews of one hour per session were held with commerce lecturers from the private and public university sector. The data collected from the six lecturers served as documented evidence under research ethical conditions for experiences and practices continuously mentioned in academic staff meetings and university faculty assessment committees. Sample size sufficiency under the principle of saturation and pragmatic considerations can therefore be defended, as increasing the number of lecturer participant interviews will render the same in-depth responses received.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit six commerce final year lecturers who taught undergraduate and postgraduate levels from both the private and public universities in one province. Purposive sampling allows for the judgment of the researcher in selecting participants who are knowledgeable on the study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2004; Crossman, 2017). The selected lecturers contributed to the final years of university graduate preparation before graduation. Lecturers were recruited via the faculty administrator of *one* public and *two* private universities. It was important that participants were not known to the researcher for them to contribute diverse viewpoints of their own individual lived experiences. Participants were purposely sampled based on speculated categories formulated from stakeholder comments in newspaper articles and other literature sources as follows: (1) private and public sector university documented teaching and learning practices, (2) professional body influenced teaching and learning practices, and (3) the non-professional body teaching and learning practices. Three lecturers were employed by the two private universities and three lecturers were employed by the selected public university. The participants represented the public and private universities equally in the aforementioned categories. Two of the six lecturers were guided by professional bodies, two lecturers are not guided by professional bodies, and two lecturers taught in both the professional body and non-professional body environments. The commerce degree stream

was selected to link the lived experiences of commerce lecturers with the graduate against non-graduate relationships in business workplaces after graduates are employed. The focus of this article is on the experiences of lecturers and graduate against non-graduate workplace employees and not to elaborate employer graduate skills and knowledge requirements. The influence of professional bodies on the teaching and learning practices of lecturers forms an important part of the study. A small sample was sufficient to avoid repetitive data that was evident after the fifth lecturer was interviewed. A small sample is sufficient if the research design is concise and focused on what is relevant to this study (Eckerdal and Hagström, 2016).

5.10.2 One-on-one semi-structured interviews – Division heads

Three business divisional managers from a case organization used in a previous study were purposely selected via the human resources administrator. The divisional managers function at a strategic level in different directorates of the organization and were therefore better equipped to comment on the regulatory implementation influences on graduate recruitment practices. The one-hour interview sessions with the individual participants were informed by the findings of the lecturer interviews. The researcher role was that of facilitator who contextualized the discussions around specific themes as previously mentioned. I could use my academic and corporate experience to probe for more detail when participants provided generalized comments. Probing allowed for deeper meanings and specific examples to emerge and thereby understand participant situational lived experiences better. Participants were encouraged to seek clarity to avoid them misunderstanding questions and discussions. The divisional managers were respectively responsible for professional body and non-professional body regulated business units. Their respective functional responsibilities were in Engineering, Engineering Projects, Public Works, Safety and Security, Human Resources, Water and Sanitation, Disaster Management, Municipality, Local Government, Health (hospital) and Technical Services.

5.10.3 Data analysis

The problem with qualitative data is how to condense highly complex and context-bound information into a format which tells a story in a way that is fully convincing to the reader. A clear explanation of how the analysis was done and conclusions reached, and a demonstration of how the raw data was transformed into meaningful conclusions is required (Thietart et al., 2002). This study employed thematic content analyses with a coding system to develop themes

as proposed by Mayring (2014). The thematic content analysis method allowed for a descriptive approach in the coding process and the interpretation of the data. The coded data was analyzed in stages and the findings of each analyzed stage informed the stage that followed. Thematic content analysis enabled the extraction of the views, opinions, knowledge and experiences of the participants from the different sets of data generated by the different data collection methods.

Data analyses of primary and secondary literature sources informed the themes developed for the one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted with the research participants. A qualitative matching process using an adapted matching theory method preceded the interviews with lecturers. The lecturer inputs consisted of learning outcomes, standards and assessment practices outlined in their coursework documentation. Themes developed from the literature reviewed and the lecturer coursework documents informed the application of the adapted qualitative matching framework method. The framework assisted with establishing how university lecturers matched graduate skills and knowledge development practices with workplace needs, considering the influence of regulatory implementation practices. The standard matching model components were adapted for qualitative assessment as follows: *inputs*: documents; *outputs*: regulatory implementation practices for matching; *processes and or procedures*: lecturer pedagogy, student evaluation practices, among others (Mitnick, 2013). The aforementioned findings informed the semi-structured interviews conducted with university lecturers from both private and public universities. The interviews assisted with establishing the influence of the university regulatory implementation practices on lecturer experiences in developing graduates' skills and knowledge for workplaces. The combined processes of document analysis and lecturer interviews availed a favorable engagement opportunity to establish why graduates are ill-prepared upon employment in workplaces. The standard matching theory model consisting of a 'stable perfect matching algorithm' was not suitable in its standard form to address the lived experiences of lecturers, but the components of the algorithm were manipulated to inform the document analysis process of which outcomes guided the interviews conducted with lecturers.

Participant scrutiny and confirmation of unbiased document content ensured consensus and the relevance of using the information provided. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the division heads were informed by the findings of the lecturer interviews and analysis of organizational documents. The organizational documents consisted of recruitment policy

documents, job descriptions and vacancies that yielded rich descriptive data that served as valuable information to corroborate participant responses obtained from interviews.

Regulatory policies and frameworks were not analyzed and reported on in this study. The findings of the research are discussed in the next section under the following main themes derived from analyzing the data: (1) university regulatory implementation influences on lecturer teaching and learning practices – private and public lecturers; and (2) employer graduate against non-graduate employee workplace conflicts.

5.11 Findings and Discussion

The intention of the findings and discussion section was to focus attention on the lived experiences of university lecturers and employer workplace relationships of graduates against non-graduates. The goals and strategic importance of regulatory policies and frameworks cannot be discounted in any context. However, the nuances of human behavior determine the success and/or failure of such goals and strategies. The main themes addressed in this section, as previously mentioned, are presented as important considerations for evaluating expectations about graduate workplace readiness from university liability to fairness in employer recruitment practices.

5.11.1 University regulatory implementation influences on lecturer teaching and learning practices – private and public lecturers

In the norm private and public university management structures consist of boards, a chancellor, administrative leaders at faculty and department levels, and an academic senate. Teaching and learning regulatory implementation influences are informed and quality assured by these management structures and/or persons holding the positions (Ballim, Mabizela and Mubangizi, 2014). Included in these structures are the expectations and influences of professional bodies that inform classroom teaching and learning. Public and private sector lecturers experienced these structures as prescriptive in their stances thereby interfering with lecturer classroom autonomy. The expectation of high pass requirements and quota systems regardless of the quality of student academic ability was deemed unfair by all participants, especially if it measured lecturer job performance. Public university lecturers have students from poor and under-represented social backgrounds as the majority of students in their classrooms increasing lecturer workloads to achieve such high pass requirements (Daniels,

2013; Majola, 2019). If professional body student quotas are not achieved the affected departments may lose their study programme accreditation. Both public and private university lecturers do not give input on student admissions for their courses and have to be competent in flexible pedagogy practices to be aware of and accommodate different student learning levels over their course period (Mzangwa, 2019). Course programmes are usually offered over a semester period of six months. However, some block courses are offered over five to eight weeks and that affects the teaching and learning time to develop students. Many courses are informed by prescribed textbooks and/or learner course guide documents that made learning theoretical, other than the lecturer introducing hypothetical practical examples. Matching theoretical skills and knowledge development in the classroom setting, as advocated by Kojima (2015) becomes difficult under such structured circumstances. Professional board exams are particularly focused on prescribing to lecturers what topics must be taught because board exams must be written. Private and public sector lecturer comments follow below:

- ***Lecturer assessment practices*:**
    - Lecturers are expected to give students more than the documented number of assessment opportunities in course documents resulting in increased workloads, as well as student entitlement. This entitlement behavior of students is carried forward to other course modules and lecturers. Students do not adhere to submission deadlines and submit complaints to the administration and/or registrar office who overrides lecturer decisions.
    - Lecturers do not have input on student admissions even if it is clear that the student do not have the ability to succeed in the course. The descriptors of poorer and socio-economically challenged students provided by Majola (2019) are also relevant to students who do not fall into these categories.
    - The aforementioned are pre-Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 student behavior patterns – Covid-19 became an extra excuse for students to submit demands and expectations outside the Covid-19 adjusted university practices. Covid-19 brought with it the expectation that lecturers will be available for twenty-four hours of the day and being inundated with emailed requests even during night time and/or midnight. Schteigman et al. (2022) contribute to this conversation adding further detail to student behavioral challenges post-Covid-19.

- Regardless of the length of time given to students to complete assessments they wait until the due date and then experience challenges that lecturers are forced to accommodate.

To achieve the expected graduate throughput requirements lecturers were often required to deviate from their documented assessment practices, among others, the number of assessments and submission deadline adjustment to accommodate students who are experiencing personal and academic challenges. Some of these challenges are household instabilities, poverty and crime that negatively impact the academic ability of students. Personal challenges experienced by students affect their mental health, that include, emotional, physical, psychological and social well-being as confirmed by Mzwanga (2019). Participant lecturers in the public sector commented that they have long been expected to be both social workers and academics to ensure that all students are afforded sufficient and fair opportunities to succeed. Lecturer pedagogic innovation and student support beyond the classroom increased lecturer workloads and workflows leading to extended working hours, exacerbated by large student classes. Yet universities expect the lecturers to achieve the expected eighty percent plus pass rates to avoid being labeled a poor performing lecturer. The inconsistent regulatory implementation practices and fear of losing jobs sometimes leads to unethical practices like lecturers adjusting student marks to achieve the pass rates expected of them (Hughes and Eaton, 2022). Whether marginally or otherwise, the quality of student learning is compromised. A student passing a study programme under such circumstances are presenting inflated false academic results that validates the endorsement of materiality non-disclosure as argued by Hubbard and Reed (2016). In the greater scheme of a degree certificate validating employment such a degree certificate is questionable. The research participant comments about pass rates and quota systems outlined below present a clearer picture of a university education and degree programme certificate afforded on graduation.

- ***Pass requirements and quota systems:***
    - Public university student numbers per lecturer are on average 150 to 300 students per class whereas private lecturer class numbers average between 20 to 30 students. Lecturers in the public sector are expected to have an eighty percent pass rate or be deemed a poor performing lecturer with the large class student numbers.
    - The majority of students enrolled in public universities are from poorer communities and experience many socio-economic challenges that impact on their

academic ability as argued by Majola (2019) making an eighty percent pass rate difficult to achieve. Large class numbers affect lecturer ability to give individual attention other than offering tutorials, consultations and revision or extra classes that very few students use. Private sector students enjoy smaller student numbers but have the same poor work ethic of not meeting deadlines and complaining for more assessment opportunities.

- Lecturer continued employment are dictated by high pass rates in both public and private sector universities. Pass requirements prescribed by universities are low and a fifty percent student pass for a module should be questioned in terms of what learning the student achieved. This is definitely a point of concern for graduate employment and universities should disclose such information (Hubbard and Reed, 2016) that the validity of the certificate is questionable.
- Lecturers adjust student marks to achieve throughput rates and quota requirements to avoid the loss of government and professional body funding and accreditation disguising what the students actually know upon graduation.

The operational and funding structures of private and public sector universities differ because public universities are government funded entities and private universities are funded by private individuals and/or organizations, endowments and rely heavily on student fees (Beauchamp and Monk, 2022). University graduate throughput rates are also informed by the quota systems of professional bodies that dictate student assessment requirements for universities to retain accreditation and funding (Ballim, Mabizela & Mubangizi, 2014). Public university lecturers in particular commented that the push by universities to comply with government and professional body prescribed requirements impact on the quality of lecturer learning, teaching and assessment practices. Concerns were raised about equating quality to pass requirements where learning is seldom matched to practice as shown in the application of the matching theory framework in this study (Kojima, 2015). Lecturers in both public and private sectors commented that a pass requirement of fifty percent does not equate to student workplace readiness. Lecturers explained that a fifty percent pass, albeit for a module or full study programme, equates to the level of skills and knowledge achieved by a university graduate. The aforementioned raises questions about accountability and responsibility in the agency agreement between universities and students in the context of Mitnick's (2013) assessment of fees paid and context of learning. The extent of the regulatory implementation

practices informing such questionable evaluation practices is clearly visible in lecturer responses to avoid being deemed non-performers, in particular. If workplace readiness is measured based on the degree certificate further student evaluation details is necessary for employers to make informed recruitment decisions, and as Hubbard and Reed (2016) argue, to validate the certificate as authentic. The study record accompanying the degree certificate for employment can be deemed as false claims of what the graduate actually knows if we consider the arguments of Hubbard and Reed (2016). Consider the following example: if the level descriptors of a subject being taught consists of five topics and ten learning outcomes, what knowledge and/or skills did the graduate achieve with a fifty percent pass. A further breakdown can lead to questions about which of the five topics and ten learning outcomes the graduate failed or struggled to fully comprehend. The subjects completed and grades achieved appear on the study record but a fifty percent pass makes the level of graduate knowledge and skills disputable to be deemed workplace ready. The same breakdown holds true for some professional bodies who require an average pass of sixty percent per subject and/or completed course programme. The degree certificate presented by the graduate for employment does not disclose the aforementioned level of detail as a measure for a graduate to perform optimally in the workplace. Further comments about teaching and learning compromises of quality, and skills and knowledge acquisition for workplace readiness follow below:

- ***Matching classroom teaching and learning to workplace needs:***
    - The structured nature of textbook and course material utilized for classroom learning hinders to an extent the matching of theory to practice (Kojima, 2015). Many students in both public and private sectors are focused on assessment content to pass and show very little inclination to acquiring further knowledge. Public university lecturers sometimes request a guest speaker from industry to provide examples on the application of particular topics in the real world but only a few students will show interest. Some will ask if they will be assessed on the practical examples provided by the guest speaker.
    - Private universities have links to employers and sometimes students have the opportunity to visit workplaces to view selected operations but not do workplace tasks. In some instances, private universities have workplace short-term learning placement agreements. However, this is very rarely integrated as a standing agreement into study programmes. The prescriptive learning material affords

lecturers minimal flexibility to manipulate content and incorporate practice. The question of the agency agreement is very relevant in this context if study programmes are advertised as being career-focused on university websites (Mobarak, 2019 and 2020).

- Lecturers provide hypothetical examples for practice, but the lecture period time of forty-five to sixty minutes does not allow much time to engage students on the relevance in the real world. Even though some lecturers sometimes have up to eight lectures per week, the lectures are focused on covering the prescribed topics of the course material. Class sizes are too big and funding is unavailable to build constructive workplace collaborations. In public universities where 300 students are allocated to a lecturer the idea of visiting a workplace and affording all students the opportunity is simply impossible.

Private and public university lecturers are experiencing similar teaching and learning constraints. Lecturers from private institutions may enjoy smaller student lecturer ratios but that does not increase the ability for matching workplace needs to teaching and learning in classrooms as the matching theory application evidenced (Kojima, 2015). The problematic socio-economic challenges of students in public universities admittedly results in challenging teaching and learning practices but one must question on who the liability rests, under the circumstances advocated by the agency agreement (Mitnick and Ross, 1975). The capacity of lecturers in both private and public sectors to sufficiently prepare students for workplace requirements are guided by university practices of class times, semester or block week timelines, class size and, most importantly, prescriptive textbooks and learning material that are theoretical. Lecturers confirmed that on the occasion they receive an updated or edited textbook the content that was edited did not change much from the previous version. In the commerce environment of the research participant lecturers the guidance of textbooks cannot allow learning opportunities of complex workplace environments due to, among other reasons, theoretical assessments for academic progress. Institutional and professional body prescriptions dictate classroom teaching and learning and complicates workplace integrated teaching and learning that is contextualized by Shteigman et al., (2022). The aforementioned discussion raises concerns considering that study programmes reflecting on university websites are claiming to prepare graduates for particular careers and professions (Mobarak, 2020). The engagement with division heads is outlined below.

5.11.2 Employer graduate against non-graduate employee workplace conflicts

Employer university graduate recruitment practices require engagement and understanding of the actual levels and standards the university graduate achieved during their study years. The feedback from both private and public sector lecturer participants in this study is valuable to assess employer expectations of university graduate levels of skills and knowledge upon employment (Hansen, 2017; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). The divisional heads were concerned about graduate attitudes and work ethic in addition to shortcomings in skills and knowledge acquired for workplace readiness. The workplace challenges were, however, beyond skills and knowledge shortcomings as graduate against non-graduate employee conflicts result in demotivated staff, behavioral challenges, and consequently productivity constraints. Although the divisional heads had different organizational functional profiles, as previously mentioned, their business units were experiencing similar staff conflicts because of what is deemed unfair recruitment practices that exclude experienced non-graduate employees from promotion and vacancy opportunities (Pollard, 2015). The conflicts were exacerbated when non-graduate employees are expected to train and upskill ill-prepared university graduate appointees to do the tasks and jobs employers expect graduates to do. The comments of the division heads are outlined below:

- Non-graduate experienced employees working for the company for many years may have completed certificate and/or diploma study programmes over the years and acted in the higher-level positions on an ad hoc basis, but cannot be appointed due to the university degree qualification shortcoming. Experienced employees enroll at universities to acquire the degree qualification to retain their jobs and find that lecturers cannot be engaged because lecturers have not worked in workplaces but only have academic theoretical knowledge. This teaching practice is confirmed by lecturers in the previous section and is stated as a consequence of the structured nature of university education, particularly in commerce.
- Graduate against non-graduate conflicts arise when experienced non-graduate employees have to train graduate appointees in the jobs that non-graduate employees are unable to apply for regardless of their experience. Workplaces do not recognize non-graduate employees' prior learning, even though there is a national (South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), (Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy and framework to address such processes as reported by Mobarak (2010) in her analysis of university RPL policies.

- Professional body regulations and compliance implications are not fully comprehended in practice by graduates that results in workplace fears of short- and long-term quality and licensing retraction fears. The regulatory implementation influences on teaching and learning practices of lecturers do not extend to the quality and risk compliance detail and practices required by workplaces. Textbooks and learning material mention ISO standards and other professional body requirements in the respective fields of teaching, however, in practice the implications of ill-informed negligent employee practices cost companies dearly.
- Unpleasant behavioral exchanges between graduate and non-graduate employees result in workplace frustrations and affect productivity processes and outputs. Repetitive errors and wastage of ill-prepared graduates exacerbate the resentment by non-graduates toward graduates.

Regulatory requirements inform vacancies and appointments for particular jobs that specify the need for university degrees. This expectation excludes the opportunity to appoint experienced non-graduate employees who subsequently enroll in university degree programmes to qualify for the jobs. University enrolled experienced employees complain about the theoretical 'nonsense' they have to learn that wastes their time and money because the real world does not work as they are taught at universities (Majola, 2019). An example was given of a senior manager appointed with a diploma level education more than fifteen years ago who has to re-apply for his job because he needs a university degree. He was given a timeline to complete the degree or lose his job. The division heads commented that RPL policies and practices at universities are not applied to recognize formal and/or informal learning for candidates to enroll in full degree programmes but rather results in the repetition of learning already known by experienced employees (Mobarak, 2010).

The aforementioned discussion provides important considerations for universities to evaluate their disclosure of information about degree programmes to both prospective students and employers. Consequently, employers should recognize the shortcomings of graduate skills and knowledge that are not provided by the degree certificate and/or the graduate results statement in their university graduate recruitment practices. Such information disclosures can assist with workplace planning when experienced non-graduates are overlooked for vacancies, job retention and promotion.

5.12 Proposals for Reform

It is not an exaggeration to note that regulatory attempts to address the transformation of university education and university graduate skills for suitable employment are not rendering the desired results. The research findings are clear indicators that universities are not producing the desired levels of education required by employers and lack sharing comprehensive information that leads to potential risks to integrity and assessment pitfalls echoed internationally by Moyo and Saidi (2019). The proposals for regulatory reform presented in this section are intended to consider the moral hazard of excluding graduates and non-graduates from fair economic participation. There is no blame in the corrective action for the greater good where systems and practices are hindering economic progress. This study is a clear indicator of some of the nuances that must be considered before shifting blame or burden of proofs that are not solution driven. The following regulatory reform proposals are embedded in principles of adding value to stakeholders who have been bickering about access and redress for many years, in a system that continues to marginalize many valuable citizens in the process.

- Universities should disclose comprehensive information about graduate learning, development and evaluation practices to assist employers to make informed decisions when recruiting university graduates. Workplaces will be able to plan accordingly and not impose unfair expectations on non-graduates without compensation and recognition.
- Regulation by the government and professional bodies that prescribe the appointment of university graduates in certain job categories, for example, in operational, technical, managerial, supervisory jobs must be adjusted to recognize other forms of learning. Academic theoretical knowledge can never compensate for experience in workplaces, regardless of the industry. Reviewed literature shows that even medical professions, where graduates are involved in practical internships during their study years, do not equate to the value of work ethic workplaces require.
- Progressively reduce the degree program study years to two years instead of the current three and four years of study. Allow workplace learning for final year/s in simulated environments after the two years of university studies if workplaces have to re-train graduates anyway after their current study years. An example is in the South African Navy environment where teamwork is taught with real obstacles coming toward a submarine in a simulated environment. Employer workplaces can be innovative in this regard.

