

**CAPABILITIES FOR MEDIA GRADUATE
EMPLOYABILITY:
THE CASE OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION**

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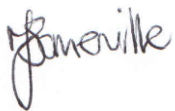
DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in South Africa faces a challenge of increasing numbers of unemployed graduates. Increased access to higher education and private higher education, together with policy commitments to equal opportunities, have wielded a promise that higher education offers a better future for graduates. And yet, research on graduate destinations shows persistent inequalities in employment outcomes. Graduate employability is a rapidly growing field of research worldwide in the context of a global knowledge economy, drawing a direct link between education, employment and economic growth. South African studies on graduate employment have concentrated primarily on public universities, with a strong focus on the transition of final year students into the workplace. This study focuses on graduates from private higher education institutions who have been in the workplace for between one and five years. Using a human development and capability approach, the thesis confronts the human capital approach to employability. Using a mixed methods sequential exploratory design within a transformative paradigm the project explores the employment experiences of media graduates from three private higher education institutions in South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 media graduates, four key informants from the institutions, and six media employers, providing multiple perspectives to address the main research question: *how does private higher education contribute to enhancing equitable opportunities for media graduate employability and well-being?* Subsequently, an electronic survey was conducted with media graduates ($n=2,746$) to get an expanded understanding of what graduates value, and the factors that enable and/or constrain their participation in the workplace. Graduate employability is shaped by the capabilities developed in higher education, and mobilised in graduates' functionings in the labour market. Through the use of an enrolment-employment typology matrix, the findings show how the choices and opportunities of higher education intersect with personal

biographies and social structures to be unequally realised in employment outcomes for different individuals. Nonetheless, there is variation in students' agency responses and the capabilities they are able to mobilise, shaped but not overly determined by their backgrounds. Consequently, shifts are needed in private higher education to develop significant capabilities more explicitly for graduates to develop the agility to navigate their way, and shape what they are able to do, be and become in the media industry.

Keywords: employability; private higher education; capability approach; human development; media education

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AU	African Union
BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
FET	Further Education and Training
FGS	First-generation student
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GFETQSF	General and Further Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NDP	National Development Plan
NPC	National Planning Commission
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework

PHE	Private Higher Education
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
PR	Public Relations
PROPHE	Program for Research on Private Higher Education
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WBL	Work-based learning
WIL	Work-integrated learning
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution

Once the commodity value of people displaces their intrinsic human worth or dignity, we are well on the way to a state of barbarism. Unless and until we bring back into our paradigms, and thus into our social analyses, the entire human being and the ways in which human beings can live fulfilled lives beyond their mere economic needs, we will continue to promote anti-human philosophies and policies that ultimately tend to work to the benefit of those who have, and to the detriment of those who do not

~ Neville Alexander, 2012¹ ~

An unemployed existence is a worse negation of life than death itself

~ Jose Ortega Y Gasset² ~

¹ cited in Motala & Vally, 2014, p. 1

² <https://libquotes.com/>

CHAPTER 1

Higher education, development and employability

1.1 Setting the scene

In South Africa, the reality of high levels of unemployment confronts us on a daily basis. It is made explicit, embodied in increasing numbers of men and women standing on street corners with placards asking for jobs. Less obvious, and therefore easily out of mind, is the existence behind the placard. The lived reality of joblessness that takes the faceless form of poverty, inequality and a struggle for survival (Molatoli, 2019). Graduates stand a better chance of being employed than non-graduates. However, increasingly the economy is unable to provide jobs even for graduates, some of whom have also resorted to placard-bearing (Bangani, 2019; Comins, 2020; Dayile, 2018; Mngoma, 2016). There have been protests such as *#HireAGraduate*, to raise awareness of graduates' jobless plight (Manabe, 2017), and more recently, demonstrations by *The Unemployed Graduate Movement* declaring "war" on what they perceive as government's indifference to their unemployment (IOL, 2020). Exacerbating issues even further, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has seen the loss of around 2.2 million jobs in the country, and pushed the economy deeper into recession (Bloomberg News, 2020; StatsSA, 2020; UNDP, 2020). This situation will have repercussions into the future in terms of opportunities for young people to access higher education, to graduate, and to find employment. It becomes all the more necessary, therefore, to support young graduates into work and livelihoods under such challenging conditions.

This study originates from a concern for the national issues of unemployment and graduate joblessness. As a South African educator for 20 years, much of my work with students at the exit level of school and higher education was vested in preparing individuals for post-education working and adult life. I have also done work in the media industry where I was exposed to how quickly technology is

changing the landscape and disrupting jobs. Thus, my concern relates to the contribution that higher education is able to make in changing the lives and futures of graduates, and it is framed by a commitment to the overarching national imperatives of social justice, equality, poverty alleviation and transformation. As a normative imperative, achieving social justice in and through higher education would mean confronting systemic imbalances and ensuring processes that advance the capabilities and agency of all students/graduates irrespective of their background, their social position or economic standing.

In this chapter, I introduce the study and provide some background to locate higher education and employability in broader development debates. In this first section, I consider the positioning of higher education within global development frameworks, starting with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs have filtered through into regional and national contexts, and underpin frameworks for sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). South Africa falls within this region, which forms the wider context of the study. The rest of the section discusses higher education and development in the region, briefly introduces the role that private higher education plays, before indicating the relevance of media in development. The remaining sections of the chapter provide an outline of the study.

1.1.1 Higher education and global development frameworks

Higher education is positioned as a key role player in development worldwide and has been increasingly drawn into regulatory frameworks and long-term strategic planning and policy documents at various levels. Most notably, at the macro-level, higher education has been incorporated as a role player in the SDGs (UNESCO, 2016; United Nations, 2015, 2017). Closely related to this study is SDG4, which emphasises a commitment to accessible, inclusive, and quality education (including higher education) for all. This goal and its targets reiterate the importance of education for development and sustainable development, particularly in addressing central issues of poverty, inequality and unemployment. The SDG agenda is operationalised at regional and national levels, where

frameworks have been established to ensure wider access and more equitable provision of higher education (African Union, 2016; EHEA, 2018; OECD, 2017). From there it is taken up into higher education policy, with an onus on institutions for implementation (DHET, 2013).

As part of its mandate to national development, the Dearing Report in the UK (Dearing, 1997) specifically linked graduate skills and knowledge to driving economic productivity and performance to compete in the 21st century labour market. Since then, as development policies have given increasing prominence to higher education as a driver of knowledge production for economic growth and development, this consolidated the employability agenda in higher education internationally, for example, in the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations (EHEA, 2018) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Report in Europe (OECD, 2016), the UNESCO report on Graduate Employability in Asia (UNESCO, 2012) and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016 – 2025 (African Union, 2016). The Preface for UNESCO's report on graduate employability in Asia states:

Governments are increasingly looking to universities to produce human resources with the right kind of capacities, skills and knowledge to meet 21st century needs. They also call on universities to facilitate the shift to a knowledge-based economy and high-technology through effective linkages between research and industry to ensure a competitive edge in the global market" (UNESCO, 2012, p. v).

As such, higher education has a mandate to develop employable graduates who will drive their nation's economic development and competitive advantage.

Higher education institutions traditionally found their purpose in teaching and learning, the development of knowledge, and in service to the community and the public good (Castells, 2017; McCowan, 2015). As policies advance the role of higher education in economic development, higher education faces "a complex and contradictory reality" (Castells, 2017, p. 41) under the converging pressures of state, society, and the economy. Arguably, a 'contradiction' arises under conditions of opposition, possibly where there is an expectation that higher education ought to play one role (economic development) rather than another

(social development). Yet McCowan (2019) describes education as both a driver of development (for economic growth) and also constitutive of development (in the development of people). It is not a zero-sum game. A focus on human development includes economic development. In the context of the SDGs, Chankseliani and McCowan (2020) point out that not only does higher education contribute to development through enabling access and promoting lifelong learning opportunities, as directed in SDG4, but higher education is also a driver in the achievement of all the other SDG goals, through the development of people, production of knowledge, and innovation. They state: “With the expansion of higher education participation, university has acquired a larger potential for contributing to societal development” (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020, p. 1). Therefore, higher education’s role in sustainable development incorporates economic and human development. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

1.1.2 Higher education and development in sub-Saharan Africa

In Africa, higher education is charged with the responsibility of serving as a partner in strategic development (African Union, 2016; Pillay, 2011). The CESA 16-25 framework is a comprehensive education and training strategy designed to meet the specific development needs at continental, regional and national levels (African Union, 2016; see also Teferra, 2018). Higher education (as a component of tertiary education) is given a central role in meeting development objectives:

Virtually all development players now concur that for any meaningful and sustainable economic growth to be realized and sustained, tertiary education must be centrally placed in the development agenda of nations. Countries around the world are striving to build the sector either under pressure, as in the case in Africa, or as priority in their strategic development plans, as in the case of developed and emerging countries. For sure, building a tertiary education system is no more a luxury African countries were once chastised for indulging in it [*sic*]; but a critical imperative for national development and global competitiveness (African Union, 2016, p. 18).

African countries find themselves under pressure to develop higher education systems which are able to meet the SDG imperatives. Where more developed countries have infrastructure and systems in place, in many African countries these are inadequate or lacking. Moreover, the economies of these countries do

not have the financial resources to cope with the demand (Kigotho, 2018) all of which adds to the pressure.

In the last decade, there has been a drive to ‘revitalise’ higher education as a tool for development in Africa (Mohamedbhai, 2018; UNESCO, 2009). As elsewhere in the world, higher education in SSA has been characterised by exponential growth (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009; Mabizela, 2007; Teferra & Altbach, 2004). There has been a surge in enrolments³ at a rate exceeding the global average (Calderon, 2018), placing pressure on state resources and straining infrastructure. Characteristically, higher education systems have become overcrowded and under-resourced as governments have been unable to keep pace with demand. Notwithstanding the growth, two particular anomalies characterise higher education in the region. Firstly, gross enrolment ratios⁴ (GER) in SSA countries are low – on average below 10%, which is well below the global average (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020, p. 4; Cloete & Maassen, 2017, p. 101). Secondly, despite the greater output of graduates, there has been an increase in graduate unemployment. According to Mohamedbhai (2015) the causes of graduate unemployment are broadly a result of higher education producing increasing numbers of graduates who are inadequately prepared for the needs of society and not relevant for a role in the workplace.

Contrary to much of the economic discourse, development is not achieved by merely producing large numbers of graduates as human capital (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2019; Mohamedbhai, 2015; Nafukho, 2020). Studies on higher education and graduate employability in the SSA region, located predominantly in public universities, have shown high levels of inequality of both higher education provision as well as employment outcomes (British Council, 2016; Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; McCowan, 2014; Unterhalter, Allais & Howell et al.,

³ SSA higher education enrolments of 7.4 million students in 2015 is expected to increase to 21.7 million by 2040 (Calderon, 2018, p. 3).

⁴ The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is calculated by the number of students enrolled in a given level of education relative to the official school-age population corresponding to that level, expressed as a percentage (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/gross-enrolment-ratio>).

2019; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Students from disadvantaged and marginalised groups face significant barriers of access to higher education. Institutional level issues, such as poor quality teaching, poor governance, inadequate facilities, lack of safety, and so on, also create unequal outcomes. These are exacerbated for those disadvantaged students who are able to gain access. On the whole, graduates are not well prepared with the knowledge and skills for the labour market. Consequently, the role of higher education in addressing issues of unemployment, poverty and development is not only inefficient and inadequate, but appears to perpetuate inequalities, undermining the social justice imperative (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Unterhalter et al., 2019).

1.1.3 A role for private higher education in human development

Chapter 2 discusses the context of private higher education in detail, and the nature of the sector. Here, I briefly introduce private higher education as a contributor to development, which underpins the rationale for the study. Worldwide, increasing higher education enrolment has been accompanied by expansion of private higher education, to the extent that in many countries the number of private institutions surpasses that of public universities (Bjarnason, Cheng, Fielden, Lemaitre, Levy, Varghese, 2009; Levy, 2007; Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018, 2020; Tamrat & Teferra, 2018).

In SSA, the pathway of private higher education has become a viable alternative to address the perceived deficiencies of the public sector. While private higher education is not without its own shortcomings and challenges (Morley, 2014), the sector absorbs over 25% of higher education enrolments and therefore has the potential to make a significant contribution to the educated workforce, and thus to national and regional development (Tsegaye, 2015, p. 86; see also Mohamedbhai, 2017; Tamrat, 2018, 2020). Private institutions particularly expand opportunities for individuals from marginalised groups, including women, mature students, and students from low socio-economic groups who are otherwise excluded from public provision, or choose this alternative (Onsongo, 2007). Also, study programmes at private institutions are vocationally orientated

towards industry including information and communication technology (ICT) and Business, to prepare graduates for the labour market.

1.1.4 Media education for development

Development objectives for Africa are aligned with the SDGs⁵ and based on Pan-African ideals for structural and social transformation brought about by Africa, for Africa (African Union, 2015, 2016). Within these strategic frameworks, the specific plan for higher education gives prominence to disciplines of STEM or STI⁶. Scientific knowledge and ICT are seen as central to equipping nations for sustainable growth and enabling Africa to establish competitive advantage and credibility in the 21st century, and also vital for participation in the ‘fourth industrial revolution’ (4IR) (StatsSA, 2017a). In turn, communications and technology also promote education and have applications in agriculture, mining and industry that have the potential to impact positively on society (Pillay, 2018). Nafukho (2020) argues that the best way to advance technologies and create wealth is through developing people. He states: “For African economies to industrialise and become competitive worldwide, they need people who possess the capacity for empathy, communication skills, problem-solving skills, technological skills, and knowledge for development” (Nafukho, 2020, p. 2). This is a call for higher education that develops skills and competencies for technological and economic development through human development.

Media education prepares graduates for a diverse field that covers a range of skills and types of work. The influence of technology on media work blurs the line between science (STEM) and arts (Humanities and Social Sciences), so that some forms of media work are highly technical, while some is artistic and creative, and others business-like, or focused on social interaction. In addition to the value of media for communication, they also play a significant role in economic and social development (Sen, 2015; UNESCO, 2008). Media and media freedom

⁵ CESA 16-25 is aligned with the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063

⁶ STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (used in South African education frameworks). STI stands for Science, Technology and Innovation (used in SSA strategic frameworks).

contribute to human development and the expansion of people's freedoms in that they drive awareness of social issues that enables citizens to make informed choices and to participate actively in democratic processes. On the other hand, lack of media freedom potentially impedes human development and democracy (Sen, 2015). Education, jobs and technology are on the priority list for the first ten years of Agenda 2063 in order to meet the strategic aspiration of inclusive growth and sustainable development (African Union, 2015, p. 7). Table 1 shows the alignment between the seven aspirations that form part of the development vision of the Agenda 2063 framework (African Union, 2015), and the distinct and independently significant roles played by the media in society, noted by Sen (2015). To these, I would add the human development values of empowerment, participation, equity, efficiency, and sustainability (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009) which underpin outcomes for social justice.

Table 1: Alignment of the role of media in human development with aspirations for development in Africa

Aspirations: Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015, p. 12)	Role of media and media freedom (Sen, 2015, p. 92)
1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development 2. An integrated continent; politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance 3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law 4. A peaceful and secure Africa 5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics 6. An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children 7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner	(i) <i>Intrinsic</i> importance as a constitutive part of development (ii) <i>Informational</i> function to broaden knowledge and understanding across society (iii) <i>Protective</i> role in reducing human insecurity and in preventing serious deprivations (iv) <i>Constructive</i> contribution in the interactive and informed formation of values

Good communications and connectivity infrastructure is part of the vision for an integrated continent, and the strategic intent of catching up, and keeping up with technological advances in order for countries in SSA to be globally competitive. However, the argument is also made that in developing countries, where infrastructure and economies are weak, government policies ought to focus on advancing more fundamental needs such as digital skills, access to data, and digital inclusion rather than chasing advanced disruptive technologies (Teagle, 2019) thus supporting the argument for more equitable distribution of resources to enhance communications not only for economic development but also for human development and social justice.

1.1.5 Employability: global and local

SSA is a region that grapples with the conflicting tensions of remaining relevant and competitive in the 4IR, while ensuring local populations have basic resources to survive. When it comes to both development and education, African countries are influenced by the wider global context but national policies and strategies must be structured for implementation in local contexts. So it was in this project too that I found myself wavering between global and local contexts. Specifically in the employability literature (reviewed in Chapter 3), my engagement was predominantly in relation to international rather than SSA or local literature. Primarily because, notwithstanding their importance, the research literature on private higher education and on employability in SSA is very thin, with some recent exceptions (British Council, 2016; McCowan, 2014; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Furthermore, as evident in the literature on higher education (reviewed in Chapter 2), many of the global trends do work themselves out in SSA (including South Africa), albeit somewhat later than in other countries, and not always in the same way (Levy, 2007).

Employability is not a dominant discourse in South African public higher education – although there is a concern for graduate preparedness for work (Walker & Fongwa, 2017) and private higher education in South Africa appears to follow more neoliberal principles than the public sector, with greater focus on

employability. I recognise that employability will not necessarily manifest in the same way in the specific context of South Africa as it does in more neoliberal systems, such as the UK. Even so, as Lewin (2019) points out, not all changes in higher education can be attributed to neoliberalism, and policies in South African higher education need to recognise and manage the tension between social justice and the instrumental goals of education.

In sum, Fredua-Kwarteng (2019) is critical of African higher education that blindly follows Euro-American systems and is esteemed as a status symbol for development but lacks relevance and purpose. He cautions against the routine production of human capital, which does not guarantee development. Instead, he advises that there ought to be concern to produce quality graduates who are relevant and “the right fit for African society and the economy” (2019, p. 2). A focus on the needs and aspirations of African society would orientate higher education towards human development. Fredua-Kwarteng (2019) believes that higher education in Africa needs to make a shift in its role as development partner in order to legitimise its existence and increase its relevance. Boosting the link between higher education, society and the economy, will help to leverage African (human) development. He adds:

Without authentic empirical data, determining the relevance of what is being produced and the effectiveness of what has been produced is at best a matter of speculation. At worst, it is just the result of a habit of producing graduates without consideration of societal needs and aspirations (2019, p. 2).

This study in a particular area of higher education makes a contribution towards understanding what is being produced, as an attempt to avoid speculation. Against the background sketched in this section, the research problem is laid out below.

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

Higher education in South Africa faces a challenge of increasing numbers of unemployed graduates. Traditionally, higher education prepared elite graduates for professional roles in the workplace. More recently, higher education

institutions worldwide are expected to produce skilled workers for the knowledge economy of the 21st century. In this role – and in conjunction with global and national policy discourse of widening access and participation – higher education is seen to be providing opportunities for employment and social mobility for a wider and more diverse body of graduates (DHET, 2013; Moore, Sanders & Higham, 2013). However, unequal employment outcomes undermine this potential, and raise questions of the role that higher education does, and ought to play in society, in both global and national contexts (Boni & Walker, 2016; McCowan, 2015).

Graduate employability has become part of mainstream higher education discourse in international literature (explored in Chapter 3). This discourse is fuelled by neoliberal policy frameworks that prioritise the instrumental role of higher education in producing graduates as skilled human capital for industry (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Higher education in SSA and South Africa, is influenced by international pressures to be competitive in the global economy, but faces its own context-specific challenges with regard to the role of higher education in social and economic development. In the face of increasing claims for higher education as a vital mechanism for addressing sustainable and inclusive development (African Union, 2015; McCowan, 2019), this has raised concerns about graduate preparedness for work (British Council, 2016; Johannesen, 2015; Walker & Fongwa, 2017) and the link between higher education and inequalities in SSA (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Unterhalter et al., 2019).

Private higher education institutions in South Africa specifically promote employability as a key outcome for graduates. These institutions deliver niche vocational programmes focused on the development of graduates' skills and attributes in fields such as media, business and ICT, to meet the needs of employers. Producing larger numbers of graduates through expanded access to higher education may meet the needs of some employers, but South African research on graduate labour market outcomes continues to show that notwithstanding the best efforts of higher education institutions, labour market

opportunities are not equitably achieved for all graduates, and as such only provides certain graduates with positional advantage in the labour market (Baldry, 2016; CHEC, 2013, DPRU, 2006; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015). With rapid expansion of private higher education as a complementary sector in meeting the demand for higher education in SSA and South Africa, there is a gap in the knowledge of the contribution of private higher education to human development (Mohamedbhai, 2017; Tamrat, 2020).

Access to jobs, employment and self-employment matter greatly in a country like South Africa with high unemployment and poverty. The thesis does not downplay the importance of this instrumental role for higher education. But I argue that a human capital approach may be perversely reductionist in making graduates dependent on being given jobs by others, or to understand that this is solely where the value of a qualification lies. In a competitive labour market, it is social and economic capital as much as skills and higher education qualifications that shape who is best positioned in the employment race (British Council, 2016 Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Therefore, using a human development and capability approach, the principal aim of this study is to understand more specifically how private higher education is able to expand media graduates' opportunities and choices as they navigate their careers in this dynamic field of work. This quest gave rise to the following research questions which guided the study:

1. How does private higher education contribute to enhancing equitable opportunities for media graduate employability and well-being?
2. What are the capabilities that diverse media graduates value for participation in the workplace and in society?
3. What are the factors that enable or constrain media graduates' participation in the workplace?
4. What are the capabilities that employers in the media industry value (from private higher education graduates)?

1.3 Sketching the conceptual framework

Having outlined the potential contribution higher education and private higher education can make to development, and having highlighted the twin challenges of unemployment and employability, this section provides a brief overview of human development and the capability approach as the conceptual framework for the study. It sketches key concepts of human development, capabilities, functionings and conversion factors, all of which are elaborated on in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Human development is an approach to development that focuses on people. The fundamental purpose is to enlarge people's choices and their well-being, in order to advance social justice. Human development is underpinned conceptually by the capability approach, which is an approach grounded in principles of human rights, concerned with people's lives and the freedoms they have to be and do what they value being and doing (Sen, 1999). As such, the human development and capability approach provides a framework that focuses on outcomes and processes of expanding people's choices and freedoms to live flourishing lives (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

Central to the capability approach are the concepts of capabilities and functionings. Capabilities reflect the freedom a person has to achieve what they value, given opportunity and choice. In other words, capabilities are a kind of freedom in the form of a person's opportunities to choose what to be and do in his/her life. Functionings are the realisation of valued capabilities. They constitute what people are able to achieve having had opportunity and choice, realised in the lives people are actually able to live (Robeyns, 2017). In making assessments of social arrangements, such as higher education, evaluations are based on the opportunities students and graduates have in and through higher education to make choices, to do what they value being and doing, and to flourish.

Conversion factors are personal, social and environmental factors that influence how people are able to make use of opportunities and how those opportunities

are converted into what they are able to be and do. Conversion factors may either enable or constrain the conversion of resources into capabilities. The approach enables not only an identification and evaluation of valued capabilities as the ultimate ends of higher education, but it also frames important questions as to whether there are enabling circumstances in place for the equitable achievement of such ends (Robeyns, 2017; Walker, 2012). As such, it directs our attention towards factors that affect graduates' capability sets and the choices they are able to make in the workplace. The focus on opportunities (capabilities) makes comparative evaluations of advantage possible, where disadvantage is defined by a lack of such opportunity to choose and to be and to do (Robeyns, 2017; Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). Being able to identify situations of relative advantage provides information on capabilities that need to be fostered, and functionings that might be restricted, opening the way for inequalities to be addressed – in policy and practice.

The capability approach has been used within research on higher education to explore the role of universities in human development (Boni & Walker, 2016; Walker & McLean, 2013) and in graduate employability (British Council, 2016; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). However, capabilities and human development have not been taken up in the field of media education and its relationship with employment and the context of private higher education.

1.4 Outline of the research design and methodology

This section provides a brief overview of the research process to give a sense of the empirical work that was done. The details and full explication are laid out in Chapter 5. For the study I made use of a sequential exploratory mixed methods design within a transformative paradigm. This is a values-driven framework appropriate for addressing social issues. Within this approach, the use of a combination of methods was intended to capture various notions of reality and represent different perspectives and insights (Mertens, 2010, 2011). For the setting, I used a case study, incorporating a selection of three diverse private

higher education institutions and four sites, from which the graduates and staff came.

The empirical data was collected in sequential iterations – first, qualitative data collected by means of semi-structured interviews, followed by a survey for quantitative data collection. In the initial phase, I first conducted interviews with 21 graduates. Only once those were complete did I conduct the interviews with four higher education staff and six media employers. The reason for this was to foreground the graduates' voices, as well as to be able to probe their comments and corroborate information from the perspectives of staff and employers. The graduate interviews obtained information about each person's experiences in the labour market subsequent to graduating from higher education. The questions were structured to track back so that graduates reflected on their higher education, linking their experiences to their journey in finding employment and their current situation. Having a broad idea of the graduates' stories, the interviews with higher education staff provided information about graduate preparation for the workplace. Interviews with media employers provided information about recruitment processes and what makes a person employable in media. The preliminary analysis of the qualitative data was used to supplement the development of the survey. The survey formed the second phase of data collection. This quantitative data served to draw a wide profile of private higher education graduates, their employment and their higher education. It provided information on job hunting, earnings, movements between jobs, different forms of employment, internships, and living and working circumstances.

Like the data collection, the data analysis was done iteratively. The qualitative data was coded using NVivo and thematically analysed for interpretation. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, mostly in the form of descriptive statistics, which allowed integration with the codes. The findings from both phases were integrated in the theorisation (presented in Chapter 8).

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This section presents a brief overview of each of the nine chapters that make up the thesis. Chapters Two and Three present a review of the literatures on private higher education and graduate employability respectively. However, I have also woven literatures throughout the thesis to link the conceptual and empirical work, and “to create a form of dialogue between data and theory” in shaping the final account (Bathmaker, 2010, p. 202).

In this introductory chapter, I have set the scene for the study. I position higher education within development frameworks at global, regional and national levels. I contextualise it specifically within sub-Saharan Africa where higher education and private higher education have a contribution to make in sustainable human development, and where the orientation of graduate employability needs to be context-specific. This substantiates the research problem and rationale, and framed the research questions that directed the study. I include a brief outline of the theoretical framework and methodology to show their relevance to the study.

In chapter Two, I present the context of private higher education. The purpose of the chapter is to present a scope of the sector, its positioning globally and in the national higher education system. The chapter sets out by defining private higher education, which is distinguishable from public higher education as a highly diverse sector, broadly identified by five main criteria, and constituted of three main types of institutions. I discuss the historical, social and political factors that have influenced the sector’s evolution over time, and how it is currently positioned within the South African education system. The final part of the chapter presents the role of private higher education in development. South Africa has followed global trends and patterns for developing countries, and this section reflects on the macro-level influences on the structure and function of private sector higher education in the country. It is higher education’s role in development that makes the human development and capability approach a relevant conceptual framework for the study, to evaluate how the meso-level operations become evident at the micro-level.