- Utilize existing Sector Education Training Authority funding and structures to employ retired skilled employees as mentors and facilitators in workplaces to avoid productivity losses where non-graduate employees are expected to develop ill-prepared university graduates. Retired employees can be compensated with a reasonable payment to avoid exploitation and employers can thereby retain valuable skills in the process. Funding for such payments can be made from the national skills fund.

The above-mentioned is not an exhaustive list of proposals but a starting point to address the current unfair and non-transformative practices that continue in debate but not in application.

5.13 Closing Remarks

The degree certificate afforded to the graduate by the university upon graduation does not justify graduate workplace readiness when the regulatory implementation influences negatively affect lecturer teaching and learning practices. The graduate throughput rates prescribed by government and professional bodies are not realistic if the quality of skills and knowledge is compromised. The challenge is that the results statement issued with the graduate certificate does not disclose what skills and knowledge is actually acquired which compromises the degree program information provided by universities on various platforms. A further technical breakdown of the graduate's actual knowledge and skills achievement could render the percentage weighting proportioned for each topic and learning outcome questioned. The employer cannot value the degree submitted for employment as justification for what the degree program is signaling because the essence of the graduate's ability is hidden in the learning achievement during the study years (Pollard, 2015; Schteigman et al., 2022).

Conflicts between graduate and non-graduate employees should be addressed as unfair recruitment practices leads to employer productivity losses that also equate to losses for the economy. Furthermore, non-graduate employee frustrations can be avoided if employer recruitment practices can be adjusted to recognize other forms of learning that are governed by government assessment policies like recognition of prior learning. Employers may save on university graduate appointee salary expenses due to government subsidies, but considering the loss in time and productivity to retrain graduates, it can be argued that the costs outweigh the benefits in real terms.

The agency agreement between universities and students clarified in this study should serve employers to assess graduate workplace abilities upon employment better. Employers must improve their understanding of the student evaluation trade-offs during the graduates' years of study to reconsider their expectations and assumptions that graduates are better equipped for the workplace compared to non-graduate employees. Informed recruitment decisions can reduce workplace conflicts of graduate against non-graduate employee relationships. Universities as institutions that contribute to economies have a responsibility to optimally evaluate the student performance for employment suitability as ill-prepared graduates have significant ramifications for workplaces, as do inconsistent regulatory implementation practices.

5.14 References

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CHAPTER SIX - DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The formulation of ideas in different ways can be influenced by change that mercilessly steers human beings into mostly unpredictable directions, as Covid-19 has proved. Ideas conceived for this study materialised long before the advent of Covid-19, when the concerns about the quality of the skills and knowledge of university graduates were already problematic. Employers across the globe continued struggling to recruit workplace-ready university graduates that inevitably exposed universities as institutions that did not effectively contribute to labour market needs. Covid-19 exacerbated the long-standing problems identified with ill-prepared university graduates and contributed different dimensions to questions about the quality of a university education for labour markets (Shteigman et al., 2022).

As a consequence of Covid-19 buzzwords like online learning, distance learning, blended learning, hybrid-learning, home schooling, social-emotional schooling, project-based learning, gamification, and other ideas and strategies influenced the way universities, in particular, had to adapt their teaching and learning practices. Admittedly, some of the aforementioned buzzwords are not necessarily new to education. However, Covid-19 impacted on pedagogy and most importantly, on student evaluations. These concepts brought with it different understandings and approaches to learning that forced universities, globally, to dramatically transform timeously without compromising the quality of graduate outputs and throughputs. The influence of external and internal regulatory practices was enforced with revised policies and practices to ensure that consistency and alignment in university teaching and learning were not conceded. That this responsiveness by universities contributed to the improved quality of a university education for labour markets remains questionable and an opportunity for further interrogation.

The aim of this dissertation by publication was to develop proposals for reforming and improving processes of university graduates' skills and knowledge production for labour markets. Three of the four research objectives developed to achieve the aforementioned aim were addressed as interlinking research phases. The three phases were designed as individual studies, of which two were published as articles in international journals and one article is under review for publication with an international journal. The three articles represent chapters three,

four and five of this dissertation. A synopsis of the research findings of each research stage is provided at the beginning of chapters three, four and five.

This chapter concludes with a summary of the main research findings, contributions to new knowledge, proposals for reform, future research, limitations of the study and conclusion of the overall study.

6.2 A Summarised Discussion of the Overall Findings

6.2.1 A brief summary of phase one

This research phase started with a pilot survey of six employed university graduates, purposely selected from the University of the Western Cape and the University of South Africa. These employed graduates' questionnaire responses assisted with the testing and refining of the Google open-ended questionnaire for any changes or edits required before starting the national online survey. The importance of the national survey conducted after the pilot survey is that participants were employed in nine different industries and graduated in different disciplines from eight South African universities. Data analysis was completed in a thematic content analysis process using the steps of coding building blocks of Mayring (2014).

The review of the literature was indicative of a variety of skills graduates require upon employment (Viviers, 2016; Botes and Sharma, 2017; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018), but reporting the workplace opinions of employed university graduates' experiences with the teaching and learning practices during their study years was a shortcoming. Not much, if anything at all, was written about university lecturers' pedagogical competence that incorporates workplace skills and knowledge were available in the literature.

This research argued that the development of workplace-ready graduates required a review of the teaching and learning strategies currently informing university practices. The contribution of universities to labour markets was examined to ensure that graduates contribute meaningfully to the workplace of employers.

The main findings of *phase one* are:

- The abundant theoretical content of university teaching and learning practices does not translate to skills and knowledge for the workplace. Graduates opined that employers have to retrain them in technical and soft skills that universities should have prepared them in.
- Employed graduates commented that lecturers should be knowledgeable and skilled in their fields of expertise to change pedagogy and convert theory to practice in classrooms.
- Employers should be more proactive in participating in university education to create awareness of workplace skills and knowledge needs and not only visit universities for career and employment information.

The study calls for more effort by universities to amicably align their curricula with labour market requirements in continuous collaboration with employers to add significant value.

6.2.2 A brief summary of phase two

Despite the continuing disgruntlement shown by international employers about ill-prepared university graduates (Vedder, Denhart and Robe, 2013; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018), the failure to produce workplace-ready graduates continue. This study afforded the opportunity to appreciate the social construction of employer workplace challenges with ill-prepared university graduates at different levels of the organisation.

A qualitative case study research design was employed to explore a large employer's perspectives and experiences with the contribution of universities to labour market requirements. The study accepts that the skills and knowledge of university graduates cannot be known by an employer prior to employment, but that the hiring of employees is still an investment decision.

There are definitely no shortcomings in the literature on employer challenges and frustrations. However, the literature lacks reporting on comparing the content of university degree programmes with employer needs. This study reveals the following main findings:

- Employers rely on the university skills and knowledge production and more importantly, they want to collaborate more significantly with universities in order to share practical skills and knowledge. The retraining of university graduates upon employment negatively impacts on employer productivity and employee workplace relationships.

- A call for shorter term university degree programmes with a one to two-year practical workplace skills and knowledge component for the development of university graduates would add more value than the existing three to four-year theoretically intensive degree programmes.
- The adjustment of fundamentals in university teaching and learning strategies required should be embedded in the development of the levels of human capability and there should not be fears of intellectual property autonomy.

The study concludes that universities are entities of social responsibility and should therefore engage with and contribute to stakeholder interests of university education. The *phase two* findings inform *phase three* of the study, of which a summary of the findings is provided below.

6.2.3 A brief summary of phase three

This qualitative interview study examined the regulatory implementation influences on the lived experiences of private and public sector university lecturers' teaching and learning practices. The employer workplace university graduate against experienced non-graduate employee conflicts are also reported. The argument that university teaching and learning practices should be compatible with employer workplace expectations to justify university graduate employment was addressed.

Employers are regulated to employ university graduates against experienced non-graduate employees for specific job levels by national government and professional bodies informed by policy frameworks. The policy frameworks specify university education standards and levels that inform employers of the skills and knowledge university graduates acquire during their years of study. This study, however, finds that the regulatory implementation deviations and inconsistent practices compromise the quality of skills and knowledge an employer expects graduates will have upon employment. The main findings of this study are:

- University institutional regulatory implementation practices hinder lecturer learning, teaching and assessment autonomy because university quality assurance structures are prescriptive and disregard lecturer expertise and decision-making.
- Government and professional body prescriptive regulatory compliance requirements put pressure on university throughput rates by setting quotas, influencing assessment

evaluation practices and thereby compromising the quality of skills and knowledge production.

- The threat of university lecturer employment linked to unreasonable pass requirements leads to progressing academically challenged students that make the authenticity of university degree certificates awarded upon graduation questionable.

The study concludes with proposals for the reform of the regulatory practices by universities, professional bodies and government.

6.3 Main Contributions to New Knowledge

6.3.1 Methodological contributions

- Using Mayring's (2014) coding building blocks in its standard form, I extracted clear themes and concepts from the literature and collected data that facilitated new perspectives and suggestions for redesigning university teaching and learning strategies. The themes and concepts provided a basis for further scientific interrogation of employer and industry needs that inform knowledge of relevant curricula designs. The coding building blocks worked well for theoretical constructs, but had to be manipulated to optimally include participant lived experiences.
- The application of multiple theories assisted with the construction of a roadmap to improved applications of research approaches that combine theories from different scientific disciplines.
- Adapting the matching theory standard model to include lived experiences represented an opportunity for future research approaches to include flexible variables that are generally absent from qualitative studies that employ the matching theory.

- Using both manual and electronic coding was advantageous. Manual coding could be cross-checked with the electronic coding process, which allowed me to remain engrossed in the data. Additional codes could also be added to the codes initially identified by the electronic system using Excel software.

6.3.2 Theoretical contributions

- National and international concerns about university skills and knowledge production shortcomings were extracted from different literature sources that increased the generalisability of the study.

- The incorporation of Covid-19 conversations from the literature strengthened the pre- and post-Covid-19 impact of university skills and knowledge production on stakeholders.

- The separate literature reviews of each study phase assisted with the identification of relevant participants for each study.

- The proposals for reform incorporate current government strategies for transforming university education and graduate employment.

6.4 Improving Current Practice

There are many other fundamental factors that may impact on the ability and capacity of universities to produce the skills and knowledge graduates need upon employment optimally. The workplace skills and knowledge requirements can be influenced by, amongst other factors, the flexible demands of industry and consequently workplaces, economic downturns affecting organisational expectations from employees to multi-task across job functions and/or tasks, which graduates are struggling to do. Considering these factors and the continued international debates for many years, we cannot continue to justify the wrongs committed towards stakeholders when solutions are not found, or at least significant progress, is not made. National strategies to solve or transform the issue of university education and economic participation by all citizens are costly and evolves from timeous debates and planning phases that cannot continue to render non-transformational results.

The proposals for reform outlined below are contextualised in three broad areas:

6.4.1 Collaboration between universities and employers

Create a roadmap or process flow to agree on what meaningful collaboration between universities and/or employers should entail if institutions fear losing copyright or autonomy of information and/or knowledge. It is clear that the current processes of collaboration are not

producing the desired results. Consider the use of organizational premises for workshopping and/or simulations to give graduates experience of workplace requirements as part of their holistic development for industry. It is clear that the shortcomings in the ability of graduates to function in workplaces are across disciplines. The practice of graduate integration for development cannot reap the desired results if other employees must train them. Allow the workplace development of graduates to be separated from daily operations to avoid productivity losses. Instead of using existing employees, employ skilled and workplace knowledgeable retirees, paying a reasonable stipend for developing graduates in such workplace settings.

6.4.2 Revised regulatory implementation practices

In the words of John Dewey "*education is not an affair of telling and being told but an active and constructive process*". In all fairness to relevant stakeholders, imposing unfair practices of quota systems that determine funding, licensing, accreditation, and other incentives, create not only subjugation but also grounds for the deviation from quality in practice. Especially, if such regulatory requirements dictate livelihoods, sustainability and judgement of incompetence. Consideration should be given and provided for alternative measures, albeit extended time or evaluation processes, outside the standard times for quality completion of a graduates' studies. Do not allow such extensions to impose unfair labour practices on particularly lecturers who are already extended with the unintended responsibility of being both social worker and academic.

6.4.3 Recognition of prior learning and assessment

The government's national Recognition of Prior Learning policy is a progressive initiative, particularly in the South African context. The implementation of the policy framework with the intention of the greater good and not capitalist extortion can certainly afford non-graduate experienced employees the opportunity to better jobs and livelihoods. Imagine the frustration of a workplace experienced employee having to re-learn knowledge in a classroom setting for 'a piece of paper' to justify employment that the individual is already competently doing in the real world. The situation becomes even more frustrating when the academic is theoretically informed but cannot be engaged about the practical implementation of such knowledge. The South African population consists of many such individuals who can gain from assessments

with either no or minimal further learning. Imagine the expedited, quality contribution to the economy if such a process of assessment can be re-imagined for the greater good.

6.4.4 Closing remarks

This empirical study was not conducted to evoke blame among stakeholders, but rather to create awareness of different nuances not available in the existing literature. The intention of the participant lived experienced nuances produced in this dissertation was not to encourage action and practice to view existing strategies differently. It may be that the need to substitute existing role players who are struggling to comprehend and effect the required solutions for the greater good should be actioned. The above list of proposals is not exhaustive but within their contexts many dimensions can be elaborated upon.

6.5 Future Research

The following areas and themes of research are shortcoming as uncovered during this empirical research:

- *Skills production for the economy:* The skills and knowledge production by universities that are irrelevant to the economy or degrees programmes that have little demand in the labour market.

- *Lecturer recruitment practices:* The recruitment of academics with the right academic qualification but no suitable competence or experience in the field of their qualification. More concerning is the recruitment practices of academics who lecture in disciplines unrelated to their academic qualification.

- *University student attitudes towards learning:* A triangulated approach to research addressing student behaviour, work ethic attitude and other related soft skills in the evaluation for graduation practices by universities. Compare university learning in this context with employer workplace operations for informed recommendations.

Future research undertaken about university education and industry needs should be practical in nature to capture the in-depth social constructs of participant lived experiences. As a principle, multiple methods, multiple disciplines and multiple stakeholders, amongst others,

should form part of the intended research to find problem-solving initiatives for the ongoing problem of ill-prepared graduates that are unsuitable upon employment.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

The following limitations are important to note:

- *Research access*: My corporate experience in large, medium and small organisations directed my intention to access research participants at all levels of an organisation that large organisations could provide. Although agreements were reached with three large organisations in advance, two reneged on their commitments at the last minute. I was very fortunate to retain the largest organisation of the three with seventy business units that could suffice to achieve my research aims.

- *Participant planning sessions:* Time constraints of organisational employees due to their flexible workflows resulted in planning challenges. My familiarity with corporate environment turnaround times guided my contingency plans in order not to waste time at the organisation if some research participants could not attend.

- *Location planning:* Traveling to venues provided by the organisation for participant engagement can be a constraint if participants are suddenly called away for unplanned work commitments. I had to alter interview and focus group sessions to cluster participant sessions by area and not centrally at the head office.

- *Researcher role:* Even though my research role was provided in writing and verbally before sessions, some participants misconstrued the sessions as an opportunity to complain about the organisation. It is important for researchers to manage participant emotions, especially pertaining to topics such as job suitability based on qualifications and not only on experience.

6.7 Conclusion

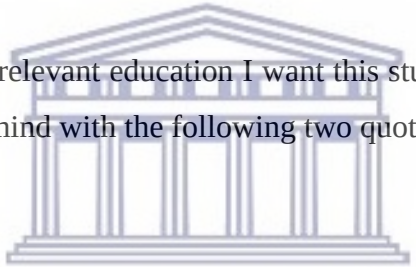
This dissertation by publication presents perspectives from various stakeholders whose lived experiences contributed to the detailed elucidation of complex issues pertaining to the contribution of universities to labour markets. These issues are embedded in the system of university teaching and learning practices and employer experiences with their employed graduates.

The proposals for reform outlined in this study serve as important resources for interested persons in this essential discussion about the contribution of universities to labour markets and how employers experience university graduates in workplaces. The complex issues that are experienced by university graduates, private and public university lecturers, and employers presented in this dissertation should not be critiqued with views of who is right or wrong but rather used to alleviate the moral hazard of continued practices that produce ill-prepared university graduates. It is instructive to add that such practices in its conduct resemble a deliberate intent to do harm. In so doing a calamity is committed against the economies of countries that are dependent on graduates for micro and macro sustainability and global competitiveness.

May this research unlock not only what apparently appears to be a challenging topic of study, but also demystify countless traditions about what a university education is and how universities should contribute to societies and economies.

6.8 Concluding Thought

As an advocate for quality and relevant education I want this study to remind stakeholders of the importance of an educated mind with the following two quotes:



- "You cannot teach today, the same way you did yesterday to prepare students for tomorrow." (John Dewey)

- "Never regard study as a duty, but as the inevitable opportunity to learn to know the liberating influence of beauty in the realm of the spirit for your own personal joy and to the profit of the community to which your later work belongs." (Konrad Lorenz)

6.9 References

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: PhD By Publication Guidelines Document

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Guidelines for the Doctoral thesis (PhD) by publications

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The doctoral thesis by publications was initially adopted by Scandinavian Universities and comprises a number of publications (published or accepted for publication). At the University of the Western Cape (UWC), doctoral and masters theses have usually been presented in the form of a monograph, but some Natural Science and Health Science disciplines have adopted the approach of presenting the doctoral thesis in the form of publications. Assessment rules for the doctoral thesis at UWC allow for the latter model to be applied. This document serves to define the framework for a doctoral thesis by publications.

The University General Rule A.5.5.5. states:

No thesis that has previously been submitted for a degree at another university may be accepted, but material taken by the candidate from his/her existing publications may be incorporated in the thesis and must be clearly indicated as such. If called upon, the candidate must submit together with his/her thesis, a copy of every thesis previously submitted by him/her for another degree, whether it was accepted or not (UWC, 2011:96).

It must be noted that this format is adopted in exceptional circumstances, defined by publications in leading national and international journals.

There are a number of advantages in adopting this approach to doctoral thesis production:

It affords students and future academics opportunities to develop a research identity early on in their studies/careers.

It contributes to the early dissemination of new knowledge produced and the impact of the research is more immediate.

The publications become a barometer of progress towards the completion of the doctoral degree.

External feedback as a result of the publications will be received at a much earlier stage from independent and objective reviewers, thereby strengthening the academic quality of the research in the thesis.

Note:

Since the doctoral thesis by publications is an alternate format for the presentation of doctoral research findings, from a quality assurance perspective it is restricted to research work already published or accepted for publication after blind peer review.

The traditional thesis format in which far greater detail is provided for the benefit of the examiners, must be used if any component of the doctoral thesis does not satisfy the above requirements.

PROCEDURES AND FORMAT FOR THE DOCTORAL THESIS BY PUBLICATIONS

The guidelines below are provided for the purpose of Quality Assurance and as information to doctoral students and their supervisors.

The procedures related to the doctoral thesis by publications are the same as those approved for the doctoral degree by the traditional thesis, contained in the University calendar (UWC, 2011) so as to ensure equivalence of standards.

The doctoral thesis by publications must demonstrate that the thesis constitutes an original and significant contribution to knowledge in the discipline concerned.

The doctoral thesis by publications should comprise articles published or accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals, as well as peer-reviewed chapters in books. Note: peer-reviewed published articles should be in the majority. The number of articles presented in the thesis will depend on the contribution of the doctoral student to the article as well as the scope

of the thesis. What is important is that the total contribution by the doctoral student to the body of new knowledge must be worthy of the award of a doctoral degree.

Publications prepared under supervision and subsequent to registration as a Doctoral student should be in the majority. In exceptional circumstances, this requirement may be waived.

The publications presented for the doctoral thesis by publications must not have been submitted for another research degree at any institution by the doctoral student.

The student should be the main contributing author in the majority of the publications. In the case of multi-authored papers, the doctoral student's contribution has to be indicated in the Appendix to the chapter containing the relevant publication.

Written consent must be obtained from the relevant journal(s) for the published/accepted articles to be included in the dissertation. UWC copyright rules will apply to the doctoral thesis by publications. (General Rule A. 6. 'Publication of Theses and Copyright'. UWC 2011: 97).

Doctoral students should be aware of the University's Intellectual Property guidelines and ensure good practice in the management thereof. These are outlined in the UWC Research Policy (UWC, 2009).

The Memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the student and his/her supervisor (Refer to Postgraduate Handbook for suggested MOU) should indicate the agreement in terms of the IP, copyright, number of published articles and confidentiality pertaining to possible industry-sponsored research projects, in accordance with the Act No. 51 of 2008: Intellectual Property Rights from Publicly Financed Research and Development Act, 2008.

The **format** of the doctoral thesis by publications should include:

Preliminary section:

The preliminary section includes a title page, abstract, keywords, acknowledgements, contents pages, a preface/declaration (Refer to the Postgraduate Handbook for examples of these documents and plagiarism declaration).

Introductory Chapter:

I. The introductory chapter should provide an overview of the identified research themes and set the stage for the integration of the published articles/accepted articles and chapters in books within the relevant contextual literature. It should highlight the importance of the studies undertaken (and reported) in the published articles/chapters in advancing the knowledge in the research field, i.e. provide the rationale and motivation for the study.

The conceptual/theoretical/research framework and methodology for the overall

study must be provided in the introductory chapter, as well as the broad research objectives and hypotheses of the study.

The outline of the thesis must be provided in the introductory chapter, with a

summary of the focus of each chapter. A contextualised narrative (in the introductory chapter) should link the chapters of the thesis. The interconnectedness of the publications in the chapters has to be emphasised under the umbrella of the overarching research theme.

The presentation of the literature review is flexible. In some instances it would be appropriate to present all of the literature review in the introductory chapter. In other cases, e.g. for more expansive studies, it would be more suitable to present a broad literature review for the research theme in the introductory chapter. The background literature relevant to the specific study undertaken in each chapter is then presented at the beginning of the appropriate chapter.

Publications section:

The chapters in this section contain the published articles/chapters in books with all correspondence between the author and the journal related to the peer review process as well as written consent to publish (see item 7 above). Reviewers' comments on the articles, if permitted by the reviewer/editor/journal, should also be provided.

Copies of the actual articles published must be included in the relevant chapter. Each chapter must be self-contained; the published articles/chapters should be reproduced as they were originally published, but with a framing introduction and conclusion.

The doctoral students' contribution to each multi-authored publication must be clearly stated in the appendix section of the relevant publications chapter. All other supporting documents must also be included in the appendix.

d. Concluding chapter:

In this final chapter, after a brief recall to the studies undertaken in the thesis, the doctoral student is required to succinctly highlight the contributions to new knowledge made in the previous chapters on the independent peer-reviewed publications and discuss the implications of the findings. In addition, the limitations of the studies undertaken must be pointed out and recommendations for further research reflected upon.

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The role of the supervisor in guiding the doctoral thesis by publication includes:

Guiding the student in the selection of independent peer-reviewed publications to be presented as part of the thesis.

Guiding and advising the student in terms of the coherence of the body of work that will be submitted as the doctoral thesis and the supporting documents required.

Ensuring that the doctoral students' contribution to the body of new knowledge presented in the thesis by publications is appropriate for the awarding of the doctoral degree.

ASSESSMENT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS BY PUBLICATIONS

The assessment of the doctoral thesis by publications is subject to the same rules and regulations for the doctoral degree as contained in the University Calendar (UWC, 2011). When a doctoral student is ready to submit the doctoral thesis, he/she has to submit a letter of intent after consulting with the supervisor. The due date for the intent letter is two months before the intended date for submission of the thesis for examination (General Rule A.5.5.2: UWC, 2011).

The examiners for the doctoral thesis are approved by the Senate Higher Degrees Committee when the intent letter is submitted. The assessment panel for the doctoral thesis comprises: three examiners, two of whom must be external examiners (General Rule A.5.5.3 [a] UWC, 2011). Examiners are asked to assess the doctoral theses on the basis of original contribution to new knowledge in the field, the quality of the research in the thesis, coherence of the argument, and the presentation of the thesis (style, typographical issues, etc.).

The Senate Higher Degrees Committee is delegated by Senate to make a final decision on the awarding of the doctoral degree after considering the examiners' reports, which are accompanied by a cover report from the supervisor summarising the recommendations of the examiners. (General Rule A.5.5.3 [b] UWC 2011).

The Doctoral candidate is required to present an oral defense of the thesis after the examiners' reports have been received.

GUIDELINES FOR EXAMINERS

Examiners for the Doctoral thesis (PhD) by publications are required to:

Comment on the quality of the journals in which the articles are published, in particular their international standing in the discipline. For chapters in a book, comment on the standing of the publishing house and the academic nature of the book.

Comment on the thoroughness of the peer review process for each article/chapter in a book.

Assess whether the students' contribution to the body of new knowledge produced in the thesis justifies an award of the doctoral degree.

Assess whether the range of publications presented constitutes a broadly coherent intellectual project.

Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance Document

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535

South Africa

T: +27 21 959 2988/2948

F: +27 21 959 3170

E: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za www.uwc.ac.za

09 October 2017

Ms K Mobarak

Institute for Social Development

Faculty of Economic and Management SciencesEthics Reference Number: HS17/8/34

Project Title: Employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledgeof recently employed graduate in South Africa: Description, Analysis and implications for Tertiary Education Public Policy and Practice.

Approval Period: 09 October 2017 – 09 October 2018

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee ofthe University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the abovementioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report ingood time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias

Research Ethics Committee Officer

University of the Western Cape

PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049

Appendix 3: Memorandum of Understanding - Supervision

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS AND SUPERVISOR

The objective of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to outline explicitly the expectations of both post-graduate students and their supervisors. Clearly defined expectations regarding the responsibilities of all parties are crucial to ensuring good supervisory relationships.
The MOU should be viewed as a tool to assist in the planning and carrying out of a post-graduate project. It should not be viewed as an administrative burden. It represents statements of intent and the implied obligations are what a supervisor and student could reasonably be expected to meet under normal circumstances.
If a project changes dramatically, a new MOU should be completed in which the major changes are outlined.
A copy of the signed form should be submitted to the Faculty office via the Departmental PG committee. The student and supervisor should each retain copies for their own records.

AGREEMENT COVERING THE ENTIRE PERIOD OF THE DEGREE

1. STUDENT FULL NAME: Kaashiefa Mobarak
2. STUDENT NO.: 2 0 5 2 8 5 3
3. DEGREE: PhD
4. 1st year of registration: 2017
5. **Full-time** [ ] **Part-time** [X]
6. EXPECTED DATE OF COMPLETION: 2022
7. DEPT: ISD
8. PROJECT TITLE:

Employer Concerns with the Quality of the Skills and Knowledge of Recently Employed Graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for University Education, Public policy and Practice

9. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT (< 200 WORDS):

There is a longstanding dissatisfaction amongst employers in many countries with the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates from tertiary education institutions. Employers complain about what they see as a 'mismatch' between the skills and knowledge possessed by graduates of the formal tertiary education system and the demands of labour markets.

If employer concerns are well founded, then the processes of skills and knowledge acquisition and the functioning of labour markets, will not be contributing to employment and economic growth to the extent that they are intended by national government skills development policy frameworks. In this context and even greater

concern would be South Africa's ability to compete internationally and to achieve the rate of growth consistent with a fair and prosperous society.

The challenge of the current employer concerns with the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates should be contextualised within the responses and accountability of the various stakeholders involved in the process of graduate development for workplace readiness.

10. SUPERVISOR DETAILS:

Principal Supervisor: Dr Razack Karriem Highest Qualifications: PhD

Outline the main responsibilities of supervisor in relation to the research project:

- Supervising the research progress;
- Provide feedbacks; and
- Administer examination process.

Co-Supervisor(s): Highest Qualifications:

Outline the main responsibilities of the co-supervisor:

11. AVAILABILITY OF THE PRINCIPLE SUPERVISOR:

Highlight any absence of supervisor(s) foreseen during the duration of the student's degree. This should include leave/sabbaticals/extended overseas trips. If supervisor is envisaged to be absent for an extended period, (> 6 weeks) then arrangements for supervision should be clearly spelt out.

12. LEAVE OF ABSENCE OF STUDENT – **Not Applicable**

(a) Stipulate how much leave (per annum) the student would be entitled to. Where possible give an indication of dates.

(b) Outline any arrangements for the student to undertake extended periods of research work to be done away from UWC. Supervision and funding arrangements during this time should be clearly defined.

13. PRESCRIBED COURSES/WORKSHOPS Agree on any formal courses, workshops etc. the student would need to attend as part of his/her degree programme.

- Registered for "**Development of Early Researcher" programme – 1 March to 15 December 2021.** DVC Research and Innovation postgraduate development programme.
- Research Project (part of PhD) – **An exploration of the regulatory influence on graduate development for labour markets in South Africa. 2022 to 2023.**

Funded by Developing Early Career Researchers Programme – Office of the DVC Research and Innovation.

- Research Supervision workshops – Postgraduate Studies Division (DPGS)

14. TIME ALLOCATION

Outline the number of hours/week the student is expected to spend in the lab/field and on the project as a whole. Where possible break this down into more clearly defined task as per the categories below: (additional categories can be added)

Progressive per writing components completion.

15. SPACE ALLOCATION: Not Applicable.

Indicate where the student would have lab space and whether a personal bench/desk/office would be available:

16. COMPUTER FACILITIES: Not Applicable.

Define the computer facilities available to the student. Specify the arrangements regarding access to these facilities.

17. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROJECT.

No funding available.

18. PUBLICATION ISSUES

(a) In preparing manuscripts for publication, who will be responsible for writing the first draft? Who will the first author and who will be listed as the corresponding author?

Student responsible.

(b) Will the student be a co-author on any other academic outputs that may arise from results obtained from the student's project?

Student as single author.

(c) Data Ownership.

Student responsible.

19. Outline any issues regarding the ownership of data obtained from this project. This should include the ownership or lab-record books, notes, computer disks etc.

Student responsible – data in private storage.

20. ARRANGEMENTS AROUND COMMUNICATION

(a) How often will student have scheduled meetings with supervisor(s)? (It is suggested that a formal meeting takes place at least once a month).

Meetings as required – planned in advance – per workflow submissions.

(b) Define the nature of the meeting, e.g. one on one, research group, and seminar:

Per workflow submissions.

(c) Outline the format of the meeting, e.g. discussion, presentation:

Discussions – face-to-face and Online – based on submission feedback.

(d) How will the student access the supervisor for unscheduled meetings or to ask advice?

Telephone, email, online – Google meetings etc.

(e) Progress Reports: How often will the student be required to submit a progress report? Outline the format of the report.

Per workflows completed.

(f) Supervisor, Response Time: Outline the time period for the supervisor to give feedback on a progress report. Also stipulate the format of the feedback (written/verbal/annotation of report).

As checking of submissions are completed.

21. STUDY OUTPUTS:

(a) (i) Full thesis / mini thesis / project report?

PhD by publication.

(ii) Give supervisor's response time for reviewing thesis drafts.

As checking of submissions are completed.

(iii) How many drafts of each section of the thesis will the supervisor review?

Not Applicable.

(b) Publications expected other than thesis itself?

2 x article publications

1 x prepared for submission to journal

(c) Seminars: List the seminars the student is obliged to attend.

Student's choice – relevant to postgraduate development.

22. RESEARCH VISITS / CONFERENCES:

1 x National Conference
1 x International Conference

23. OTHER DUTIES: Outline any tasks the student is expected to perform for the research group. Give the number of hours/week.

Not Applicable

24. OTHER EXPECTATIONS: Highlight any other expectations for the year.

25. OUTLINE ANY OTHER ISSUES RELEVANT TO THIS PROJECT.

- Dr Razack Karriem was appointed as the research supervisor effective January 2020.
- Dr Dr Kamila Ludwikowska, Wroclaw University of Science and Technology, Poland was the initial supervisor who could not continue her support since June 2017 due to workflow challenges.
- The student, Kaashiefa Mobarak, worked individually effective June 2017 while Dr Karriem assisted with UWC administrative support.
- The aforementioned resulted in Kaashiefa Mobarak publishing as an individual student and not with a supervisor.

26. Student: [redacted] Date: March 2020

Supervisor: [redacted] ……Date: ……March 2020…… D

Co-Supervisor: …… Date: ……..

Dept Chair/PG Coord.: …A.BAYAT…… Date: ……March 202

Appendix 4: City of Cape Town Research Approval: Directorate of The Mayor

CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD

Date: 28 November 2017
TO: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: DIRECTORATE OF THE MAYOR
REF: DOM 1589

In terms of the City of Cape Town System of Delegations (July 2017) - Part 29, No 1 Subsections 4, 5 and 6
"*Research:*

(4) To consider any request for the commissioning of an organizational wide research report in the City and to approve or refuse such a request.

(5) To grant authority to external parties that wish to conduct research within the City of Cape Town and/or publish the results thereof. (Delegated to Dir OPP)

(6) To after consultation with the relevant Executive Director: grant permission to employees of the City of Cape Town to conduct research, surveys etc. related to their studies, within the relevant directorate

The Executive Director: Directorate of the Mayor is hereby requested to consider, in terms of sub-section 5, the request received from

Name: Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak
Designation: PhD candidate
Affiliation: University of the Western Cape (UWC), Institute for Social Development, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences.
Research Title: "Employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledge of recently employed graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for Tertiary Education Public Policy and Practice".

Taking into account the recommendations below (see Annexure for detailed review):

Recommendations

That the CCT via the ED: Directorate of the Mayor grants permission to Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak in her capacity as a PhD candidate at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Institute for Social Development, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences to conduct research subject to the following conditions:

- The relevant CCT line management authorities - including Directors and Managers in Human Resources (HR) and/or Organisational Effectiveness and Innovation Development (OE&I) being contacted and informed by the researcher of the planned research, to obtain further guidance and to agree on a process for selection and accessing graduate respondents who meet the sampling criteria, as well as the identification of potential team leaders and direct reports to approach for focus group participation and interviews;
- Through HR and OE&I, engage with the IS&T department on the technical requirements for dissemination of the e-questionnaire or an e-link for CCT respondents;
- The willingness and/or availability of individual staff members to participate in a voluntary capacity in the research;
- That the link to the questionnaire is distributed by a CCT HR or OE&I representative and that in the interest of confidentiality the completed questionnaires when submitted go directly to a facility set up by the researcher;
- CCT identified staff members agreeing to have the completed questionnaires and/or interviews used for the purposes of the research;
- A clear acknowledgement in the report that the views of the CCT staff/participants are not regarded as official CCT policy;
- All ethical standards and commitments are adhered to;
- Response information – for City, respondents and focus groups – is anonymised;
- The City name and logo not being used in the research report;
- Submission of the completed research report to the Office of the Executive Director: Directorate of the Mayor and the Research Branch: Department of Organisational Policy and Planning, as well as the Department of Organisational Effectiveness and Innovation in the Directorate of the Mayor, within 3 months of completion of the report and research; and
- Permission being obtained from the ED: Directorate of the Mayor to publish the study.

✓ 28/11/2017

Approved ☑ Comment: _____
Not Approved ☐ Comment: _____

4/12/17

Acting ED
Craig Kesson – Executive Director: Directorate of the Mayor

18/12/2017
Date

CIVIC CENTRE IZIKO LEENKONZO ZOLUNTU BURGERSENTRUM
12 HERTZOG BOULEVARD CAPE TOWN 8001 PRIVATE BAG X9181 CAPE TOWN 8000

Appendix 5: Research Access - Project Plan

PhD Degree Research Access – Provisional Project Plan

Student Name: Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak

Contact details: 0714993542 – kmobarak@uwc.ac.za

Discipline: Development Studies

Student Number: 2052853

TITLE: Employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledge of recently employed graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for Tertiary Education Public Policy and Practice

Dissertation in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

University of the Western Cape

SUPERVISOR: ***Dr Abdulrazak Karriem***

DATE: **February 2018**

WORK PLAN

PHASE 1

Literature Review – February 2017 – ongoing

Research context and sample selection/allocation – March 2017 – 30 April 2017

Proposal submission/registration – September 2017

Responses to employer concerns analysis – October 2017 (electronic research)

Data analysis – responses employer concerns – December 2017 (electronic research)

Develop instruments for interviews based on responses – December 2017 – Feb 2018

Workplan for data collection, arrangements for family, work, travelling – Feb-March 2018

Data collection – March 2018 – June 2018

Analyzing data – July 2018 – September 2018

PHASE 2

Chapter 1 – introduction – December 2017 to January 2018

Chapter 2 - background on employer concerns – a global perspective – Jan 2018 to Feb 2018

Chapter 3 – literature review – Feb 2017 to Feb 2018

Chapter 4 – research focus and research methodology, Data Collection – Feb 2018 to June 2019

Chapter 5 – Findings, analysis and discussion – July 2019 to October 2021

Chapter 6 – Proposals for reform, implications for non-reform – Sept 2022

Chapter 7 – Summary, recommendations and future research – Nov 2022

Final submission for examination – December 2022

ORGANISATION ACCESS – DATA COLLECTION

PHASE 1

No	Respondent	Time-frame	Data to be gathered	Activity	Provisional Distribution and Collection Date	Sampling No	Review
	Graduates employed between Jan 2010 and March 2017. Graduates should be employed for at least 6 months after graduation.	45 minutes per candidate for questionnaire completion.	Degree studied, Learning institution graduated from, employment function. Refer questionnaire attached.	Consent form and Individual questionnaire completion. To be distributed in the first week of March 2018.	1 March 2018	Amount of questionnaires dependent on how many employed graduates organisation has.	18 to 30 March 2018 – quality check questionnaire responses for proper completion, legibility, 25% usable and representative sample.
	Focus Group 1 - Team leaders/ supervisors direct report of employed graduate.	1 hour session – includes registration.	Graduate post-employment training. Does having the degree influence recruitment. How much consideration is given to the type of and grades of the degree when recruiting. How can graduates' skills and knowledge be improved. Does the learning institution influence recruitment and selection. Refer survey schedule attached.	Focus group session. Will be clustered according to survey questionnaire schedule.	March 2018. Exact date to be provided closer to the time. At least 10 working days in advance.	10-15 candidates or based on number of immediate reports – where these differ.	18 to 30 March 2018 Quality check - Group data according to questions, themes, do ethical review, field note analysis, Match logs. If necessary, request another session for clarification purposes. Inform client at least 10 working days in advance of such a request.

No	Respondent	Time-frame	Data to be gathered	Activity	Provisional Distribution and Collection Date	Sampling No	Review
	Focus Group 2 – T&D director/HR team.	1hr30min session – includes registration.	Employer opinions on graduate skills and knowledge. Post-employment training done by organisation. Regulatory framework comments i.e. NQF, Skills Development Frameworks. Employer opinions on roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in graduate skills and development. Collaboration initiatives with learning institutions. How can the situation be improved?	Focus group session. Clustered based on description provided herewith. Refer survey schedule attached for related questions.	March 2018. Exact date to be provided closer to the time.	Number of candidates based on organisational representatives as per descriptor. One-on-one Interviews with 2 x divisional /unit managers – that graduates/ business unit report to.	30 March to 15 April 2018 Quality check - Group data according to questions, themes, do ethical review, field note analysis, Match logs. If necessary, request another session for clarification purposes. Inform client at least 10 working days in advance of such a request.
	Focus group 3 –25% of employed graduates respondents to questionnaire.	1hr30min session – includes registration.	Employed graduate opinions on graduate skills and knowledge. Post-employment training done by organisation. Workplace experiences relevant to degree.	Focus group session. Clustered based on description provided herewith. Validating &clarifying data from questionnaire respondents submitted.	1 x session between 20-30 March 2018. To be confirmed at least 10 working days in advance.	25% sample of questionnaire respondents re workplace experiences and qualification outcomes.	30 March to 15 April 2018 Quality check - Group data according to questions, themes, do ethical review, field note analysis, Match logs. If necessary, request another session for clarification purposes.

No	Respondent	Time-frame	Data to be gathered	Activity	Provisional Distribution and Collection Date	Sampling No	Review
			Selection, relevance and guidance - re study. Did receiving funding, if any, influence choice of study.				Inform client at least 10 working days in advance of such a request.
	FEEDBACK SESSION 1	1 hour	Feedback on graduate questionnaire analysis.	Focus group	1 x session between 20-30 May. To be confirmed 10 working days in advance.	Org representatives selected by organisation. Preferably HR, unit managers.	Feedback on graduate responses to questionnaire. Between 15-20 May 2018.
	FEEDBACK SESSION 2	1hr30mins session	Feedback on Focus groups 1, 2 and 3.	Focus group session.	1 x session between 20-30 May. To be confirmed 10 working days in advance.	Org representatives selected by organisation. Preferably HR, senior management, director, unit managers.	Feedback on focus group sessions 1, 2, 3 after analysis. 2-5 June 2018.
	FINAL FEEDBACK SESSION	1hr30min session	Draft of analysed data for thesis – for organisation comment and finalisation.	Focus group session.	1 x session. 2-5 June. To be confirmed 10 working days in advance.	Org representatives selected by organisation.	Final completion of data analysis for thesis.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

The data collected will only be used for purposes of my thesis in achieving my PhD.

Names of the organisation will not be printed - The company will be coded as 'Company 1, 2, 3' – whichever is applicable.

Names of respondents will not be printed or made available to anyone where confidentiality is promised.

All respondents will be coded as ‘Respondent 1, 2, 3’ – whichever is applicable.