Proceeding to chapter Three, I focus on a review of the international literatures pertinent to the construct of graduate employability and higher education. The purpose is to explore conceptualisations of employability, the influence of employability on the role and purpose of higher education, and ultimately what this means for graduate labour market outcomes. The chapter commences with a review of the conceptual literature that has contributed to ways in which the notion of graduate employability is defined and understood globally. The positioning of employability in relation to higher education is framed by literatures on education, as well as social, economic and human resource policies. These are combined in this chapter to discuss the way particularly neoliberal economic policies have positioned the purpose of higher education in society, and prioritised the preparation of graduates for the labour market as its key function. In the second section, I discuss the globally dominant discourse of graduate employability. I juxtapose policy with empirical literature to link it with South African higher education and frame the argument to challenge this dominant discourse. In the final section, I discuss employability in the labour market, and specifically within the creative industries in South Africa. I focus on empirical studies on graduate employment and employability in the national context, to which this study adds, and contributes unique conceptual and contextual perspectives. I sum up the chapter with a synopsis of the shortcomings of the human capital approach and present an alternative conceptualisation of employability.

In chapter Four, I present the conceptual framework for the study. Building on the literatures, the purpose of this chapter is to present the conceptual framing of human development and the capability approach for evaluating higher education outcomes and graduate employability. The study is underpinned by a commitment to social justice, and the use of a human development and capability approach is central to my argument for higher education outcomes that shift away from graduates' economic value to focus on what each individual values being able to be and do. I introduce and discuss human development, its relevance in higher education, and the key concepts used to frame the data collection and

analysis. In the analysis, human development and the capability approach provided the conceptual tools for evaluating graduates' higher education and labour market opportunities. It is not possible to draw direct correlations between cause and effect when it comes to higher education achievements, and employability is often assessed in absolute terms. Therefore, I discuss the importance of making comparative evaluations of the opportunities that individuals have as a means to identifying relative advantage, and to address disadvantage. The second half of the chapter discusses the operationalisation of the capability approach, in conceptualising graduate employability for human development. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the pros and cons of the approach.

Chapter Five presents the methodology and research design of the study. The chapter starts with an overview and rationalisation of the philosophical underpinnings of the research which has transformative intentions and adopts a pragmatic orientation in operationalising the design. The second part of the chapter describes the sequential exploratory mixed methods design strategy and details the case study setting. In the third part, I describe and account for the data collection methods, processes and instruments used. These follow the sequence of each stage – qualitative then quantitative. The final section includes my reflection on the ethical considerations, my personal positioning as the researcher, and the limitations of the study. The mix of methods makes a contribution to employability research by integrating measures of employment outcomes with the quality of life those outcomes enable.

Chapter Six is the first of two empirical chapters. It reports on the data analysis and draws a profile of who private higher education graduates are, why they chose to enrol in private higher education, and the implication of that choice by way of employment outcomes. The purpose of this chapter is to present a subjective dimension to employability, and it creates a backdrop to the later discussion of higher education means and ends. This analysis was drawn predominantly from the quantitative data in the survey but is supplemented by the

qualitative input from the interviews. The intention is to provide the reader with deeper insight into who the individuals are who make up the body of private higher education graduates, not as a 'sub-species' of university graduate, but as individuals who represent the substantive diversity that is characteristic of the structures and hallways of higher education in South Africa. These are individuals who have taken a particular higher education route based on a purposeful choice. This choice is fundamental to their higher education outcomes, and substantively integral to the diversity of their employment outcomes, discussed in the further analysis.

The second empirical chapter (Chapter Seven) is framed by the profiling insights obtained from the previous chapter. The purpose of the chapter is to critically consider graduates' employability, not as a job position, but as a process of development through higher education and in engagement with the labour market. In this chapter I bring together the quantitative and qualitative data, and present the perspectives of staff and employers in dialogue with the perspectives of graduates. The first part of the analysis was set in the context of private higher education. I discuss the opportunities that private higher education afforded graduates for the development of employability. The second part of the analysis was located in the labour market and focused predominantly on the perspectives of employers, to understand their operations, recruitment procedures, and what they expect of graduates. The discussion hones in on internships, which the employers showed were an important mechanism for employment and employability. The final section is an analysis of the graduates' experiences in the workplace. I correlate the attributes that graduates and employers respectively value, and discuss the extent to which these are realised in employment opportunities for different graduates.

The theorisation presented in Chapter Eight draws together the empirical data with the theoretical concepts to explain the findings. The purpose is to conceptualise employability from a human development and capability perspective as an alternative to the human capital approach. Employability is a

complex and multidimensional construct and I theorise the findings in the distinct spaces of higher education and the labour market, before bringing them together to critically consider how graduates' valued opportunities from higher education are realised in employment achievements in the labour market. In the first section I present four key capabilities that comprise a capability set for employability valued by graduates. The discussion links back to the choices that graduates made on entry to private higher education, and the personal and social factors that influenced those choices. In the second section, I discuss the four corresponding functionings for employment in the media workplace. Again, differences in individual achievements are evident as a result of the different resources and personal circumstances that influence the way in which each individual is able to capitalise on his/her higher education opportunities. In the final section, I present the findings in a typology matrix that characterises different ways in which enrolment choices intersect with employment outcomes. I also discuss the important role of agency. The chapter ends with a critical reflection of what this might mean for employability and higher education policy, particularly in meeting social justice objectives.

In the concluding chapter, I reflect on the study and present an overview of what has been learned and the value the study adds to the field. Firstly, I return to the research questions that guided the thesis. I reflect on and respond to the questions based on the empirical data and the findings. The reflections in the second part of the chapter step back from the empirical substance to reflect on the theoretical, methodological and personal aspects of the research. These have implications for further research, and I make a few suggestions. I conclude the chapter with some implications and suggestions for private higher education providers on the way forward.

In sum, this chapter introduces and frames the broader study, its context, rationale and purpose. I laid out the problem statement and the research questions that guided the data collection. I provided brief sketches of the conceptual framing and the research design. Finally, I provided an outline of the

structure of the thesis. The next chapter builds in greater detail on the context of private higher education that has been introduced in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Private higher education in context

Introduction

There are few countries in the world that do not have a private higher education sector (Levy, 2010, 2018a, 2019). Yet, notwithstanding the significant global presence of private provision, the notion of higher education is more readily associated with public universities. The absence of comprehensive data and reliable analysis of private higher education has cast a shadow over this sector, and opened the way for “static images and stereotypes” of its function and motives (Tamrat, 2018, p. 24). However, the increase in demand for higher education generally, the trend towards privatisation within public provision, and the rapid and expansive growth of private higher education, have all put more of a spotlight on the role and place of the private sector within higher education systems worldwide. Private higher education is distinct from public higher education, yet a significant and inclusive part of a dual-sector reality within higher education systems worldwide (Levy, 2018b).

The purpose of this chapter is to frame private higher education, firstly in the context of the broader higher education system. This is important because it provides a current snapshot of this changing and under-researched sector, and explains the wider context in which private higher education in sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa is positioned. Secondly, to explain the role private higher education plays in contributing to educational opportunities for diverse students. This links the context with the conceptual framing of the capability approach to support the argument for higher education for human development. Thirdly, to focus on the role of private higher education in promoting employability through which it has the potential to contribute to national goals of transformation and social justice.

This chapter has three sections. The first section focuses on the global scale by providing a broad description of private higher education. This builds towards understanding the distinctive features of the sector. In the second section, the focus hones in on private higher education provision in South Africa. I describe how the sector has evolved to become what it is today. The final section moves from the shape of the sector to its function, with a discussion on the role of private higher education and the opportunities and challenges of the sector in its contribution towards development.

2.1 Private higher education: a distinct part of a dual-sector system

Since the turn of the 21st century, there has been rapid and exponential growth of the private higher education sector worldwide (Altbach et al., 2009; Bjarnason et al., 2009; Buckner, 2017; Levy, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2018a; Varghese, 2006). Until the 1990s private higher education was a marginal, informal entity barely associated with national higher education systems, but it has evolved into a very large sector, integral to those systems. According to Levy:

The growth of private higher education is widespread across large and small countries, with large and small higher education systems and private higher education shares, in developing and developed countries, and where private higher education is longstanding or only recent (2010, p. 123).

The growth has taken place in absolute terms, with an increase in the actual numbers of institutions and student enrolments. Simultaneously, the sector has grown its proportional share of the higher education market. The growth has been such that private higher education now has a universal presence⁷, and comprises 33% of higher education enrolment worldwide. This means that one in three students is enrolled in private higher education, with approximately 57 million students enrolled worldwide (Levy, 2018a, p. 5). While private higher education institutions are generally smaller than public ones, they outnumber their public counterparts. In many countries, private higher education holds the majority

⁷ PROPHE lists only 10 countries with truly no private higher education, namely, Algeria, Bhutan, Cuba, Djibouti, Eritrea, Greece, Luxembourg, Myanmar, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (Levy, 2018a).

share – which can be up to 80% of their higher education enrolments (Levy, 2018a).

Three decades ago, private higher education was shrouded in myths (Tilak, 1991). Developments in the sector were unanticipated, and debates focused on the impact of the emergence of private higher education on the public sector (Asmal, 2002; Kruss & Kraak, 2002; Levy, 2006; Mapesela, 2002; Schwartzman, 2002). Since then, private higher education has become more accepted as part of mainstream higher education and is seen as less of a threat to public provision. The debate has now shifted to the role private institutions can play in the sector as a whole (Kinser, 2010; Moumné & Saudemont, 2015; Shah & Nair, 2016; Tamrat, 2018, 2020; Tankou epse Nukunah, Bezuidenhout & Furtak, 2019; Tsegaye, 2015). However, understandings of the sector are still sketchy, and descriptions are generalised and misrepresentative of the different modes and institutional structures. Positioning this thesis in the context of private higher education contributes current empirical data to further the knowledge base on the sector.

2.1.1 Defining private higher education

There is no universally applicable definition of private higher education. It is broadly understood to be any form of independent, non-state higher education provision (Altbach et al., 2009; Bjarnason et al., 2009; Buckner, 2017; CHE, 2018a; Kruss, 2002; Kwiek, 2018; Levy, 2015, 2018a; Mabizela, 2007; Shah & Nair, 2016; Tamrat, 2018; Tilak, 1991; Varghese, 2006). Providing a concise definition of private higher education is made more complex by the fact that it is not a homogeneous sector. On the contrary, worldwide, it is a sector characterised by heterogeneity and diversity, having changed greatly over time, and displaying significant differences within regions and across continents and nations. Also, private sectors display notable internal contrasts of sub-sectors, types and forms of provision, making it difficult to condense the characteristics of this sector into a definitive, one-size-fits-all description.

Further contributing to the complexity is the notion of privatisation. This is a “dual phenomenon” that takes two forms, each of which strongly influences the other (Levy, 2009, p. 1; see also Buckner, 2017; Kwiek, 2017, 2018; Levy & Zumeta, 2011; Rizvi, 2016; Tilak, 1991). Firstly, privatisation refers to increased provision of private higher education and the growth in size of the private sector. This growth is a result of increased private higher education enrolment in response to demand to supplement the strained capacity of public provision. The second form of privatisation refers to the diversification of sources of funding in public higher education provision through an increase in private (outsourced) components and private funding within the public sector. On the whole, privatising of functions in public universities is a form of cost-sharing and corporatisation in the operation and administration of institutions. These strategies result from lack of government ability to meet the costs, as well as withdrawal of state support in favour of market mechanisms, influenced by neoliberal ideologies (Olssen & Peters, 2005). It is the former – the growth and expansion of the private higher education sector, and its characteristics and contribution within dual-sector higher education provision – that is of particular relevance to this study.

2.1.2 Recognising private higher education

In South Africa, the title ‘university’ is restricted to public higher education institutions only, on the grounds of the scope and range of operations that include amongst others, research and community engagement. To the extent that private higher education institutions generally do not include these functions as part of their operation, they do not meet the criteria for recognition as a university according to the Higher Education Act (RSA, 1997) and are precluded from university status⁸. In addition to this nominal distinction, the Council on Higher Education (CHE)⁹ provides a simple differentiation between public and private higher education in South Africa based on funding and ownership/governance:

⁸ This is subject to amendment according to the Higher Education Amendment Act No. 9 of 2016 (RSA, 2017). The amendment proposes a distinction between three status titles for private higher education institutions, namely “university”, “university college” and “college” defined according to a prescribed set of criteria of scope and range of operations for each.

⁹ These definitions appeared on the FAQ page of the CHE website as the answer to the question “What is the difference between a public and private higher education provider?” I retrieved this information on 30

Public higher education providers are institutions that have been established and funded by the state through the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Public providers include universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities.

Private providers, on the other hand, are owned by private organisations or individuals. Although many of them offer the same qualifications as public providers, private provider institutions are mainly privately funded or sponsored and are generally not subsidised by the state (CHE, 2019).

On the whole, private higher education is identified according to five main criteria by which institutions, and by inference, the sector, is distinguished (Kruss, 2002, 2005; Jamshidi, Arasteh, NavehEbrahim, Zeinabadi, Rasmussen, 2012; Levy, 2009, 2010; Mabizela, 2007; Mohamedbhai, 2017; Tamrat, 2018; Tladi, 2010; Varghese, 2006). These criteria include:

- (i) *Funding*: this is mainly from private sources, including student fees, with no reliance on state funding.
- (ii) *Ownership*: institutions are privately-owned. Ownership can assume a variety of forms, including individual ownership or family-owned, partnerships, religious entity, non-governmental organisation (NGO) or non-profit organisation (NPO). Proprietary arrangements of private institutions established as business organisations might include sole or corporate ownership, closed corporation (CC), section 21 company, private limited company, or even public shareholding.
- (iii) *Governance*: private institutions are primarily accountable to the founding individual or institution, and are generally free from government or political involvement. Governance and control are mostly held within the institution itself.
- (iv) *Market function*: private institutions are flexible in their programme offering with a strong market focus, which includes niche and specialised vocational training, as well as alternative modes of delivery, including distance education and part-time options. It is this characteristic of the mission and

April 2019. Their updated website in 2020 reveals a blank FAQ page and there is no longer a search function on the website. Although the FAQ has been removed, the description remains legitimate and aligned to the definitions and criteria in the Higher Education Act.

identity of private institutions that has driven the public good versus private benefits debate of private higher education's contribution to society.

- (v) *Size*: private institutions are considerably smaller than public universities in terms of student enrolment, as well as campus space and number of sites. Campus sites do not incorporate the extent and infrastructure of public universities, and may even take the form of city centre office blocks. Institutions range from standalone single campus entities to the “multiversity” (CHE, 2018a, p. 4) which is structured in the form of a range of different subsidiary brands and different institutions across multiple sites.

The abovementioned criteria distinguish private institutions from public ones. They also differentiate private institutions from each other, based on many possible combinations of these criteria. This range of variable combinations is what characterises the diverse nature of the sector. Private higher education is also classified according to its profit motive, which includes for-profit and non-profit institutions. These types are not easily identifiable from one another and it would appear that the difference lies not necessarily in the pursuit of financial gain as such, but in the technicalities of profit distribution. In the case of for-profit institutions, profit accrues to shareholders, while in the case of non-profits, it is invested back into the institution. Although, the literature shows that the extent to which this is done by institutions, or measured by regulatory bodies, is not always evident (Levy, 2015; Mohamedbhai, 2017, Tamrat, 2018, 2019a). Worldwide, non-profit private higher education predominates, but for-profit institutions are on the rise, and are particularly evident in the growth of corporate ownership and acquisition of smaller non-profit institutions. Profiteering is perceived by some to be incompatible with the public good role of higher education, yet with increasing privatisation there is a narrowing gap between public and private higher education provision on their funding grounds. As a result, perceptions seem to be shifting towards evaluations of quality and accreditation, rather than profit distribution, as criteria of institutional validity (Mohamedbhai, 2017).

Notwithstanding the variations and diversity that characterise private higher education, the patterns of growth of the sector have shown particular trends and similarities in the types of institutions and sector formations (Altbach et al., 2009; Bjarnason et al., 2009; Jamshidi et al., 2012; Levy, 2008, 2009, 2010; Mabizela, 2007; Varghese, 2006).

2.1.3 Institutional types

Broadly speaking, three classic types of private higher education have been identified worldwide (Kruss, 2002; Levy, 2009, 2010; Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018). The types are based largely on their roles and motives. Each type differently shapes the nature and purpose of higher education in its specific national context, and plays a different part in the way they enable access to higher education. The different types include: (i) institutions based on religion, culture or group identity; (ii) elite and semi-elite institutions that are exclusive and carry high status; and (iii) non-elite, demand-absorbing institutions that provide for students otherwise excluded from the public system. These types are not immutable and there is internal differentiation in terms of the nature and characteristics of institutions within each category. Cutting across the types, are also differences of ownership and governance, funding, function and size, as was discussed in the previous section. Hence, institutional profiles are complex and multi-faceted. According to Levy (2010) a reasonably-sized private higher education sector is likely to include all three types. South Africa's private higher education sector is classified as small (Levy, 2018a) although there is evidence of all three types. I will describe each type briefly, with greater emphasis on the latter two types, which are included in the case study.

(i) Religious and cultural institutions

This type of institution is characterised by a particular faith, cultural or ethnic identity and accordingly serves a niche target market (Levy, 2008, 2009; Tamrat, 2018, 2019a; Varghese, 2006). These are predominantly small, non-profit organisations. In Africa, religious institutions are predominantly Christian or Muslim. In many countries, religion-affiliated institutions served as the precursor

to existing private higher education institutions, but this form of institution is showing signs of decline relative to the other types.

(ii) Elite and semi-elite institutions

Elite institutions are perceived to be synonymous with prestige and privilege. This type of private institution is typified by the Ivy League group of universities in America, some of which top the world university ranking lists¹⁰. According to Levy (2009) these institutions are defined by academic and intellectual leadership as much as the privilege of their target market. The more common presence worldwide is that of semi-elite private institutions, which sit between elite and non-elite, and are characterised as being above-average in their status and student selectivity (Levy, 2009). The most 'elite' private colleges in South Africa fall into this category, and two of the institutions included in this case study would be classified as semi-elite to elite.

Other characteristics of semi-elite institutions worldwide include their priority of high quality, practical teaching with smaller class size. These institutions offer niche, vocationally orientated programmes, and generally attract students of higher social class who can afford their high tuition fees. It is not unusual for these institutions to seek foreign ties and international recognition to enhance their image (Levy, 2009). These are generally commercially motivated business entities, with "a strong belief in the ability to offer a superior or more efficient product; the will to serve students and business; and the wish to support national development" (Levy, 2009, p. 16). These institutions provide access to students who may otherwise have enrolled at public universities, and who, in doing so, leave space at public university for others.

¹⁰ Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, Harvard University and Yale University, top the three different university ranking systems, i.e. Times Higher Education (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com>), QS (<https://www.topuniversities.com>) and Shanghai rankings (<http://www.shanghairanking.com>).

(iii) Non-elite institutions

This type forms the largest growth area in private higher education (Levy, 2009). As demand for higher education has grown, non-elite institutions have enabled access particularly for non-traditional students who otherwise may not have enrolled in higher education. Like the semi-elites, these institutions are often vocationally focused, responding to workplace needs. One of the institutions included in this study falls into this category. In unregulated systems, this type opens the way for poor quality and rogue institutions, which discredit the type of institution and even the sector, despite quality provision by others (Levy, 2009).

This first section of the chapter has focused on defining and describing private higher education. Although there is no precise definition, the discussion provides a description of the general nature and characteristics of the sector positioned within the global system. The next section takes a closer and more specific look at the size and shape of the private higher education sector in South Africa.

2.2 Private higher education in South Africa

In South Africa, post-secondary education has a 200-year history and originated in the form of private colleges (Fehnel, 2006; Mabizela, 2002). Over time, many of the original colleges became public universities as the state took over the financial control and governance of institutions. This includes several of the existing public universities, including the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, currently the country's largest and top-ranked public universities (QS, 2020a, 2020c; Times Higher Education, 2019, 2020). The early private colleges were established by individuals and churches, their purpose being to provide good quality professional and vocational education and training. Evidently workplace preparation, together with elements of student mobility and internationalisation, have been present in the role and purpose of private higher education from the outset. Social, economic and political factors have continued to influence fluctuations in the expansion and contraction of the public and private higher education sectors over time (Mabizela, 2002).

In the mid-20th century, racial segregation in education was legislated (Fehnel, 2006; Mabizela, 2002). Universities were racially divided and this entrenched unequal structures from which higher education still struggles to free itself today. Under these conditions, private institutions provided skills training and post-secondary education to population groups that were being denied access to universities by the government. This led to high demand and a proliferation in the number of private providers. There were over 300 institutions, which served as a cheap alternative for post-secondary education. They operated without government interference, and there was little control over the quality of provision (CHE, 2016). These circumstances allowed unscrupulous providers to move in, laying the foundation for the negative reputation of poor quality delivery by private providers that continues today.

After 1994, one of the priorities of the democratic government was to restructure the education system. New regulations and policies for higher education prioritised access and equality, focused on redress and social transformation (CHE, 2016; DHET, 2001, 2013). In terms of the new legislation – the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997 – no private institution is permitted to offer higher education unless registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training, and offering accredited programmes (RSA, 1997). This led to a significant reduction in the number of registered private institutions, which were drawn in as part of a comprehensive national framework for post-secondary education (DHET, 2013). Now, all private institutions are registered with the DHET. The new framework draws clear distinctions between Higher Education, Further (vocational) Education, and Occupational Education as sub-frameworks on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). For purposes of clarification, this thesis is limited to the bounds of Higher Education (see Figure 25). Programmes need to be accredited by the CHE and registered by SAQA before they can be delivered (CHE, 2004). The regulatory framework comprises a stringent quality assurance mechanism in which institutional audits and programme re-accreditation are conducted by the CHE at regular intervals (approximately three-year cycles). These processes have enhanced the

credibility of the sector by reducing illegal operators and ensuring private provision meets stipulated quality standards (CHE, 2018a).

Since the turn of the century, South African private higher education has followed trends in global growth of the sector, albeit as a late arrival on the scene (Levy, 2007, 2010). Higher education in South Africa is seen as a driver not only of economic development but also part of the national plan for social and human development (National Planning Commission, 2012). Originally, inclusion of the sector was considered to be “potentially damaging” and “unfair” competition with public higher education institutions (DHET, 2001, p. 13; see also Mapesela, 2002) but it now contributes much needed diversity in the higher education sector as part of a dual-sector system (CHE, 2018a; Levy, 2018a). Over time it has been challenging to get an accurate picture of private higher education in the country due to the paucity of empirical data coming out of the sector. It was only as recent as 2014 that the DHET statistical reports first included data on the private higher education sector¹¹, and this comprised merely a single page with enrolment statistics (DHET, 2014). However, in each subsequent year the reporting has become more substantial, and now incorporates a much more extended and detailed breakdown of the enrolment statistics, as well as data on graduates and staffing (DHET, 2019a).

2.2.1 The current landscape

In South Africa, private higher education now comprises just over 15% of the higher education sector (DHET, 2019a, p. 5). Although this share is proportionately small, the actual numbers are not insignificant as it includes 133 registered providers (DHET, 2019b) and enrolment of over 185 000 students (DHET, 2019a). Besides the increase in the size of the sector within the last decade, it is particularly the *rate of growth* that is notable. The enrolment increase in private higher education between 2010 and 2017 was 104%, while public university enrolment grew by 16% (a comparative synopsis of the two sectors is

¹¹ This data was the unaudited enrolment figures for 2010, 2011 and 2012 submitted by private providers in the annual report to the DHET.

provided in Table 2 later in this section). This statistic is indicative of a massive surge of students towards private higher education, and the DHET (2013) anticipates an enrolment of 500 000 students in the private sector by 2030.

The programmes offered by private institutions span the higher education, TVET and occupational qualifications frameworks (DHET, 2018). Many private higher education institutions differentiate themselves by offering niche vocational programmes in fields such as theology, beauty and hospitality, and there is a spread across a wide range of fields. More than half the students (62%) in private higher education, are enrolled for qualifications in Business, Commerce and Management (CHE, 2018a, p. 2; DHET, 2019a, p. 27) and Figure 1 shows the proportional enrolments reported by field of study (recorded in 2017 and reported in 2019). Media qualifications would fall into the Communication Studies and/or Culture and Arts fields, which together comprise 10% of private higher education enrolments.

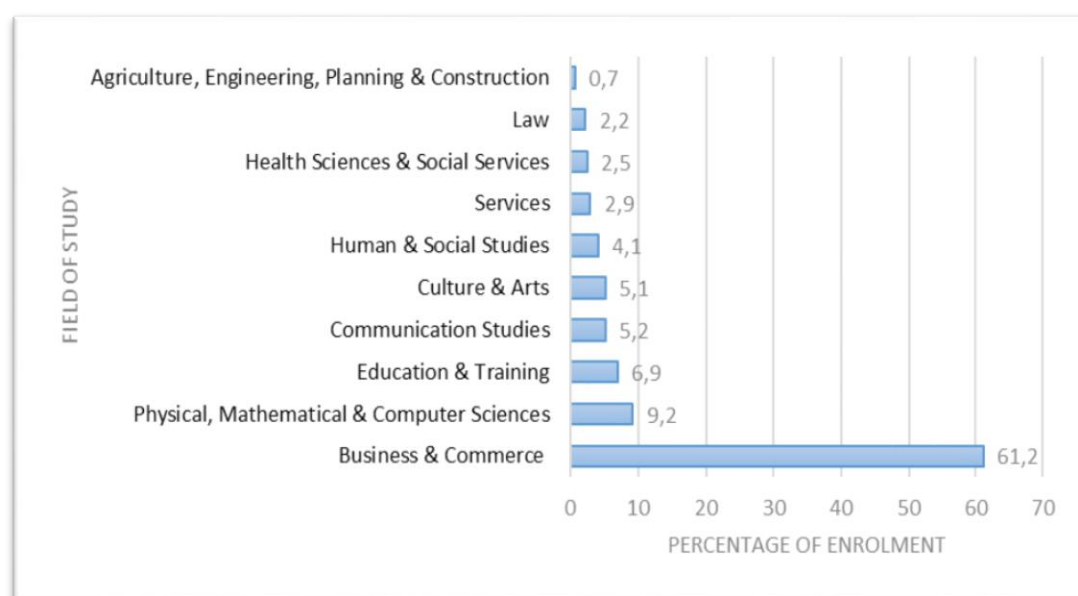


Figure 1: Private higher education enrolment by NQF field (Source: DHET, 2019a, p. 27)

The diversity of providers is not only typified in different programme offerings but also fee structures, according to institutional type. The costs of running institutions are considerable (Heher Commission, 2017), and private institutions

receive no subsidies, grants or allowances from the state, and therefore are dependent on the income they receive from student fees. Students enrolled at private institutions are not eligible for financial support from the government student financial aid scheme (NSFAS), and need to find their own means to afford their payments. The fees for private higher education vary considerably between institutions, and range from about R95 000 per annum at elite institutions to approximately R28 000 per annum for less elite institutions. At the lower and mid-range, private institution fees are comparable with those charged at public universities. See Appendix B for a comparative table of the annual fee structure for a Graphic Design programme at private and public institutions, as applicable for first-year of study in 2020. Fees also vary according to the study programme. Non-profit institutions aim to be affordable and facilitate access to higher education for more students. Fees at such institutions may be lower than those at public institutions (CHE, 2018a; Heher Commission, 2017). But student fees are not necessarily indicative of whether an institution operates for profit or not. Also, as the table in Appendix B shows, there are many 'hidden' costs charged by some institutions in addition to the upfront tuition fees, which can add considerably to the total fee structure for the year. The diversity of the sector is represented in the different institutions and sites I selected for the study. Descriptions of these specific institutions is provided in Chapter 5 when I present the case study (see section 5.2.1).