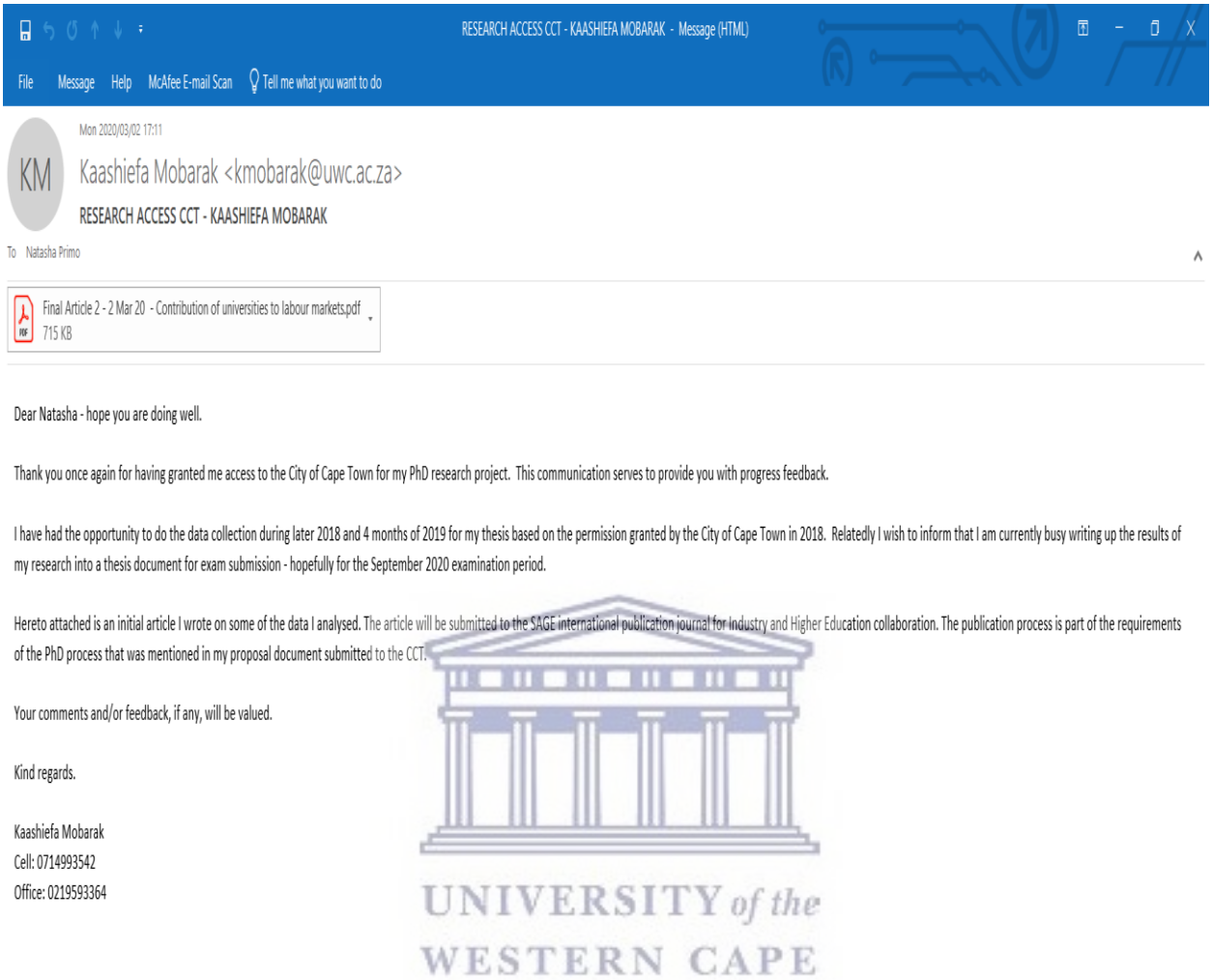
All information will be kept confidential as committed to the organisation and my university’s ethical process.

The collected data will be stored in my private filing capacity at my home office in a locked filing unit for a period prescribed by my university.

It is requested that the organisation adhere to the scheduled meetings as best possible in order for me to stay within the time frameworks.

Please communicate any deviations from committed meetings at least 3 working days in advance in order for me to plan accordingly.

Appendix 6: Informing City of Cape Town of Article to be Published



RESEARCH ACCESS CCT - KAASHIEFA MOBARAK - Message (HTML)

File Message Help McAfee E-mail Scan Tell me what you want to do

Mon 2020/03/02 17:11

KM Kaashiefa Mobarak <kmobarak@uwc.ac.za>

RESEARCH ACCESS CCT - KAASHIEFA MOBARAK

To Natasha Primo

Final Article 2 - 2 Mar 20 - Contribution of universities to labour markets.pdf
715 KB

Dear Natasha - hope you are doing well.

Thank you once again for having granted me access to the City of Cape Town for my PhD research project. This communication serves to provide you with progress feedback.

I have had the opportunity to do the data collection during later 2018 and 4 months of 2019 for my thesis based on the permission granted by the City of Cape Town in 2018. Relatedly I wish to inform that I am currently busy writing up the results of my research into a thesis document for exam submission - hopefully for the September 2020 examination period.

Hereto attached is an initial article I wrote on some of the data I analysed. The article will be submitted to the SAGE international publication journal for Industry and Higher Education collaboration. The publication process is part of the requirements of the PhD process that was mentioned in my proposal document submitted to the CCT.

Your comments and/or feedback, if any, will be valued.

Kind regards.

Kaashiefa Mobarak
Cell: 0714993542
Office: 0219593364

Appendix 7: Case Organisation – Research Access Request

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa

Telephone :(021) 959 3858/6 Fax: (021) 959 3865

E-mail: ***pkippie@uwc.ac.za*** *or* *spenderis@uwc.ac.za*

REQUEST TO USE YOUR ORGANISATION AS A CASE STUDY FOR MY PhD RESEARCH

Student: Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak (2052853)

Lecturer: University of the Western Cape

Project Title: Employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledge of recently employed graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for Tertiary Education Public Policy and Practice**.**

What is this study about?

This research study is being conducted by Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak a student at the University of the Western Cape. You are invited to participate in this project as an employer as the study focuses on the alleged lack of skills and knowledge of employed graduates. This study examines the nature of employer concerns with their recently employed graduates' skills and knowledge, if any, with the objective of establishing how employers perceive graduates' skills and knowledge within workplaces.

Research methodology?

The research methodology will consist of a qualitative approach using questionnaires, focus groups and unstructured interviews of which you will be provided with all questionnaires and discussion information in advance. You should be able to complete the questionnaire within 30 to 45 minutes, the focus groups can be completed within 90 minutes, and unstructured interviews can be completed within 75 minutes – allowing for initial introduction to the sessions and discussions. Employers will be provided with a meeting schedule at least 30 days in advance, or as agreed in order that the organisational processes not be disrupted. The researcher will assist where necessary.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

All organisational and your personal information will be kept confidential and will remain anonymous if that is your choice. You will be required to sign a consent form to protect your privacy and confidentiality while participating in this study. The researcher shall not reveal the identity of the organisation and its participants and will safeguard the confidential information obtained in the course of the study. All information and data to be used will be revealed to the organisation before publication of this research.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no risks involved in participating in this research project. From the beginning, aims and objectives will be clear.

What are the benefits of this research?

There are no material benefits for the interviewee but your responses will assist with clarifying the process/es of graduate development for labour market readiness thereby assisting to create proposals to reform current processes.

Do I have to complete the questionnaire and may I stop participating at any time?

Individual participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to complete the questionnaire and to stop participating at any stage during the process. If you stop or decide not to participate, you will not lose anything.

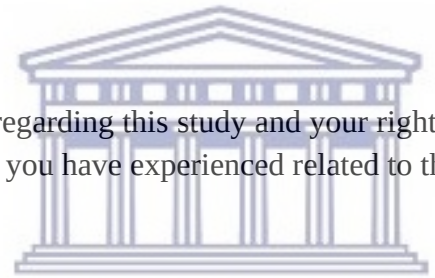
Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

There are no negative effects that could happen from participating in this study for respondents. The employer will be informed and afforded an opportunity to view the questionnaire prior to you receiving the questionnaire and would have given permission for your participation in advance.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by **Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak** a student at the University of the Western Cape. My contact number is 0714993542, email: kmobarak@uwc.ac.za.

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr Ina Conradie at The Institute for Social Development (ISD), University of the Western Cape, her telephone number (O21) 959 3858 .



Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Dr Sharon Penderis

Acting Director

Institute for Social Development

School of Government

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee. To be confirmed.

Appendix 8: Google Questionnaire

GRADUATE QUESTIONNAIRE

NB: Please complete if you graduated between 1 January 2010 and 31 March 2017; And entered employment after graduating during the aforementioned period. PLEASE READ THE QUESTIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS CAREFULLY. You will need between 30 - 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

NB. PLEASE PROVIDE AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE - REFER TO THE INSTRUCTIONS WHERE APPLICABLE.

* Required

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I agree to take part in this research.
I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I am free not to participate and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to explain myself.
I am aware that the information I provide on the questionnaire might result in research which may be published, but my name may not be used.
I agree to answer the questions to the best of my ability. By completing this questionnaire, I give free and informed consent to participate in this research study.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

INSTRUCTIONS:
Please complete the following biographical information by providing the answer relevant to you. You must type the answer on the line/s provided where applicable, and select the options, where applicable.
Please answer ALL the questions.

1. 1) What is your gender? Male/Female.

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

2. 2) What is your age group? In years.

Mark only one oval.

- Between 21 to 25
- Between 25 to 30
- Between 30 to 35
- Between 35 to 40
- 40 years and older

3. 3) What is your race?

Mark only one oval.

- African
- Asian
- Coloured
- White
- Foreigner
- Other

4. 4) What is the highest qualification that you achieved?

(Qualification defined as a degree or diploma from a tertiary education institution (higher education) that is accredited on the South African National Qualifications Framework from level 5 and above).

Mark only one oval.

- Diploma (3 -years of study)
- Bachelors degree (BCom; BAdmin; etc.)
- Honours degree
- Masters degree
- Doctorate degree
- Other (same criteria of 'qualification' given above)

5. 5) What was your overall academic percentage/ aggregate achieved upon graduation?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Below average (less than 50%)
- ◯ Average (50-60%)
- ◯ Above average (60-70%)
- ◯ Surpassing (above 70%)

6. 6) When were you employed by your current employer?
(between January 2012 and March 2017) Provide the date please.

_____

Example: January 7, 2019

7. 7) Did you have part-time or full-time employment while you were studying?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ YES
- ☐ NO

8. 8) If 'YES' to number 7 above – please specify 'how long in years and months' you were employed while studying and the 'job title' you fulfilled at the time.

_____

9. 9) If 'NO' to number 7 above – briefly specify why you were not employed while studying?
(Please do not write more than a paragraph of 7-8 sentences)

LEARNING INSTITUTION AND QUALIFICATION SELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions:
Please complete the following questions on your selection of the learning institution (university) you graduated from and your choice of study. A 'graduate' for this study means an individual with a 3-4 year degree. Please answer all the questions. Ask the researcher for assistance if necessary.

10. i) What is the name of the learning institution you graduated from?

11. 1) Which of the marketing strategies below, if any, created awareness of the higher education/learning institution you graduated from? *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] School visits
- [ ] Telecommunication
- [ ] Social media platforms e.g. Facebook
- [ ] Website
- [ ] Word of mouth
- [ ] Brochures
- [ ] Open days
- [ ] List any others

12. 2) What influenced you to study at the selected learning institution? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Reputation
- ◯ Qualifications offered
- ◯ Information offered
- ◯ Funding offered
- ◯ Structure of the qualification programme
- ◯ List any others

13. 3) If 'Funding offered' is selected in number 2 above –briefly explain.

(Consider the following: (1) Was this private or government funding. (2) Also did receiving funding influence you to study - and did the funding also influence your degree of study).

14. 4) Who, if any, at the learning institution assisted you with the selection of your study programme?

15. 5) Did you receive sufficient information about the study programme (i.e. degree) of study to help you make an informed decision about your choice of qualification?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

16. 6) Briefly explain - YES/NO in (5) above, how did the information assist you/or not.
(Limit your answer to a paragraph - not more than 6-7 sentences please).

17. 7) If 'Maybe' to number 5 above –briefly explain.
(Limit your answer to a paragraph - not more than 6-7 sentences please).

18. 8) Did you understand the information that the learning institution provided to you during the learner recruitment (admission) process?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

19. 9) Briefly explain (how did the information assist you/or not).

20. 10) Were you informed of the labour market needs during your years of study? Briefly explain.

21. 11) How many jobs were you employed in since your graduation?

Mark only one oval.

- In my first job since graduating
- Less than 3 jobs
- Between 3-5 jobs
- Between 5-8 jobs
- Other

22. 12) If you have selected any of the options other than the first one in (11) above, did your qualification influence your decision to move to other employment?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

23. 13) Briefly explain your choice in (12) above.
(Limit your answer to a paragraph - not more than 6-7 sentences please).

24. 14) Is your qualification relevant to your current job?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

25. 15) Briefly explain your choice in (14) above.

EMPLOYED GRADUATE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions:
Please complete the following questions on your skills and knowledge as an employed graduate at any time between January 2010 and March 2017. (NOTE: You are a graduate who was employed at any time between January 2010 and March 2017).
Please answer all the questions. Ask the researcher for assistance if necessary.

26. 1) In which province do you work?

27. 2) In which sector of the economy do you work? E.g. Education, Finance, Health, Retail etc.

28. 3) What is your current job title and main function?
List only two main functions if you have more than one.

29. 4) How long have you been employed by your employer?

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 to 2 years
- 2 to 3 years
- 3 to 4 years
- 4 plus years

30. 5) Where applicable, did you ever leave your previous employment due to your qualification not preparing you for the job you were employed in?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO
- MAYBE

31. 6) Please explain your choice in (3) above.
(Limit your answer to a paragraph - not more than 6-7 sentences please).

32. 7) Did any employer ever inform you that you lack the skills and knowledge to fulfill their job requirements?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

33. 8) If YES in (5) above - Please explain.
(Limit your answer to a paragraph - not more than 6-7 sentences please).

34. 9) Is your qualification relevant to your current position?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

35. 10) Please explain your choice in (7) above.

36. 11) Did your study programme prepare you fully for the job market?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

37. 12) Please explain your choice in (11) above.

38. 13) What skills and knowledge did you learn or have to learn since you graduated - as an employed graduate?

(You may list and explain any additional skills and knowledge you had to acquire since you graduated).

39. 14) Was it possible for the learning institution to provide these skills and knowledge?

('Learning institution' you graduated from - where your degree is from please.)

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

40. 15) Please explain your choice in (14) above.

41. 16) What further learning, if any, did your employer/s send you on to develop you for the job/s you are/were employed in?

(Please focus on further learning not acquired during your graduate studies. List specific training and/or skills programmes you had to attend).

42. 17) Was it possible for the learning institution to provide this 'further learning' mentioned in (16) above?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

43. 18) Briefly explain your choice in (17) above.

44. 19) In your opinion, what qualities do employers seek of graduates on employment?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Problem solving
- ☐ Ambition
- ☐ Innovation
- ☐ Other

45. 20) Briefly explain your choices in (19) above.

46. 21) Select the qualities that you had that made you employable after graduation?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Interpersonal skills
- [ ] Leader
- [ ] Ambition
- [ ] Problem solving
- [ ] Technical skills
- [ ] People skills
- [ ] Team player
- [ ] Other

47. 22) You now have labour market experience, would you have selected the same study programme you did before you graduated?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

48. 23) Please explain your choice in (22) above.

49. 24) Based on your answer in (23) above, do you think that learning institutions can prepare a graduate fully for the labour market?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

50. 25) Please comment on your response in (24) above.
(Please focus on your own transition from your learning institution to the labour market).

51. 26) In your opinion and experience, should lecturers have labour market experience?

Mark only one oval.

- YES
- NO

52. 27) Please clarify your opinion in (26) above.
(Please justify your answer/s with examples - based on your own experience/s).

Appendix 9: Google Graduate Questionnaire Information Sheet

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa

Telephone :(021) 959 3858/6 Fax: (021) 959 3865

E-mail: ***pkippie@uwc.ac.za*** *or* *spenderis@uwc.ac.za*

INFORMATION SHEET

For

Questionnaire

Project Title: Employer concerns with the quality of the skills and knowledge of recently employed graduates in South Africa: Description, Analysis and Implications for Tertiary Education Public Policy and Practice.

What is this study about?

This research study is being conducted by Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak a student at the University of the Western Cape. You are invited to participate in this project as an employed graduate as the study focuses on the alleged lack of skills and knowledge of employed graduates. This study examines the nature of employer concerns with their recently employed graduates' skills and knowledge with the objective of establishing how employers perceive graduates' skills and knowledge within workplaces.

What is the questionnaire about?

The questionnaire consists of two parts. In part one you will be asked to complete information about your personal details and career history. Part two of the questionnaire requires you to share information about the degree you achieved, the institution you graduated from, the skills and knowledge you acquired while studying and the skills and knowledge your employer required after

employing you. You should be able to complete the questionnaire within 30 to45 minutes. The researcher will assist where necessary.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

All your personal information will be kept confidential and will remain anonymous if that is your choice. You will be required to sign a consent form to protect your privacy and confidentiality while participating in this study. The researcher shall not reveal the identity of the participants and will safeguard the confidential information obtained in the course of the study.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no risks involved in participating in this research project. From the beginning, aims and objectives will be clear.

What are the benefits of this research?

There are no material benefits for the interviewee but your responses will assist with clarifying the process/es of graduate development for labour market readiness thereby assisting to create proposals to reform current processes.

Do I have to complete the questionnaire and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to complete the questionnaire and to stop participating at any stage during the process. If you stop or decide not to participate, you will not lose anything.

How long will it take to complete the questionnaire?

The full questionnaire will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. This may vary from participant to participant. The researcher will assist where necessary.

Do I need to bring anything to the interview?

You may bring a certified copy of your degree, the degree programme/course outline if available and a copy of the job description/s-specification/s you have and are fulfilling since your employment. This will assist you to remember details of your study programme and job duties which will be needed when completing the questionnaire. A black ink pen will also be required.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

There are no negative effects that could happen from participating in this study. Your employer will be informed and afforded an opportunity to view the questionnaire prior to you receiving the questionnaire and would have given permission for your participation in advance.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by **Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak** a student at the University of the Western Cape. My contact number is 0714993542, email: kmobarak@uwc.ac.za.

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr Ina Conradie at The Institute for Social Development (ISD), University of the Western Cape, her telephone number (O21) 959 3858 .

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Dr Sharon Penderis

Acting Director

Institute for Social Development

School of Government

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee. To be confirmed.

Appendix 10: Google Graduate Questionnaire Consent Form

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa

Telephone :(021) 959 3858/6 Fax: (021) 959 3865

E-mail: ***pkippie@uwc.ac.za*** *or* *spenderis@uwc.ac.za*

Letter of consent: To complete questionnaire

I……., have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I agree to take part in this research.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I am free not to participate and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to explain myself.

I am aware that the information I provide on the questionnaire might result in research which may be published, but my name may be/ not be used (**circle appropriate**).

I understand that my signature on this form indicates that I understand the information on the information sheet regarding the structure of the questions.

I have read the information regarding this research study on the lack of employed graduates' skills and knowledge in organisations.

I agree to answer the questions to the best of my ability.

I understand that if I don't want my name to be used that this will be ensured by the researcher.

I may also refuse to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.

By signing this letter, I give free and informed consent to participate in this research study.

Date:……

Participant
Name:…….

Participant
Signature:…….

Interviewer
name:……..

Interviewer
Signature:…….

Appendix 11: Focus Group Interview Schedule

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

FACULTY OF ECONOMIC AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE – POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Preamble: Permission to record

Copyright waiver

Section 1 – Introduction:

What position do you hold within the organisation?

What are your main responsibilities?

How long are you working for the company?

Section 2 –The nature and significance of employer concerns with the skills and knowledge of employed graduates – (employed between 1 Jan 2013 and March 2017 – graduates working for at least 6 months)

How many graduates were employed during the period 1 January 2010 and March 2017?

What positions do they hold? (*Prompt: are there available records that I can use for my research? Only graduate numbers, name of tertiary institution graduated from, degree names and employment categories will be used.) Confidentiality will be ensured.*

What do you believe are the main issues your company experience with your employed graduates' skills and knowledge?

How significant are these concerns with the graduates' lack of skills and knowledge for the company in context of your response above?

Section 3 – Challenges and/or concerns employers have with employed graduates' alleged lack of skills and knowledge.

Can you provide specific examples of the concerns and consequences of this lack of skills and knowledge of employed graduates for your organisation?

On these issues what is your organisation doing about the lack of skills and knowledge of already employed graduates? (*Prompt: is extra training done, if so, what does this training involve?).*

What makes this new training distinct from the formal institutional training the graduate received from the tertiary institution they graduated from?

What informed the organisation's decision to employ this graduate? (*Prompt: is the graduate's degree relevant to the job function the graduate is fulfilling/employed in?).*

May I have a copy of the job specification/description of graduates relevant to the degree they hold?