A comparative perspective of the private and public higher education sectors in South Africa is provided in a synopsis in Table 2 below. Based on the annual statistics provided by DHET (2019a, 2019b) I have included a selection of information relevant to this study.

Table 2: A synopsis of South African higher education

	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	TOTAL
Title / Status	College / Private HE institution (PHEI)	University	
No. of institutions	100 registered + 33 provisional reg.	26 (incl. 6 Univ of Tech)	159
Registration	DHET registration & prog accreditation Accreditation of progs with international bodies (optional)	DHET registration & prog accreditation	
Enrolments 2017	185 046	1 036 984	1 222 030
YoY enrolment growth (2016-2017)	17 638 (10% growth) [22% of tot growth]	61 147 (6% growth) [78% of tot growth]	78 785 (6%)
Enrolment growth (2010-2017)	94 279 (103.9% increase)	144 048 (16% increase)	238 327
Sector ratio 2017	15% (9% in 2010)	85% (91% in 2010)	100%
SA students by population group 2017	African – 67% Coloured – 8% Indian/Asian – 7% White – 17.8%	African – 73.7% Coloured – 6.2% Indian/Asian – 4.8% White – 14.3%	
Foreign students 2017	16 387 (8.9% of enrolment)	67 434 (6.5% of enrolment)	83 821 (6.9%)
Gender ratio 2017 (% of enrolment)	58 (F) : 42 (M)	58 (F) : 42 (M)	
Graduates 2017	35 922 (19.4% of enrolment)	210 931 (20% of enrolment)	246 853
Programme / field of enrolment	Bus, Comm & Man - 61% Phys, Math, Comp, Life Sciences - 9.2% Ed - 6.9% Comm Stud & Lang - 5% Cult & Art - 5% Hum & Soc. Stud - 4%	SET - 29.9% Bus Man - 26.9% Hum - 24.4% Ed - 18.8%	
Qualification enrolment	UG (cert/dip) - 58.7% UG (deg) – 34.5% Hons – 2.7% Masters – 4% Doctoral – 0.2%	UG (cert/dip) - 26.7% UG (deg) – 53.6% Hons – 9.8% Masters – 5.7% Doctoral – 2.2%	
Qualification graduates	UG (cert/dip) - 55.7% UG (deg) – 31.6% Hons – 6.7% Masters – 5.9% Doctoral – 0.1%	UG (cert/dip) – 26.3% UG (deg) – 45.6% Hons – 20.6% Masters – 6.1% Doctoral – 1.4%	
Academic/Research staff	7 616 (4 210 full-time; 3 406 part-time)	19 631 (permanent)	
Media programmes	±30 registered providers that offer accredited professional & vocational programmes predominantly at undergraduate level (HC, Dip, Deg, Hons) in the broad field of Media.	Range of professional & academic programmes offered at undergraduate to post-graduate level (Dip, Deg, Hons, Masters & Doc)	

Sources: DHET (2019a; 2019b)

Notwithstanding the difference in enrolment numbers between the public and private sectors, the demographic profile is very similar. There is a slightly lower percentage of African students at private institutions (67% versus 72%) with a marginally higher percentage of other ethnic groups, and foreign students. The gender ratio and proportion of enrolment to graduate in 2017 are virtually identical between the sectors. Also, of relevance to this study, is the difference between enrolments for degree and diploma programmes. Enrolments for certificates and diplomas are higher at private institutions, with the Bachelor's degree and post-graduate programmes being more popular at public universities. This differentiation between the sectors is diminishing.

Public universities face the dilemma of lack of capacity against growing demand. At the start of the 2020 academic year, Wits University received 68 752 first-year applications, with the capacity to absorb 4 900 students (Magubane & Pillay, 2020). Such demand, in conjunction with constraints on state finances, has led government to advise universities not to over-enrol students in order to ensure their infrastructure, resources and quality of teaching are not overwhelmed (Mlamla, 2020). Funding and capacity challenges at universities also impact on throughput, staff ratio, infrastructure maintenance, research, and overall quality of provision and transformation (Heher Commission, 2017). The private sector, despite being relatively small, plays a role in expanding access to higher education, and supplementing the lack of capacity within public institutions.

2.2.2 Investment and expansion

As is characteristic of the sector worldwide, in South Africa, private higher education is a heterogeneous sector. There is wide variation in terms of the type and nature of institutions, their sizes, fee structures, as well as the fields of knowledge of the programmes and qualifications offered. The majority of private providers are small, single campus institutions. In the last couple of years, however, moves have been made by large private investment corporations to acquire individual institutions, forming private education groups (Bizcommunity, 2018; CHE, 2018a; Coetzee, 2019; eNCA, 2018). The largest and most

established of these is ADvTech, and more recently Stadio Holdings has joined the market with plans to incorporate a range of brands structured into a “multiversity” (eNCA, 2018; Milpark Education, 2018). Referring back to the criteria that identify different forms of private providers (section 2.1.2), these acquisitions significantly alter the funding, ownership, governance, market function and size of institutions through the collective structures.

The structure of a holding company brings a range of different small institutions together under one business and organisational umbrella. From a governance and funding perspective, a centralised system can enhance the efficiency of institutions. This structure expands the diversity of the fields of study on offer by an organisation, as well as the target market of students who are able to access the different brands. Within a holding company there are elite institutions as well as lower-fee institutions. The argument is made that these organisations are assisting to expand the capacity of the system to meet the demand for higher education in the country (Barron, 2016). They also cater for a range of socio-economic groups. The elite institutions target students from wealthy families who might otherwise study overseas. At the other end of the scale, the lower-fee institutions provide opportunities for access to students from lower socio-economic groups, including students from the ‘missing middle’, who are not eligible for NSFAS funding and unable to pay fees at public universities¹² (CHE, 2018a).

The infiltration of corporate business into education is an explicit realisation of the commercialisation and commodification of higher education. Education is the commodity that is being traded on the stock exchange, and the acquisition of institutions is made by way of strategic investment decisions (Barron, 2016; Coetzee, 2019; Strydom, 2016). In some instances, this includes extending investment into other Southern African countries (CHE, 2018a). From the

¹² The ‘missing middle’ describes working-class students whose annual household income is above the R350 000 minimum to qualify for financial aid for university, yet insufficient to afford the fees. Private higher education, particularly low-fee institutions are seen as a feasible option for these students (Heher Commission, 2017).

educational perspective, the growth of this dimension of the sector is a response to the demand for higher education with the dual focus of enabling access and preparing graduates for jobs (Barron, 2016).

The chapter so far has largely described what private higher education is, and what the sector in South Africa looks like. As the size and presence of the sector has grown, so has its stature. Less often viewed as a threat to the public sector¹³, the discussion has advanced to understanding the role private higher education can and does play in development.

2.3 Private higher education: a role in development

As the wave of growth in private higher education has swept across the globe, private higher education has shown to be “much more a developing than developed world phenomenon” (Levy, 2018a, p. 15; see also Reisz & Stock, 2012). Comparatively, expansion has been greatest in developing countries and is concentrated in these regions, which now hold 80% of global private higher education (Levy, 2018a, p. 11). The largest concentration of private higher education is in Asia¹⁴ and Latin America. In these regions, very high private enrolments have led to higher education systems that are dominated by a mass private sector and restricted public sector (Geiger, 1988). In contrast, despite the growth, Africa’s private higher education sector is relatively small, at about 18% (Levy, 2018a, p. 6). In South Africa, as in many other African and developing countries, the national higher education function is fulfilled predominantly by the public sector, with a peripheral private sector (Geiger, 1988) comprising a small share of only around 15% of the total higher education enrolment (DHET, 2019a,

¹³ It is possible that with increasing privatisation of public universities, private higher education is once again seen as threatening competition for the public sector. Barron (2016, p. 1) reports that Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande decried private colleges as they “would lead to an increase in the cost of higher education and academics being poached from the public sector as well as a loss of the financial contribution of wealthy students to public universities”.

¹⁴ PROPHE’s categorisation of developing regions includes Africa, the Arab region, Latin America and Asia. In the case of Asia, Levy (2018, p. 11) acknowledges the “misplacement” of Japan and South Korea, which are developed countries in a developing region. They are the only two developed countries with majority private higher education shares.

p. 7; see also Levy, 2007, 2018a). Despite these two contrasting structural patterns (between Asia and Latin America, and Africa) the significance of such growth in developing regions is that it has taken place outside of governments' plans, driven by demand by populations for higher education and social mobility (Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018).

2.3.1 Expanding opportunities and options

Growth in private higher education is broadly a response to the demand for “more, better or different” higher education (Kruss, 2002, p. 15) as the capacity of public institutional supply is under increasing pressure (Jamshidi et al., 2012; Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018). Private higher education, therefore, has a role in development in the extent to which private institutions are able to create opportunities for access, vocational training, and social mobility for students.

At a macro-level, the growth of private higher education has been spurred on by dominant neoliberal influences on global economies that have similarly affected higher education systems generally. The deregulation and privatisation of state provision has coincided with escalating demand for higher education. In African countries, the strain on public finance and inability to cater for the demand led to programmes of structural reform. Hence, in return for funding by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), countries became further subjected to the domination of global politics and international bodies that enforced privatisation and directed development (Buckner, 2017; Levy, 2007; Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018; Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Varghese, 2006). Buckner argues that the “supranational” pressure (2017, p. 297) has played a role in facilitating and legitimating the model of private higher education for adoption at the national level – albeit also as a coercive mechanism when linked to financial lending practices. So it was that declining public sector provision allowed space for private initiatives to move in and serve a demand-absorbing function, not only to cater for a growing population but also to promote national development. As such, the exponential growth in the private sector has been a response to development, and is a means for further development (Jamshidi et al., 2012; Tsegaye, 2015).

Within higher education systems in SSA, private higher education supplements public provision, and increases access to meet demand (Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018). Private higher education not only supplements, but also complements public provision (Bjarnason et al., 2009; Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018). Beyond access, private higher education fills gaps through offering a variety of different options that are not available at public institutions, such as distance education, part-time study, and vocational programmes. These options expand the range of choice for students. This means that rather than the sectors being in competition with each other, there is market segmentation through differential offerings (Kwiek, 2018; Levy & Zumeta, 2011). Private higher education is not always a default option, but might be chosen as a preference over a public institution. Such choice may come in response to the deficiencies in public provision, where private institutions are seen to provide increased opportunities for participation by women, both as students and staff, and a safer, more secure environment (Onsongo, 2007; Tamrat, 2018). However, the sector also faces significant challenges (Morley, 2014; Tamrat, 2018). With a conservative estimate of 75 million students in private higher education worldwide, and the ongoing escalation in demand for higher education, the days of the monopoly of public institutions is a thing of the past (Levy, 2018b, 2019, p. 6). Tamrat (2018) cautions that private institutions ought to take responsibility for ensuring their legitimacy so that the sector is able to respond to institutional, national and continental concerns for economic development.

In South Africa, as in much of the continent, private higher education predominantly takes the form of non-elite institutions. Where the public sector lacks capacity, private institutions absorb the overflow and enable more students to have the opportunity of access to higher education. Although the private sector remains peripheral, it has significance, as, according to Levy: “In this setting most students are not choosing their institutions over other institutions as much as choosing them over nothing” (2009, p. 18). In a demand-absorbing capacity, this type of institution has become a predominant avenue of access for a more diverse

range of students, including non-traditional students such as mature students, females, and those who are unable to afford the fees of elite private colleges.

2.3.2 Opportunities and challenges for private higher education

Widened participation and private funding have incentivised investment in higher education and grown graduate numbers so that higher education in Africa is producing more graduates than there are jobs (Tamrat, 2019b). The model of marketised higher education is based on economic markets of developed countries, rather than being aligned to the capacity-building needs in African countries. Tsegaye (2015) argues that private higher education has been given insufficient attention when it comes to high-level African development policies and strategies, and has a far greater role to play.

The advantages that private higher education can offer have been mentioned above. Notwithstanding the positive features and potential value of private higher education, the sector has some significant challenges that generally speak to the reputation of the sector. These challenges include issues of perception and legitimacy, funding, quality and regulation, particularly when it comes to for-profit institutions (Tamrat, 2018, 2019a). As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the scarcity of consistent and reliable information about the sector has led to generalised perceptions, and provided little grounds to either challenge stereotyping or establish legitimacy. Throughout Africa, questions of quality of provision hang over private higher education (Akplu, 2016; Ishengoma, 2007; Levy, 2007; Mabizela, 2007; Tamrat, 2018, 2020; Varghese, 2006). Quality issues arise as a result of lack of regulation of institutions or quality assurance of programmes, and teaching and learning. In South Africa, private higher education is now highly regulated with stringent quality assurance and accreditation processes in place (CHE, 2004; 2018a; 2018b). These processes go some way to enhance the legal and professional legitimacy of the sector and of institutions, but do not necessarily alter the market legitimacy or assure the development of quality graduate outcomes in the labour market (Cosser, 2002).

As a strategy to enhance their reputation and market legitimacy, private higher education institutions establish relationships with industry, which they also use to boost graduate employment opportunities. Quality of provision is seen to lie in responding to market indicators, and in the employment outcomes of graduates. Cosser states: “Quality, in this context [private higher education], is not a matter of perception but a measure of the socio-economic value which its cultivation adds to society (2002, p. 120). However, in this thesis I challenge the human capital logic, or a simplified correlation between market-orientated education, employment outcomes and quality of provision. Based on this syllogism one could deduce that if private institutions provide good quality work-integrated learning then access to private higher education in itself assumes employability. This is a logic that prompts enrolment, but does not guarantee employment. As Mabizela points out, the challenge for governments and for private institutions is to ensure that the growth of private higher education that has widened access – whether to semi-elite or non-elite higher education provision, and in for-profit or non-profit institutions – enables equitable outcomes and ensures the development of the sector is “not left to the vagaries of the market but planned with set purposes” (2007, p. 35).

2.3.3 Opportunities for graduate employability

When it comes to employability, many private higher education institutions differentiate themselves by offering niche vocational programmes that are employment-focused and involve work-integrated learning pedagogical practices (Kraak, 2002; Kruss, 2002). Vocational training traditionally fell outside the ambit of higher education (Mabizela, 2002; Kraak, 2002). However, in the current context employability has become a focus of higher education, and private institutions are well-placed to tap into this market. Private institutions are by nature able to be more flexible and efficient than public institutions (Bjarnason et al., 2009). Their smaller size, independent governance and less bureaucratic administrative procedures enable more nimble decision-making and action. Consequently, they readily adapt their offering to make themselves more relevant. As such, private institutions have the advantage of being able to add

new market-related programmes to their offering, adopt and train for new technologies, and provide alternative, more flexible modes of delivery (CHE, 2018a). Private providers, as independent institutions, also build relationships and work co-operatively with other institutions, including forming alliances and partnerships with professional bodies in responding to labour market needs and opportunities (Bjarnason et al., 2009; Govender & Taylor, 2015; Tamrat, 2019b).

Growing numbers of students are seeking higher education qualifications in the hope of gaining a competitive edge in the job market (Halliday, 2016). As capacity in public institutions is constrained, private institutions increasingly become a feasible alternative for school-leavers. Also, private institutions might be the only option for those students who are unable to meet the entrance criteria for public universities. Studies worldwide have found that amongst the multitude of reasons students choose to attend private higher education, improved employment prospects is consistently amongst the top on the list of priorities (Baliyan, 2016; Bezuidenhout, De Jager & Naidoo, 2013; Kruss, 2007; Shah, Nair & Bennett, 2013; Sojkin, Bartkowiak & Skuza, 2012; Tavares, 2017; Zain, Jan & Ibrahim, 2013). The ability of an institution to produce employable graduates is often perceived as an indicator of institutional quality and success. From this perspective, the institution's reputation becomes a significant factor in students' enrolment choice (Loo, Lim, Ng & Tiong, 2017).

Privatisation and competition for places at institutions have increasingly commodified higher education. This has turned its provision into a market function, and transformed students into consumers (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009; Naidoo, Shankar & Veer, 2011; Nixon, Scullion & Hearn, 2018). Institutions market themselves as brands (Stephenson, Heckert & Yerger, 2016) and employability has become part of the marketing strategy. For students, the marketing of employability plays a role in influencing the choice of institution and selection of study programme, as students and institutions seek to ensure their positional advantage in a competitive labour market. As consumers, students expect that private institutions will enhance their employment chances by creating

links into the world of work (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014; Van Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, 2014). Institutions attempt to link graduates into jobs, making use of high graduate employment rates to give the institution positional advantage over others in the competitive business of higher education as the demand for private higher education rises (Halliday, 2016). However, there is not a great deal of empirical evidence on the extent to which this is achieved by private institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a scope of the landscape of private higher education, tracing its emergence within global higher education systems, and its related position in SSA and South African higher education. Although distinct from public sector provision, the two sectors are closely inter-linked. It is the dynamics of the public sector in response to economic and political forces that has fuelled the growth of the private sector, and continues to shape private provision. Private higher education is notable by its heterogeneity, from sectoral to institutional level and across different contexts. This, together with its ability to adapt to meet market needs, enables the sector to play a significant role in enabling and enhancing access to higher education for a diverse range of students, and including those who may otherwise have been excluded. Private institutions, functioning as business organisations have become an important mechanism for achieving market ends in a marketised system, and they measure their own success that way (Judson & Taylor, 2014). However, they are not only businesses, they are education institutions too. Africa provides a stark example that producing more and more graduates does not necessarily add value to national development or to enhancing individual lives if graduates' skills and knowledge are not aligned with the labour market where they can be productively employed (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2019; Mohamedbhai, 2015). Nafukho stresses the importance of higher education being able to produce a workforce committed to "learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to earn, and learning how to learn" (2020, p. 2). As technology changes the world of work, traditional routes to employment have also changed, and so too ought institutions to change

the way graduates are prepared for the world of work. The purpose of higher education has shifted from access, to success, and now to preparing for the complexities of the future of work. Deegan and Martin state: “As the future of work unfolds, what makes us human is what will make us employable” (2018, p. 7). Employability, therefore, requires a new focus that is human-centred.

This chapter sets the contextual scene for the review of the literatures on employability. In the next chapter I discuss the ways in which employability is conceptualised and discursively framed, which shapes both what private higher education does and the way in which graduates are positioned in the labour market.

CHAPTER 3

Graduate employability and higher education

Introduction

The previous chapter set the contextual scene of private higher education as the setting for the study. I now turn to considering graduate employability in higher education. Graduates are positioned at the intersection of the higher education supply-side and the labour market demand-side, and we need to understand the way in which higher education processes and labour market demands shape employability and employment outcomes for different graduates. Graduate employability, as an outcome of higher education, directly affects equitable social mobility and the quality of people's lives.

In this chapter, I explore the construct of employability, its meaning and the various ways in which it is understood and applied in relation to higher education and (human) development. I start conceptually, and the first section includes a synopsis of ways in which employability is defined and understood. This frames employability in the context of global processes and policies that have come to dictate the purpose and function of higher education in society. The next section discusses employability in the context of higher education. I present the mainstream debates that are directing higher education processes and outcomes globally. While higher education enhances employment opportunities for graduates, the possibilities it offers are juxtaposed by pitfalls so that the extent to which these are realised in the labour market is not equitable for all graduates. Employability is also shaped by local contexts. In the third section, I consider the realities of employability in the labour market, specifically in South Africa, and in the creative industries. The final section includes a discussion of the studies that have been done on graduate employment in South Africa. This forms the basis for critical reflection on a normative approach to graduate employability that

contributes to higher education's key objectives of transformation and social justice in the country.

3.1 Conceptualising employability

Employability is an expansive, inter-disciplinary topic covered by a rapidly growing body of conceptual and empirical literatures. Its association in the context of higher education is relatively recent, having emerged in the late-1990s following the release of the Dearing Report (1997) on higher education in the UK. This report asserted that the primary responsibility of higher education is to prepare students for the world of work, and explicitly called for the development of high level transferable skills to ensure national economic success (Dearing, 1997). Since the turn of the century, employability has become core to debates about the function and purpose of higher education in society. Worldwide, the notion of employability has become increasingly significant in higher education as a driver of policy frameworks that structure the pedagogy, curriculum content, as well as graduate outcomes of institutions. Employability can be seen to bridge higher education with schooling on the one hand, and the job market on the other, shaping students' career trajectories into and out of higher education. Notwithstanding the existing prevalence and centrality of employability in higher education, there is inconsistency in how it is understood and implemented in practice.

3.1.1 Employability defined

Employability is a complex and multifaceted construct (Chetty, 2012; Knight, 2001; Small, Shacklock & Marchant, 2018; Tomlinson, 2012, 2017b; Williams, Dodd, Steele & Randall, 2016). It is described by Knight (2001, p. 94) as a "chameleon concept" as its meaning and impact are variable between different national and institutional contexts. The concept is related to, but not synonymous with, employment. Conceptualisations have evolved over time as careers and models of employment have changed, resulting in various interpretations of its

meaning when applied in the context of higher education (Clarke, 2018; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Gibbs, 2000; Harvey, 2000, 2001; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Holmes, 2001, 2013; Lees, 2002; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2002; McQuaid, Green & Danson, 2005; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Teichler, 2002; Tomlinson, 2012, 2017b; Williams et al., 2016).

A widely accepted definition is that of Yorke, who defines employability as:

a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (2006, p. 8).

Accordingly, employability is considered to be an individual achievement that is embodied in a graduate as a combination of innate characteristics and personal competence. Implicit in Yorke's (2006) definition is the expectation that higher education qualifications will set graduates apart from non-graduates in gaining employment and reaping economic benefits. While the multi-faceted nature of employability might make employment prospects and economic benefits "more likely" for graduates (Yorke, 2006, p. 8; see also Borat, Cassim & Tseng, 2016; Maslen, 2019), higher education institutions are not able to control labour market conditions, and neither employment nor success can be delivered as a guaranteed outcome for graduates. To draw a direct link between learning and the labour market as a "two-sided equation" is simplistic (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 4). In reality, there are many factors that influence whether a graduate finds and gains employment relative to other job-seekers in a competitive market of supply and demand (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay 2005). Moreover, conflating employability with employment is to confuse the means and ends, the processes and the outcomes of education. Employability is not a static checklist of attributes linked to a job, but dynamic and ongoing learning achievements that contribute to a graduate's propensity to find work and negotiate his/her way in the labour market (Harvey, 2001; Hinchliffe, 2013; Holmes, 2001, 2013; Knight & Yorke, 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay 2005).

Positioning employability as an outcome of higher education raises questions of *how* it ought to be measured, and *what* it measures (Harvey, 2001; Støren & Aamodt, 2010). Employability is generally measured by means of graduate tracer studies or destination surveys that track graduates' transition into the labour market. In instances, these procedures are a formal requirement of regulatory processes for institutions. The CHE (2004, p. 24) describes such measures as "impact studies", indicative that they serve as an index of institutional performance rather than graduate competence. Yet, quantitative measures of how many graduates have jobs provides a static snapshot of a situation in a particular context at a particular time, and reduces employability to employment outcomes.

As a measure of higher education outcomes, the personal achievement of employability is sometimes referred to in terms of *employability skills* (Cranmer, 2006; Lees, 2002; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Suleman, 2018) or *graduate attributes* (Barrie, 2006, 2007; Bozalek, 2013; Bridgstock, 2009; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Osmani, Weerakkody, Hindi, Al-Esmail, Eldabi, Kapoor & Irani, 2015¹⁵). Theoretically, notions of skills and attributes are more suitable indicators of graduate performance and competence than job destinations. However, employability is a context-specific notion, therefore such generic, decontextualised terms do not necessarily measure whether employability is achieved or not (Chetty, 2012; Suleman, 2016). In order for graduates' skills and their attributes to be meaningful as indicators of employability, they ought to be relevant to the context in which they apply, and measured accordingly (Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2018; Schull, King, Hamood & Feakes, 2020). And yet, to reduce employability to practical competence at the end-point of multiple years of higher education, or the static measure of a qualification that determines social positioning, is to diminish the depth and complexity of the educational process. Nor does it explain why skilled graduates are unemployed (Holmes, 2001, 2013). In addition to individual characteristics, employability also needs to take into account external factors and personal

¹⁵ These authors identify employability skills as graduate attributes.

circumstances (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Accordingly, some scholars argue for conceptualising employability as the development of *graduate identity* (Hinchliffe, 2013; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2001, 2013; Jackson, 2016). This is a broader approach, which recognises employability as a dynamic, interactive process that evolves over time and in different spaces with different people, rather than only being represented by the first job a graduate gets. In addition to developing what graduates are able to do, employability contributes to who graduates are and what/who they are able to become.

3.1.2 Employability as a function of higher education

The preparation of graduates for the labour market is not a new function of higher education. In the nineteenth century, with industrialisation, universities played a role in preparing an elite body of young people for professional and leadership positions in society and in the workplace (Altbach, 1991; Castells, 2017; Delanty, 2003; Tomlinson, 2012). Graduates left university with broad knowledge and skills which became 'customised' in the workplace. The implications of this were twofold. Firstly, graduates generally transitioned seamlessly from university into professional and managerial jobs, and secondly, the employer took on the responsibility for training graduates (as employees) who developed a career for life. In the post-industrial society of the late 20th century, the professions gave way to service industries, marking a shift towards a knowledge society – or more specifically, an information society¹⁶. Delanty states: "...the information society is a society in which new kinds of politics emerge which have knowledge as their key feature" (2003, p. 73). In the 21st century, as knowledge in the form of information and technology has become central to contemporary society, so has higher education, which is seen as important for its role in producing knowledge workers (Altbach et al., 2009; Castells, 2017; Delanty, 2001; Tomlinson, 2012).

¹⁶ Delanty (2003) notes that the quest for knowledge has shaped society since the Enlightenment. Hence, the knowledge society is centuries old. What has changed over time is the type of knowledge society that has emerged – from the Enlightenment's general knowledge, to the specific and useful knowledge of the professional society, and the current era of information and the application of knowledge in technologies.

Technology has infiltrated the world socially and economically, and developments in ICT are creating new markets, increasing competition and transforming the way in which business is conducted. Knowledge and information have become the global currency (Coates & Warwick, 1999; Stiglitz, 1999). A knowledge-driven economy is defined as:

an economy in which the generation and the exploitation of knowledge have come to play the predominant part in the creation of wealth. It is not simply about pushing back the frontiers of knowledge; it is also about the more effective use and exploitation of all types of knowledge in all manner of economic activity (Coates & Warwick, 1999, p. 12).

This economy is characterised by competition for ideas, knowledge and skills, so that human and intellectual capital have become the assets that generate comparative advantage and wealth (Becker, 1993; Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2008). Consequently higher education, as the mechanism of commodity production, has been drawn into a “triple helix” (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995, p. 1) for policy frameworks that engage university-industry-government relations. Higher education, whose core functions include the production, transfer and dissemination of new and existing knowledge, is seen to play a key role in nations’ development and global competitiveness (Göransson & Brandenius, 2011; Reddy, 2011). Increased importance is placed on the economic value and labour market returns of graduates in a competitive, high-skilled knowledge economy. All of which has foregrounded the instrumental role of higher education and its capacity to prepare graduates for the labour market within education and economic policy frameworks.

The underlying assumptions of this approach lie in human capital theory (Becker, 1962; Mincer, 1958; Schultz, 1961) and capitalist notions of commodity production and exchange (Giddens, 1971). As such, human labour is a valuable commodity, and education is understood to be an investment that increases a person’s productivity and makes him/her more employable. In this way, higher education is valued for its contribution to, and impact on the economy through the production of human capital that assumes a return on investment (Becker, 1962; Psacharopoulos, 1994; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004). From this perspective, in which primacy is given to productivity and economic goals as the

source of well-being, the preparation of graduates for employment has become a central purpose of higher education. Within this discourse, employability is conflated with employment, and institutions and individuals are the means of production driven by the needs of the labour market.

On a global level, the role of higher education in society has shifted as a result of a complex combination of social, economic and political factors that have put demands on higher education to adjust to the changing needs of society and the economy (Brown et al., 2008). In the 21st century, these changes have predominantly been driven by developments in technologies and globalisation that have created a global knowledge network and integrated economy, significantly influencing the role and position of higher education in society (Altbach et al., 2009).

3.1.3 The influence of neoliberalism on higher education outcomes

Neoliberalism is a globally dominant ideology closely tied to capitalist market systems that has become specifically entrenched in the political economy of education (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Jones, 2013; Klees, 2008, 2017; Lakes & Carter, 2011; Lynch, 2006; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Torres, 2013; Torres & Jones, 2013a, 2013b). Harvey defines neoliberalism as:

...a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (2005, p. 2).

Broadly speaking, neoliberalism espouses principles for development based on market solutions rather than on state interventions. These ideological principles – in the context of globalisation, capitalist markets and the knowledge society – have reinforced the value of knowledge in driving the economy, and hence knowledge production in higher education as a market function. They have pushed educational reform towards market-driven policies of efficiency and accountability, international competitiveness and privatisation. Neoliberal politics casts a particular role for the state in relation to the market, and hence with higher education (Harvey, 2005; Olssen & Peters, 2005). In principle, the state is

responsible for creating the necessary conditions for appropriate market operations but beyond that, not to intervene. The consequence has been the increasing commodification of higher education which is sold as a market commodity to students (Lynch, 2006; Niadoo, Shankar & Veer, 2011; Tilak, 2008). These principles weave together with human capital discourse to position higher education as the means for student-consumers to invest in themselves and enhance their market value, while also responding to the demands of employers and stimulating economic growth for the nation. Hence, employability has been the framework by which economic doctrine has legitimised its place in higher education policy (Bonal, 2003; Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

The effects of neoliberal ideologies in policies account for the privatisation of and in higher education. These effects include, amongst other processes, the cutting back on education funding and limited expenditure on the ongoing operational costs of institutions. These costs are handed over to be carried by students in the form of tuition and other fees¹⁷. In addition, the capacity of state expenditure that is allocated for higher education is strained by the ever-increasing demands made by the expansive growth of the sector, and the burden it places on operations and infrastructure. Growth of higher education as a market industry is evident in the increasing use of private companies within public universities (Komljenovic, 2019). The changing dynamic between the state and higher education provision has raised much debate amongst scholars on the role the state plays in higher education provision for society (Hazelkorn, 2017; Marginson, 2013, 2016c; Morgan & White, 2014; Rizvi, 2016; Williams, J., 2016), and also on the role of higher education in society (Caplan, 2018; Marginson, 2007, 2011; Singh, 2014; Vally, 2007; Waghid, 2008; Walker, 2018; Williams, G., 2016). Privatisation also includes increasing numbers of private higher education providers together with the growth of the private sector (Jamshidi et al., 2012; Tilak, 1991). It is this dynamic that underpins the choice of this context for my study.

¹⁷ See Appendix B that shows the comparative table of fees for a year of study at different South African institutions.

Neoliberalism also espouses a specific conceptualisation of the individual, as economically self-interested, enterprising and competitive (Olssen & Peters, 2005). This discourse constructs students as rational economic consumers who shape themselves through higher education. The approach towards higher education is driven by the need to have a degree, which students purchase as a commodity and which generally serves instrumental ends in ensuring their employability and social mobility (Molesworth et al., 2009). They make demands of institutions based on their perceived “sovereignty” as the customer (Nixon et al., 2018, p. 928). This perception drives the study choices they make, and gives them an entitlement in their expectations of having their needs and satisfactions met – which includes pedagogical inputs and employment outcomes. Student-consumers’ engagement with institutions is a business transaction for which they seek value for money (Jones, Vigurs & Harris, 2020; Woodall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). The idea of a free-market economy and reduced state regulation embedded in neoliberalism gives the impression of consumers having freedom and choice. However, Boden and Nedeva (2010) side with Rose’s argument (1989, cited in Boden & Nedeva, p. 39) that this is merely an illusion as it is the market (rather than the individual) that controls the circumstances in which choices can be made, particularly in public services. Instead individuals are pitted in competition with each other, as each acts to maximise his/her own interests, creating a system of unequal outcomes (Kupfer, 2011; Lynch, 2006; Marginson, 2013). Tomlinson also cautions against getting caught up in the illusion. He states:

Whilst utopian visions of the ‘knowledge economy’ invokes images of self-empowered human agents enjoying an Aristotelian economic good life where they are free to choose who they wish to become, the new economic context also carries discernible challenges and risks (Tomlinson, 2017b, p. 5).

Neoliberal principles applied in higher education practice are purported to reduce inequalities, as investing in education and skills development is seen as a way to increase wages for individuals and stimulate economic growth for the nation. It is in this context that employability discourse in higher education has been promoted. However, it has not brought with it the liberating effect that was envisioned, and specifically not to the graduates for whom it was envisioned.

Thus, one of the objectives of this study is to challenge the discourse of employability framed by a neoliberal hegemony, and to argue for an alternative conceptualisation of employability that supports the transformative and social justice objectives of higher education.

This section has presented the basic construct of employability, including the political and economic ideologies surrounding the notion that have given it particular prevalence in contemporary higher education. The next section focuses on graduate employability discourse that dominates international higher education policy and practice, and the role of higher education in developing employment outcomes for graduates.

3.2 Employability and higher education outcomes

Based on the political and economic framing of employability in higher education policy, in practice this is essentially a case of graduate supply and demand in the interests of society and the economy (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Tomlinson, 2012). Higher education providers are on the supply-side, and the labour market on the demand-side, with graduates and employers as the beneficiaries (serving as proxies for society and the economy respectively). Returning to Yorke's definition, the dominant employability discourse is one focused on the development of (scarce) skills as the graduate achievements "which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (2006, p.8).

3.2.1 A dominant discourse: skills and economic development

A dominant discourse on graduate employability is grounded in the economic role of graduates. Graduates are seen as knowledge workers for the labour market, whose value lies in their use as a means of production. This discourse takes a utilitarian view on the purpose of higher education, to train graduates with the knowledge and skills required by employers – particularly competence in advanced technologies for the 21st century labour market. A direct link is drawn

between education, employment and economic growth, based on assumptions that “education leads to skills, skills lead to employment, employment leads to economic growth, economic growth creates jobs and is the way out of poverty and inequality” (Klees, 2017, p. 4). As such, the employability agenda in higher education is geared around teaching work-related skills and preparing graduates for employment. This discourse is legitimated because training graduates for high skilled jobs enhances economic productivity and fuels the nation’s competitive advantage on the one hand, while on the other hand, a degree enables graduates’ access to better jobs, higher salaries and is claimed to be key to a good life (DHET, 2013; Holborow, 2012; Tomlinson, 2012).

Central to the skills discourse is the notion of developing human capital. As mentioned in the previous section, this economic concept is strongly supported by neoliberal ideologies. Human capital is an embodied asset, such as knowledge, that provides a form of wealth (Becker, 1962, 1993; Schultz, 1961). Holborow states:

Human capital encapsulates this binding together of knowledge and expertise with their function and value in the economy. Knowledge is reclassified as an economic category and human endeavour linked to productivity: the greater its outcomes, the greater its value (2012, p. 101).

A person’s expenditure on education produces his/her human capital, and inasmuch as the knowledge and skills are sought and valued in the labour market, higher education ought to make graduates employable and bring a return on this investment. The return on the cost of higher education is expected in the form of a job, and specifically access to more skilled employment. Furthermore, the benefits of higher education ought to be realised in higher salaries for graduates than non-graduates. The investment should also have a compound effect, as job-specific training and experience add further value to the individual (Mincer, 1962).

Coupling higher education to the labour market has implications for graduates. These apply not only to the way they are positioned in the labour market, but also to how graduates frame their perceptions and expectations of higher education, and their employability. In response to the demands made by the knowledge-

driven economy for a high-skilled workforce has come a surge in demand for, and the massification of, higher education (Altbach et al., 2009; Trow, 1999). Worldwide, access and participation have been prioritised in higher education policy frameworks (UNESCO, 2016). Higher education is no longer the preserve of small cohorts of elite middle-class graduates who fit neatly into a professional market place. Widened access and high demand has led to large numbers of diverse graduates who invest in higher education as the means to secure a job and a better future (Brown, 2000; Tomlinson, 2012).

3.2.2 Educational means and ends

The inclusion of graduate employability in higher education policy is an attempt to bridge the gap between education and jobs. Government policy frameworks promote the skills agenda as part of their development strategies. The key objectives in South Africa's National Development Plan for 2030 include: "An expanding higher-education sector that can contribute to rising incomes, higher productivity and the shift to a more knowledge-intensive economy" (NPC, 2012, p. 48). Higher education is thus viewed as central to national development and employment goals. In general, this means the onus lies on higher education to ensure the country has the workforce to be globally competitive, while also ensuring livelihoods for the populace (Brown et al., 2008). Employers too make demands on higher education to produce work-ready graduates who are fit-for-purpose (Cai, 2013; Hesketh, 2000; Shah, Grebennikov & Nair, 2015; Sin & McGuigan, 2013). In accordance with those demands and policy objectives, higher education programmes and curricula have become increasingly vocationally orientated, designed to produce the type of graduates that employers want to recruit.

In the light of this, work-integrated learning (WIL) has gained popularity as a form of pedagogy concerned with the development of graduate attributes for employability (CHE, 2011; Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron, 2010; Jackson, 2015; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). It offers opportunities to integrate academic learning with workplace practice in a real or simulated learning environment,

whether in the classroom or in the workplace. The intention is to give students a more situated and 'real world' learning experience to enhance graduates' readiness for the world of work. Variants of WIL include workplace learning, internship, field work, job shadowing, service learning, practicum placements, project-based learning, and experiential learning, amongst others. The specific form(s) are determined by each institution in line with their mission and curriculum. WIL is considered to be an educational approach that serves the mutual benefit of students and workplaces (CHE, 2011; Govender & Taylor, 2015).

Pedagogically, benefits of WIL for graduates extend from academic learning, to skills development, career benefits and personal development (CHE, 2011). Academically, this learning takes place in the discipline-specific context of the study programme. The approach is less didactic and more participative, bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. Work skills are context-specific and the orientation is generally on the development of generic skills, also described as transferable or soft skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Barrie, 2006; Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragolini, 2004; Ibrahim & Jafaar, 2017; Kalfa & Taksa, 2015; Scott, Connell, Thomson & Willison, 2018). Soft skills include intangible skills that influence how a person performs in the workplace, such as communication, reasoning, problem solving, time management, interpersonal skills, and so on. Clearly, these are skills that some students will have learned at home and school, and are not necessarily only learned in higher education.

Arguably preparing graduates for employability ought to take a longer-term perspective than merely the transition from higher education into work. WIL programmes provide opportunities for students to "try-on professional roles" (Bowen, 2018, p. 1148) and construct a professional identity as part of their career development (Jackson, 2017; Jackson & Wilton, 2016; Trede, 2012; Trolan, Jach & Snyder, 2018). As such, WIL is not a one-size-fits all approach. Still, as much as work-based learning and workplace experience would appear

to be ideal forms of graduate preparation, Boden and Nedeva (2010) argue that an employment-based pedagogical orientation reduces higher education to the acquisition of technical skills and factual knowledge rather than development of the mind. Also, Lloyd, Paul, Clerke and Male (2019) found that WIL placements presented social and cultural challenges within the workplace for some students that detracted not only from their learning and professional identity formation, but also from their well-being.

3.2.3 The possibilities and pitfalls of employability discourse

Dominant employability discourse holds out the promise of equal higher education and transformative outcomes for graduates. Wider access to higher education, the opportunities of work-specific teaching and learning that meet the needs of employers, and a qualification that certifies performative competence, all enhance the likelihood of employment and opportunities for social mobility for graduates. And yet, Brown (2003) argues that the lure of the opportunities that higher education offers, is a trap that is not able to deliver what it promises. Together with the possibilities are significant pitfalls. In light of the competitive and neoliberal dynamic of the labour market, employability discourse is fuelled by positional competition (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Brown, 2003; Brown et al., 2003; Halliday, 2016; Holborow, 2012; Tomlinson, 2012). The nature of competition, however, is that there are winners and losers.

(i) The possibilities of a degree and the pitfalls of credentialism

The “education explosion” (Dore, 1976, p. 2) has created an over-supply of graduates, with a range of knock-on effects for higher education, the labour market, and for individuals. According to Dore (1976) qualification-earning has become a ritualised process that he described as “the diploma disease” (see also Lewin, Little & Wolf, 2019). This manifests in the pursuit of graduate credentials. Higher education is perceived to be the means for graduates to gain comparative advantage in a rapidly-changing and competitive labour market. The credentials of higher levels of education, specialised knowledge and skills, and a qualification are “the currency of opportunity” (Brown, 2003, p. 142). They become a proxy for

quality education, whether or not quality teaching and learning is delivered or achieved. They also imply performative competence. In other words, having a degree assumes that graduates have the necessary attributes and abilities for the workplace, so that their higher education signals their employability. The degree, in turn, is used by employers as a screening mechanism for recruitment purposes (Cai, 2013; DiPietro, 2017). Even so, there are limits to the absorptive capacity of the labour market.

While higher education may elevate graduates chances of employment above those of school-leavers, graduates may still face stiff competition relative to each other for a limited number of jobs. Under these circumstances, graduates who are unable to find work may pursue yet higher levels of (post-graduate) education, believing this will make them all the more employable. But they risk becoming more highly qualified than the level of jobs available (Brown, 2003; Tomlinson, 2008). Over-qualification (also known as underemployment) has been shown to have significant negative long-term effects on graduates' career opportunities (Baert, Cockx & Verhaest, 2013; Khan, 2010; Nunley, Pugh, Romero & Seals, 2017; Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2011, 2019). Increasingly, as graduate supply exceeds demand, there are insufficient graduate-level jobs for graduates and a qualification becomes an essential means to secure non-graduate level work. Thus, the value of the degree diminishes (Dore, 1976; Poole, 2019). Yet the demand for higher education increases, driven by the need for a qualification as a means to a job and an income. Despite the ideological assumptions of knowledge workers for the knowledge economy, in reality, it comes down to employment as a means to a livelihood. Dore states: "If education is learning to *do* a job, qualification is a matter of learning in order to *get* a job" (1976, p. 8, *italics in original*). While higher education providers can teach graduates the skills for employability, even good quality higher education is not able to guarantee jobs for graduates.

(ii) The possibilities of quality teaching and the pitfalls of institutional status

The labour market competition is not only a tussle between graduates for a limited supply of jobs, but graduate employment figures become a relative performance measure for institutions too (Brown, 2000, 2003; Brown et al., 2003; Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Marginson, 2011; QS, 2020b; Tomlinson, 2012). University rankings provide a comparison of educational performance, and are used as a representation of educational quality and excellence, feeding an institution's status position. Employability forms one of the four pillars of world university rankings¹⁸ (Linney, 2019; QS, 2020b). Producing employable graduates is seen as an institutional achievement, indicative of efficiency in developing a good 'product', as well as institutional engagement with employers. It implies efficiency, relevant programmes, and high standards of teaching provided by the institution, therefore high graduate employment statistics boost the status and reputation of an institution. Positional advantage and reputational capital go hand in hand, fuelling each other and serving as a proxy for quality education (Hazelkorn, 2011). And yet, it appears the assessment of teaching quality is not amongst the criteria used for employability rankings (QS, 2020b). Instead, the QS ranking criteria are strongly weighted towards the ratings given by employers to job placements. Institutions that appear on a ranking list enjoy significant prestige, which attracts new students for whom study choices are seen to be determined by employment outcomes. In this way, systems of institutional hierarchy open the way for the employability agenda to extend beyond education and become a marketing tool in an institutional ranking competition, where employable graduates form part of the marketing collateral (Linney, 2019). Rankings essentially favour well-resourced and prestigious institutions, so that status begets status (Hazelkorn, 2011; Shay, 2018). As Marginson states: "The higher the status of the institution, the larger the human capital of its graduates, irrespective of what is learned" (2011, p. 31).

¹⁸ The four pillars used by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), one of the providers of a global university ranking system, include research, teaching, employability, and internationalisation (Linney, 2019). See <https://www.qs.com/>

Institutional rankings are valued on global and national levels (QS, 2020a, 2020c), and politicians use rankings to signify economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness (Hazelkorn, 2013). Meanwhile, in the labour market, employers are in their own war for talent (Brown & Tannock, 2009). Employers draw on institutional reputation to guide recruitment choices, and the selection of what Hesketh calls a “graduate elite” (2000, p. 257). These are graduates considered to be top performers, eligible for employment based on the institution from which they come. Employers rank institutions on an institutional hierarchy that they use for graduate selection and recruitment (Ingram & Allen, 2019; QS, 2020b; Sadik & Brown, 2020; Tomlinson, 2017b). In addition, institutions may establish a reciprocal or inter-dependent relationship of supply and demand with employers. Partnerships between employers and institutions give employers an increased stake in the development of graduate employability (Cai, 2013; Maxwell, Scott, Macfarlane & Williamson, 2009). This might involve collaboration on curriculum content and focus on skill development orientated towards the employers’ needs. It also includes institutions establishing a hold with employers to serve as feeders for graduate recruitment. In this regard, recent studies in India (Sadik & Brown, 2020) and the UK (Ingram & Allen, 2019) found that employers’ recruitment practices favour graduates from elite institutions to the exclusion of graduates from non-elite institutions. Accordingly, employers pre-select an ‘ideal’ candidate based on the reputation of their institution. The strategy gives the illusion of being a fair and objective recruitment process, but in fact gives advantage to a small group of (middle-class, well-resourced) graduates, and leaves limited prospects for a much wider group of (working-class) graduates, who by nature of their institution do not even make the shortlist. Thus, Sadik and Brown (2020) argue that policies which give disproportionate focus to the graduate supply-side rather need to be balanced by attention to unequal demand-side practices in order to provide equitable opportunities for graduates from non-elite institutions to access jobs.

Notwithstanding the fact that institutional rankings may offer value to graduate employability for some graduates and for certain institutions, such vertical

stratification does very little to recognise or promote the quality of teaching and learning, or address issues of inequality. On the contrary, it reflects inequalities between institutions and individuals, and provides structures for their reproduction (Brown, 2003; Hazelkorn, 2013; Sadik & Brown, 2020; Shay, 2018). This raises particular concerns for meeting higher education objectives in South Africa.

(iii) The possibilities of an income and the pitfalls of the graduate premium

The financial investment in a three-year study programme in higher education is considerable¹⁹. This may well be anticipated for private higher education, which is seen to be for private benefit. Although, increasingly there is a shift in thinking of the public/private good discourse around public higher education provision too, as all students make private gains from a higher education (Daviet, 2016; Jonathan, 2002; Morgan & White, 2014). The private benefits argument receives support from policymakers on the basis that students should pay for the range of benefits that they derive from higher education. However, this assumes that one of those benefits will be financial (Cappelli, 2020). The return on the investment in higher education is seen to lie in the graduate premium, which comprises the job opportunities and earning potential that accrue to the individual from having a degree (Cappelli, 2020; Hersch, 2019; Kemp-King, 2016; Lindley & Machin, 2016). The graduate premium provides an indication of the value derived from studying. It reflects the increased relative demand for a graduate in the labour market due to his/her advanced skills and knowledge, and occupational status. For this reason, on the whole, graduates receive higher salaries than non-graduates. Calculations of the financial return from the degree effectively show whether the benefits of attending university were worth the costs.

¹⁹ Appendix B shows the tuition fees for a year. The expenditure over the duration of a three-year programme would triple those costs. In addition, each year there are the costs of transport, books, stationery and learning materials, board and lodging (if the institution is in a different city from the family residence) and general living expenses. Conservatively, this could amount to R100 000 to R300 000 in total costs per year. See <https://www.news24.com/parent/Learn/Tertiary-education/how-much-does-a-first-year-at-university-cost-20160317>

There are a number of factors that influence the graduate premium (Cappelli, 2020; Hersch, 2019; Kemp-King, 2016). These include the level of qualification, field of occupation, subject specialisation, as well as gender. As can be expected, higher levels of study, for example post-graduate degrees have a higher premium than an undergraduate qualification. Fields such as science, medicine and engineering have a high premium, but arts and teaching less so. With respect to gender, empirical literature provides evidence of gender disparities in the workplace (Blau & Kahn, 2016; Pitman, Roberts, Bennett & Richardson, 2019; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Tomlinson, 2012). Studies on the graduate premium²⁰ show that institutional reputation has a significant and positive influence on earnings (Cappelli, 2020; Chevalier, 2014; Hersch, 2019; Kemp-King, 2016). As was evident in India (Sadik & Brown, 2020), graduates from elite or prestigious institutions enjoy substantially greater lifetime earnings. The implications of this are twofold. Firstly, the benefits of the quality of job and wages that graduates can earn after graduating from such an institution are seen to justify the risk attached with the commitment to the cost. Secondly, these factors influence students' choice to attend prestigious institutions (Chevalier, 2014; Hersch, 2019). In mitigation, however, Cappelli (2020) found that having a technical qualification that is in demand, can be more important to wage level than the institution, or the duration and level of qualification. In the South African context this means that employers might employ a graduate with a one-year Higher Certificate in a niche qualification over someone with a three-year degree, irrespective of the institution. The graduate premium is used to rationalise the costs of higher education being borne by the student, because he/she will see the return over his/her working lifetime. Based on the earnings benefits, graduates ought to be able to pay off any student debt and contribute towards, if not support, the household living expenses. However, it is possible for there to be a negative return for a graduate, and without the surety of work and earnings,

²⁰ Much of the empirical literature I found on the graduate premium is from USA where there is a significant private higher education sector. Although the American education system differs from the rest of the world, the fundamental principles are relevant for higher education generally, and for private higher education in South Africa.

the risk of the investment in higher education significantly increases (Cappelli, 2020).

Studies show increasing inequalities in graduate earnings (Hersch, 2019; Kemp-King, 2016; Lindley & Machin, 2016). There are a number of influencing factors that are implicit in higher education and the labour market, e.g. over-supply of graduates and technology, which I will not detail here as they are addressed later in this chapter and the thesis. Factors that obtain less attention in the literature on graduate premium, are social and personal factors that students bring into higher education, such as family background and socio-economic status. These affect an individual's choices of, and access to an institution and study programme. In fact, they have a direct influence on the type of institution in which a student enrolls, and ultimately – based on the evident link between institutional reputation and recruitment practices (Ingram & Allen, 2019; Sadik & Brown, 2020) – on the graduate's earnings premium. Thus, according to Hersch (2019, p. 504): "...in deciding among colleges, differences in costs associated with undergraduate institutions are more relevant than differences in benefits from the status of the undergraduate degree". Given the evidence of a particularly strong influence of institution type on the graduate premium, the decisions on entry to higher education, therefore, can to an extent predispose the labour market outcomes – either favourably or not. While higher education holds the possibility of a positive return for graduates, there is great variation on the return; and the risk of earning a negative return from unemployment, underemployment, or interest on a student loan, is more likely to fall on those graduates who have the fewest resources and already had diminished opportunities in the labour market (Cappelli, 2020; Sadik & Brown, 2020).

This section has focused on a dominant discourse that prevails in the graduate employability agenda in higher education. Preparing graduates to meet labour market needs focuses on the development of skills as personal capital, with the potential to enhance employment outcomes. The next section takes a closer look at the application of employability in the labour market.

3.3 Employability and labour market outcomes

Having focused on the higher education supply side of graduate employability in the previous section, I now turn to the labour market side. The realisation of graduate employability is a complex process that occurs at the intersection of higher education and the labour market. At university, graduates' knowledge and attributes are shaped collectively. Once graduates transition into the workplace, each one has to manage his/her employability individually. Tomlinson (2012) describes two perspectives to the transition into the rapidly changing and dynamic 21st century labour market. The more optimistic view has a vision for individuals to capitalise on the possibilities enabled by higher education, by adopting a relatively flexible and proactive approach to their working lives, in which the graduate premium enables them to be productive and earn well. The less optimistic view portrays a highly competitive and precarious environment, where employment is uncertain, underemployment is likely, and where graduates will need to adapt continually in response to changing labour market demands. My argument in this thesis is that a human capital approach to employability fuels the illusory promise of the former while obscuring the sombre reality of the latter.

Higher education is perceived to equalise graduates' employment opportunities and life chances. Yet differential rewards exist for the same qualification (Jaschik, 2017; Winkle-Wagner & Nelson, 2009). Once in the labour market, graduates' employment prospects are influenced and determined by the social, political and economic dynamics of that environment. Here too, the neoliberal-capitalist influence makes it a highly individualistic and competitive environment. Not only are graduates competing for jobs, but employers are competing with each other in their quest for employable graduates who can enhance their productivity and economic worth. Consequently, employers' recruitment and employment practices can make the labour market a highly unequal environment that can hinder social mobility and weaken the opportunity gains promised by higher education. Brown explains it as follows:

The relationship between origins and destinations is now determined by a market competition that restricts the role of state intervention, severely limiting

its capacity to reform educational opportunities aimed at weakening the relationship between origins and educational attainment (2013, p. 693).

Labour market perceptions, experiences and outcomes vary between different national contexts (Kupfer, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012). The particular way in which graduates are positioned and manage their employability is mediated by the relationship between higher education and the local labour market. In this section, I discuss employability in the specific context of the South African labour market.

3.3.1 Employment opportunities in the creative industries in South Africa

In South Africa, the media comprises occupations that fall within the creative industries, which is a sub-set of the cultural and creative sectors of the economy. Figure 2 shows the range of sub-fields, including media, within the cultural and creative industries in South Africa²¹.