Section 4 – Employer perceptions about the contributing factors to the dissatisfaction and lack of graduate skills and knowledge.

Who and/or what do you see as contributing factors to the dissatisfaction and lack of graduate skills and knowledge? (*Prompt: which stakeholders, processes and/or structures i.e. education policy, practice, processes?).*

What in your organisational experience is done well and what is not done well related to these contributing factors mentioned above?

Are your perceptions and experiences with graduates' lack of skills and knowledge grounds for change in preparing graduates for the labour market? (*Prompt: are these perceptions/experiences relevant to learning institutions or organisations to effect graduate labour market readiness?*

Should employer perceptions/dissatisfaction be regarded at tertiary institution level? (*Prompt: what should be the strategy to effect this process? Should employers have influence in graduate development? To what extent?)*

Section 5 – Improving graduates for the labour market.

What informs the recruitment of graduates for employment at your organisation? *(Prompt: Do you look at the graduate programme/s of the tertiary education institution to view the outcomes of the degree achieved? (Signalling theory).*

Do you compare the achieved learning outcomes of the tertiary education institution degree with your job specification/description before employing the graduate?

Is your organisation collaborating with tertiary education institutions? How do you feel about closer collaboration with tertiary education institutions?

What do you think graduates should do to be labour market ready? (*Prompt: is it the graduate's responsibility to ensure that they get access to the jobs they wish to enter before they select a degree of study? Will your organisation be willing to allow graduates access before they enrol for degree programmes? (adverse selection theory, reputation and information theory, quality of skills and knowledge).*

If you agree with the previous point, how can this be effected? Or not if you do not agree? (*Prompt: who should be responsible to ensure graduates enter the correct degree programme?) (Moral hazard theory, adverse selection, matching theory, agency theory, knowledge.)*

What do you think should be the strategy of the main parties in tertiary education to ensure that graduates are labour market ready? *(Prompt: who should be responsible for improving graduates lack of skills and knowledge?)*

Section 6 – Roles and responsibilities.

Do the present mechanisms for priority setting, decision-making and funding in the tertiary education sector help or hinder business-tertiary education collaboration? (*Prompt: explain/elaborate)*

Are the dynamics of education processes i.e. national government skills development policies and practices affecting your organization? If so, how? (*Prompt: negative or positive – a short critique required).*

Should employers be involved in and/or contributing to university learning and processes?

Do you think lecturers/facilitators of learning at universities should have labour market experience in order to teach especially business graduates?

Will this affect graduate development positively? If so, how?

What in your opinion are the main barriers to achieving a breakthrough in graduate skills and knowledge development nationally? What about locally? (*Prompt: the education system? Credibility gap (graduates not being employed for a long time, seen as having little chance of improving etc.)*

Finally, is there anything you would like to add?

(Prompt: briefly comment on what could be a solution to the problem in your opinion – as an individual as well as from an organisational perspective?)

Appendix 12: Focus Group Consent Form

Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa
Telephone: (021) 959 3858/6 Fax: (021) 959 3865
E-mail: pkippie@uwc.ac.za

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

LETTER OF CONSENT: TO PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

I……, have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I agree to take part in this research.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I am free not to participate and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to explain myself.

I agree not to divulge any information that was discussed in the Focus Group Discussion.

I am aware that the information I provide in this Focus Group Discussion might result in research which may be published, but my name will not be used.

I understand that my signature on this form indicates that I understand the information on the information sheet regarding the structure of the questions.

I have read the information regarding this research study on the lack of employed graduate skills and knowledge.

I agree to answer the questions to the best of my ability.

I understand that if I don't want my name to be used that this will be ensured by the researcher.

I may also refuse to answer any questions that I don't want to answer.

By signing this letter, I give free and informed consent to participate in this research study.

Date: _____

Participant Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Interviewer name: _____

Interviewer Signature: _____

This research is being conducted by **Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak**, a student at the University of the Western Cape. Her contact details are as follows:

Cell: +714993542 Email: kmobarak@uwc.ac.za

If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact **Dr. Abdulrazak Karriem** at The Institute for Social Development (ISD), University of the Western Cape. His contact details are as follows:

Tel: +27 (021) 959 3853 Email: akarriem@uwc.ac.za

Appendix 13: SAJHE– Article Acceptance for Publication and Review Process

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF
Higher Education

POSTAL ADDRESS PO Box 3003 Matieland 7602 South Africa
EMAIL sajhe@sun.ac.za

INVOICE

2019/33(4)_#3337 UWC
DATE: 2019/10/14

BILLED TO:
K Mobarak
Academic Development Department
University of Western Cape
P/Bag X17
7535 Bellville

VAT NO: 4120105111

	Pages	Rate	Subtotal	Total
Page Fees	17	R 370	R6 290	
Submission fee paid by author to be deducted	-R0			
Total Amount Due				**R6 290**

SAJHE is not registered for VAT

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This invoice serves as confirmation that the article was accepted for publication in the South African Journal of Education Vol 33 (4) of 2019:

Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness 186–202
K. Mobarak

Peer review Process: Two peers in the field of educational inquiry have reviewed the paper anonymously. A grid system of evaluation with comments are used. This article was accepted for publication on the grounds of good argumentation and elucidations, coherence and acceptable technical conventions, after revisions were made.

BANKING DETAILS

BANK	ABSA BANK
ADDRESS	PLEIN STREET, STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA
CLEARING CODE/SWIFT	ABSA ZAJJ
ACCOUNT HOLDER	SAJHE
BRANCH CODE	632005
ACCOUNT NO	406 385 6791
REF NO	**3337 33 4**

Please send proof of payment to: sajhe@sun.ac.za
Regards
Anèl de Beer
Treasurer

SAJHE is not registered for VAT

Appendix 14: SAJHE – Reviewer Comments (Accepted – No Editing Required)

RE: Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness

External

Inbox

au1@sun.ac.za Fri, Feb 22, 2019, 7:46 AM

to me

Dear Author
Did you get hold of the comments?
SAJHE Support Team

-----Original Message-----
From: Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak [mailto:kmobarak@uwc.ac.za]
Sent: 21 February 2019 13:35
To: De Beer, A, Mev [sajhe@sun.ac.za] <sajhe@sun.ac.za>
Subject: Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness

Ms Kaashiefa Mobarak
University of the Western Cape

Dear Editor

I have downloaded the reviewer comments document hereto attached and found no comments in the document for review.

Please advise accordingly.

[http://cdn.sun.ac.za/100/ProductionFooter.jpg]<http://www.sun.ac.za/english/about-us/strategic-documents>

Kaashiefa Mobarak <**kmobarak@uwc.ac.za**> Fri, Feb 22, 2019, 7:50 AM

to au1

Dear Support team

Thank you very much for getting back to me.

I received confirmation that my article was accepted (no changes necessary) and that I'll receive an invoice in due course. Also that I will receive details of the publication details shortly.

Paulette if this is you - thank you so very much for your treasurable, understanding and kind service always.

Have a blessed day - warmest regards

Appendix 15: SAJHE – Editing Certificate

Michèle Boshoff
Text editing services
BA (Hons) UPE; Associate member: Professional Editors' Guild (PEG)
Committee member: Western Cape branch
Member: ProLingua
: actnow@adept.co.za
36 Brandwacht Street, Stellenbosch 7602
☎082-340-0648/021-883-9608

--ooo00ooo---

EDITING CERTIFICATE

This certificate is to confirm that I have
proofread and language edited a manuscript entitled

Employed graduates' reflections on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace readiness

written by **K Mobarak**
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
University of the Western Cape

Please note: The language editor focuses on language-related issues only and does not accept responsibility for academic interpretation, research rigor or the correctness of statistical information or the presentation thereof. Attention is given to, amongst others, sentence structure, tenses, spelling (SA English/Oxford in this case) and possible typing errors, academic register, punctuation, conciseness, clarity, and consistency. The language editor has not received instructions to implement a specific journal's house style or to follow SA English/Oxford spelling as opposed to American spelling, although the differences in spelling were pointed out to the author. Editorial suggestions to the text were made in track changes and the author/s had the prerogative to accept, delete, or change the suggestions made by the language editor. The language editor did not see or proofread this document again, or after further amendments and refinements were made by the authors.

MBoshoff
.....
Michèle Boshoff

Place: Stellenbosch
Date: 8 January 2019

Appendix 16: SAJHE – Confirmation of Article as Part of PhD

[SAJHE] 33(4)_3337_Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness

Inbox

Ms Anel de Beer <**au1@sun.ac.za**> Fri, Jul 12, 2019, 4:33 PM

to me

Dear Author(s)

a) Your paper is set for publication in Vol. 33 No. 4 of 2019

b) Plagiarism: To retain the integrity of both author and journal, you need to submit a turnitin test-report to confirm that your paper has a score of 15% or less (15% is the acceptable average). For example, in many cases doctoral work is used verbatim. We advised that this be addressed considering that DHET subsidy is gained for both the study and article. If the score is above the 15% this would imply that you need to paraphrase your main position, use some varying words to explain a similar concept or argument already made elsewhere. Send the turnitin report with your paper ID in the subject line and the word turnitin, e.g. #3005 turnitin - on or before 31 July 2019. If you have already submitted the confirmation, no further action required.

c) Visit our webpage (homepage) where future publications dates will be confirmed. We will update the publication date from time to time (unforeseen circumstances will have an impact on the publication date (e.g. Eskom) - BUT - the paper will be published before 15 December 2020. Currently, the publication date for Vol 33(4) is scheduled for Sept/Oct.

c) Please take note that the copy editor will be in contact with the author in the 5 weeks prior to the publication date - and will finalise the layout of the paper with the input of the author, before final publication.

d) This journal charge page fees for publications. The managing editor will forward the invoice for page fees payable to the author once the final layout has been confirmed by the copy editor. Page fees for 2019 will be R370 per page.

e) Language editing confirmation: please make sure that you have uploaded the proof of an accredited language editor as a supplementary file to confirm that your paper has been language edited. If not, your paper will not be published – regardless of any confirmation by the system.

Congratulations with the acceptance of your article in the South African Journal of Higher Education.
Regards
SAJHE Administration & Support Team

South African Journal of Higher Education
http://www.journals.ac.za/index.php/sajhe

Appendix 17: SAJHE – Turnitin Report

Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness

ORIGINALITY REPORT

%12	%5	%5	%9
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to CTI Education Group Student Paper	%3
2	www.tandfonline.com Internet Source	%1
3	Submitted to University of Greenwich Student Paper	<%1
4	scholarworks.waldenu.edu Internet Source	<%1
5	academic.oup.com Internet Source	<%1
6	Submitted to University of Durham Student Paper	<%1
7	Submitted to Laureate Higher Education Group Student Paper	<%1
8	journals.co.za Internet Source	<%1
9	Submitted to University of Edinburgh	

Appendix 18: SAJHE – Published Article No. 1

REFLECTIONS OF EMPLOYED GRADUATES ON THE SUITABILITY OF THEIR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR WORKPLACE-READINESS

K. Mobarak
Academic Development Department
University of the Western Cape
Cape Town, South Africa
e-mail: kmobarak@uwc.ac.za

ABSTRACT

There is broad consensus amongst scholars and policy makers that the development of workplace-ready graduates requires a review of the teaching and learning strategies currently informing classroom learning. It has been argued that the curricula taught at higher education institutions should be compatible with industry requirements and expectations: this would not only ensure the livelihood of graduates, but also their viability in an increasingly competitive and changing labor market. Accordingly, academics have a duty to revise their approaches to teaching and learning to ensure that the graduate output will service graduate workplace-readiness. In light of the aforementioned realities, this study explored the opinions of employed graduates with regard to their workplace-readiness upon employment. The primary objective was to establish whether South African higher education institutions are producing graduates considered worthy and capable by the employment sector. The study is guided by the following three theories: *moral hazard*; *economics of trust and information*; and *adverse selection*. These theories elucidate the importance of inclusive stakeholder responsibility and accountability for the development of workplace-ready graduates. Twenty-four responses of employed graduates from eight South African higher education institutions were obtained by means of a questionnaire administered via a Google link. The study found that graduates generally did not feel adequately prepared for the workplace. The article concludes that considerably more effort is required to align higher education curricula, and teaching and learning strategies with labour market requirements.

Keywords: moral hazard, economics of trust and information, adverse selection, workplace-readiness, employed graduates, skills and knowledge, teaching and learning strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Employers have expressed concerns about graduates who cannot do the job due to a lack of knowledge and skills (Hansen 2017; Botes and Sharma 2017, 110). Academic skills are a primary requirement for employers, but most employers are looking beyond these skills for work experience combined with a qualification. Therefore, it is important to establish whether degree courses sufficiently prepare graduates for the work they are employed for (Hansen 2017;

South African Journal of Higher Education http://dx.doi.org/10.20853/33-4-3337
Volume 33 | Number 4 | 2019 | pages 186–202 eISSN 1753-5913

Botes and Sharma 2017, 110). A survey of 400 organisations across different countries conducted by the NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers 2016), for instance, found that only three of ten employers considered recent graduates to be proficient in their application of knowledge and skills in the work environment.

Employers seek candidates who have experience gained through internships or co-operative programmes (Hansen 2017). Workplace-focused skills in high demand are communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprize, planning and organising, self-management, learning, and technology (Brown 2013). These skills continue to be relevant across various fields in different economic sectors (Bowley 2018). Bowley (2018) argues that the evidence in the datum collected from a survey of 2000 business leaders shows that so called "soft skills" are in higher demand than hard skills. She adds leadership, strategy, management, collaboration and time-management to the list of important soft skills required by organisations (Bowley 2018). It is thus evident that the responsibility for the development of these skills must be reconsidered.

Ultimately the transfer of skills and knowledge in formal classrooms occurs with the purpose of developing the graduate to provide for their livelihood, and perhaps, to achieve a level of independence as an individual in future. The responsibility for the production and transfer of skills and knowledge is a process that involves many stakeholders. It is widely acknowledged that each stakeholder in this process has a level of accountability in the development of the graduate for the labor market.

The convergence of stakeholder responsibility and accountability should lead to the development of a holistic graduate who is prepared to embrace their future with confidence. Similarly, academics should be encouraged to find ways to present their subject content in ways that takes into account graduate workplace-readiness. The graduate attributes embedded in teaching and learning have to contribute to converting theory into practice. As far as could be ascertained from the literature, no recent study has focused on asking employed graduates across various economic sectors about their individual experiences in their respective workplaces since they graduated. Against this background, this study assessed employed graduates' individual experiences regarding their workplace-readiness after employment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical overview

A possible reason for the continued debates about graduate workplace-readiness is frictions amongst stakeholders and insufficient collaboration between higher education institutions and

the labor market. Given this context, the three theories may assist with creating awareness of the consequences of not improving the education process of graduate workplace-readiness, namely: moral hazard theory (Emons 1988); economics of trust and information theory (Dranove and Jin 2010); and adverse selection theory (Michaely and Shaw 2015, 280). *Moral hazard* refers to situations where one party has the opportunity to take advantage of another and instead of doing what is right, they do what benefits themselves instead of the party they should serve (Emons 1988). The *economics of trust and information theory* posits being accountable to, for example stakeholders such as students who trust higher education institutions to provide them with correct information and for being accountable in that relationship (Dranove and Jin 2010). Dranove and Jin (2010) argue that disclosure of information is not regulated leaving the "sellers", in this case higher education institutions, at an advantage. Adverse selection, as proposed by Michaely and Shaw (2015, 280), refers to information asymmetry that may lead to a moral hazard because "investors", which in this case constitute students, are uninformed and end up being less successful. The authors' argument is viewed as part of a three-way interaction among stakeholders, i.e. students, higher education institutions, and the government, where a lack of relevant information and ineffective programmes may adversely affect a student's success (Michaely and Shaw 2015, 280).

The following three headings *employers*; *workplaces*; and *student skills and knowledge* contextualize the environments for which skills and knowledge transfer are important. The literature focuses on the viewpoints of different parties that are linked to these environments showing the significance of an effective and efficient participatory stakeholder contribution to the skills and knowledge development requirements.

Employers

Employers in South Africa and internationally want work-ready graduates. The continuing debates that graduates from higher education institutions lack skills and knowledge lead to increased mistrust among employers in the ability of graduates to perform effectively in the workplace once they are employed (Klebnikov 2015). These concerns are further influenced by ongoing debates and accusations by different stakeholders on many platforms about employed graduates' shortcomings after employment. The accusations are mostly directed at higher education institutions for delivering graduates who cannot fulfil the needs of the workplace (Klebnikov 2015; Hansen 2017).

South African stakeholders in education such as Nedbank chairperson Ruel Khoza believes that higher education institutions are failing the country with the mismatch between skills and qualifications that are not servicing the needs of employers and labor markets (Barron

2012). The issue is also highlighted by Klebnikov (2015) who claims that employers are experiencing difficulty when trying to find job-success qualities in graduates. Some graduates end up working in lower skilled jobs that are not relevant to the degrees that they obtained (Klebnikov 2015).

Workplace

The workplace is a flexible environment where micro- and macro-economic factors influence responsiveness and diversification by companies that are different from the structured environment of a classroom. There are, however, commonalities in the skills and knowledge produced in a classroom setting required by workplaces to respond to the economic environment. Employers recruit graduates to service their need to be sustainable and to grow in a highly competitive labor market environment.

Higher education institutions list the skills and knowledge developed in their degree programmes on various platforms used for marketing their study programmes. With many of these degree programmes, higher education institutions commit themselves to the development of skills and knowledge comprising, amongst others, soft, technical and theoretical skills in different fields of study. Of the skills in high demand for employers are also listed in degree programme module content, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprize, planning and organising, self-management, learning, and technology (Brown 2013). How these skills are taught in classrooms must be explored as employers are not satisfied with the ability of graduates to transfer these skills to the workplace setting (Hansen 2017).

The challenge in transferring skills and knowledge to the workplace occurs when theory has to be converted into practice (Hansen 2017). Brown (2013) argues that skills and knowledge teaching and learning often take place theoretically in the classroom resulting in a mismatch between practice and theory. This discrepancy is an important factor that needs to be addressed given that 95 per cent of employers internationally want new graduates with work-related experience (Hansen 2017). This percentage is a leap from the previous year's 64.2 per cent (NACE 2016). Furthermore, workplaces require hands-on decision-making and problem-solving abilities from graduates due to workplace operational processes being dependent on flexible turnaround times and other influences such as productivity to remain profitable and sustainable. Case scenarios are provided in classrooms as practice examples for students, but in some instances these case studies are outdated. The workplace expectations cannot be taught in theory without grasping the actual and recent practical application and implementation requirements of industry (Jackson 2013, 776).

Student skills and knowledge

Selecting an undergraduate programme of study at first-year level can be a daunting exercise for a student. They may have an idea of the field they wish to enter after graduation but they still need guidance on how the skills and knowledge taught in classrooms are relevant to the workplace requirements. Furthermore, students rely on academics to know to what extent what is taught in classrooms will develop their ability to succeed in the workplace. Undergraduates are often not aware of the importance of gaining work-related experience before they graduate even though studies show that it will enhance their chances of securing employment (Jackson 2013, 776). It is therefore important for academics to be aware of these realities to inform and better prepare graduates for the workplace.

Students, on the other hand, should be able to trust that the skills, knowledge and information provided by higher education institutions will hold them in good stead for accessing the employment sector and their future growth. This would not only ensure the livelihood of graduates after employment, but also their viability in an increasingly competitive labor market.

This study explored the reflections of employed graduates about their workplace-readiness after employment. Awareness and consideration of graduate experiences and comments should guide academics towards more appropriate teaching and learning strategies and practices at higher education institutions.

The next section provides an overview of the literature on higher education institutions' responses and the expected contribution by academics to the process of developing workplace-ready graduates.

Higher education institutions responses to workplace requirements

The awareness of workplace requirements can guide academics towards more appropriate teaching and learning strategies to adequately prepare graduates for the workplace. Continuing debates on the responsibility for producing workplace-ready graduates are not solving the problem. Considering the extent of the moral hazard consequences (Emons 1988) of ineffective teaching practices on the recipients, questions on whether a graduate should have recourse if the degree quality is not what was expected is inevitable. The aforementioned may affect graduates who have completed a study programme and on employment find that they were not holistically prepared for the workplace by their higher education institution.

The responsibility of "reasonable disclosure" of relevant information in a relationship of trust (Dranove and Jin 2010) about course content to prospective students during or before enrolment in degree courses must be a duty of higher education institutions. Especially if there is an awareness that learning programmes are not able to produce workplace-ready graduates.

Prospective students, as customers, intending to invest in their future will not adversely select to invest their time and money in a process that will serve them minimally, or not at all, in future. The responsibility for the matching and alignment of skills and knowledge production of workplace-ready graduates should be addressed to ensure an output of productive graduates. The graduate leaves the higher education institution with a degree that was advertized by the higher education institution to have outcomes of what the graduates will be able to do on completion of the degree programme. The question of who is responsible for graduate workplace-readiness should be addressed considering that graduates enrol at higher education institutions to provide them with the prospects to eventually be suitably employed.

The role of academics at higher education institutions is to strive to provide solid, relevant preparation at the baccalaureate and other graduate levels (Harrison 2017, 8). Yet, employers argue that graduates are not adequately prepared for the changing world of work (Botes and Sharma 2017, 110). Traditionally, higher education institutions produced thinkers and intellectual elites, but due to the complexity of the global society nowadays, higher education institutions have to move away from outdated paradigms towards meaningful progress (Crow 2014). At higher education level, meaningful learning and student development is the responsibility of the individual academics in classrooms. Institutional teaching and learning frameworks and policies are the foundation of the structure of learning processes, but teaching and learning happens when learning content and contact time with students add value and also become a footprint that graduates can take with them into their future.

A study conducted by recruitment consultants McKinsey and Company (2014) involving nine countries including India, Turkey and Brazil reported that the lack of workplace-directed training compounds the shortage of employment opportunities. The report further states that workplaces should be more involved in academic courses which, in my opinion, may result in academics losing ownership of teaching and learning, or having to up-skill themselves with workplace practical needs. The latter should not be an option if academics realize how important their roles are to individuals, society and a country's economic growth, sustainability and competitive advantage particularly in a global context.

Expected contribution by academics

Linking education to workplace needs require an adjustment of the way knowledge is transferred by educators in the classrooms. In this respect, attempts are being made in the academic environment to assess the needs of employers and labor markets (Hansen 2017).

Viviers (2016) reported on a study that explored the level of pervasive skills of South African accounting students. The study established that educators are aware of the skills

development responsibilities to be incorporated into course modules but that this process needs improvement (Viviers 2016). Higher education institutions have a responsibility to their students and the public at large to provide relevant teaching and learning that will add value to the growth of the economy. In the case of the accounting field, education institutions are regulated by the policies and processes of the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA) that prescribes course content requirements and alignment to industry requirements. However, employers also require pervasive skills development (Viviers 2016, 245). These skills are soft skills such as leadership skills, teamwork and communication skills that do not necessarily form part of the traditional accounting course content academics would teach in the field of accounting (Viviers 2016, 245). Academics are therefore required to adjust their content to also incorporate soft skills development. By disclosing the positives and negatives of degree programmes, higher education institutions can assist students with selecting a study programme from a variety of skills and knowledge acquisition options and institutions available at different levels of the South African skills development frameworks, which may serve them better in their future economic participation and livelihood.

In recent years higher education institutions have been encouraged to incorporate the concept of work-integrated-learning in the higher education landscape (Harrison 2017). Lecturers should include work-integrated-learning in the curricula but the process should have a multiple stakeholder approach that should include students, businesses, government and the education sector (Harrison 2017). A foreseeable challenge can be the difference between the structured approach in a classroom and the flexibility of labor market needs and its environment. Higher education curricula content incorporates theory that might have to be adapted to practice.

This convention is not impossible, but might entail re-training of some academics who are not suitably developed, or employing academics with a combination of workplace and lecturing skills, knowledge and ability, and thereby replacing lecturers who have not progressed to a level required to produce capable graduates. If the economy needs suitably qualified graduates with both academic and workplace experience, as indicated by Hansen (2017), this matter should be addressed urgently. Academia should be capable of responding timeously to the markets they serve, as what is taught should facilitate the required outcome of suitable workplace-ready graduates. The notion of work-integrated-learning as part of the curricula resulting in revised teaching and learning strategies might be construed as unfair because higher education institutions are traditionally and/or debatably [*my opinion*] expected to teach and produce research and thinkers (Harrison 2017).

The attempted responsiveness by higher education institutions in recent years in

collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) confirms the recognition of the need for change. It is therefore important for academics to continually revise and/or enhance existing teaching and learning strategies and/or implement new strategies to commit to the development of workplace-ready graduates.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative approach to data collection was followed using a content analysis strategy. The qualitative methodology was useful to discover and describe employed graduates' reflections on the suitability of their academic qualifications, skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness. The aim was to compare employed graduates' comments with various texts from the literature that could contribute to the revision of teaching and learning strategies at higher education institutions (Flick 2013, 5).

Population and sampling

The population consisted of participants who were employed graduates and who graduated between the period January 2010 and March 2017. The minimum period of employment was 6 months so respondents can provide informed feedback. Non-probability, random snowball sampling was used because there was no sampling frame (Saunders and Lewis 2012, 139). There was no exact indication of the population size as the initial six participants selected were asked to forward the questionnaire link to their contacts who would suit the specified criteria. These six respondents were selected from previous students of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) and on referral from other known contacts. No particular geographical area was specified to participants other than respondents having attended a higher education institution in South Africa. Participants were employed in different industries and graduated from eight different higher education institutions in three provinces in South Africa.

The random sampling technique allowed for new participants to be recruited (Ochoa 2017) from the initial six participants selected to participate in the study. By using the snowball sampling technique, the pool of respondents could be increased (Saunders and Lewis 2012, 139) in an accessible manner. In this case the Google questionnaire link was forwarded electronically via email. The respondents could also use email and other social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to distribute the questionnaire link to their contacts. The questionnaire link for this pre-test study was distributed between 15 November 2017 and 22 December 2017. A total of twenty-nine responses were received of which twenty-four questionnaires were completed and could be used for the study. The remaining five that were

excluded were spoiled questionnaire responses as not all questions were completed.

Data collection Instrument

Google forms was used to design the questionnaire for the collection of the primary data. Standardized qualitative questions were used in a specific order (Saunders and Lewis 2012, 139) that allowed for more precise comparison of the responses. The advantage of applying this method was that the data could be collected in a cost-effective manner over a short period of time (Crossman 2017).

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: *biographical information* consisting of nine questions; *higher education institution and qualification selection* consisting of fifteen questions; and a *skills and knowledge* section with a combination of twenty-seven open-and-closed-ended questions. The questionnaire link that was distributed using Google docs allowed for the responses to be recorded automatically in a linked excel spreadsheet. The snowball sampling process was impersonal as the researcher could not assist and/or influence participant responses by clarifying questions. To ensure validity, the readability and understandability of the questionnaire was pre-tested with three graduates. Adjustments were made where necessary before forwarding the link to the initial six respondents. The three pre-tested questionnaire responses were excluded from the sample as their purpose was to ensure that the instrument is error-free and technically sound to a random snowball participant. To ensure individual participant data trustworthiness and confidentiality, no participant had access to the responses of others, thereby confirming a true reflection of individual views. Public access restrictions were set on the electronic Google form feature.

Ethical considerations

The questionnaire was cleared by the University of the Western Cape and endorsed by the ethical clearance procedure number HS17/8/34. Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary. A paragraph stating their voluntary participation with no compensation was included in the electronic questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire confirmed consent and a short paragraph to this effect was added in the introduction section of the questionnaire. To ensure anonymity, participant email details were not electronically tracked and/or recorded.

Data analysis

The electronic participant responses were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Mayring (2014) states that qualitative content analysis is a mixed-method strategy because the frequency of respondent comments about a certain category or theme is recorded numerically. However,

the focus of this analysis is on the qualitative comments of the respondents. The variation in participant responses was categorized against the main themes and questions posed in the questionnaire. Three main themes were presented with more precise sub-theme codes for each main theme. Participants' comments and thoughts related to the themes and sub-theme codes were provided as extensively as possible and a short explanation was given to describe the comments. The following steps for qualitative content analysis were applied (Mayring 2014, 25):

- Coding, i.e. working through the material with the aid of a theme system;
- Examining the common occurrences of themes, and establishing the contingencies, requirements and constraints mentioned by participants; and
- Collating and interpreting the employed graduate comments under the three main themes and listed sub-themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conceptual framework to present the findings is focused on the suitability of academically acquired skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness under the following main themes: (1) awareness of workplace requirements and workplace-readiness; (2) graduate preparation by higher education institutions; and (3) employer expectations vis-à-vis higher education graduates.

Background information

Respondents had mixed views on the extent to which higher education institutions contributed to their workplace-readiness. Factors such as lecturers having relevant workplace experience; making sure that theories are relevant to contemporary workplace needs; and changing teaching and learning strategies into relevant practical approaches featured prominently in the graduates' feedback. The thematic presentation of the data assisted with showing the employed graduates' workplace challenges from a broader perspective across industries and occupations. Approaching employed graduates from different higher education institutions, degree programmes, industries and job functions endorsed the argument that the challenges experienced by employed graduates are applicable to degree programmes in *different* disciplines and fields of study.

Awareness of workplace requirements and workplace-readiness

This theme was divided into two sub-themes, namely (1) *Lack of information;* and (2) *Qualification-employment compatibility.*

Lack of information

Responses varied but the feedback was generally similar. Fourteen participants said that they had not received any information from their respective higher education institution on labor market needs. Others mentioned that some degree programmes provided more specific labor market requirements, while a number of graduates took the initiative to explore labor market requirements in their field of study. Examples of respondent comments include:

> "Very few of my module lecturers informed me about the needs of the labor market."
>
> "There was not much information on the labor market demands. However, before I even started the course, I had researched job availability in my field and what employers looked for when hiring graduates."

A pertinent factor mentioned by respondents is the insufficiency of the labor market information received from higher education institutions.

Qualification-employment compatibility

The overall feedback was that graduates *were* working in their field of study. Only one respondent was working in an unrelated field. The following examples reflect the participants' comments:

> "I completed a BCom Finance degree and I am currently employed as a finance assistant – my main function is to pay invoices and do intercompany billings."
>
> "I use my qualification on a daily basis – Personal trainer, help people get fit and healthy."
>
> "I am not currently doing what I studied to do – I have a BCom degree and work as a sales consultant in retail. However, I did other jobs as well – also worked as a chauffeur."

Providing relevant information to students during degree courses corresponds with the views of Dranove and Jin (2010) that higher education institutions are obliged to create awareness when learning programmes cannot produce workplace-ready graduates. Correct information assists students to invest time and money in programmes that will serve them well in future. Although the responses about information received differed, twenty-three of the twenty-four respondents were working in their field of study and were thus reaping the benefits of studying towards a suitable degree.

Graduate preparation by higher education institutions

Theme Two consisted of three sub-themes: (1) *Qualification-job requirements compatibility*

assessment; (2) *Curricula and labor market requirements – compatibility assessment*; and (3) *Student perspectives on lecturer competence.*

Qualification-job requirements compatibility assessment

The comments were predisposed to the theoretical inclination of degree programmes that should be more practical. Herewith some of the participant comments:

> "A substantive portion of the undergraduate learning is strictly theoretical. Shifting from a [theoretical] mindset to a practical mindset is something my degree did not prepare me for."
>
> "So much more can be done with students. Preparing students for the world of work is vital and students should have a curriculum vitae when they leave the higher education institution. They should be finding jobs in their final months at the higher education institution with the help of their lecturers."
>
> "Students should also be placed in vacation programmes which will provide experience on what to expect. They need to be made more workplace smart and technology savvy."
>
> "More practicality could have been illustrated in classrooms by lecturers."

The emphasis on the word "practical" by many participants implies the need for degree programmes to have less theoretical value, or more theoretical articulation with workplace practical application.

Curricula and labor market requirements – compatibility assessment

Graduate comments varied as some participants acknowledged the flexibility of workplace environments and the related challenges it holds for classroom teaching and learning. The need for academics to make theory more relevant to practice was expressed by graduates from all disciplines. The following comments present the views of the respondents from diverse industries and job functions:

> "Higher education institutions should partner with employers and government and offer programmes that enable higher education students to gain work experience while studying. A degree nowadays is no longer worth the paper it's written on if one does not have experience of some sort. However, I believe that focused programmes aimed at giving experience to students in their field of study would go a long way."
>
> "It is possible to teach a student how to perform certain duties especially if learning is more authentic."

The matching and alignment of skills and knowledge for producing workplace-ready graduates is important for the development of well-rounded graduates as is evident from the participant comments. The pre-test survey data for this research were collected over the period November to December 2017. The graduates' comments are generalized views of the skills and knowledge

obtained in their job contexts as a result of their formal studies.

Student perspectives on lecturer competence

Twenty-two respondents relayed the importance of lecturers having workplace experience in order to make the classroom learning more relevant to the workplace. Two respondents commented that lecturers should at least be aware of the relevance of the theory they taught to the workplace environments. The following comments were made:

> "Lecturers can use their workplace knowledge and bring [it] into the content taught and the student can understand not only the content but how it can be in the real world. And the student can be made aware of the expectations that lie ahead for a graduate to prepare in advance."
>
> "In this way lecturers can convey knowledge to the students in a well-rounded way – not just from an academic perspective. Working in the labor market is multi-dimensional and they should have the multi-faceted experience."
>
> "It is one thing to know the theory from prescribed textbooks from which lecturers get their course content. However, it is a completely different issue to teach a course when you also understand the practical aspects of the theory you teach."

The respondent opinions expressed the benefits of teaching and learning that incorporates the participation of and integration with practice as important requirements from lecturers in preparing better-equipped graduates.

Employer expectations vis-à-vis higher education graduates

This theme is discussed under two sub-themes: (1) *Towards addressing skills and knowledge gaps at employment stage*; and (2) *Assessing the viability of a revised pedagogical approach for a balanced theoretical-practical perspective*. Respondents were required to provide actual examples of their workplace experiences after graduating. Comparing workplace skills and knowledge demands with academically acquired skills and knowledge, allowed for the reflection on what higher education institutions are reasonably capable of producing for workplaces.

Towards addressing skill and knowledge gaps at employment stage

The respondents placed more emphasis on soft skills and practical knowledge they needed for the workplace. Below are respondent comments on the skills and knowledge that employers had to develop among graduates after employment:

> "Perseverance, self-control, time management, positive attitude, hard-working selling skills, skills in business processes."

> "Practical marketing skills; skills in social media, graphic design, computer programming, data analysis and networking."
>
> "How to professionally engage with people from all walks of life; how to manage difficult conversations with clients."
>
> "How to acquire the skill of being adaptable, as things change on a daily basis so you have to learn to keep up with these changes."
>
> "Practical communication, organisational and people skills."
>
> "Technical skills."
>
> "Employers need their employees to be hungry to learn, to see opportunity and build something new from it; they need people that can identify risk from a mile away and strategise on possible solutions. They also need people who will be accountable for what they do."
>
> "Employers seek people who will solve particular problems within their companies."

Although respondents acknowledged the need for theory-in-practice, they pointed out that the focus and development of degree programmes should shift towards becoming more real world-oriented.

Assessing the viability of a revised pedagogical approach for a balanced theoretical-practical perspective

Participants provided suggestions of how this can be achieved based on what were expected from them in the workplace. Graduates' suggestions and comments were as follows:

> "Lecturers could have hosted certain 'how to" sessions or provide recent workplace case studies."
>
> "The institution only taught about the existence of processes and procedures and how they work. But there was never an opportunity to experience how the [processes and procedures] worked practically."
>
> "Lecturers provided the theoretical part but more practical scenarios would have better prepared me."

Respondents seemed confident that higher education institutions can prepare them more sufficiently for workplaces. The greater majority of participants stated that they would choose the same learning programme if the teaching and learning processes could be adapted to suit workplace-readiness and/or labor market needs.

Participant concerns about workplace-readiness were evident across different economic sectors and jobs. The fact that participants graduated from different higher education institutions shows that the problem is experienced nationally, which in turn points to the need for a broader conversation and action among stakeholders. Although graduates gained skills and knowledge from higher education institutions that were transferable to workplaces, it is

apparent that there still are shortcomings in the teaching and learning process that hinder workplace-readiness. The request and need for practical application and labor market relevance in teaching and learning is evident from this group of participants.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiatives for graduate workplace-readiness improvement have been implemented as shown in the literature, but the debates from various stakeholders still reflect negativity in this regard. Employed graduates are stakeholders in the education processes of higher education institutions with important experiences that can add value to the initiatives by academics to improve teaching and learning strategies. The comments and observations by employed graduates in this study provide suggestions that could be valuable in rethinking how graduates should be prepared and developed in classroom contexts.

It is clear that predominantly theoretical approaches towards teaching and learning do not strengthen graduates for the workplace. Investment in learning and development after graduation that should have been done effectively during degree programmes is unfair if the initial teaching and learning processes could have addressed the shortcomings. Graduate comments reflect the deficiencies in their development after employment. Although graduates confirmed that they were not *directly* informed by employers that they lacked skills and knowledge, employers had to re-train them in skills and knowledge, which the higher education institution could or should have addressed in the first place. They also felt inadequate in their ability to effectively respond to workplace needs. This resulted in employers having to train and/or re-train them in soft skills, hard skills and technical skills that could have been addressed to some level in the degree programme.

An important concern that needs to be addressed is that academics should take responsibility for their own development in making their teaching and learning relevant to the needs of labor markets and adequate preparation of the graduate who will have to participate in a flexible workplace environment. The graduate comments resonate with the need for lecturers to provide, for example, simulated examples of converting theory into practice. The repetitive learning content taught in classrooms must be aligned with the flexibility of the workplace in the form of case studies that have occurred more recently. Contemporary study material might be better suited with content and techniques that are currently utilized in the labor market. In the same way that students are responsible to expand their knowledge beyond the classroom, lecturers have a responsibility to renew their knowledge and teaching techniques to keep teaching and learning current.

Producing workplace-ready graduates is a key factor that could affect labor markets and

the graduate adversely if not done properly. This study provides valuable guidelines from employed graduates with regard to skills and knowledge requirements, which in turn could help to improve both module content and teaching and learning strategies in classrooms. The literature indicates that some of the shortcomings in skills listed by employed graduates in this study were mentioned in previous studies, but that it is still not sufficiently addressed in classrooms. Participants employed in different industries and work situations echoed these shortcomings, which denote that the problem is not discipline-specific. An interesting and important finding is that 22 of the 24 respondents confirmed that they did not choose the wrong degree programme, but that the teaching and learning practices during their studies did not prepare them sufficiently for the practical world of work (Botes and Sharma 2017, 110).

The inadequacies in both teaching and learning practices and programme content happen at different higher education institutions, affirming the need for review and adjustment of teaching and learning strategies. Graduates compete at various levels in the labor market that is highly flexible and competitive. Consideration of the employed graduates' suggestions may guide academics in their own development by staying current in their field. All stakeholders thus have a duty to commit responsibly to developing workplace-ready graduates as it is a moral hazard to know that a system is wrong yet allowing it to continue to the disadvantage of others. The need for employers to engage more pro-actively with the higher education sector with regard to curricula formulation, will help ensure that the graduate output by higher education institutions meet labor market requirements. This could partly be achieved through collaboration between curricula developers at higher education institutions and the relevant parties of the labor market sector.

In the same manner as is expected of individuals to be competitive for their own growth and livelihood, so must a country be competitive and sustainable. Higher education institutions have a moral obligation and responsibility to ensure that the educational investment that they are contributing to will enhance the country's economic growth over the long term.

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NACE *see* National Association of Colleges and Employers.

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Appendix 19: Sage – Acceptance of Article for Publication

ACTION REQUIRED: Industry and Higher Education Contributor Form

Inbox

Industry and Higher Education <**onbehalfof@manuscriptcentral.com**> Mon, May 4, 2020, 3:40 PM

to me

04-May-2020

Dear Ms. Kaashiefa Mobarak,

Your manuscript "Exploring the contribution of universities to labour-market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective." has been accepted for publication in Industry and Higher Education.

In order for SAGE to proceed with publication of your article, you must complete a Contributor Form.

You should review and complete the form online at the journal's SAGE track site. The following link will take you there directly.

https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ihe?URL_MASK=78a3ec1642584973b3c4670aebcf3249

Please note that without a completed agreement, we are unable to proceed with publication of your article.

If you have any questions please contact the Editorial Office.

With best wishes,
Sage Track

Appendix 20: Sage – Reviewer Comments

Industry and Higher Education - Decision on Manuscript ID IHE-20-0025

Inbox

Industry and Higher Education <**onbehalfof@manuscriptcentral.com**> Mon, Apr 6, 2020, 11:43 AM

to me

06-Apr-2020

Dear Kaashiefa

Re: Manuscript ID IHE-20-0025 entitled "Exploring the contribution of universities to labour-market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective."

I have now received the referees' reports on your paper. Their comments are set out below.

As you will see, the paper is recommended for publication in IHE subject to some revision. Both reviewers felt that the paper was interesting and contained useful results for the South African HE system. However, both also felt that greater clarity was needed, especially with regard to the introduction and methodology aspects of the paper.

Once you have had a chance to consider the comments, perhaps you would kindly get back to me to let me know whether you think you will be able to revise the paper so as to respond to the suggestions of the reviewers?

As ever, of course, some of the reviewers' comments are matters of opinion and you may or may not agree with them. Other comments go to the substance of the paper and/or reflect well-informed readers' responses that are likely to be typical of the responses of the wider IHE readership.

Finally, and assuming that you will be sending a final version, please be sure to adhere to the checklist attached.

Technical guidelines for revision
To revise your manuscript, log into https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ihe and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

You may also click the link below to start the revision process (or continue the process if you have already started your revision) for your manuscript. If you use the below link you will not be required to login to ScholarOne Manuscripts.
*** PLEASE NOTE: This is a two-step process. After clicking on the link, you will be directed to a webpage to confirm. ***
https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ihe?URL_MASK=68cb1e1ab993424b8e117e2ec7d829ad

You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, please revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer.