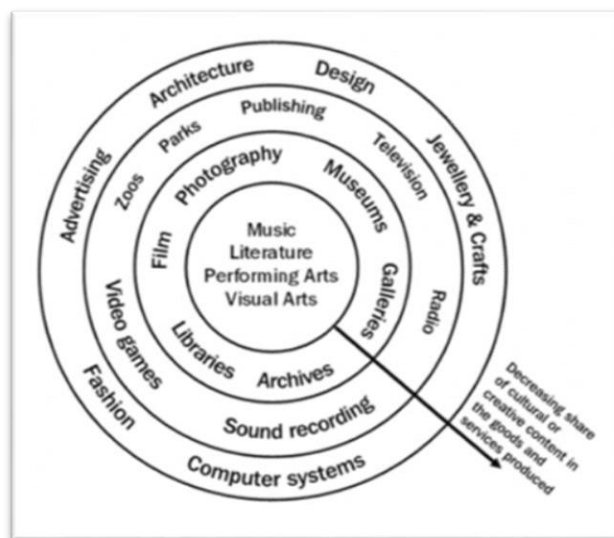


Figure 2: Model of Cultural and Creative Industries in South Africa (Hadisi & Snowball, 2017, p. 9)

²¹ South Africa does not have an officially recognised definition of the cultural and creative industries, but makes use of the UNESCO (2009) Framework for Cultural Statistics that identifies the defining characteristic as the symbolic nature of the goods and services produced. This includes more traditional cultural occupations and industries such as fine art, performing arts, music, craft etc. as well as more commercial creative sectors, for example, design, advertising, interactive media and so on (Lutshaba et al., 2020).

The creative industries have been listed amongst a small group of professions that are growing in Africa (World Economic Forum, 2017). With strong job growth potential and new work formats these industries are viewed as “drivers of economic growth, employment, and the development of a post-colonial cultural identity” (Hadisi & Snowball, 2017, p. 5). In 2017, 2.77% of total employment in South Africa was in creative occupations²², and account for just under half a million jobs (Lutshaba, Liebenberg & Snowball, 2020, p. 16). Accordingly, it appears to be an industry that affords a range of employment opportunities to graduates, who make up approximately one-third of the creative workforce (Lutshaba et al., 2020). The greatest opportunities for work in the media industry in South Africa, are in small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs). While these are spread country-wide, the employment opportunities predominate in Gauteng (Johannesburg), Western Cape (Cape Town) and KwaZulu-Natal (Durban), giving graduates in these regions comparative advantage in finding employment (Lutshaba et al., 2020).

A strong transformation imperative in the South African creative industries is showing a trend towards a more diverse and racially representative sector (Lutshaba et al., 2020). This is shown in Figure 3 below.

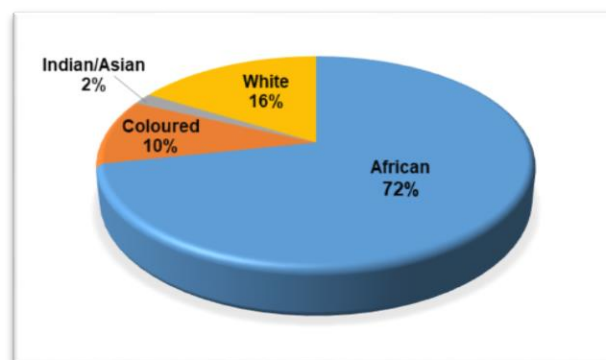


Figure 3: SA creative industries: racial representation (Lutshaba et al., 2020, p. 23)

²² This figure is an under-representation. In 2017, the total creative employment in South Africa was 7.03% or 1.1 million jobs. This includes those employed in support occupations in creative industries, which may well include media graduates doing work outside their specific qualification. However, I have opted not to use this statistic to represent the size of the potential employment pool, as it also includes professionals such as Accountants and Lawyers, which would exclude representation by graduates with a media qualification.

Two anomalies stand out in these trends. Firstly, a consistent over-representation of white workers, and secondly, a notable under-representation of young women under 35 years of age. Although the proportion of male and female graduates is similar, on the whole across the industry, men outnumber women (Hadisi & Snowball, 2017). Furthermore, men earn on average up to R4 000 per month more than women (Lutshaba et al., 2020). These disparities have particularly significant implications for Black female graduates with regard to labour market opportunities.

By nature, the creative economy is sensitive to national economic conditions, and jobs are inclined to be precarious in this sector. Formal employment in creative occupations has declined since 2015, and there has been a concomitant increase in the informal sector that now comprises 46% of these industries (Lutshaba et al., 2020, p. 18-19). There is also a significant shift of creative work being embedded in-house into other industries e.g. people being employed within banking, insurance, health, property and other companies to do work in marketing, communication and social media etc. Creative work is conducive to a portfolio career pattern that comprises a bricolage of continually evolving jobs and projects. This means that workers move between types of employment over time; they also move between the formal and informal sectors, or work in both sectors, according to their economic circumstances (Bridgstock, 2013; Hadisi & Snowball, 2017). This has resulted in a growing number of people doing freelance and contract work, which now comprises 34% of work in the creative industries i.e. one-third of the workforce in this sector (Lutshaba et al., 2020, p. 18). With diminishing options in formal employment, managing a career in a workplace of this nature requires people who are agile and adaptable. Rather than relying on being formally employed in a job, graduates need to be prepared to take on alternative forms of working and earning. In order to enhance their employability in an industry of this nature, graduates require the flexibility to respond to new and changing environments, to be continually learning new skills, and applying their knowledge in a range of different contexts and types of projects, so that they are able to expand their opportunities.

3.3.2 Graduate un/employment in South Africa

In South Africa the official unemployment figure stands at 30%²³ (StatsSA, 2020, p. 1). This means that one in three people are jobless. The burden of unemployment is concentrated amongst the youth (aged 15-34 years) and the unemployment rate of this group is 42% (StatsSA, 2020, p. 9). Graduates fall within this category, although the statistics are not representative of graduates alone, who have better employment prospects than their age cohort with lower levels of education. Graduate unemployment statistics in 2019 were reported at 31% having increased by 11% since the end of 2018 (StatsSA, 2019b) but in relative terms, graduates comprise “*only 2% of the unemployed persons*” (StatsSA, 2019a, p. 7, my italics). This may explain why Van der Berg and Van Broekhuizen (2012, p. 4) describe graduate unemployment in South Africa as “a much exaggerated problem” with little cause for concern, in contrast with an international context. It is necessary to be circumspect in the use of social statistics, which could misrepresent the extent of an issue (Best, 2001). Also, the statistics are not permanent but subject to variation in each Quarterly Labour Force Survey. For this reason, I consider the actual statistics less significant than the trends (for South Africa alone, rather than measured against a different national context) – which have been moving progressively upward. And I argue that it is indeed cause for concern because behind the statistics there are (±134 000²⁴) actual lives, and families affected.

In the context of neoliberal influences on the skills discourse, employability requires individuals to be continually building their skills and knowledge, and adapting themselves to fit in with job market demands and expectations. Accordingly, being able to secure employment signals an individual's success, and being jobless is seen as a consequence of personal deficit (Hwang, 2017; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Tomlinson, 2012; Motala & Vally, 2014). The

²³ These statistics were reported in Q1 of 2020, and do not reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. I have chosen not to update the statistics to the most recent 2020 figures which are exacerbated by the particular effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market and employment statistics. Although I acknowledge that the effects of the pandemic on the employment and the economy will most certainly be lasting.

²⁴ My calculation of 2% of the 6.7 million unemployed persons (StatsSA, 2019a, p. 7).

reasons given for joblessness include a skills gap, lack of experience, and inefficiencies in job search skills on the part of the graduate (Graham, Williams & Chisoro, 2019). Bangani's (2019) report on the unemployment dilemma of graduates provides narratives of individuals who feel hopeless and rejected in the face of the lack of response to job applications by employers. They feel exploited by unpaid internships where they were promised training but instead do the actual work of employees. One of the graduates reported on expressed her inadequacy to be able to fulfil her responsibility in financially supporting her family who "took their every cent to put me through school so that I can graduate" (Bangani, 2019, p. 2). Another spoke of her diminishing sense of physical health and well-being as a result of the anxiety and insecurity of fixed employment seven years after graduating. Overall, the narratives express the personal deficiencies that label each graduate as what the author sub-titles "the qualified unemployed" (2019, p. 2). The common storyline is that they believed higher education would make life better, instead they live the humiliation of continuing to be financially dependent on the family, and are desperate for an opportunity to prove themselves, to have some prospect of a better future.

Unquestionably, graduate employability is not the responsibility of higher education alone. Nor is lack of success in finding a job the 'fault' of the graduate. The inclination for graduates to pathologise their inability to secure employment diverts attention from the structural barriers and inequalities that are causing unemployment (Allais & Nathan, 2014; Motala & Vally, 2014; Tomlinson, 2012). Often, the response of employers is to point to a skills shortage (Daniels, 2007; Erasmus & Breier, 2009; Gibbs, Steel and Kuiper, 2011). The government's response to the unemployment problem is to propose measures to create jobs and to promise financial support for township entrepreneurship (Ramaphosa, 2018, 2019). These proposals accede to systemic deficiencies but individuals still require training and knowledge in order to benefit from those interventions. As such, these 'solutions' do not shift the focus from the supply of human resources by higher education, nor do they remove the burden of responsibility for accessing a job or the cost of finding it from the individual.

Returning to the argument about the extent of the unemployment problem and whether there is cause for concern (Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2012) graduate unemployment is only a small proportion of a much larger and more alarming youth unemployment statistic. However, there is an inexorable link between unemployment, poverty and inequality, even if an individual has a degree. Motala and Vally (2014) stress that unemployment is a structural condition, and indicative of significant politico-socio-economic issues in the country. Their point is that unemployment in South Africa will not be solved by focusing on supply-side interventions alone without recognition of the causal factors affecting demand. They call for critical reflection on the link between higher education and the economy, a broader view of the role of “purposeful” (2014, p. 16) higher education that is able to transform individual lives and communities, as well as resolute commitment to dismantling entrenched structures and systems that continue to stand as barriers to change.

3.3.3 Measuring graduate employability in South Africa

Early reports on graduate employment in South Africa were generally based on the data from the national Quarterly Labour Force Surveys produced by Statistics South Africa²⁵, and they took a broad economic and human resource orientation (Bhorat, 2004; DPRU, 2006; Kraak, 2010; Moleke, 2001, 2003; Pauw, Oosthuizen & Van der Westhuizen, 2008). More recently institution-based tracer surveys were conducted to measure higher education employment outcomes and job destinations (Baldry, 2016; CHEC, 2013; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Letseka, Cosser, Breier & Visser, 2010; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2012). The most recent South African employability study is that of Walker and Fongwa (2017), part of a larger international study (British Council, 2016) which took an alternative approach to look at graduates’ opportunities (rather than employment) as higher education outcomes. Overall, what has emerged from these studies is a picture of unequal labour market outcomes for graduates, shaped not only by their skills or qualification but influenced by

²⁵ This is the national statistics agency responsible for conducting official demographic, economic and social censuses and surveys (<http://www.statssa.gov.za/>)

structural barriers and background inequalities. The significant variables that have been identified as determinants of graduate employment/unemployment are race, socio-economic status (alternatively described as family background), gender, field of study, and higher education institution (Bhorat, Mayet & Visser, 2010; CHEC, 2013; Moleke, 2010; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Accordingly, the impact of unemployment hits Black graduates hardest, more so if they are female and from poor or working class families, have attended a non-elite institution, and did not follow their first choice of study programme. Figure 4 provides a synopsis of factors influencing employment outcomes, based on the findings reported by Bhorat et al. (2010), CHEC (2013) and Rogan and Reynolds (2015).

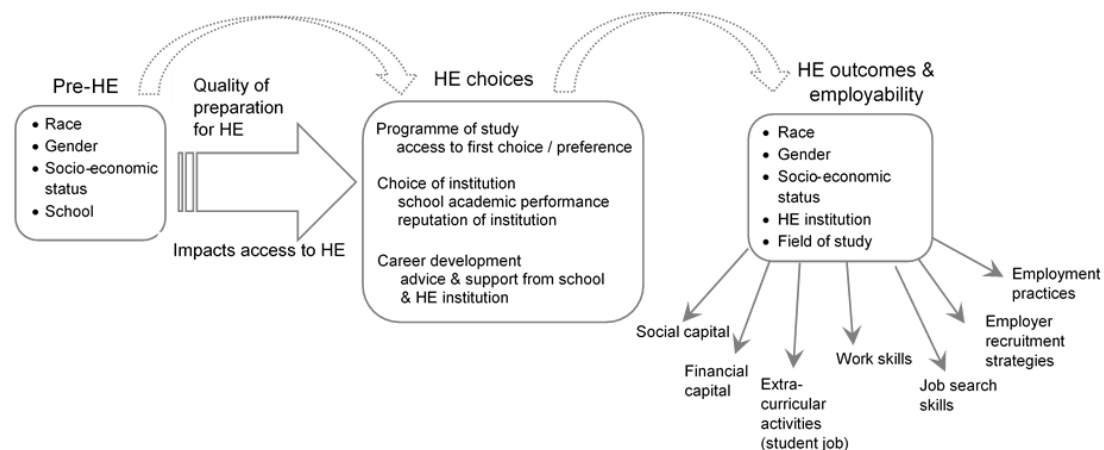


Figure 4: Synopsis of factors influencing graduate employment outcomes (adapted from Bhorat et al., 2010; CHEC, 2013; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015)

Importantly, given the high expectations placed on higher education alone to produce employable graduates, it is not possible to ignore the significance of the personal and background factors that students bring with them into higher education. Personal factors of race and gender, as well as social factors of socio-economic status and schooling background, all combine to influence students' access to higher education, the choices they make of institution and study programme, and ultimately their higher education progress and outcomes.

For more than two decades South African higher education has been structured and regulated around development strategies for transformation, with key objectives of equality and social justice (DHET, 1997, 2013). Equitability in higher education is driven on the back of key policy directives for widened access to higher education, increased rates of participation, ease of movement through the system, and development of scarce and critical skills for the country's economic development. These strategies are seen to enhance socio-economic opportunities for an increasingly large and diverse graduate population. And yet, evidence shows that higher education and graduate employment outcomes continue to be unequal. Allais (2017) cautions as to how much weight is placed on tracer studies as a tool to evaluate the contribution of higher education to society. She points out that while measures of graduate attributes and employment outcomes provide empirical data on graduates' transition into the labour market, they are inadequate indicators of any particular correlation between higher education's cause and effect in the labour market. Instead graduate destination measures might more closely reflect the effect of social and economic structures on the lives of individuals in spite of their higher education. With the policy focus directed towards the equity of what is coming into higher education rather than its outputs, Brennan and Naidoo argue that higher education is engaged in "the social construction of legitimate difference" (2008, p. 292). This serves as a caution that the perceived existence of broadly equal opportunities provided by access to higher education may belie the inability of higher education (and a qualification) to equalise the complex and lopsided relations in the labour market and society.

The equalising effect of higher education is underpinned by the notion of meritocracy. Meritocracy is the belief that anyone can ascend the social and economic ladder, irrespective of their social position, provided they are given an opportunity and work hard enough (Littler, 2018). Based on this argument, higher education provides graduates with training and opportunities, and if individuals are sufficiently talented, skilled and hard-working they will find employment. With these values in mind, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and township

schools anticipate that the hard work they invest in getting a qualification will be suitably rewarded with a job. Graduates all have the same training and qualification, and are led to believe they all have the same chance of getting a job. However, in reality, students' different backgrounds and personal biographies give them "unequal social starting blocks" (Littler, 2018, p. 8) that neither a qualification nor hard work is able to equalise. An individual's success occurs in social context, and there are more barriers for some graduates than for others. As such, as Brown et al. (2003) point out it is possible to be employable but not employed.

Graduate employability fits neatly into higher education policies that promote social justice on the grounds of developing skills that potentially enhance employment and social mobility for individuals, and aspiring to serve the nation with an employable workforce. However, as shown in this chapter, understanding what constitutes employable graduates is unclear. Different higher education providers have different approaches to the ways in which they incorporate employability into their curricula and pedagogies. They also have different student markets who have various expectations of their own employability. In addition, we have seen that employers too, have their own perspectives on what comprises an employable graduate, and their recruitment strategies are based on preconceptions of the employability of graduates from particular institutions. Boden and Nedeva (2010) describe the employability agenda as a form of neoliberal 'state capture'²⁶ of the curriculum and pedagogy. Singh (2011) is also of the view that neoliberal strategies have enabled the appropriation of the social justice objectives of higher education for the achievement of competitive economic ends. Policies of access and employability may make higher education less unequal, but they do not necessarily lead to greater social equality or justice. Framed by the political history of education in England, Power (2012) argues that rather than using a political or ideological lens to evaluate education policies, a perspective which evaluates policies relative to their social justice orientation is

²⁶ This is a term that has particular resonance in South Africa following scandals of systemic corruption that emerged during Jacob Zuma's presidential term of office in which state resources were misappropriated to benefit private individual interests (Arun, 2019).

more universally useful – both in evaluating the effectiveness of the policies as well as identifying social injustices.

Addressing the ambiguity of equity policies in higher education, Marginson (2011) distinguishes between those that focus on equity as fairness, and those in which the focus of equity is on inclusion. While both involve strategies that apparently align with higher education's function of equitable provision of social opportunity, they have slightly different objectives in the way each positions the institution and individuals, and hence different equity outcomes. I will discuss them briefly as Marginson's argument is useful, firstly to understand the reproduction of unequal outcomes in higher education, which implicates the neutrality of human capital as a currency for graduate employment. Hence, secondly, as a guide to an alternative conceptualisation of graduate employability that achieves more equitable and inclusive employment outcomes in South Africa.

Strategies of fairness in higher education include policies to expand access in order to ensure growth in the number of students from previously disadvantaged groups, and thereby to be more equitable and inclusive. While the base of non-traditional students grows, without some other form of change, the wider and deeper base remains situated under an apex of existing, traditional users in the system who know how to play the game and benefit from positional advantage. Therefore, notwithstanding policies that enhance social representation, equitable outcomes remain elusive. Alternatively, strategies of inclusion recognise hierarchies of social advantage and do not assume a fair competition. Therefore, inclusive policies move beyond rules of fairness to focus on behavioural change and rules about how to compete. In terms of justice, Marginson (2011) refers to Sen's notions of justice (Sen, 2009) and explains that policies of fairness focus on institutional processes and the relationships between institutions to bring about change. They are based on the notion that institutional reform will advance behavioural change. As such, they focus on the agency of institutions. But Marginson (2011, p. 30) points out: "It emphasises the responsibility of institutions to facilitate access and completion, as if simply opening the gates of privilege is

enough". Undoubtedly, 'opening the gates' may enhance equality of access to higher education, but it is not an assurance of equal education, or equal outcomes (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Brown, 2018; Pillay, 2019; Singh, 2011; Walton, Bowman & Osman, 2015). While fairness strategies focus on mechanisms of redress to ensure fair competition, they neglect the fact that individual agents have an unequal capacity to compete (Marginson, 2011).

Moreover, if we consider justice and equity as inclusion, this would mean that employability policies would focus on human behaviour and the achievement of justice in real situations. Achieving inclusive social justice means developing the agency of individuals, and particularly in those who were previously excluded, so that they have the capacity to make use of opportunities for themselves. In doing this, the institution becomes a place where the capabilities and agency of students and graduates is enhanced. Marginson (2011) cautions that unless the capacity is built from the bottom-up, any kind of 'reformed' system will revert to its earlier distribution. In short, achieving social justice in graduate employability requires not only equity of access to higher education, but also ensuring inclusive and equitable opportunities for access, choice and participation in the labour market.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter, I presented a definition of employability that has been widely drawn on in employability discourse to frame research on higher education outcomes and to guide educational policies. Through the course of the chapter, I presented dominant notions of human capital within neoliberal ideologies to frame a critique of employability merely serving as a performative function of higher education. The chapter reveals the shortcomings of a human capital approach focused on instrumental higher education outcomes drawing a linear trajectory from higher education to work, economic productivity and earnings. While notions of human capital present possibilities for graduate employability, these are offset by pitfalls when confronted by realities of hierarchical social

structures. Theoretically, human capital presents as universally applicable, yet it eschews the complexities of higher education processes and outcomes, and the contextual variabilities of the labour market, so that in reality, social background rather than skills and qualifications determine graduate employment outcomes (Marginson, 2019).

In South Africa, attempts to reform higher education have had little effect on altering graduate unemployment rates and patterns. Given the strong influence that structural factors are shown to play in determining graduates' employment prospects (Baldry, 2016) it is unreasonable to expect these outcomes to change without taking an alternative approach to the ways in which graduates are prepared for the workplace and for navigating their way in the labour market structures. The beneficial outcomes of higher education are intrinsic as well as instrumental. Therefore, I argue that rather than being an individual achievement, employability is a relational process. The individual skills, knowledge and personal attributes developed in and through higher education are less for the purpose of winning an individual competition in which the prize is a narrowly defined job, and where the benefits (for the few) are determined by hierarchical managerial structures and corporate balance sheets. Higher education ought to develop graduates as active agents, who can use and adapt what they know and what they are able to do and be, so that in collaboration and co-operation with others they are able to respond to changes in society, in their communities and in their own lives. Such an approach would place less policy emphasis on an institution's capacity to promote graduate employment, and more on fostering employability through opportunities for graduates to connect with others, to have choices, and to be empowered to participate in society and sustain a livelihood. The next chapter discusses the capability approach as a framework that takes the spotlight off human capital (while still keeping it relevant) and conceptualises employability with a focus on human rather than economic development.

CHAPTER 4

A human development and capability approach

Introduction

The previous two chapters framed the study in the context of higher education systems, and literatures on graduate employability respectively. The discussion so far has positioned private higher education within broader higher education provision, and graduate employability as part of the development role of higher education. Higher education outcomes are linked to economic, political and social contexts (represented graphically in Figure 5). Given the complexity of dimensions, the challenge for higher education lies in managing its role in balancing the outcomes and opportunities between the individual and society (Tomlinson, 2017b). In the context of a national higher education system that aims to be inclusive, transformative and responsive to societal development objectives (DHET, 2013) this research project was borne out of a concern to understand the contribution made by higher education, specifically from private providers, to human development.

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for evaluating the opportunities for graduate employability developed in and through private higher education. Taking a position in favour of higher education for human development (Haq, 2003) my argument is for a broader conception of graduate employability that serves both instrumental and intrinsic purposes if private institutions are to contribute to: (i) the social justice objectives of national development; (ii) the transformative objectives of higher education; as well as to (iii) their own institutional objectives of quality provision in the preparation of graduates for lives as responsible citizens who can contribute to society (DHET, 2013; National Planning Commission, 2012). Conceptualising graduate employability through the lens of human development and the capability approach serves as an

appropriate evaluative framework for assessing the opportunities provided by higher education for graduates to flourish in society (Sen, 1999).

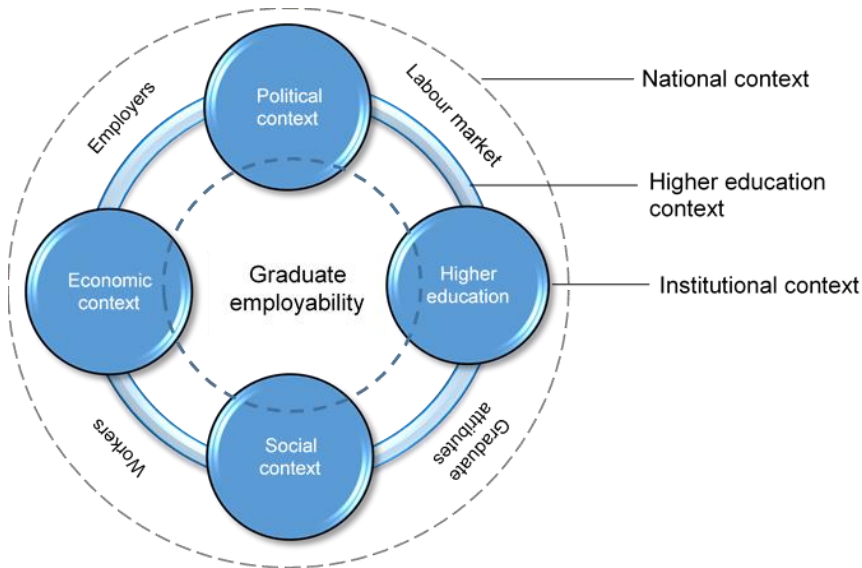


Figure 5: A simplified representation of the multiple contexts of graduate employability

This chapter is structured in three sections. The first section elaborates on human development as an approach to development, and higher education as a key site for such development. The second section introduces the capability approach as the conceptual tool for evaluating private higher education's contribution to human development. I present some of the core concepts of the capability approach and how they might be applied to frame understandings of graduate employability. The third section discusses the operationalisation of the approach to frame thinking about employability and human development. It concludes with a synopsis of the value as well as some critique of the capability approach.

4.1 Human development

Human development offers a perspective to development that prioritises people as the ends of development. Supported by the essential principles of equity, efficiency, participation, empowerment and sustainability, the fundamental purpose of human development is to enlarge people's choices in order to

advance social justice (Alkire, 2010; Deneulin, 2014; Haq, 2003; UNDP, 1990).

The Human Development Report states:

A person's access to income may be one of the choices, but it is not the sum total of human endeavour. ...The most critical of these wide-ranging choices are to live a long and healthy life, to be educated and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and personal self-respect (UNDP, 1990, p. 1).

Giving recognition to social dimensions in the development process, human development shifts away from the traditional focus on economic growth, income and material wealth as the route to advancement. While wealth or income are important, and can contribute instrumentally to how people are able to live, human development emphasises the need to pay attention to the relative quality and distribution of economic growth (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). Haq states that "...unless societies recognise that their real wealth is their people, an excessive obsession with creating material wealth can obscure the goal of enriching human lives" (2003, p. 18). Economic measures do not determine people's well-being, nor guarantee that their lives will be enriched. People's lives are enriched when they are given choices and opportunities to decide ways in which they want to shape their own lives. Also, there are many non-economic choices people can make to influence their quality of life. Widening people's choices in all aspects of life, including social, political, cultural as well as economic dimensions, is empowering and links growth to human development (Haq, 2003). Without such choices, many other opportunities remain inaccessible (UNDP, 1990).

Human development is concerned not only with people as the ends of development, but also relates to the means by which those ends are achieved.

Referring again to the Human Development Report (1990) which states:

...the process of development should at least create a conducive environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accord with their needs and interests (1990, p. 1)

The process of human development is that of widening people's choices and the level of well-being they are able to achieve. Education, and higher education is a means to human development ends. Therefore, a human development lens on

higher education processes and outcomes has implications for educational policies and institutional strategies that create a conducive environment for graduates to develop their full potential and have reasonable opportunities to choose a good life.

4.1.1 Higher education and human development

Higher education has an important role to play in promoting development at global, national and local levels (Boni & Walker, 2016; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020; Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; McCowan, 2019; Unterhalter et al., 2019). As alluded to in Chapter 1, the development role of higher education is drawn into global challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment that play out at national and local levels. The focus of higher education's development role is most often placed on its contribution to economic growth and the potential to enhance a nation's competitive advantage in the knowledge economy. However, higher education also contributes in a broader way to the economic, social, cultural, and political development of society and of individuals. Hence, while higher education drives development, it also serves as a marker of development (McCowan, 2019).