Once the revised manuscript has been prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center.

When submitting your revised manuscript, you will be able to respond to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you make to the original manuscript. In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the reviewer(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

I look forward to hearing back from you when you have had a chance to consider the comments.

With thanks and best regards,
John

John Edmondson
Editor in Chief, Industry and Higher Education
kjedmondson25@gmail.com

REVIEWS

Referee 1
I feel the article, although interesting, is in need of more work before publication, specifically in the following areas:

1. There are places where information appears that seem out of place in the section:

1.1 At the end of the introduction, the findings of the study are given. This does not seem an appropriate location for this information.
1.2 Very importantly, I found quite a few results in the Conclusion section that were not given in the actual results section. For instance, the comment on page 19 lines 34-35 and lines 53-55.

2. It is stated on page 2 lines 17-19 that graduate feedback was not used in the study; however, part of the research design focuses on the questionnaire and focus group discussions with the graduates. This paradox needs clarification.

3. The author mentions more than once the continuing debate on the issue, which is mainly in online and newspaper articles. I see that a few of these are listed in the References, but are not referred to in the text.

4. In some instances the author leaves whole paragraphs without referencing support; for instance page 6, paragraph 2.

5. Several times the word data has been changed to datums (for instance page 10 line 41). This is incorrect.

6. The heading on page 12 line 56 should probably contain the word "versus" and not vis-a-vis?

7. Some references are referred to for the first time only in the conclusions and recommendations. All these references should be contained in the literature review and then referred back to the discussion and conclusions. A work should not be mentioned for the first time in the last section (for instance Franco, et al., and Kalufya et al).

8. I would prefer the findings to be more structured and more to the point and succinct. I find it quite hard to read, to focus on the specific issue at hand.

9. I think the author should be more specific about the type of business that was the focus of the study and the type of graduate (what they were studying). More information of this kind would be helpful.

10. Some of the findings are somewhat unclear; for instance the finding on page 13 lines 10-12. I was not sure what the participants meant with that specific statement and it is not made clear by the author.

Referee 2
The authors need to introduce signalling theory earlier in the manuscript as they make reference to it in the first paragraph as part of their core argument (see p 1 line 24). Furthermore, the introduction section is quite haphazard and does not seem to have a clear structure. The authors jump from literature to methodological descriptions of data collection with no bridge between the sections. This section needs to be revised to more systematically introduce the topic of the manuscript.

In the theoretical section, the argument that employers draw their expectations from the SAQA learning outcomes is questionable. One could argue that signals are also inferred by employers based on their own experiences and personal knowledge systems (see Cai, 2013). Furthermore, this line of argument negates the agency and diversity of students within a programme. What I mean here is that individual students have different strengths despite having undertaken the same programme. This will also influence the employer experience of graduates from a specific programme.

In the methods section where purposive sampling was used to recruit focus group members, the authors need to be more explicit regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the focus group.

There is an over-reliance on Spence and Vollgraaff in the text.

Attachments area

Kaashiefa Mobarak <**kmobarak@uwc.ac.za**> Mon, Apr 6, 2020, 12:23 PM

to kjedmondson25

Dear John

Thank you for your email.

I have perused the comments in your email below and will certainly revise the article for re-submission.

Thank you once again for the opportunity.

Kind regards.

Kaashiefa Mobarak

John Edmondson <kjedmondson25@gmail.com> Mon, Apr 6, 2020, 12:25 PM

to me

Dear Kaashiefa

Thank you for your quick response, and I look forward to receiving your revised version when it is ready.

With best regards,

John

John Edmondson

Editor, Industry and Higher Education

New Book: *Innovation and the Arts: The Value of Humanities Studies for Business*

https://books.emeraldinsight.com/page/detail/Innovation-and-the-Arts/?k=9781789738865

Appendix 21: Sage – Confirmation of Article Being Part of PhD

Call for Papers-International Journal of Higher Education

External

Inbox

IJHE Editor <ijhe@sciedupress.org> Mon, Sep 6, 8:09 AM

to me

Dear Kaashiefa Mobarak,

I am Susan Sun from International Journal of Higher Education, which is a printed and online scholarly journal, peer-reviewed, published by Sciedu Press, Canada. I have had an opportunity to read your paper entitled "Exploring the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective". Through your works, I know you are an expert in this field. We are seeking submission for the forthcoming issues published in **December 2021, February 2022 and April 2022**. Your submission will make an important contribution to the quality of this journal.

The paper should be written in professional English. The length of 3000-8000 words is preferred. All manuscripts should be prepared in MS-Word format, and submitted online: http://ijhe.sciedupress.com/ or sent to: ijhe@sciedupress.com

We are also recruiting reviewers for the journal. If you are interested to be a reviewer, it's our great honor to invite you to join us. Please find the application form and details at: http://sciedupress.com/reviewer and send the application form to: ijhe@sciedupress.com After assessment, the editorial board will decide whether we offer you the position of reviewer or not.

1) Description of International Journal of Higher Education (IJHE):

International Journal of Higher Education (IJHE) seeks to publish research articles that are original hypothetical and theoretical in its nature and that provides exploratory insights in the fields of educational theory, teaching method, instructional design, students management, case studies etc. in both undergraduate level and graduate levels. The editorial board welcomes high-quality research or review papers focusing on teaching, researching, training and applied work in the field of higher education. The journal is published in both printed and online version. The online version is free access and download.

ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING:

- Cabell's Directory

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PKP Open Archives Harvester

ProQuest

ResearchGate

Scopus (2018-2020)

SHERPA/RoMEO

The Standard Periodical Directory

UCR Library

2) Information for authors:

1. The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration (or an explanation has been provided in Comments to the Editor).

2. The paper should be written in professional English. The length of 3000-8000 words is preferred.

3. All manuscripts should be prepared in MS-Word format, submitted online: http://ijhe.sciedupress.com/ or sent by email: ijhe@sciedupress.com

4. Article processing Charge 600.00 USD for each paper is charged. If your paper is accepted for publication, you will be asked to pay the Fee.

3) Peer Review Policy

We use double-blind system for peer-review; the reviewers' identities remain anonymous to authors. The paper will be peer-reviewed by three experts; one is an editorial staff and the other two are external reviewers. The review process may take 4-10 weeks.

4) e-Version First

e-Version First is a feature offered through our journal platform. It allows PDF version of manuscripts that have been peer reviewed and accepted, to be hosted online prior to their inclusion in a final printed journal. Readers can freely access or cite the article. We aim to publish accepted manuscripts in e-Version First in two weeks' time after the final draft completed.

Deadline for Submission (December 2021 Issue): October 25, 2021

Deadline for Submission (February 2022 Issue): December 25, 2021

Deadline for Submission (April 2022 Issue): February 25, 2022

For any further information about the journal, please log on its website: http://ijhe.sciedupress.com/ or contact with me by email: ijhe@sciedupress.com

Thank you for your time reading this email and I am looking forward to receiving your submission.

Best Regards,

Susan Sun

Editorial Assistant, International Journal of Higher Education

Sciedu Press

****

Mailing Address: 1595 Sixteenth Ave, Suite 301, Richmond Hill, Ontario, L4B 3N9, Canada

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E-mail2: ijhe@sciedupress.org

Website: http://ijhe.sciedupress.com/

Kaashiefa Mobarak <kmobarak@uwc.ac.za> Thu, Oct 14, 12:38 PM (5 days ago)

to IJHE

Dear Susan

My sincerest apologies for the delay in responding to your email.

Thank you for recognising my work - it is sincerely appreciated.

Please confirm the following:

1) The journal's rules on publishing articles that form part of a PhD by publication.

2) Whether you would be interested in publishing an article covering the topic: **"Assessing the influence of regulatory practices on university and industry collaboration in preparing graduates for the labour market in South Africa"**.

Your feedback will be highly appreciated.

Thank you very much in advance.

KAASHIEFA MOBARAK

Lecturer: Economics and Management Science

Industrial Psychology Department

University of the Western Cape

Cape Town, South Africa

Linked-In: www.linkedin.com/in/kaashiefa-mobarak-a6a4a8102

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3802-3369

Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kaashiefa-Mobarak

International Journal of Higher Education <ijhe@sciedupress.com> Fri, Oct 15, 3:08 AM (4 days ago)

to me

Dear Kaashiefa Mobarak,

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Exploring the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective

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Abstract

Organisations function in a flexible and changing environment that requires dynamic responses to diverse forces influencing their sustainability and growth. Employers wish to recruit graduates who can capably and successfully transfer their university-acquired skills and knowledge to the workplace. The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa from an employer's perspective. Signalling theory assists as the theoretical framework to establish: (1) whether the skills and knowledge required by labour markets are reflected in the advertised degree programmes of universities; and (2) whether skills and knowledge shortcomings could have been addressed sufficiently by universities.

Keywords

Labour market requirements, signalling theory, teaching and learning practices, university contribution

There is a longstanding dissatisfaction amongst some employers in many countries with the quality of the skills and knowledge of their recently employed graduates (Hansen, 2017). In 2017 the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), a US-based non-profit professional institution, surveyed 400 employers internationally and found that only 3 out of 10 confirmed that graduates were proficient in the workplace application of the skills and knowledge they had acquired academically. The NACE survey results are consistent with the ongoing concerns expressed by various South African stakeholders in newspaper articles sourced by the researcher from 2012 to 2015 concerning the failure of universities to produce workplace-ready graduates. As stakeholders in skills and knowledge production, employers complain about shortcomings in the quality of the skills and knowledge possessed by graduates in comparison to labour market demands (Botes and Sharma, 2017). Employers are also worried about the scope and relevance of graduate skills and knowledge in relation to labour market needs (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018).

This alleged failure of universities to produce suitable graduates for the labour market raises concerns about the learning outcomes and learning standards signalled by degree programmes offered by South Arica's universities. In the context of this study, the word 'signal' refers to the information about the degree programme, learning outcomes and standards marketed by the university to students wishing to enrol in different disciplines.

Against the background of the employers' concerns, these signals from universities are analysed using the signalling theory developed by Michael Spence in 1973. Signalling theory provides a useful framework for understanding that the recruitment of graduates by employers is influenced by the signals received from universities about the qualifications they award to graduates. Employers trust the signalled information in forming their expectations of what graduates will know and be able to do when they are recruited. It is therefore important to establish whether the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa is sufficient in preparing graduates for the work they are eventually employed to undertake (Botes and Sharma, 2017; Hansen, 2017).

Universities are responsible for the learning outcomes of, standards achieved by and qualifications awarded to graduates. Ideally, universities are expected to produce

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graduates who are proficient in contributing meaningfully to workplace and labour market requirements in different sectors of the economy, but this has not been the case in many countries. Based on the expectation that university graduates are ready for work, employers recruit them to add value to their operations. In this regard, hiring graduates is considered an investment by the employer (Spence, 1973), but experiences around the world have shown that hiring graduates has become an expense for most employers. Thus, a major concern amongst employers is that universities are not producing graduates who are competent in performing the assigned tasks at the workplace. A graduate's inability to meet expected performance requirements hinders the organisation's capacity to be effective and responsive in highly competitive local and international business environments (Hansen, 2017). In light of the employers' concerns, therefore, this study explores the contribution of universities to labour market requirements from an employer's perspective in South Africa.

Theoretical overview

Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) suggests that an employer cannot observe the skills and knowledge of an employee prior to employment but that hiring an employee is still an investment decision. The theory has been adopted in many fields – amongst others, economics and marketing – and in this study it is used to explore the signals sent by universities about their degree programmes to prospective students and employers. In the context of education discourses, it has been argued that such signalling informs the employer that having a degree raises wages simply because the education level is a signal of the employee's ability, even though this ability is unobserved by the employer prior to the employment decision (Tambi, 2018). Gabbert (2015) suggests that degrees serve as a signal to managers that graduates are valuable and that hiring graduates increases productivity and makes the company look good. Employers, then, rely on the messages or signals received about degree programmes or qualifications from universities when recruiting graduates and trust the reliability of this information in their expectations of what graduates will do when they are employed (Vedder et al., 2013).

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), together with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) database, provide qualifications outcomes and the learning standards of registered qualifications linked to institutions at various levels of education, among which are universities. Employers can access the learning outcomes and standards of registered qualifications on the SAQA website or on the websites of universities when they need information about what graduates should be able to do and what they should know when they have completed their degree programme. According to the graduate participants in this study, prospective graduates intending to be admitted to a study programme will most often access the website of a university to obtain information about degree programmes.

Signalling theory is useful for describing the behaviour between two parties when one party as the *sender* (here the university) communicates the information it is selling to a *receiver* (the prospective student or employer) (Connelly et al., 2011). The employer as receiver reviews the learning outcomes of the university qualification a graduate achieved to inform its recruitment and selection processes. The prospective graduate as receiver uses the advertised degree programme as a guide when selecting a study programme. Given these circumstances, the receiver of the information should be able to trust that it will provide the value it promises. In other words, prospective graduate employees send a signal about their skills and knowledge to an employer when they acquire a degree qualification (Connelly et al, 2011). Signalling theory posits that the purpose of most human behaviour is to signal value and status to others (Gabbert, 2015); therefore, employers recruit on the basis of the information signalled by universities through the qualifications they award about the learning outcomes graduates have achieved. The signals sent by universities, however, seem to have become distorted, given the continuing contentions that many graduates are not adequately prepared for the labour market.

By applying signalling theory, this study aims to establish the impact of that alleged inadequate preparation on graduates themselves and on employers of graduates. The role of universities based on the content of their degree programmes as advertised on their websites is analysed in the context of employers' concerns about graduates' skills and knowledge and their relevance to workplace requirements.

Degree programme information signalled by universities

Previous studies, including those by Brown (2013) and Bowley (2018), focus on scarce and other important skills at various levels of demand by employers. Brown (2013) argues that the skills in demand are: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management and technology. Bowley (2018) notes that a survey of 2000 business leaders indicated that 'soft skills' were in higher demand and adds the following skills among those required by employers: leadership, strategy, management, collaboration and time management.

An exploration of the degree programmes described on the websites of seven randomly selected universities (private and public institutions) in South Africa revealed that the skills listed by Brown and Bowley are covered by the programmes. Universities, however, differ in the ways they

present or signal degree programme content. Considering that this description will be the first point of access to information for a prospective student applying for admission to a programme, one could argue that the information should not be deficient in detail concerning expected outcomes and/or the levels of outcomes to be achieved. The programme descriptions on the websites of the randomly selected universities provided the following *common threads* of information:

- *Programme*: the department offering the degree programme and a list of the modules.
- *Duration*: full-time and part-time study options in years.
- *Admission requirements*: prerequisite knowledge at a particular NQF level with an average of 60% achieved; matric with Bachelors degree access; and, in some cases, particular courses or modules must have been completed to qualify for admission.
- *Career opportunities*: among others, in finance, working in banks, insurance companies, investment companies, education, industry, journalism, fitness instructor, coach, project manager, business manager.

Of the websites viewed, only two provided a breakdown of the outcomes of the modules offered in the degree programmes from year one to the final year of study. The information extracted for this study focused on the main outcomes and content provided on degree programmes in order to ascertain what the graduate would know and what the employer could expect of the graduate on employment. These two universities provided the following additional information linked to the content that would be taught:

- *Main Outcomes:* (1) Students should be able to calculate, understand, graphically solve, interpret, analyse, or (2) students should demonstrate ability to . . . ; raised awareness of . . . ; the capacity to . . .
- *Main content:* application of tools; introduction to . . . ; graphically solve; measures of . . .

The lists are not exhaustive, but for the purposes of this study only the similarities in the information provided were extracted. The word 'understand' appears quite often under the main outcomes section of the descriptions of final-year modules. To 'understand' does not equate to being able to 'apply' or 'do', as would be expected from the terms 'solve' and 'analyse' that appear less frequently in module outcomes and content sections. A prospective student may not fully comprehend what the degree programme outcomes translate to for the labour market at the time of application for admission to a degree programme. An employer may misunderstand or misinterpret the outcomes when the description does not specifically state that a graduate 'will be able to' but rather 'should be able to'. Prospective students may look at the career opportunities listed in advertised degree programmes to influence their choice of study. Ultimately, applying the signalling theory perspective of human behaviour, graduates may want to signal their value and status to employers because they have a university qualification (Gabbert, 2015) that is deemed to belong to the highest level of education bands on the NQF.

The aim of the above analysis was not to compare universities, but rather to trace the process a prospective student would be likely to follow when selecting a degree programme, and therefore the names of the universities are not mentioned. The degree programme content analysis, it should be noted, excludes the possibility that the popularity or reputation of a particular university will also inform a prospective student's selection.

Employers' concerns with the qualifications offered by universities

The continuing stakeholder debates about the poor quality of university qualifications suggests a lack of problem-solving mechanisms to address employer concerns and labour market requirements (Franco et al., 2019; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018). Yang and McCall (2014) cite Connelly et al. (1973) in arguing that educational investment by an individual in higher education is interpreted as a signal to employers about the future productivity of a job applicant through completion of rigorous university degree programmes. Globally, however, employers are questioning why graduates hold what seem to be appropriate qualifications but, once in the workplace, are found to be unable to do what the employer was led to believe they would be able to do (Franco et al., 2019; Hansen, 2017).

In most cases, the recruitment of graduates is based on the information signalled by universities about the outcomes the graduate of a degree programme will have achieved during their studies (Hansen, 2017; Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018; Master, 2014). The career opportunities connected with the qualification from a particular programme as signalled on university websites and/or in other media, such as newspaper advertisements, may also influence an employer's perception of the skills and knowledge a graduate should have on employment if that qualification is relevant to a job vacancy (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018).

Gernetzky (2011) refers to the statement by the then Deputy Performance and Evaluation Minister in South Africa that graduates had to be retrained when they began working. Apart from the retraining commitment required of employers, the Minister's comment is also concerning for graduates, who have already invested time and money in studying. Andrews (2013), a former Dean of Wits Business School, reports on his discussion with business leaders in which they raised the concern that many Master of

Business Administration (MBA) graduates were able only to regurgitate outdated theories and applied theoretical formulas to problems. In the same context, Vollgraaff (2015) draws on comments of a senior partner of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Southern Africa, relaying his concerns about the difficulties experienced by the organisation in finding and keeping the right people due to a lack of talent, linked to the capabilities of employed graduates, which was stifling its ability to expand. Vollgraaff (2015) further reports that 48% of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in Africa alleged that it had become more difficult to hire workers, and 54% said talent expenses had affected their companies' growth and profitability negatively in the past 12 months.

Master (2014) argues that businesses are faced with the challenge that the quality of education necessary for skills to be transmitted in the workplace, acquired and retained is increasingly lacking. Employers not only employ graduates; they also send their existing employees to complete qualifications they previously have not had an opportunity to acquire. Government and professional bodies' policies and practices prescribe to employers the qualification requirements for particular jobs, thereby impacting the recruitment and selection processes of organisations. In light of Master's (2014) argument for employees to be educated, and that the education system is not relevant to employers' needs, what options do graduates have if their university education does not adequately prepare them to meet job requirements? Master (2014) further argues that employees, in the absence of adequate education, will remain trapped in the realm of functional work and productivity will suffer because those employees will be able only to exercise their skills to the limits of their working knowledge and their imagination. Thus their ability to be self-directed and innovative is adversely affected – an ability that is increasing in importance with the emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in which organisations and economies must compete in an environment of disruptive technologies that will change how we live and work (Schwab, 2015). Employees who are sent to university to study will be disadvantaged if study programmes are not improved to match more closely the needs of the workforce.

It is evident from the literature, media reports and debates sourced for this study that the graduate skills and knowledge challenges for employers persist despite the voicing of stakeholder concerns. Statistics quoted by Vollgraaff (2015) and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2017) further strengthen concerns about the quality of degree programmes and the inability of graduates with the resulting qualifications to contribute meaningfully to the labour market. In light of the increasing global competitiveness and flexibility of economies, employers' concerns across many industries should be a matter of importance to all responsible parties in South Africa.

Research design and implementation

A qualitative approach was used to investigate the extent to which degree programmes offered by universities in South Africa reflect the skills and knowledge requirements of employers. This approach to social inquiry helps in analysing the extent to which universities can sufficiently prepare graduates for the labour market. As already noted, an analysis and review of the literature, including a qualitative content analysis of the degree programme information on the websites of seven South African universities, as well as the opinions of various stakeholders expressed in newspaper articles, informed the initial data collection process. The qualitative methods used for data collection included interviews and focus group sessions in a process of naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry helps towards an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its natural setting (Bowen, 2008); therefore all participants were from business units that impacted each other operationally. All were employees in the same organisation at different levels of the hierarchical structure. The selected employer is classified as a large institution situated in one province with 70 business units (such as engineering, safety and security), as well as support services spread across various districts. Naturalistic inquiry allows for the use of various techniques, including online open-ended questionnaires, focus group sessions and one-on-one interviews, applying structured and unstructured processes (Bowen, 2008). All data were collected and recorded in English. The qualitative methodology enabled discernment and description of the employer's experiences with employed graduates, resulting in the employer's perception of the contribution of universities to the labour market (Flick, 2013).