A human development perspective on higher education focuses on the development of people. Higher education prepares graduates as professionals who are able to contribute to the economy and a better society (Walker & McLean, 2013). Educational processes promote the development of knowledge and skills that enhance graduates' productive abilities so that they have value in the labour market and are able to earn an income. In this way, higher education plays an instrumental role in contributing towards economic development through the formation of graduates' human capital. However, this is not its only role, as higher education also contributes to individual development, both instrumentally and intrinsically, by increasing the opportunities and options that students and graduates have, both in their own lives as well as in the role they play in society. Becoming employable and earning an income contributes to graduates' lives. Over and above human capital, the benefits of the educational processes exceed

income-earning capacity and include development of capabilities and enhancing agency, choices and well-being (Boni & Walker, 2016; Walker, 2012; Walker & McLean, 2013).

The inclusion of higher education in the SDGs gives a broad perspective of how higher education can, and is expected to, contribute to global challenges (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020; UNESCO, 2016). However, the effects of higher education are not all beneficial. Pedagogies and educational processes have the potential either to reduce or reproduce disadvantage (Boni & Walker, 2016; Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Unterhalter et al., 2019). Human development as a process of enlarging choices has two dimensions that need to be kept in balance. It is important for people not only to have opportunities but also to be able to make use of those opportunities (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009; Haq, 2003). This aspect is important in higher education provision where development of skills and knowledge goes some way towards a graduates' well-being but is insufficient if he/she is unable to put them to use. Such outcomes would diminish the well-being of the graduate as well as the contribution he/she can make to society. It is also important to bear in mind within the human development paradigm that while people are the end of development, they are also the means (Haq, 2003). One of the central goals of human development is that people will become agents of change in their own lives and communities. Higher education that enables graduates to participate in social and economic activities significantly contributes to economic growth and social development, which in turn enhances people's individual lives. As such, people are both beneficiaries and participants in the development process.

A human development approach to higher education outcomes such as employability includes human capital, economic productivity and returns on investment, but moves beyond those objectives to focus on graduates' full lives and well-being (Flores-Crespo, 2007a; Fongwa, 2018; Walker, 2012; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Rather than graduate employment options and career paths being determined only by the economy, this approach embraces social, political

and cultural factors that, together with economic factors, provide a range of options that determine what graduates do after achieving their qualification. Conceptualising graduate employability within the means and ends of human development provides a framework for interrogating higher education processes and outcomes. This would include challenging whether employment destinations can serve as a measure of quality higher education provision, and whether increased access to higher education is in fact addressing issues of inequality and enabling opportunities for all graduates (Shay, 2018; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Taking a broader conception of employability for human development is important in developing countries where higher education has the potential to positively impact individual lives and contribute to economic growth (British Council, 2016; McCowan, 2014; Oketch, McCowan & Schendel, 2014) and yet at the same time has the potential to be part of a system that generates and perpetuates inequalities (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020; Unterhalter et al., 2019).

4.1.2 A conceptual tool for evaluating human development

In South Africa, higher education policy objectives for the achievement of social justice prioritise equitable access to quality education (DHET, 2013; CHE, 2018b). Education White Paper 3 (DHET, 1997) aimed at achieving transformation of the higher education system in line with national goals of reconstruction and development. Specific targets for the sector were laid out in the National Plan for Higher Education (DHET, 2001). These objectives were mostly directed at the formation of a new institutional landscape and strengthening knowledge production. Brennan and Naidoo (2008, p. 288) refer to such objectives as higher education's "import role". One in which agendas from the wider society are imported into higher education and look inward at structures and processes with the intention of improving performance. Higher education's internal processes have implications for the shape and cohesion of societies and for the quality of life of individuals. However, more equitable access and increased participation in higher education do not preclude the persistence of inequalities in a differentiated higher education system (Singh, 2011). Nor do they necessarily ensure fair outcomes, or the achievement of social justice in society.

While this is the broad vision for the country, few specific legislated targets exist in this regard. Graduate employability has the potential to contribute towards higher education's "export role" (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 288) in achieving a fairer and more just society through what graduates are able to be and do, and the kinds of lives they are able to live.

According to the human capital approach, the quality of higher education and the effectiveness of graduate outcomes are evaluated by means of graduate attributes and job destinations. However, social justice concerns with higher education outputs cannot be reduced to evaluations of individual benefit or performance in a country with high poverty and low social mobility (Sulla & Zikhali, 2018). While access to higher education significantly enhances the equity agenda *in* higher education, not all graduates derive the same benefits, so that for some "their advantages lie in comparison to people without any kind of higher education rather than in comparison to qualified people from higher socio-economic backgrounds" (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 295). Concerns for reducing injustice and inequality *through* higher education ought to focus on comparisons of relative advantage between graduates, who by nature of their higher education are perceived to have an advantage over non-graduates.

The aim of human development is to expand people's freedom (Alkire, 2010; Haq, 2003). Human development is supported by the essential pillars of equity, efficiency, participation, empowerment and sustainability, so that these values are used to frame policies and processes, and underpin judgements of social development. Operationalising human development values in (private) higher education and in graduate employability would need to do more than provide the opportunity of higher education through giving individuals access, but also ensure that students and graduates are able to make use of those opportunities (Haq, 2003). This would require values of equity and efficiency embedded in the procedural processes of institutions that recognise students' diverse backgrounds and expand their opportunities accordingly. Also, outcomes ought to focus on empowering graduates as active agents who are able to make valued

choices and experience well-being as they navigate their way in the labour market. The justice project lies in recognising this is not a one-size-fits-all educational strategy, but one that is flexible and responsive to individuals and ultimately able to lead to sustained transformation of actual lives (Alkire, 2010). The capability approach is an effective conceptual tool for the purpose of making such evaluations. The next section presents the approach and its constructs in greater detail.

4.2 The capability approach

The capability approach provides a normative framework for the evaluation of the lives of individuals and the society in which they live (Sen, 1985, 1992, 1999). Robeyns (2017, p. 23) describes it as “a theoretical framework about wellbeing, freedom to achieve wellbeing, and all the public values in which either of these can play a role, such as development and social justice”. The approach was developed by Amartya Sen in the context of welfare economics. It was a response to, and critique of, dominant paradigms that use measures such as gross national product, industrialisation, or technological advance as goals of development, yet obscure wide disparities between nations and eschew distinctions in people’s actual lives (Sen, 1985; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). In contrast, the capability approach considers development as a process of expanding people’s freedom. The ultimate end of development is the well-being of each individual. Accordingly, it asks questions about what people are able to do and what they are able to achieve that determines the lives they are able to lead (Sen, 1999). While not a theory of justice, the capability approach is concerned with inequalities and issues of social justice. It is premised on the notion of human diversity and the recognition that inequality exists not in a lack of uniformity amongst people but rather in the particular aspects of people’s lives when they are compared with each other (Sen, 1992). Therefore, the approach provides the evaluative space in which such comparisons of a person’s advantage²⁷ can be made (Sen, 1992).

²⁷ Sen uses ‘advantage’ as a relative term of the real opportunities a person has in comparison with others. The advantage lies in the freedom to achieve well-being, compared with others, more so than in the

The purpose is not to make everyone the same but rather to foreground people's differences as the basis for ensuring that each person has the resources and opportunities he/she requires in order to enjoy quality of life.

Martha Nussbaum (2003, 2011), however, is critical of Sen's capability approach, which she feels falls short when it comes to providing guidance on what constitutes minimum requirements for a just society (Nussbaum, 2003). She states that comparative evaluations of provision, of education for example, do not necessarily ensure justice for citizens unless they also address questions about the level of provision that ought to be delivered as a fundamental entitlement. Based on the notion that inequalities in life prospects are imposed by social structures, she has proposed a list of ten central capabilities as minimum entitlements for a threshold level of human dignity for all people (Nussbaum, 2011).

Despite their differences, both Sen and Nussbaum prioritise the role of the approach in addressing inequalities and making evaluations in the interests of just outcomes, because, as Sen states: "...justice cannot be indifferent to the lives that people can actually live" (2009, p. 18). Sen points out that while a perfectly just society might be an unattainable ideal, it is possible to work to reduce injustices and to do what we can to make society more tolerable (Sen, 1999, 2009). The message relevant to the context of higher education in South Africa is that while we strive for full equality, which may not yet be achievable, ongoing objectives ought to be focused on reducing inequalities and expanding people's freedoms, because the freedom to choose our lives can make a significant contribution to well-being.

As a normative approach, the capability approach serves as a tool for social and political action (Deneulin, 2014). It is based on value judgments and aims to provide guidelines on how things *ought* to be done and how improvements can

comparative or actual level of achieved well-being (Sen, 1985). Robeyns (2017) describes advantage as being those aspects of a person's interests that matter either generally or in a specific context.

be brought about that would have a practical bearing on people's lives. A normative approach to life assessments makes a statement of what is desirable in terms of values, which then shape the data that is collected and the way it is analysed. As such, it provides ways of identifying development objectives and understanding how policies can support the achievement of those objectives (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). Using the capability approach to evaluate media graduate employability provides a framework for assessing how (private) higher education contributes to the (good) lives of graduates, as workers and as citizens. Within the capability approach, the individual is the primary moral unit of analysis, and there is no assumption that higher education outcomes are the same for each individual. In the context of the expansion of access and participation in higher education, the approach makes space for recognising the increased diversity of the graduate body, and what each person values and is able to do in life. In addition to assessing the well-being and opportunities of individuals, the capability approach also frames evaluations of higher education institutions, business organisations, and the state, as well as the role of policies and processes in expanding the choices that graduates have in the workplace, their quality of life as graduates, and the freedom individuals have to shape their own lives. These choices ought to serve the interests of the individuals themselves, and in turn, those of society.

Where other approaches and theories might serve to evaluate higher education outcomes based on pedagogical processes or educational resources, or even statistical measures of graduate success, the capability approach underpins processes of human development that aim to improve people's lives in the interests of individuals and of society. Education is one of multiple dimensions of human development (Alkire, 2010). Therefore, I consider this approach suitable in asking normative questions of policies and practice in the context of a higher education system that aims to be a transformative mechanism for the achievement of human development.

4.2.1 Capabilities and functionings

As an approach to social justice, the focus of the capability approach is on addressing issues of inequality (Sen, 1992). In working towards a more equal society, the approach uses the assessment of what people are able to do or be as an adjudicating principle to evaluate dimensions of advantage. Hence a person's position is judged from the perspective of, both what they manage to accomplish i.e. their actual achievements, and also their freedom to achieve what they value being able to do or be. Equality/inequality, therefore, is viewed in terms of people's capabilities and functionings (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1992, 1999).

Capabilities as described by Sen (1999) are the real opportunities people have to achieve what they value, given opportunity and choice. In other words, capabilities are a kind of freedom in the form of opportunities to choose what to be and do. Evaluating the capabilities people have enables us to judge "how good a 'deal' a person has in society" (Sen, 1992, p. 41). As such, they allow for interpersonal comparisons of relative advantage. Freedom for the expansion of opportunities is instrumentally important as "more capabilities translate into more advantage and more well-being" (Walker & Fongwa, 2017, p. 58). Nussbaum (2011, p. 21) expands the conceptualisation of capabilities as "combined capabilities" to highlight the fact that capabilities comprise a combination of a person's internal dimensions together with the external environment. The substantive freedom a person has to choose and to act depends not only on a person's innate abilities but also on how those internal capabilities interact with the social, economic and political environment. The individual and the environment are inter-related elements, so that external conditions act on a person's potential in the process of capability formation and achievement, and the development of capabilities requires favourable external conditions. For example, it is possible for a student to be trained with the skills and abilities to work, however, the combined capability lies in having economic, social or political uptake conditions that support a graduate being able to make choices and to function in accordance with those capabilities. The notion of combined capabilities is important, therefore, in probing societal achievement and

shortcomings. This has relevance in the context of judging educational processes and outcomes, as developing internal capabilities requires favourable external conditions. In other words, the opportunities fostered in and through higher education are not able to be developed or realised for an individual if such opportunities are constrained by external conditions (Nussbaum, 2011).

Education is a capability insofar as it provides students with opportunities to learn, to develop skills and relationships, and the effective possibility to gain decent employment and to earn an income (Flores-Crespo, 2007a; Saito, 2003; Terzi, 2007). The role of higher education institutions in this process is not inconsequential. Organisational structures and relations do play a role in enhancing or limiting capabilities for individuals (Flores-Crespo, 2007b; Sen, 1999; Otto & Ziegler, 2013). Within such organisations, the focus of the capability approach on the individual is significant, particularly given the diverse body of students and graduates in a national higher education system that strives to increase access and promote equality. As Sen states: “Human diversity is no secondary complication (to be ignored, or to be introduced ‘later on’); it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality” (1992, p. xi). Preparing a diverse body of graduates with equitable opportunities for employability as a freedom of choice and substantive freedom to do what they value after graduating, is important.

Functionings are the realisation of valued capabilities. They constitute what people are able to achieve having had opportunity and choice, and they are realised in the lives people are actually able to live (Robeyns, 2017). A person’s well-being depends on the combination of functionings achieved. Functionings relate to basic and complex dimensions of life, for example, having good health, being educated, being able to work, enjoying social relationships, having the ability to express oneself, and so on (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). In the context of the lives of media graduates, functionings include what students are actually able to achieve as the outcomes of higher education processes, such as being able to earn a decent living, building working connections, choosing one form of work

over another, or choosing not to work. Having opportunities to achieve valued functionings enhances the substantive freedom of individuals. For graduates, this comes in the freedoms to be employed, to have a career and opportunities for future endeavours of their choice.

Capabilities (and the related functionings) are distinguishable from graduate attributes, and it is important to make this distinction. Primarily, these concepts differ philosophically, with capabilities being underpinned by a political philosophy of ethics, equality, well-being and freedom (Sen, 1992). Graduate attributes are generally understood to incorporate a comprehensive variety of skills and qualities that graduates possess. The more dominant perspective in the employability literature is that of graduate attributes as the wide range of personal qualities and cognitive abilities developed as outcomes or achievements in higher education, which are relevant to the world of work and other aspects of graduates' lives (Griesel & Parker, 2009; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Osmani et al., 2015). However, there are different viewpoints on the nature of graduate attributes, and some scholars expand the conceptualisation into a more complex notion by situating personal skills and abilities within an overarching set of attitudes and values through which the specific skills are translated, thus drawing attributes closer to capabilities (Barrie, 2006; Bozalek, 2013). Nonetheless, they remain conceptually different. Attributes may be nested within capabilities but they are not capabilities per se.

4.2.2 Well-being, agency and choice

The discussion on human development showed the importance of well-being as the end of development processes. Well-being constitutes the quality of a person's life, and it is substantiated in what he/she is able to do and be (Sen, 1985, 1992, 1993). Sen states: "The primary feature of well-being can be seen in terms of how a person can 'function'" (1985, p. 197). He is referring to a sustained state of being and living well. Capabilities are the opportunities a person has to achieve well-being, and these opportunities are judged by the achievement of ongoing well-being in life and work. Assessments of well-being are not externally

determined but are made from the perspective of a person on his/her own life, and according to what he/she counts as valued (Sen, 1992, 1993). Such achievements are frequently measured in material terms, for example, earning an income or having possessions. However, while income might be instrumental as a means to well-being, it does not necessarily constitute a state of well-being. Achievement of well-being is multi-faceted and includes both material and non-material dimensions that contribute to quality of life. This could include, for example, health, security, knowledge and understanding, meaningful work, participation and empowerment, relationships and affiliation, satisfaction, as well as a sense of harmony with others and the world (Alkire, 2010). Any single dimension on its own, material or non-material, is unlikely to provide an ongoing sense of fulfilment.

Agency plays an important part in well-being and human development. Sen defines an agent as:

Someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objective, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well (1999, p. 19).

The agency role in making choices is central to living and being well, as it has implications for people being able to bring about change in their own lives (Sen, 1985, 1987, 1992, 1999). In the process of expanding human freedom, Sen (1999) distinguished the opportunity aspect of freedom, which concerns the opportunities available to achieve well-being, from the process aspect, which refers to the agency as a means to well-being. In other words, not only the opportunity, but also *how* well-being is achieved is important, and can play an intrinsic role in the development of well-being (Deneulin, 2014; Sen, 1992).

Agency freedom relates to a person being free to pursue whatever goals or values he/she regards as important (Sen, 1985a). Thus, it is evident when a person, as responsible agent, is actively involved in achieving his/her own well-being. Claassen (2016) claims agency as a capability, on the grounds that it is the opportunity for the achievement of autonomous deliberation and free action,

and that achieving these functionings is dependent on social conditions. This positions agency as both an individual and a social achievement. Deneulin states:

...agency does not come out of nowhere. One is not born an agent. One becomes an agent through interaction with others. It is through processes of recognition by others that one acquires the necessary conditions to become an agent of change in one's own life, the life of others and in the natural world (2014, p. 95).

Deneulin (2014) argues that it is in relationship with others that agency develops. Social relationships create the conditions of possibility for people to gain recognition for who they are, what they can do, and as being able to contribute to society. Individuals play an agency role as members of the public and as participants in society, which includes taking part in the labour market, and involvement in other economic, political and social actions and activities – whether directly or indirectly (Sen, 1999). Being able to identify and transform relationships that marginalise individuals or undermine the conditions for agency formation, becomes a key aspect for addressing issues of social justice (Deneulin, 2014; DeJaeghere, 2019). Well-being is achieved individually, but a person's well-being also extends to responsibilities towards the well-being of others, so that “doing something for oneself and for others, contributing to creating or changing one's social, economic, political, cultural and natural environment, [is] the hallmark of a human life well lived” (Deneulin, 2014, p. 42).

The notions of agency and well-being are strongly interdependent albeit separate and distinct from each other (Sen, 1992). Intersecting with them is the notion of genuine choice, which, as mentioned previously, is fundamental to human development. To a certain extent, agency is operationalised through freedom of choice, and choosing is part of living (Sen, 1992, 1999). While the aim of human development is to expand people's choices, well-being does not necessarily lie in the number of options from which to choose but in being able to make a choice from valued and viable alternatives; or even in choosing not to take up an opportunity (Sen, 1993, 1999). For graduates, this means that well-being is not dependent on having many different jobs to apply for, but rather that the potential work opportunities they seek are ones that they value. Graduates who are unable to find media-related work might turn to more readily available income-earning

alternatives, such as working in retail or call centres, which would enable them to earn, but if this is not a valued choice of work, it may come at the cost of well-being. The influence of choice means that agency and well-being do not always work in the same direction (as shown in Figure 6). It is possible for an individual to choose an alternative that does not enhance his/her well-being, or to make a choice that prioritises the well-being of others over self (Sen, 1992).

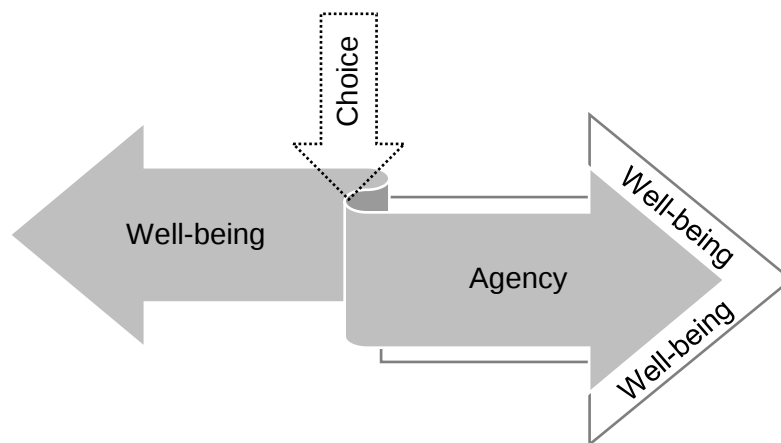


Figure 6: Visual representation of the relationship between choice, agency and well-being

Agency achievement lies in the pursuit and the realisation of goals that the individual has reason to value, whether connected to his/her own well-being or not. It is possible for a person in exercising his agency, to forego his own well-being for an ulterior purpose, as might be the case if a graduate were to decide to take an unfulfilling, menial job in order to earn some income to support the family. It is also possible for a person to have opportunities and yet still not achieve well-being. This might occur if a graduate is given a seemingly desirable job, but where she is underpaid and exploited. Despite the negative conditions, she may choose to remain in the position in order to gain the experience that she feels will ultimately provide access to job options in her field. For an individual to have the capacity to respond to opportunities, depends on the resources at his/her disposal, which in turn helps to realise what he/she wants to do.

4.2.3 Converting resources into opportunities for well-being

In the capability approach, conversion factors are those personal, social or environmental factors that influence how a person is able to convert a resource into a capability and then into a functioning (Robeyns, 2017). Conversion factors influence how people are able to make use of opportunities and to live. Material and economic resources such as money or a car, are instrumental means that can enhance opportunities, or lack of such resources may constrain opportunities and limit achievements. The capability approach recognises that income and commodities form the material basis as a means of well-being. The use of a given level of income (or bundle of commodities) varies between individuals, and is contingent on circumstances (Sen, 1999).

Sen (1999) identifies five distinct factors – personal and social – that influence the freedom and well-being a person might achieve from his/her income. These include:

- (i) *Personal heterogeneities*: People have different income needs depending on their age, gender, health status, disability etc. For example, a person who is ill needs additional income for medication or treatment that a healthy person does not require. In addition, even if well compensated, an ill person, or someone with a disability may not enjoy the same quality of life from the same level of income as a healthy person.
- (ii) *Environmental diversities*: Conditions in the local environment, such as temperature, rainfall, pollution, etc. can determine what a person needs to do with his/her income. For example, an individual living in a township without service delivery may need to spend more of his/her income on purchasing water, fuel for cooking and heating, warm clothing etc. than a person who lives in a middle-class suburb with full service delivery. Such an environment may also impact daily quality of life²⁸.
- (iii) *Social variations*: This is closely related to the environment, and includes quality of life associated with social conditions, including social

²⁸ Issues of service delivery influenced by neoliberal policies severely impact communities in South Africa and affect the quality of lives of individuals, particularly those in townships (McDonald & Pape, 2002; StatsSA, 2017b).

arrangements and facilities, prevalence of crime and violence, community relationships etc. A graduate who lives in a township may live further from commercial centres and therefore need to spend a considerable proportion of his/her income on public transport. He/she also does not enjoy the ease and convenience of door to door travel to work that a person with his/her own transport might enjoy.

- (iv) *Relational perspectives:* Community and cultural differences influence different patterns of behaviour and customs. Therefore, one's position relative to others, such as being relatively poor in a rich community may inhibit a person's functionings. For example, this might include inhibitions for a working class person on how his/her income is spent, or in knowing how to dress for the office, or taking part in the social activities with middle-class colleagues.
- (v) *Intra-family income distribution:* The freedom and well-being achieved from one's earnings may depend on the needs of other members of the family. Some graduates may need to support their family on their income, while others may have their full income for their own use. This distribution makes a difference to what can be achieved with the income and its contribution to that person's quality of life.

The level of income a graduate is able to earn is not on its own indicative of success or quality of life because of the different circumstances that determine the needs for which that income is used, and the opportunities it enables. In the same way that personal and social factors influence the use of financial resources and income in a person's freedom and well-being achievements, the principle of conversion factors is relevant to the conversion of any resources into opportunities. It is applicable to higher education achievements, and also plays a role in the opportunities graduates have in the labour market. Robeyns states:

The advantage of having a clear picture of the resources needed, and the particular conversion factors needed, is that it also gives those aiming to expand capability sets information on where interventions can be made (2017, p. 47).

Understanding how conversion factors shape higher education and employment opportunities for different graduates is important in striving for more equitable opportunities for graduates.

In a diverse group of people, conversion factors mark how each person is differently able to make use of opportunities to achieve functionings. As a result of these differences, people need different amounts of resources to achieve the same outcomes (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Also, given the same resources, different people will achieve different outcomes. This means that not all graduates who receive the same teaching and earn the same qualification will have the same ability to achieve in the workplace, because the extent to which they are able to benefit from their higher education depends on intersecting factors such as their personal health, their home and schooling background, their ability to get to campus or work etc. Walker (2020b) argues that it is not only capabilities that matter in the development impact of higher education, but resources also play a vital role. While fostering capabilities in and through higher education remains important, her study shows that material and economic deprivation has its own particular impact on capability formation and well-being of students.

Conversion factors are not fixed but dynamic. They can vary with time and circumstance for individuals, and can be altered by policies and choices. Therefore, understanding these influences and the way they affect capability expansion allows for interventions to enable improvements in the development process (Robeyns, 2017). The significance of the capability approach is that advantage does not lie purely in having resources, nor does it lie in the means by which the resource is converted; what is important is the opportunity the resource provides for each individual and the extent of functioning that can be achieved (Sen, 1992). Social justice then lies in evaluating an individual's level of advantage in capabilities and functioning achievements against others.

4.3 Operationalising the capability approach

The operationalisation and practical significance of the capability approach was initially seen by scholars to be limited due to the theoretical under-specification of the approach, and its multi-dimensional nature (Alkire, 2010; Chiappero-Martinetti & Roche, 2009; Comim, 2001; Robeyns, 2017). However, from its economic origins, the empirical use of the capability approach over the last two decades has expanded into multiple social applications (Burchardt & Vizard, 2011; Robeyns, 2017). The focus of the approach on issues of human rights, equity and social justice gives it significance in the context of education generally (Flores-Crespo, 2007a; Hart, 2012; Saito, 2003; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007) and in the context of higher education and graduate employability specifically (Fongwa, 2018; Ilieva-Trichkova, 2014; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). The capability approach provides the conceptual foundation for human development, and its application in practice and policy (Alkire, 2010). Using a human development and capability approach as a conceptual lens for researching employability in higher education, therefore, provides a framework for evaluating graduate choice, well-being and agency within the human development role of private institutions.

Figure 7 is an adapted and simplified representation based on Robeyns (2005, 2017) showing the concepts of the capability approach applied to the development of an employability capability set. Resources, both material and non-material, are important inputs to educational and labour market opportunities. Choices and opportunities both in higher education and after graduation, are influenced by conversion factors and structural constraints, for example, factors such as personal background, social norms, institutional and employer policies and processes. Structural constraints have a determining influence on conversion factors and also directly on formation of capabilities (Robeyns, 2017). Agency plays an important role for graduates in the outcomes they are able to achieve, particularly in the light of structural constraints. Graduate employability can be conceptualised in terms of both capabilities and functionings. The capability of employability in the context of this study refers to the opportunities graduates have to make choices in what they do both in higher

education and after graduating. The capability set comprises a range of opportunities provided by private higher education institutions and the learning experiences. The multiple combinations of what graduates can achieve represent their employability functionings. These achievements are determined by conversion factors, including social structures, that enhance or constrain opportunities. Employment is one of multiple achievements that form part of the employability capability set. A complex dimension of this study, not reflected in the diagram, is the layered application both in the context of higher education, as well as in the space of the labour market.

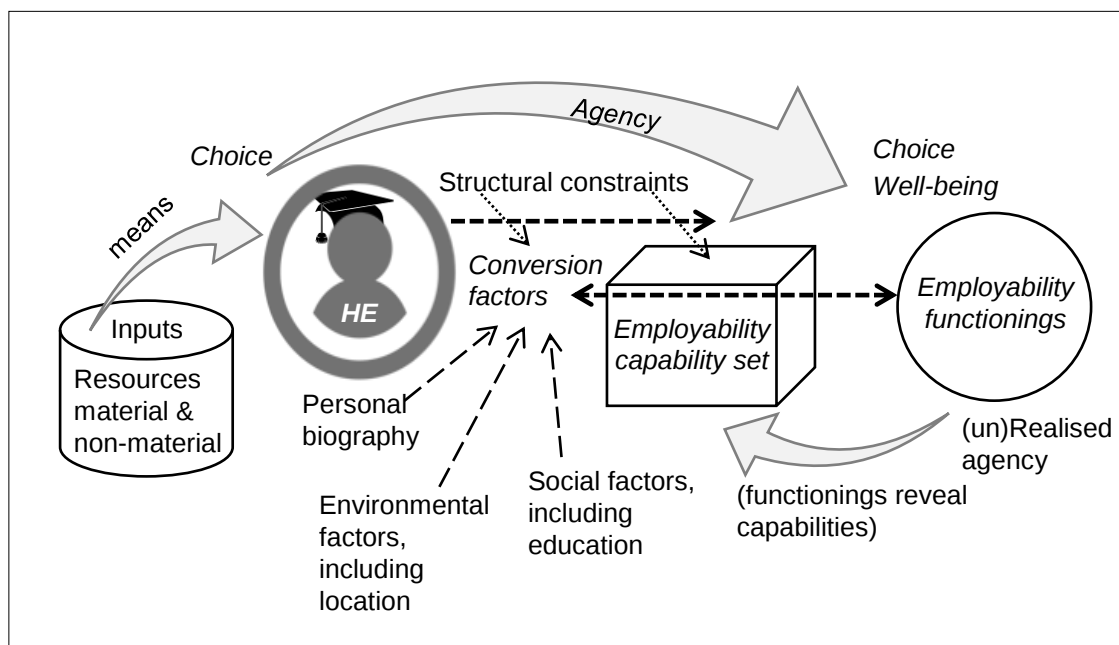


Figure 7: Conceptualising graduate employability in terms of the capability approach (adapted from Robeyns, 2005, p. 98; 2017, p. 83)

The use of the capability approach to frame the data collection and analysis in this study enables an assessment of not only the opportunities that private higher education provides for graduates, but also the use that different graduates have actually been able to make of those opportunities, and the options available to them. In the analysis, a focus on what graduates are able to do (their functionings) enables evaluation of their capability sets, as the latter, which are not observable, are derived from the former, which can be observed (Sen, 1999). The value of

the capability approach is in recognising that graduates have the freedom to choose among various bundles of functionings in the ways they choose to lead their lives. It also recognises that individuals who have experienced deprivations resulting from political, economic and historical circumstances require different amounts of resources to develop the functionings required for employability. The focus on capabilities also includes the option for graduates to have opportunities that they choose not to take up (Sen, 1999). For example, a graduate may choose not to take a particular job if he/she feels the work is not aligned to his/her personal values. It is in making comparative evaluations of the capabilities for employability across the group that relative disadvantage or advantage between graduates is revealed, and that throws the light on the social justice implications for policy and practice.

4.3.1 Capabilities in response to human capital

The human capital approach to graduate employability was discussed in Chapter 3. According to Sen (1997) human capital, as an investment in human well-being and development, bears a strong connection to human capabilities, as both are concerned with the role of human beings and what people are able to achieve. However, Sen points out that it is at this point that the differences in the two approaches become apparent, and the instrumental notion of the human capital approach can be subsumed into the broader perspective of the capability approach.

The human capital approach foregrounds employers and the labour market, for whom the graduate is a means to economic production. The capability approach centres round graduates' lives, in which the labour market and employment are just one dimension. This broader perspective shifts away from the view of employment as the ultimate achievement of higher education (Walker, 2012). The capability approach recognises the instrumental importance of employment, but considers that higher education has more to offer to graduates that is of both instrumental and intrinsic value. It includes concern for the ways in which graduates are able to contribute towards social change through what they choose

to do and be. Employment is important, and graduates stand a better chance of being employed than those who don't have higher education, however, expenditure on educational resources does not always have a direct positive correlation with a sense of well-being or quality of life (Ionescu, Ionsecu & Jaba, 2013; Speckman, 2018). As such, rather than replacing the human capital approach, the capability approach serves to supplement and go beyond instrumental educational outcomes (Walker, 2012).

4.3.2 Employability for human development

Employability is frequently used synonymously with employment, but ultimately translates into the ability of graduates to work. Work plays a significant role in people's lives. In the context of human development, work is about more than jobs or employment. It can take many forms that might include paid and unpaid work, opportunities for voluntary work, care work, and creative work opportunities (UNDP, 2015). For individuals, work provides income and livelihoods that enable other social and economic opportunities. It also contributes in significant ways to the development of society through the reduction of poverty, and contributes to more equitable growth. As such, work supports human development in a synergistic and mutually reinforcing way, shown in Figure 8.

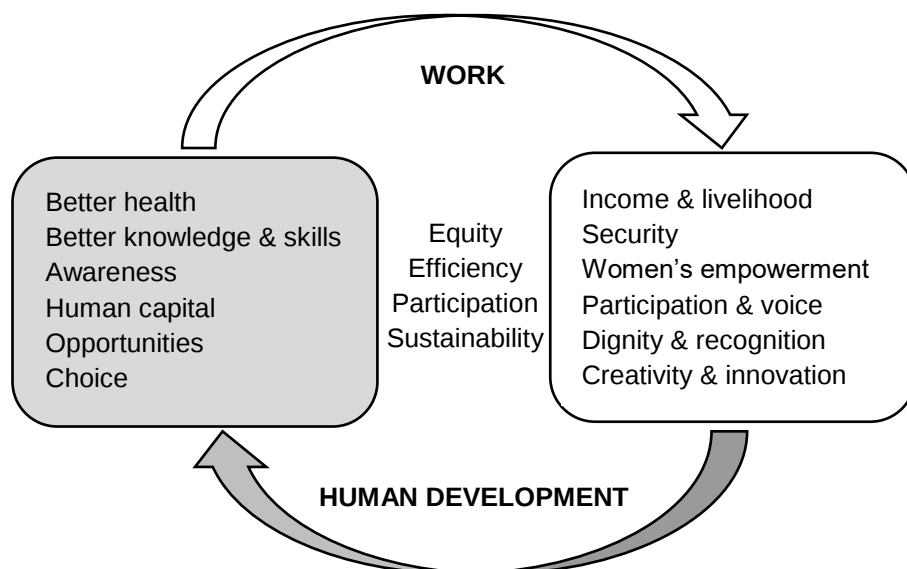


Figure 8: The synergistic relationship between work and human development (adapted from UNDP, 2015, p. 33)

This relationship is underpinned by the principles of equity, efficiency, participation/empowerment, and sustainability (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). The relationship between work and human development does not automatically imply a direct positive correlation. It depends on the quality of work, the work conditions, and the societal value attached to the work. The UNDP report on work for human development states: "... just as the right kind of work enhances human development, so the wrong kind can be deeply destructive" (UNDP, 2015, p. 29). This includes work that is exploitative, stifles workers' potential, and deprives them of their rights, dignity, or social protection.

In terms of graduate employability, this has implications for the supply-side (of graduates) from institutions, and the labour market demand-side (or workers), so that both the quantity and quality of available work ought to enable opportunities fairly and equally. As was mentioned previously, the opportunity aspect of freedom is the available opportunities a person has for choice. This is distinct from the process aspect of freedom, which is the freedom to actually make that choice (Deneulin, 2014; Sen, 1992). What this means for employability is that consideration is given to the capability for work, which is the freedom for a graduate to choose a job or activity he/she has reason to value from amongst a range of different available opportunities (Bonvin, 2012). Beyond having the skills and knowledge for a range of work, higher education that is concerned for human development ought to equip graduates with the agentic capacity to be able to make appropriate work choices, and to weigh up the dimensions of work that they consider valuable. This might include the salary, location and travel, benefits and entitlements of the position, work conditions, and so on, that each person considers to be prerequisites for "valuable work" (Leßmann & Bonvin, 2011, p. 89). This would also include the freedom to choose not to work, or to decline a position that is potentially harmful or poorly remunerated (Bonvin, 2012; Bonvin & Farvaque, 2006). Figure 8 shows that 'good' work that is valued provides opportunities for a good life. When graduates have the opportunity to participate in the workplace, to earn a livelihood, to be creative, to feel secure and gain

recognition, according to what each one values, this fuels other choices and opportunities for well-being.

Taking the core concepts of capabilities, functionings, and conversion factors, a human development approach to higher education is able to address shortcomings in the human capital approach to employability. While this alone is not going to alter the unemployment statistics in the country, it has the potential to expose inequalities and reveal which students are most affected.

4.3.3 Comparative evaluations of (dis)advantage

Through this chapter I have discussed the value of the capability approach as a framework for making comparative evaluations of advantage. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) frame well-being in terms of levels of advantage and disadvantage. They define disadvantage as “a lack of genuine opportunity for secure functioning” (2014, p. 9). This expands the notion of functionings beyond an achievement at a particular moment. As such, well-being does not lie in being offered a job or getting a promotion. For a person to truly experience well-being, it needs to be sustained over time. The job or promotion position needs to provide ongoing satisfaction with work and to relate well with other aspects of the person's life (Leßmann & Bonvin, 2011). For example, a graduate who works on a freelance basis may experience anxiety and reduced well-being knowing that once a particular project is complete he/she faces the prospect of not earning until being able to find the next project. Despite not being unemployed (in the broad sense of the word²⁹) and even if he/she earns well, the insecurity of not being in fixed employment, and the inconsistency of income, creates lack of security of functioning that is disadvantageous, both relative to others as well as in absolute terms. A graduate in a high-earning job is not necessarily better off than someone in low-paid work if the level of functioning and the ability to sustain the functioning are not achieved, and particularly if he/she perceives that there is no prospect of the situation improving (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007).

²⁹ As discussed, Sen (1975) states that this can depend on the individual's perception of the recognition aspect of employment. It was the case in this study that a participant who had been earning by means of various freelance jobs and project work over a couple of years described himself as 'unemployed'.

A feature of disadvantage is that it brings with it a sense of vulnerability and risk that impacts on well-being. Disadvantage is strongly linked with poverty and lack of income (Walker, 2020b). For many students, particularly those from poorer families, getting a higher education qualification and a job is perceived to be the route out of poverty, and the mechanism by which they aspire to uplift themselves and their families out of disadvantage. When it comes to making choices, whether about higher education or finding work after graduation, their status of economic need means that disadvantaged individuals may expose themselves to risks that students who come from wealthier families do not face. Their choice process about where or what to study is qualitatively different from those of students from well-off families who have freedom of choice to select what they consider the best institution and study programme (Brynin, 2012; Reay, Davies, David & Ball, 2001; Tavares & Ferreira, 2012). For disadvantaged individuals, the perception of risk drives decisions made out of fear and anxiety. They may take any job as soon after graduation as possible, regardless of whether it provides an adequate salary or suits their skillset, on the grounds that some income is better than none. However, they may not realise that underemployment carries with it the long-term risk to their careers of “life in the graduate graveyards” (Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2019, p. 110; see also Baert & Verhaest, 2014; Baert et al, 2013; Nunley et al., 2017). The desperation to earn an income, may result in taking a job where there is a risk of personal harm or other forms of inconvenience, because they consider it would be riskier to wait for a job option with a higher salary or that better suits their preference. Risk is part of life and many individuals voluntarily make risky choices and decisions, however, it is the involuntary exposure to risks in the absence of options that characterises disadvantage (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007).

A further feature of disadvantage is its multidimensional nature. It cannot be reduced to a single measure with the hope that it might be resolved through employment. According to Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) the plural nature of disadvantage can result in risks and disadvantage clustering, creating a compound effect in which disadvantage leads to further disadvantage and ill-being. For example, students from disadvantaged backgrounds have a higher

likelihood of having had poor quality schooling, which impacts on performance in higher education, as well as on confidence and social skills, and consequently also on employment options, with a likelihood of joblessness. This is described as “corrosive disadvantage” (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007, p. 10). For any graduate, regardless of his/her background, unemployment is a form of disadvantage that has the potential to be corrosive over time. Not being able to work, clusters with other disadvantages such as poor mental and physical health, crime and drug abuse (Belluz, 2015; Wilkinson & Marmot cited in Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). In addition, being out of work for any length of time acts as a negative signal to employers and this becomes one of a number of “scarring effects” (Baert & Verhaest, 2014, p. 2) including loss of self-esteem, low motivation and a sense of disenfranchisement from unfulfilled potential, as well as deterioration in relationship with others. In the field of media, such effects might be exacerbated by the rapid advances in technology, so that without work, graduates are unable to keep up to date with innovations such as computer programs or digital equipment, and their skills to perform tasks become quickly outdated. Being unemployed and keeping up to date would require media graduates to enrol for courses, or to be doing online learning – all of which comes at a financial cost. Consequently, the longer a graduate is without work, the more vulnerable he/she becomes to economic conditions, and the harder it becomes to secure work (Graham et al., 2019; Hwang, 2017; Rothwell & Rothwell, 2017).

Unemployment and disadvantage are complex states of existence, and yet the repercussions become a personal problem for which the individual needs to take responsibility. Dealing with the corrosive effects of unemployment requires identifying and removing the causes of “unfreedoms” (Sen, 1999, p. 3) within social and economic arrangements. This would include addressing structural barriers to employment, and overcoming the clustering of disadvantage (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). This applies not only under conditions of unemployment, but equally to the extent to which a job itself, pay level, or work conditions can have a corrosive effect on other disadvantage. Employability focused on human development seeks mechanisms for each individual to have the opportunity to

attain security of functioning in his/her own particular context. Risk can be reduced through creating conditions for securing and spreading the good effects of “fertile functionings” that assist in the development of other functionings or capabilities (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007, p. 10). This could mean, for example, if a person is able to work as part of a team on a project this can expand connections, start to build a network, reinforce skills, build experience, provide opportunities for participation and social interaction (and possibly further ensuing interactions), create affiliation, provide exposure to new contexts and learning, develop confidence, enhance self-esteem, and so on. In this way, being able to work on one project potentially generates multiple other capabilities and functionings, and also reduces various risks and insecurities.

4.3.4 Pros and cons of the capability approach

Using the capability approach as a framework to broaden the scope of analysis of graduate employability, gives consideration to the opportunities that higher education outcomes actually provide for graduates as they enter the labour market. It also frames an evaluation of higher education processes and their contribution to graduates’ well-being and quality of life. In sum, the value of using the capability approach in the context of evaluating higher education outcomes include the following:

- (i) It provides a normative lens linking macro-level systems with the meso- and micro-level, so that higher education is relevant for individuals as well as for society. It allows us to consider what private providers are doing, what they ought to be doing and what they could do better in developing graduate employability and contributing to human development. It has implications for higher education policy and practice.
- (ii) Its multi-dimensionality allows us to consider the many facets that contribute to graduates being able to flourish in life, so that higher education encompasses the development of a wide range of abilities and opportunities, giving consideration to the many ways in which graduates are able to participate in and contribute to their community and to society, which

includes working and earning an income, but is not restricted to being employed.

- (iii) It recognises the diversity of graduates, and values their individuality with regard to what they may want to be or do with their qualification. It recognises each graduate as a moral equal who ought to have the freedom and agency to decide on his/her own career and life path.
- (iv) It provides an evaluative framework for making comparative assessments of graduates' well-being, to identify inequalities in the freedoms and choices that different graduates have for employment, and then to work towards greater equality.
- (v) It provides a conceptual lens focused on means and ends to attend to (private) higher education that is inclusive and ensures that the conditions are in place to foster capabilities for employability so that each individual is able to pursue his/her own ultimate ends (Robeyns, 2017).

A focus on capabilities and functionings in evaluating graduate employability, recognises that in addition to personal attributes, there is much within social structures and processes that enhances employment for some graduates and constrains it for others. Therefore the approach has value in revealing systemic and structural constraints that potentially lead to unequal and unfair practices. This is important for making headway in meeting developmental targets for transformation, particularly given the weak economy and unpredictable labour market conditions characteristic of South Africa (Bisseker, Singiswa & Uthum, 2018) and which are all the more tenuous and unpredictable with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Bloomberg News, 2020; UNDP, 2020). The capability approach is not often used in the context of higher education evaluation, or understanding employability, and the ability to combine human development and the capability approach adds to its value.

Nonetheless, there has been wide-ranging critique of the approach conceptually and methodologically (Comim, 2001; Pogge, 2010; Robeyns, 2017). In the context of employment and employability, shortcomings of the approach have

been expressed in terms of its inability to adequately theorise agency and structure (Powell & McGrath, 2019) and its insufficiency in influencing social policy for employment (Laruffa, 2020). Two particular shortcomings of the approach that I feel are relevant in the context of this study include firstly, the strong focus on individual capabilities. Such a focus remains conceptual and ideological in educational and workplace contexts, which are strongly social and relational. Stewart (2019) warns of making judgements based on individual decisions because in social contexts choices are not always made autonomously. Social norms influence behaviour and social relationships play a role in an individual's choices and decision-making. Therefore, considering career and job decisions as individual choice and opportunity possibly unrealistically reduces the complexity of social and affective factors that actually influence these decisions. Secondly, in looking at the expansion of capabilities for employability, the approach makes it important that capabilities are developed, but without needing to give consideration to *how* this is done, or *who* should be responsible. The responsibility for the development of agency lies neither solely with higher education providers, nor with the student or graduate agent. If employability can be enhanced through the development of capabilities, it would be necessary to understand how it might be possible to actually implement this in higher education, why capabilities are or are not expanded, and who ought to take responsibility for their development.

It is possible to combine the capability approach with other theories – an idea supported by Sen (2009) and found in capabilities literature (Hart, 2018; Powell & McGrath, 2019). However, sociological or critical realistic approaches bring different epistemological and ontological stances. Bearing the critique of the capability approach in mind, and notwithstanding its shortcomings, my commitment to a human development and capability approach for the purposes of this study lies in its ontological stance on normative individualism (Robeyns, 2017). A human development and capability conceptual framing enables us to make claims about who should count when making evaluations and decisions about social arrangements such as higher education. As such it recognises the

individual as the unit of ultimate moral concern, which aligns with the philosophical and pragmatic intentions that underpin the study. These are presented in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented human development and the capability approach as the conceptual framework for the study. This is a normative approach to evaluating the contribution private institutions make to what graduates are able to be and do in the labour market. Moreover, it is grounded in a concern that higher education outcomes ought to be equitable and fair, and enable all graduates to enjoy well-being in what they choose to be and do. According to Sen (1999), evaluations of well-being might focus differentially on people's opportunities, or what they are actually able to do. A focus on an individual's capabilities does not inform us of what he/she is able to do. And a focus on his/her functionings does not clarify what kind of life the graduate is living or would like to live. However, it is possible to work with both capabilities and functionings because "...the real value of a set of options lies in the best use that can be made of them, and... the use that is *actually* made (Sen, 1999, p. 76, italics in original). It is not possible to directly observe capabilities, however their formation can be related to observable functionings, so that a focus on functionings reveals a person's capability set, and the latter can be judged by the former (Sen, 1992, 1999; Wolff & De-Shalit, 2013). The value of this study is not only to consider the opportunities that higher education provides graduates for employment, but also to understand how those opportunities are mobilised in the lives of graduates, and what they have been able to achieve in their specific circumstances. Use of this framework with an emphasis on human freedoms for the conceptualisation of employability leans towards what Walker and Fongwa call a "potentially radical" approach (2017, p. 58), more so than that of human capital and decontextualised individuals. This framework guided the research design for the data collection that is presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Mixed methods and transformative intentions

Introduction

The primary purpose of this research project is to understand graduate employability in terms of the way in which higher education outcomes are able to be converted into employment in the labour market for different graduates. This means bringing together the policy intentions of higher education institutions with the activities of the labour market, and understanding how this plays out in the lived realities of graduates. The purpose of this chapter is to present the research methodology and design of the study. The chapter is structured in three parts. In the first part (section 5.1) I present the theoretical underpinning, and justify my choice of a transformative paradigm and mixed methods design that guided my planning and intention prior to the data collection. The second part reports on the design and research setting as well as the implementation of the plan. It comprises three sub-sections reporting firstly on the institutional sites and their selection (section 5.2), then on the practical processes that I followed and the instruments used in conducting the two different phases of the research (sections 5.3 and 5.4). In the third part (section 5.5) I reflect critically on the process, the ethical considerations and the methodological limitations of the study.

5.1 Theoretical underpinning

This section describes the theoretical basis from which I planned the study, and that connects the discussion to the discipline and the topic (Thomson, 2013). It started with the research problem described in Chapter 1.

5.1.1 Fruitful questions

Central to most research is a problem from which questions arise that direct the planning and guide the method to be followed (Stake, 1995). Research questions are derived from the purpose of the study. From the broad intent, they set boundaries to a research project, clarify the particular direction that the process will take, and provide specific focus for the study. The research questions also provide a framework for reporting on research findings, and as such link the study's purpose to the methods and the findings (Plano Clark & Badiie, 2010). While positivist research is strongly focused on the method to provide observational evidence of scientific truths, in social science research Gadamer (2004, cited in Nixon, 2017) argued that knowledge is constructed through asking questions and developing understanding in context. As such the method is a tool, and "It is the question – the 'fruitful' question – that drives and guides that process" (Nixon, 2017, p. 7). Such questions are constituted by elements of the past, the present and the future. They are located in current concerns, but shaped by distinctive histories, with the intention of providing an orientation to future actions (Nixon, 2017).

The 'fruitful' questions that have guided this research project, and contributed to the choice of methodology and methods used in the quest for understanding, are the research questions as presented in Chapter 1, and which I repeat here for convenience:

1. How does private higher education contribute to enhancing equitable opportunities for media graduate employability and well-being?
2. What are the capabilities that diverse media graduates value for participation in the workplace and in society?
3. What are the factors that enable or constrain media graduates' participation in the workplace?
4. What are the capabilities that employers in the media industry value (from private higher education graduates)?

These questions speak to current concerns about graduate employment, employability and well-being, and the equitability of higher education outcomes. They arise from concerns about the purpose of higher education and the role it plays in expanding opportunities for graduates to flourish in life. This concern is grounded in a consciousness of our political, economic and social history in South Africa, which has shaped educational cultures and structures unequally and unjustly. Addressing these concerns requires an understanding of what graduates are experiencing in the workplace and how they are able to apply their higher education for employment success. The intention is that these questions provide insightful perspectives to clarify the role that private higher education institutions are able to play going forward in contributing to the transformative objectives of the higher education sector in producing equitable opportunities for all graduates (DHET, 2013).

I used these questions to orientate the design and methods of the research project so that the methodological decisions made enable findings that can answer the questions.

5.1.2 Transformative intentions

Underpinning this study is a concern for human rights and social justice, aligned with higher education's objectives to contribute to development and transformation in the country (DHET, 2013). For this reason, this study is framed by a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009) that works in conjunction with a pragmatic orientation towards implementation that will potentially bring about social change in practice. The transformative paradigm is a framework that situates research in response to historical burdens of social inequities. It gives recognition to contextually situated dimensions of diversity and privilege, and confronts the ethical implications of social processes that sustain conditions of pervasive marginalisation, oppression and/or discrimination. The goal of the approach is to challenge societal structures and processes that sustain the status quo in the interests of enhancing social justice (Mertens, 2009, 2010, 2011; Mertens, Bledsoe, Sullivan & Wilson, 2010). Social problems such as

unemployment are made prominent in the media and in academic literature, however such issues are difficult to address and practical solutions are elusive. To this end, Mertens et al., (2010) explain the value of the transformative approach in researching social issues:

If a transformative lens is brought to such topics and the focus is on human rights and social justice, then researchers can raise questions that are directly relevant to the life experiences and contexts of those whose quality of life is most impacted by inequality, discrimination, and oppression (2010, p. 197).

It is a strongly values-driven approach, and, according to Mertens (2012, p. 811) the predominant axiological assumption provides a “conceptual framework” for the paradigm from which the other assumptions logically flow.

Ontologically, transformative research is grounded in the belief that there are multiple socially constructed versions of what is considered to be real. Distinct from the constructivist notion of multiple constructed realities, the transformative approach holds to a belief that there is one reality about which there are multiple opinions (Mertens, 2007, 2010; Mertens et al., 2010). For this reason, while I foreground the graduates’ reality based on their experiences, I considered it important to obtain different perspectives on graduate employability – not only from the graduates themselves, but also from the higher education providers who prepared the graduates, and the employers who have expectations of what they require from graduates. However, recognising the influence of power, associated with factors such as economics, gender, socio-economic status, tradition etc., in determining what is accepted as real and legitimate, this approach emphasises the need for critical reflection on whose version of reality is privileged, and in which context. This critical reflection is important for research in education, as Mertens et al., point out:

...that which seems “real” may instead be reified structures that are taken to be real because of historical situations. Thus, what is taken to be real, needs to be critically examined via an ideological critique of its role in perpetuating oppressive social structures and policies (2010, p. 199).

People’s various perspectives reflect different versions of reality, and not all are equally legitimate. Social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and other factors shape an individual’s construction of reality, and it is necessary to be cautious in

the analysis of those perspectives not to ignore some of these broader societal factors that might privilege one version of reality over another (Mertens, 2010). Questions of power and privilege also have epistemological implications.

Within a transformative context, epistemological assumptions view the relationship between the researcher and participants of paramount importance. Mertens (2010, p. 471) refers to the “cultural competency” of the researcher in understanding historical and social contexts in order to establish relationships of trust with participants, which are sensitive to diversity, power and privilege, and are critical in achieving valid contextual understanding. This includes partnerships that draw diverse participants into active participation in the research process as a way of addressing privilege and/or power differences. Other approaches, such as interpretive and constructivist research, also take a perspectival and contextual view on knowledge. These are belief systems in which the researcher’s goal is to understand things from the perspective of the participant. Understanding is formed from interpretation of social action, with priority given to action over structure (Chowdhury, 2014). In contrast, the transformative approach is concerned with the power and privilege that is embedded in people’s perspectives and hence in both action and structures. In the context of graduate employability, I am mindful of the relative power that institutions and employers have over graduates. Also, of my own power as researcher in the choices and decisions I make in the data collection and interpretation. What is important is that there is an interactive and collaborative link between researcher and participants to ensure that neither the researcher nor a particular participant group, overpowers what is known (Mertens, 2009, 2012). In foregrounding graduate experiences and voices, therefore, their interview data will feed into the data collection from staff and employers, and it will also contribute to the design of the survey.

Social science research generally makes use of qualitative methods to add depth to the investigation, and this is an important component of transformative research. However, Mertens (2012) states that addressing methodological

questions is likely to include more than a once-off data collection with one type of data. She explains:

...the most likely scenario would be a mixed methods design with cyclical collection of data that feeds into subsequent decisions about how to use the information to move the research to the next level or to make changes in the community (2012, p. 809).

Methodologically, a transformative approach is compatible with mixed methods. This research design uses a combination of methods to capture the various notions of reality, focused on obtaining data that represents a variety of perspectives and insights, and giving consideration to voices with more or less power (Mertens, 2007, 2010, 2012; Mertens et al., 2010). In addition, the use of a sequential design enables the initial data to inform the next phase of collection. In this way responses of participants in the first phase are used to design the instrument for the second phase, based on what has been learned. Given the paradigmatic concern for remaining alert to issues of power and privilege, the methodological assumptions need to ask questions about the optimum method to get the “real picture” (Mertens, 2010, p. 472).