It is important to note that graduate feedback is not reported in this article. The data collected from employed graduates as outlined below, however, informed the data collection process with the management participants. Graduates had qualifications from different universities and had studied in different disciplines – among others, accounting, engineering, sports science, commerce and political studies.

Online open-ended questionnaire with employer's graduates

A non-probability convenience sampling method (Saunders and Lewis, 2012) was used to access the graduates hired by the employer via an online Google questionnaire link sent to the organisation's human resources officer, who then forwarded the link to the graduates' email addresses. Non-probability convenience sampling allows for the selection of participants in a process that does not give all

individuals in a population an equal chance of selection (Saunders et al, 2012). Convenience sampling proceeded until the required number of participants was reached (Saunders et al., 2012). A total of 35 graduates, employed in different business units within the organisation, received the link. The convenience sampling technique applied facilitated speedy delivery of the questionnaire to participants; cost-effectiveness in collecting data; and availability of the participant sample (Crossman, 2017).

The Google Forms application was used to design the questionnaire, which consisted of three sections: (1) biographical information (9 closed-ended questions); (2) university and qualification selection (a combination of 15 open-ended and closed-ended questions); and (3) skills and knowledge (a combination of 27 open-ended and closed-ended questions). The link was made available online for the month of June 2018 to allow participants sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. Of the 35 graduates who received it, 33 responded. Only 30 returned questionnaires were used for this study because the remaining 3 were not completed in full. Employed graduates from nine different business divisions of the employer completed the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations. The open-ended questionnaire was cleared by the University of the Western Cape and was endorsed by Ethical Clearance Procedure No. HS17/8/34. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. The criteria for participation in the study were specified in the questionnaire and participant confidentiality was assured by electronic settings that automated responses directly to the researcher on its completion, and not to the human resources officer who had forwarded the questionnaire to participants. The analysis of the data collected from the employed graduates informed the selection of participants for the management focus group sessions.

Focus group 1 – Employed graduates

Purposive sampling, as a non-probability method, was used to select 10 of the 30 online participants for one focus group interview session. The inclusion criterion was that participants selected for the group should be representative of the nine business units from which online responses were received. (Graduates from other business units were excluded because they did not respond within the period for which the Google open-ended online questionnaire was available.) The main reason for this focus group interview session was to clarify the online responses of the completed questionnaires in a real setting to increase the validity and reliability of the analysed data.

Confirmation of completion of the online open-ended questionnaire had to be signed by each participant in the focus group session. This was communicated to participants beforehand and the confirmations were signed at the session. Electronic verification was carried out by accessing the Google responses. The focus group process involved electronic and written flipchart recording of participants' responses. The data collected from the employed graduates informed the themes and questions of the interview schedule and discussion for the focus groups with the management teams.

Focus group 2 – Management teams

Six focus group sessions, categorised as Focus Group 2, were held with management teams representing the business units in which the participant graduates were employed – among others, engineering, water affairs, safety and security, finance, human resources, information and technology. Purposive sampling was applied in the selection of the participants with the assistance of the human resources consultant based on the managers to whom the graduates reported. The focus group sessions were held at three different venues to facilitate the availability and travel of the managers. In all, 24 managers participated, with 4 at each session. There are different opinions about the minimum number of participants required for a focus group session and, therefore, the number of participants is best determined by the purpose of the focus group (Bigby, 2018). In this case, the purpose was that managers should share experiences, opinions and perspectives about the graduates employed in their respective and cross-functioning departments. The small groups allowed for an easier flow of collective conversation (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011), encouraging honesty and valid feedback which contributed ideas and views to help resolve the employer's concerns with the research problem.

An interview schedule consisting of guiding questions related to the themes developed from the analysed graduate data informed the semi-structured focus group sessions with the management teams. The primary aim was to reflect on common perspectives of the data collected from employed graduates and the experiences of managers with these graduates in the workplace.

The sessions encouraged a range of responses that provided a broader appreciation of the attitudes, behaviour, opinions and perceptions of the participants concerning the research issues (Hennink, 2007). It was important to appreciate how managers saw their own reality and hence to obtain richer data. The sessions provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore the gap between what managers say and what they do or how they respond in workplace settings to the alleged lack of skills and knowledge of employed graduates. Permission to record the sessions electronically was granted in advance and, in addition, managers were asked to write their responses on a flipchart during the session. The researcher also made written notes of comments when probing for clarification of points made. No challenges were experienced in getting consent for

participation and confidentiality from participants. Consent forms were signed before the focus groups started.

One-on-one interviews – Division heads

Purposive sampling was used to select the 3 divisional heads for the one-on-one interviews. The human resources officer was requested to select heads to whom managers participating in the focus group sessions reported. Data collected from the focus groups with the graduates and managers informed the questions scheduled for the semi-structured interviews with the divisional heads. In addition, further discussion with these participants gave them an opportunity to provide their own views and contribute to an understanding of the internal influences on the research issues from a higher level of the organisation.

Qualitative interview formats allow for discussion and open-ended questioning of participants. I simplified the thematic questions to ensure that they were clearly understood by all the participants, but participants were also encouraged to seek clarity in the case of misunderstood questions (Ary et al., 2010). The divisional heads operate at a strategic level of the organisation and provided comparative feedback on the respective business units reporting to them. They were probed about collaboration with universities and the extent to which this was encouraged in order to ensure that degree programmes were responsive to the needs of the labour market. Consent forms were signed and the same processes of note-taking, written flip chart responses and electronic recording were used to gather data.

Data analysis

Analysis of the respective categories of qualitative data collected varied slightly. The online open-ended questionnaire responses were automatically recorded in an Excel spreadsheet that was linked to the online questionnaire and analysed using qualitative content analysis. Responses by the employed graduates were categorised according to the questions in the questionnaire from which the aforementioned three themes were developed (the themes are specified below under 'Results and discussion'). Graduate focus group responses were merged with online group responses. The analysis focused on the comments and variations in the responses of participants that were linked to the themes developed. Participants' comments were provided as extensively as possible and a short explanation was given to describe them. Mayring's (2014) steps for qualitative content analysis were useful in bringing out the essence and meaning of the data collected. Important passages could be coded in multiple ways, helping with the credibility of the findings by constantly aligning the process of coding with the research question and the literature reviewed. The steps were applied as follows:

- *coding*, which involved working through the material with the aid of a theme system;
- *examining* the common occurrences of themes, and establishing the contingencies, requirements and constraints mentioned by participants; and
- *collating and interpreting* the graduates' comments under the three main themes and listed subthemes.

The electronically recorded data, the flipchart data and the researcher's notes from the management team focus group sessions were captured in an Excel spreadsheet. The same themes developed from the online questionnaire responses guided analysis of the data collected from the focus group sessions and the face-to-face interviews. The reflections and experiences of the managers were juxtaposed against the reflections of graduates where this was applicable.

One-on-one interview recordings and written responses were captured in an Excel spreadsheet and Mayring's (2014) coding system with the same themes as previously developed were applied. The main themes applied in the same qualitative process assisted with the reduction of subjectivity in interpreting the findings. The four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability for judging trustworthiness within a naturalistic inquiry setting, as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994), were established through the progressive and integrated processes of data collection linked to the same themes. Contextualising and linking the data collected from one participant group to inform and guide the data collected from the next group with the same coding system until saturation was achieved confirmed achievement of the four criteria (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln's (1994) four criteria were fulfilled in terms of: certainty in the truth of the findings; the applicability of findings in different business units; the consistency and reproducibility of the findings; and the degree of researcher impartiality achieved by allowing participants the comfort of a conducive and safe environment in which to interact without the researcher's influence.

Finally, randomly selected degree programmes specific to the qualifications held by the participating employed graduates were sourced from the websites of seven universities. These programmes, as advertised, were analysed to compare their content and learning outcomes with the data collected about degree programmes from the respective participant groups. The focus of the comparison was on the programmes' content and outcomes in relation to labour market needs and on *how* the required skills and knowledge were achieved during the study years. Thus the comparative analysis concentrated on the signals (Spence, 1973)

employers receive about qualifications and their interpretation of the acquired skills and knowledge of graduates on employment.

Results and discussion

The research findings are contextualised by the interpretations of the management teams of the university qualifications held by employed graduates as signalled by universities and the NQF. The thematic framework in which the key findings are presented is influenced by Mayring's (2014) coding system. The three main themes developed from the data analysis were: (1) degree programme content versus labour market needs; (2) skills and knowledge production by universities; and (3) how universities can improve skills and knowledge production.

Degree programme content versus labour market needs

The findings concerning degree programme content are based on the degrees held by the employed graduates. The influence of stakeholders such as professional bodies on degree programme content is considered in the presentation of the findings (Master, 2014), especially in the fields of accounting and engineering. Management participants thought that relevant content and different modes of teaching should be applied to graduate development in classroom settings, noting that studies influenced by professional bodies should encourage continuous professional development and certification beyond university degrees for quality assurance and up-to-date knowledge.

Managers had different views on degree programme content because of the influence of professional bodies and others on accounting and engineering degree programmes compared to more flexible programmes (the regulatory requirements of those two fields prescribe what learning content universities should incorporate). Points made by the participants included:

- Workplace accounting utilises software applications; hence there is a need to prepare graduates with these updated skills.
- There is a need to apply, or at least to create awareness of, innovative and relevant digital and software application ability in accounting and engineering as well as other contexts.
- Awareness should be created in graduates of the need for continuous professional development (ongoing professional certification in the field of, amongst others, engineering). A university degree does not complete their development and professional requirements for the labour market.

The more flexible degree programmes, such as commerce, sports science, information technology, education, finance and human resources, afford universities a less structured opportunity for content development. In some of these fields of study certain modules, like psychology in human resources and biokinetics in sports science, are compulsory for students to register with professional bodies. In these cases, universities have less flexibility in content development as professional bodies influence and prescribe content levels and alignment. All management teams concurred that, regardless of the influences of professional bodies, all the degree programmes did signal the content their various business units required in the workplace. Managers, however, had strong opinions about the way content was taught. Comments included:

- 'Soft skills, such as communication skills, should be taught in line with current workplace needs and tools especially incorporating critical and analytical writing and e-communication tools like Skype and other methods'.
- 'Appropriate business verbal and writing skills are required and not long drawn out essays that say nothing. When writing, there is a need to be specific because we do not have the time to search for the essence of what is being said'.
- 'Include soft skills learning such as emotional intelligence; work ethic; effective communication in its various forms of manual and electronic media'.

Managers confirmed that their graduate recruitment processes were influenced by workplace experiences with graduates, the signals of degree programme content and, particularly, the learning outcomes of graduate qualifications. The qualifications possessed by graduates inform the job descriptions and vacancies employers are filling and relevant content alignment is an important requirement (Franco et al., 2019). Of particular interest to the employer are the outcomes and levels of learning graduates achieve: these are seen as indicative of the quality of the production of qualifications. Vollgraaff (2015) and the NACE (2017) argue that adequate outcomes and levels of learning are not being achieved by universities' degree programmes.

Managers were also concerned that graduates did not have an understanding of or regard for workplace communication turnaround times and the relevance of the organisational structure for the completion of operational tasks. They thought that, while a study programme might include reference to organisational structures and organograms, their importance was not sufficiently accentuated. Dominant views included the following:

- 'Improve graduate knowledge and understanding of organisational structures for relevance and

adherence to reporting lines within the workplace context'.
- 'Graduates must be able to apply theory in practice to achieve workplace objectives timeously, there can be some trade-offs but workplaces require outputs in specified turnaround times'.
- 'The various methods of communication serve a purpose in the expedience and urgency of workplace operations'.

Employers' reliance on the learning outcomes and levels of learning afforded by degree programmes constitutes, according to signalling theory, the investment risk taken in graduate recruitment. Spence (1973) argues that employers do not have an opportunity to observe the applicant's capability of applying skills and knowledge during the recruitment process. This study finds that degree programme content is not adequately taught by universities for graduates to transition effectively into the workplace, thereby making the signals sent by university degree programme descriptions questionable (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2018; Vollgraaff, 2015).

Skills and knowledge production by universities

The management teams acknowledged that universities could not develop the skills and knowledge needed by the labour market to the full extent required. They did, however, concur that graduates could be taught in a more holistic manner for workplace readiness. A common of all the management participants was that graduates struggled to convert theory into practice. This lack of practical application ability resulted in a mismatch between graduates' and employers' workplace expectations (Franco et al., 2019). Some of the specific concerns of managers in relation to graduates' lack of ability to transfer theory to practice were:

- 'Graduates need better written and verbal skills to address real world issues'.
- 'Preparation of graduates should be improved for appropriate communication responses to situations: the number of words is less important than the relevance of the words'.
- 'Graduates' critical and analytical abilities are not adequate – for example, in the interpretation of instructions'.
- 'Degree programmes need to avoid the use of outdated textbooks or cases, and to make theory relatable to real labour market and workplace problems'.

According to the managers, the above issues affected productivity and graduate motivation, and personal workplace relationships amongst graduate employees, as well as manager–employee relationships. Teamwork, as well as individual contributions, were deemed to be important motivators. A lack of motivation leads to strained relationships that impact productivity negatively. Managers expressed frustration with the graduates' lack of commitment to their own and their team's development. Among the management experiences and concerns were:

- The work ethic of graduates needed improvement to change their attitudes and behaviour in relation to tasks and instructions from managers or others in the workplace.
- Graduates should have an ongoing willingness to learn – companies must be flexible with regard to their operational environments, internal and external.
- There was a need to encourage adherence to turnaround times for task completion – there are seldom second and third chances in workplaces.

The challenges experienced in South Africa in relation to graduates' readiness for the workplace are, as indicated by the literature reviewed for this study, also prevalent in other countries. Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2018), for example, argue that there is a significant difference in the prioritisation of employability skills between employers' expectations and universities' preparation of final-year students in Tanzania. The authors claim that self-awareness, the application of knowledge and teamwork were the top three skills in employers' ranking of graduate employability shortcomings. These were also among the skills identified by the management participants as lacking in South African graduates.

Universities, it has been argued, need to develop the graduate's ability to adapt to the world of work through greater self-awareness in the context of the operational requirements of the workplace (Hansen, 2017). Some managers thought that the *status* of having a degree somehow gave graduates the impression that they did not have much more to learn. This point is echoed by Spence (1973), who argues that degrees are perceived to determine status, and therefore a demand for higher wages. The following issues were highlighted by the managers in this study:

- 'There is a need to develop awareness of the risks of not following or disobeying particular instructions and workplace processes'.
- 'Workplaces do not have memoranda or model answers against which any problem may be compared – graduates must be encouraged to have their own ideas in problem-solving'.
- 'Having a degree without industry experience does not give a graduate the right to expect or demand a high salary'.
- 'The employer has to invest another 12–24 months in retraining graduates for the workplace before they can make a meaningful contribution'.

The managers acknowledged that theory was an important factor but stressed that universities should teach the conversion of theory into practice and develop that way of thinking and learning progressively during the study years.

Improvement of skills and knowledge development by universities

It is important to note that managers at all levels accepted that the worlds of academia and industry differed their mode of operation. As a stakeholder in university graduate outputs, however, they believed that, for South Africa's employers and economy to prosper, stakeholders should be afforded input into skills and knowledge development in a participatory manner. Suggestions for collaboration included:

- 'Universities should engage with industry specialists/practitioners to maintain a current awareness of workplace requirements'.
- 'Encourage collaboration between industry, employer representatives and educators to create awareness of classroom teaching and learning challenges in making learning content relevant to employer needs'.
- 'Recruit suitably qualified industry representatives to teach part of the curriculum, or encourage lecturers to gain industry experience in their field of teaching'.
- 'The autonomy of the university in the learning process might be a concern in partnering with industry'.
- 'Encourage mentoring of students by industry representatives during their study years'.

The management teams also offered suggestions regarding how universities could assist graduates to transition to the workplace and so reduce the retraining time currently required. Dominant themes in the context of converting theory into practice as suggested by the participants were:

- 'Review and adjust curricula based on changing times and labour market requirements'.
- 'Universities should offer degree programmes for 1 or 2 years: employers have to invest 12–24 months to prepare graduates for the workplace despite programmes with a duration of 3 to 4 years'.
- 'Move away from outdated theoretical modes of learning and teaching practices and use available technological advances in line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Google is one such tool and is used on many platforms and has many variations and dimensions to assist with the application of technology in teaching and learning practices'.
- 'Relate learning and teaching to broader societal knowledge requirements'.
- 'Incorporate real-world issues into learning and teaching and avoid textbooks that discourage adaptability and flexibility in the face of change'.

The participants thought that university lecturers should have workplace experience in their particular fields or, at minimum, should make an effort to involve themselves in workplaces periodically or include industry experts and/or practitioners in their processes of teaching and learning. They recommended on-the-job training with the help of industry coaches and mentors to enhance the production of skills and knowledge by universities.

The managers stressed that lecturers' knowledge of industry was an important influence on graduate attitudes. They suggested that lecturers should have continuous professional development as a personal drive so that they could maintain a current and relevant awareness of the requirements of workplaces for which their graduates are destined. The following recommendations were offered for universities to develop graduates more holistically:

- 'Develop learners' attitude from entitlement to continuous learning practices'
- 'Use Fourth Industrial Revolution technology and tools that are already employed in industry as far as possible'.
- 'Encourage critical and analytical ability to be responsive to workplace turnaround times and reporting structures required to make workplaces operationally functional'.
- 'Industry does not operate on stagnant theories and knowledge: it is constantly changing and needs employees who know how to evolve'.

Consideration of the experiences and perceptions expressed by the management teams may result in the more holistic development of students who then, as graduates, will be better equipped and prepared for the workplace.

Conclusions and recommendations

The employer's representatives respected the fact that companies and universities operate in different environments. However, as stakeholders in higher education, employers rely on the production of appropriately skilled graduates from universities and should therefore contribute more meaningfully to the expected outputs of degree programmes. From the research reported in this paper, it is evident that managers are willing to contribute to and collaborate with universities in order to enhance the processes of teaching and learning. The participants accepted the possibility of power-play in such collaboration that might cause challenges, but were convinced that students would benefit from greater cooperation. Franco et al. (2019) argue

that students are eager to work in a practical environment and want to acquire new knowledge. For this reason, the implementation in South African degree programmes of the use of industry mentors and coaches for graduate development is offered as a recommendation.

The formulation of Career Advisory Services for the creation of short-term employability programmes at universities as suggested by Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2018), could, with the collaboration of government and industry, make a useful contribution. Stakeholders might contemplate the development of a database of industry mentors and coaches, initially for particular degree programmes: this could include retired industry experts, thereby avoiding productivity challenges for employers.

The continuing challenges experienced in relation to graduates' skills and knowledge result in efficiency obstacles for business units, whose productivity levels and targets are compromised. Instead of focusing on their organisational operations and outputs, managers have to retrain graduates, investing money and time that could be better spent elsewhere: 1 to 2 years of retraining involves the use of costly external service providers and/or existing employees. Sometimes, there is resistance among employees to involvement in on-the-job training for graduate recruits because some have years of work experience but no degree, and may have to report to these same graduates in the future. This dilemma may lead to a debate on the relevance of a degree to job performance.

Some managers were of the opinion that degrees should be offered by universities for 1 or 2 years only. Some also suggested that the government should subsidise the employer or the industry instead of universities for further graduate training with greater relevance to the economy. Government skills development and related policies are embedded in the organisational staffing policies and practices that inform the graduate recruitment process: many job specifications require not only experience but also a university degree. These specifications are aligned with what graduates with that level of qualification should have learned, as signalled by the NQF and universities' descriptions of degree programmes. As a result, it is difficult for employers to avoid the employment of graduates, even if they question the quality of graduate qualifications. It seems, therefore, difficult to disagree with the contention that the processes of teaching and learning should include employer and industry representatives.

The autonomy of universities might be questioned in the context of partnerships between universities and industry (Franco et al., 2019). If government is committed to investment in university education for the good of the economy, the sovereignty of universities should not take preference over the appropriate development of students for industry. Franco et al. (2019) argue that such partnerships could include student internships as part of the curriculum, leading to a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and innovation. Universities are encouraged to incorporate the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution into their teaching and learning practices to improve their capacity to meet labour market needs (Schwab, 2015). Nonetheless, most universities continue to lack the ability to meet labour market requirements (Hansen, 2017, Vollgraaff, 2015).

The literature reviewed in this study, together with the employer perspectives and experiences reported, indicate that fundamental aspects of teaching and learning in South Africa's universities are in need of adjustment. The fact that employers are willing to participate in universities' teaching and learning processes offers an opportunity to enhance the global competitiveness of the South African economy. Ultimately, this will reduce the expensive practice of importing labour at a variety of skills levels.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive and very helpful comments. Sincere appreciation to the Editor of *Industry and Higher Education*, John Edmondson, for his efficient and encouraging feedback.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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