5.1.3 Mixed methods

Linking back to Gadamer’s (2004, cited in Nixon, 2017) argument, the method of enquiry is selected on the basis that it is a helpful tool and appropriate to the nature of the enquiry. Since its emergence, mixed methods research has been touted as more than a method. It has been given the ‘status’ of a paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), a distinctive methodology (Greene, 2006, 2008), and a pragmatic approach (Morgan, 2007), which have been much debated and contested (Burke Johnson, 2011; Maxwell, 2011). Reviews of the mixed methods literature over time show that more recently, the selection of mixed methods is less a justification of its legitimacy and positioning within research, and more focused on its value as a helpful tool. Not only does the mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches enhance each other and provide a range of design options (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006) but it is more than a framework for a process of knowledge production. As a tool, mixed methods work within paradigms to add meaning to what is learned (Shannon-Baker, 2016). In

conjunction with a transformative paradigm, mixed methods becomes a tool for social change (Mertens, 2011, 2012, 2015).

The empirical research on graduate employability in South Africa, reviewed in the literature in Chapter 3, has taken a predominantly quantitative orientation comprised of surveys that measure job destinations and the employment status of graduates on transition from higher education (CHEC, 2013; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Moleke, 2010; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015). Other literature on unemployment in the labour market makes use of the national quantitative datasets from the Statistics South Africa Labour Force surveys (Bhorat, 2004; Pauw et al., 2008; Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2012). It is possible to use regular surveys to build a progressive picture of graduate movement in the labour market (Moleke, 2003). However, on the whole, these surveys and tracer studies serve higher education institutions and the labour market. They do not provide information about what graduates are actually experiencing, their opportunities, or how they are able to manage their career pathways. There has been limited research that provides qualitative data on graduates' workplace experiences (Case, Marshall & Fongwa, 2018; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). These studies contribute an understanding of how graduates are able to make use of their higher education experiences and what this means for the purposes of higher education in South Africa in achieving post-apartheid development objectives. Methodologically, the qualitative study by Case et al. (2018) and the mixed methods study conducted by Walker and Fongwa (2017) were both conducted in public universities. This study is able to make a methodological contribution using mixed methods in a private higher education context.

The economic, social, political and cultural complexity of South Africa, means that there are multiple versions of reality when it comes to the opportunities and challenges provided in and through higher education. Borrowing from Mertens' experience of conducting research in this country, I will use her prompts for mixed methods to:

- Identify, support, and include the voices of diverse participants

- Reveal different version of reality, including their basis in terms of privilege and power
- Contribute to the change in understanding of what is real in order to focus on those aspects of the context that can contribute to positive social change (Mertens, 2011, p. 196).

The intention in the use of mixed methods is that it will thereby be a helpful tool to enhance the use of the study findings to support the pursuit of higher education for social justice in the country (Mertens, 2011).

5.1.4 Cyclical (sequential) design

The research design takes a sequential exploratory structure (represented simplistically in Figure 9 below). There is an initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis followed by a phase of quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003). Within a mixed methods design, Yin (2018, p. 64) describes this as a “nested arrangement” with complementary enquiries (in this instance, conducted sequentially). The phases are conducted independently, however the data is integrated during the process of analysis as the qualitative data underpins and informs the quantitative data collection. The sequential data collection enables the qualitative and quantitative data to complement each other when it is integrated in the final analysis and findings.

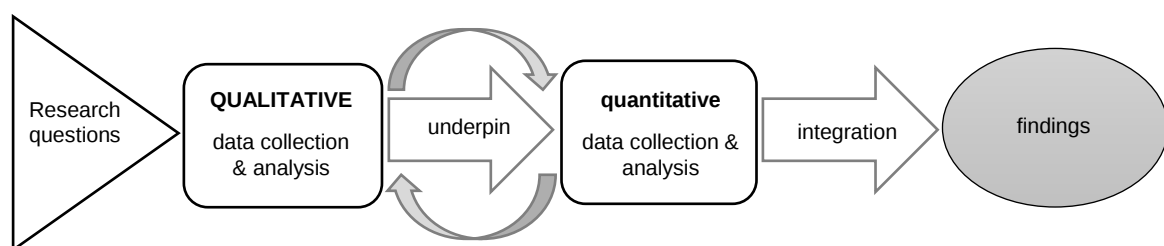


Figure 9: Visual representation of a sequential exploratory mixed methods design (adapted from Creswell et al., 2003)

The transformative approach promotes a cyclical design for data collection (Mertens, 2007, 2010, 2012). The cyclical nature of the data collection process engaged graduate participants in the first cycle of the first phase. Initial interviews with graduates provided in-depth data about their higher education and

employment experiences. This was followed by a second cycle of interviews with key staff informants and media employers to follow up on the graduate data, and to add a diversity of perspectives on higher education and labour market reality. The body of qualitative data from the in-depth interviews conducted with graduates, staff and employers in the first (qualitative) phase, contributed to the design of the questionnaire that was completed by a larger population of media graduates in a final cycle of data collection. The survey conducted during the second (quantitative) phase, enabled further exploration and expansion of understanding on graduates' experiences (Creswell et al., 2003; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Yin, 2018). The complexity of this design enabled different forms of engagement with a rich depth, and added breadth of data that otherwise would not have been obtained from a different design or a single method.

5.2 The design

The particular design of this research is a case study. A case study is concerned with “the *particularity* and *complexity* of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi, my italics). It is not only the case itself but also the inherent issues that might be of concern, enabling contextual understanding of the world, and it is this feature that distinguishes it from other modes of enquiry (Yin, 2018). Yin provides the following definition:

A case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident (2018, p. 15).

A case study is not a sampling unit, and therefore not representative of any larger population but significant in and of itself (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Mindful of the limitation of case study as a basis for generalisation to a broader context (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018), I selected this design due to its various benefits, which include a particular contextual focus, as well as its flexible nature (described more as a strategy than a method), the openness to incorporate multiple variables, and its amenability within the use of mixed methods (Bryman, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Yin, 2012, 2018). Unlike

some case studies, the site itself was not the object of analysis but is significant, as it provides the context, acting as “a backcloth to the collection of data” (Bryman, 2016, p. 61).

The study incorporates three private higher education institutions and various stakeholders as the embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018). In this instance the phenomena under investigation include organisational processes and the pedagogical outcomes, as well as individuals within and external to the organisation. The many intersecting variables include graduates, staff, employers, teaching processes, recruitment processes, and various contextual realities. The study covers multiple sites that represent distinct institutional types and the intention is not to portray separate cases but rather draws a single set of conclusions from all of them. Multiple case studies are often used for comparative purposes in building or supporting theory, or understanding causality (Bryman, 2016), and Yin (2012, 2018) advocates multiple case studies for theoretical replication³⁰. However, in this instance, comparison is not the purpose, and the decision in favour of a single case design is to provide contextual representation, i.e. that the different sites represent the diversity and differentiation of institutions that comprise the case of private higher education, while each retains essential characteristics that define this context. Moreover, understanding the diversity within the sector, the intention is not to be able to generalise the findings but rather to explore and gain insight into the influences that have enabled or constrained employability for graduates. While case studies are not concerned with statistical generalisation, inferences, analytical or theoretical generalisation may follow (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Yin, 2012).

5.2.1 The case of private higher education

There are approximately 30 registered private higher education institutions in South Africa that offer accredited programmes in the broad field of Media (DHET,

³⁰ Yin (2018) describes replication logic for multiple case studies as analogous to multiple experiments. As for experiments, this would require consistent and identical conditions, which is what makes this selection unsuitable for the context of this research given the diversity of private higher education institutions.

2018a, 2019b). These include vocational and professional programmes that offer qualifications at Higher Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, and Bachelor Honours Degree levels in a range of sub-fields including, Journalism, Graphic Design, Digital Design, Public Relations, Creative and Visual Communications, Radio, Television and Sound Engineering, as well as New media, Multimedia and Interactive media. These institutions and programmes formed the pool of possible cases from which the selection for this study was made³¹.

5.2.2 Organisational typology

This purposive selection of the institutions resulted in three case 'types'. They represent the diversity of types of institutions found within the private higher education sector and are differentiated according to their form, ownership and governance structures (which also relates to their size)³². They range in size from small, i.e. single-campus entities, with under 150 students, and an individual owner/manager; to medium, i.e. multi-campus entities with $\pm 2\,000$ students, managed by a Board of Directors; and large, i.e. corporately owned entities comprised of several separate higher education institutions merged into an academic subsidiary, represented by multiple campuses nation-wide that together accommodate approximately 5 000 students. Despite these structural differences, there is uniformity at the level of the student/graduate, who pays fees to participate in a single programme in a single institution at a particular site, and is considered a graduate of that institution. Therefore, in collecting data from the participants, they all represent the case of private higher education at different sites. The sampling and data collection was consistent across the cases.

³¹ In the final selection, I excluded the Advanced Certificate and Advanced Diploma programmes in favour of the Diploma and Bachelor's Degree programmes that represent the same levels 6 and 7 on the NQF. I only gave consideration to undergraduate qualifications (see footnote 5) and therefore also excluded the Bachelor Honours Degree programme which is a postgraduate academic qualification (CHE, 2013).

³² Information describing these institutions was obtained directly from the institutions, as well as from their marketing collateral and their websites. I have omitted citations and provided a generalised typology in order to preserve the anonymity of the institutions.

5.2.3 The selection process

The process of selection of institutions was a two-phased approach (Yin, 2018). In an initial step, I downloaded the register of private higher education institutions (DHET, 2018b) from the DHET website and identified 31 institutions that offer relevant media-related programmes. The next phase of filtering and selection was influenced by several factors according to which preference was given:

- (i) firstly, to institutions that showed a specialisation for media and creative programmes, rather than institutions where there are one or two media programmes incorporated into a broad range of offerings across multiple fields and disciplines;
- (ii) secondly, to different institutions across which I could identify an overlap of programmes in popular sub-fields, to provide for consistency of the skill and knowledge development of the programmes³³. This became narrowed down to qualifications in the sub-fields of Journalism, Public Relations, Graphic Design, and Creative/Visual Communication. These appeared as the most commonly offered programmes by different institutions, and allowed the case institutions to represent popular media programmes offered by different private providers;
- (iii) thirdly, according to the governance structure of the organisation, as I wanted a diverse representation of different types of organisation within the sector (described in the next paragraph); and
- (iv) fourthly, having met all the above criteria, I was influenced by my previous work experience in the sector³⁴, and the shortlist included institutions with which I was familiar and which I felt would facilitate access.

There are institutions that I excluded, despite the fact that they met one or more of the criteria listed above, on the grounds of their location outside the major centres of Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. I did this because

³³ I was not too particular about the consistency of type of qualification. In other words whether the qualification is offered as a Higher Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor's degree in the sub-field, as the purpose and characteristics of all these undergraduate programmes typify vocational/professional qualifications.

³⁴ See my personal positioning discussed in section 5.5.3.

geographical location does influence employability³⁵ and I felt it was important that, for the purposes of the research, graduates should have had access to similar job markets. Ultimately, the final selection included three different institutions, comprised of four providers³⁶ and nine (popular and overlapping) programmes between them. Permission was sought, and granted, to include the three institutions as cases in the study, and to collect data from graduates and staff (see Appendix D: Institution information letter).

Having described the research design and setting, the next sub-section presents the first phase of the data collection process.

5.3 Qualitative data collection

The initial qualitative phase of the study sought to obtain in-depth information on the perspectives of the three groups of participants, viz., graduates, staff and employers. Data was collected by means of 31 semi-structured interviews, which included 21 interviews with media graduates, four interviews with key staff informants and six interviews with employers. A characteristic feature of case studies that incorporate multiple data sources is the need to converge and triangulate the data (Yin, 2018). This was done chronologically and methodologically. In the data collection process, priority was given to conducting all the graduate interviews first so that the interviews with staff and employers could probe and corroborate information provided by graduates. The same was possible with information given between the institutions' and employers' perspectives. This form of triangulation of data from different sources served both as a form of cross-checking and verification of data, as well as a source of data for further investigation (Bryman, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). As mentioned, the interview data guided the development of the questionnaire to enable wider exploration of information that emerged in the

³⁵ The majority of the institutions delivering media-related programmes do have campuses in one or more of these cities.

³⁶ The large organisation was represented by two different institutional brands that offered different programmes

interviews. The value of the plural approach within a case study enabled access to multiple perspectives of reality and in-depth contextual data that would not have been possible with fewer categories of participants or a different method, and which were aligned with the transformative intentions of the study.

5.3.1 The graduate sample

The graduate population comprised those students who graduated with a media qualification³⁷ from the selected institutions between 2013 and 2017. This means that at the time of conducting the study there was a time period of between one and five years since participants had graduated³⁸. I decided to delimit this period because it allowed sufficient time for graduates to have found work and started a career, and yet still be able to remember and reflect on their higher education programme and its relevance to their experience. Graduates either side of this timespan were omitted as, on the one side, brand new graduates (2018 cohort) may not yet have been able to find work and would have limited experience to draw on to analyse their career management strategies³⁹. On the other side, graduates with over five years of work experience are likely to have a more established career path (even if they have chosen a new career) which means multiple additional experiential factors beyond higher education would come into play in influencing their experiences and employability, weakening the relative significance of the higher education qualification with time.

A letter was sent to the media graduates informing them about the research project and inviting them to participate in an interview (see Appendix E: Graduate information letter). This was distributed on my behalf by the institutions via their

³⁷ As described in the selection process (section 5.2.3), I had identified the specific qualifications that would form the graduate population early in the design strategy as part of the case selection process.

³⁸ I use the term 'graduated' to refer to the successful completion of the academic programme to meet the requirements of the qualification irrespective of the date of the official graduation ceremony (which may or may not have been in the same calendar year).

³⁹ At the time that I started the data collection process, it was only four months since the 2018 cohort had completed their academic programme. In their study, Pitman et al. (2019) felt that administration of the Australian Graduate Survey within six months of graduation undermined the measure of the correlation between higher education and employment as it had not allowed sufficient opportunity for graduates to find meaningful work.

databases (in line with the institutions' POPIA compliance)⁴⁰. The invitation included a link to an online response form (Appendix F) where respondents volunteered to be interviewed and provided some basic information, including the following:

- Qualification and year of completion
- Demographic characteristics
- Work status
- Type of organisation
- Terms of employment
- Geographic location

Responses were received from 76 graduates, 74 of whom volunteered to be interviewed. At this stage of the process, I was seeking qualitative data from graduates. Therefore, based on the information provided in their responses, I made a purposive selection of a sample of 21 participants to interview.

The criteria for selection of the graduate sample were broad. As an initial step, I had planned to identify five participants from each of the four different institutions. However, I was not able to adhere to that as I received fewer than five responses from one of the institutions (despite requesting the invitation letter to be sent out a second time to allow for additional responses). Consequently, I selected both the volunteers from that institution, who met the criteria, and ensured that there was a balanced representation from the other three institutions, as well as from across the programmes. I could have done a random sample selection (and briefly considered doing so) which would have ensured each volunteer an equal chance of being selected, however, I deliberately chose not to do that because I decided it was important to ensure the sample was diverse. This process was complicated by the number of volunteers, which was higher than I had expected, and provided a very varied mix of characteristics. As a result, this prompted me to prioritise certain characteristics as selection criteria over others, and then to

⁴⁰ The Protection of Personal Information Act No 4 of 2013 (POPIA) is the legislation designed to protect individuals by restricting access to any personal information (such as telephone numbers, email addresses etc.) that is processed by both private and public bodies. All organisations and people who collect, store and otherwise modify or use information (such as might be contained in an institution's database) are responsible under POPIA and must comply with the conditions required for the lawful processing of personal information (Accessible Law, 2020; KPMG, 2016). My data collection process respected and worked within the parameters of the institution's commitments to POPIA regulatory compliance.

filter the selection by means of an iterative process as I worked through the levels of variables accordingly, and excluded duplicates.

As a preliminary step, I followed a process of elimination, based on characteristics that were not valid according to the scope of the study or its design. As the interviews were to be conducted face-to-face, my first step was to discount any candidates living overseas, as well as those who indicated they are currently resident in remote areas beyond the cities of Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria. This was done for reasons of both consistency of my selection process (discussed in section 5.2.3) as well as accessibility, given the time and financial constraints for this phase of data collection. Secondly, I eliminated those volunteers who indicated that they have a post-graduate (Honours) qualification. According to my programme selection, and the request to the institutions, these individuals ought not to have received the invitation, which included only those with an undergraduate qualification. I extracted one response in which the information provided was not aligned to the information requested. In total, this discounted 14 responses and the selection was made from the remaining list of volunteers. The process of selection of volunteers for interview participation is represented visually in Figure 10 below.

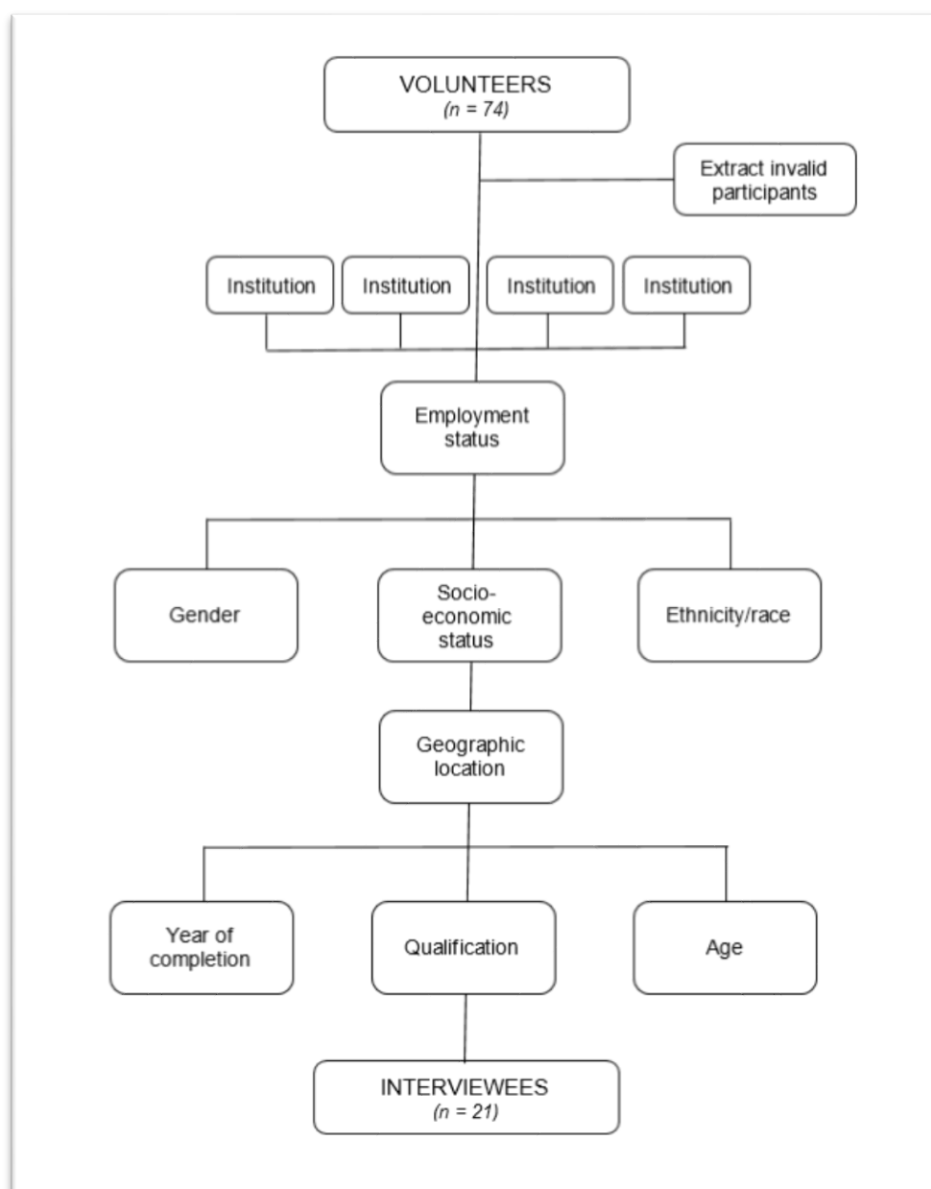


Figure 10: Visual representation of the process of graduate interview participant selection

Having grouped the respondents by institution, the criterion to which I gave top priority for selection, was current work status. Volunteers indicated their status as one of the following: (i) employed, (ii) self-employed, (iii) voluntary work, (iv) internship, or (v) unemployed. My first step was to ensure that the sample represented each of those categories. Having identified those sub-groupings, I then worked through the profile of individuals according to their other characteristics, ensuring that there was a diverse selection. The second level of

priority was the demographic characteristics of gender and socio-economic status (determined by household income). I had not asked participants to identify their race, and used their names as a crude form of identification when reviewing the final list to ensure diversity. The final significant criterion was the city of residence, as I wanted to ensure there were participants currently living and working in the major cities. This finally included Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg⁴¹. The rest of the information took low levels of precedence and was not used for selection per se, but only considered necessary to be present amongst the sample. This included the year of completion, so that the sample included graduates from across the five-year timespan, with the majority from 2017 and 2016⁴². The remaining variables, such as qualification, age etc. would have been used to decide between candidates where all other criteria were similar, however, I did not reach this level of selection.

I followed an iterative process reviewing the selection variables, to ensure that all were reflected in the sample to some extent in a range of combinations, and finally compiled a list of 21 interviewees. As a final process to check the suitability of the selection, I calculated the proportional representation of the selection criteria in my sample list (specifically employment status, gender, socio-economic status, year of completion and city of residence) against the ratios in the full list of volunteers. I found it was closely representative of the full group, and adequately reflected the diversity. The list of interview participants is provided in Table 3 in Chapter 6.

5.3.2 Staff as key informants

Employability is both a process and an outcome in higher education, and as such it is framed by the policy framework and enacted in the curricula of institutions. My intention was to get both a policy and pedagogical perspective on graduate employability from the institutions. Without having in-depth knowledge of the

⁴¹ There were only three volunteers from Pretoria, and none of them offered unique characteristics that would have made it worthwhile to travel there for a single interview.

⁴² The only year not represented in the sample is 2014. There was only one volunteer from that year, who unfortunately was excluded due to where she is currently living.

institutional staff structures, it was my judgement that the head of institution was the most suitable person to identify and select the relevant people to convey the institutional information and meet the specific need of the project. On this basis, each institution provided a staff member who served as a key informant, and I conducted four staff interviews representing each provider. The list of key informants from the institutions is provided in Table 5 in Chapter 7.

5.3.3 The employer sample

The intention was to obtain qualitative data from employers. I wanted to ensure a heterogeneous sample comprising a spectrum of media businesses ranging from large public corporations, to large commercial organisations, small private businesses as well as community based organisations and/or NGOs. I used a purposive sampling technique described by Teddlie and Yu (2007, p.80) as emergent sequential sampling, based on a gradual selection principle when “the sample evolves of its own accord as data are being collected”. At the start of the project, I had in mind to allow the sample to emerge from the institutions’ networks, guided by the data they provided, to enable easier access than a cold call. However, the key informants did not respond to my request for employers to approach. I then turned to convenience sampling, in order to access any employers who happened to be available and accessible at the time (Cohen et al., 2007). This also incorporated a purposive element, in order to ensure that the sample included employers from a relevant range of sub-fields of media corresponding with the graduates’ media qualifications⁴³.

The first step in selecting the employer sample comprised an internet search for media organisations using the terms ‘advertising’, ‘print media’, ‘graphic/visual design’, ‘video production’, ‘radio’, ‘public relations’, and ‘marketing’. If necessary, I added the suffix ‘agency’ or ‘companies’. In this way, I wanted to be sure to cover the relevant media fields. I then narrowed the search based on the

⁴³ These fields are not clearly delimited in organisations. For example, work in a digital agency might include advertising, marketing, graphic design, print media, photography, social media, copywriting.

convenience of location and ease of access in the Johannesburg area⁴⁴. As a next step, I read through the company websites, the job titles of employees, and the descriptions of any available positions, in order to ascertain the nature of the work done by that organisation to ensure suitability for, and alignment with the graduates' skills and qualifications. Using the contact information on the website, I then sent a letter to the CEO informing him/her about my project and requesting an interview (see Appendix H: Employer information letter). I justified the reason for having selected their organisation due to its relevance as a potential employer in the field of the graduate sample, and I made them aware that the intention was not to evaluate or compare organisations but rather to understand their organisation's needs and expectations of the graduates they employ. I followed this up with a phone call. In this way, I made contact with 22 different organisations. A significant part of the challenge lay in getting access to the appropriate person in the company who would grant permission, through a cold call. Most of the organisations ignored or diverted my requests, but none declined. Finally, after multiple and repeated efforts, I was able to secure six media employers who agreed to participate in an interview.

This sample includes a small range of types of organisation – one NGO, three small private enterprises, and two entities owned by large corporations. Although this small sample is not representative of all media employers (Cohen et al., 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007) and there were insufficient responses to enable a choice, I was able to ensure that the sample represented a cross-section of media fields representative of, and relevant to, the graduates' qualifications. Therefore, as employers, these are indeed the companies that might seek employees with the qualifications held by the graduate sample. The list of the employer sample is provided in Table 6 in Chapter 7.

⁴⁴ Due to the cyclical nature of the qualitative data collection in which I conducted employer interviews after graduate interviews, I restricted employer interviews to one city, i.e. Johannesburg, which is where I completed the graduate interviews. It was not feasible from a time or cost perspective to return to Durban and Cape Town to interview one or two employers. I also felt that employers in Johannesburg adequately represent those in the other two cities.

5.3.4 Interview schedules

Face-to-face, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants. Stake (1995, p. 64) describes the interview as “the main road to multiple realities”. In-depth interviews are a form of interpersonal interaction generally seeking a depth of information and knowledge. The main purpose is to obtain understanding about personal matters such as an individual’s lived experience, values, decisions, or perspectives (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). The semi-structured interview is a flexible and adaptable technique for finding out information because it offers the possibility to modify the line of enquiry during the process in response to both verbal and non-verbal cues (Morse, 2012; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Notwithstanding its tractable nature, this type of interview asks all participants the same questions, which gives it form, but they have the choice to respond as they choose. This combination of structure with openness makes it a useful instrument for qualitative data collection for mixed methods research, frequently used in conjunction with a survey (Bryman, 2006; Morse, 2012).

Interview schedules were prepared for each category of participant (see Appendix I: Interview schedules). Questions were framed by the literature review and the conceptual framework for the study. I jotted down questions based on principles I encountered while reading for and writing draft chapters. These questions were then refined and customised for the study, and possible probes were included. It is not possible to anticipate every probe, and I was aware of how necessary it was to listen carefully and actively to the participants during the course of the interview “occasionally asking the dumb question” (Stake, 1995, p. 66) to assure what was said and meant.

5.3.5 Graduate interview pilot study

I conducted a pilot test of the graduate interview schedule as a form of trial run in order to check its feasibility (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The intention was to find out how a participant might interpret the questions, and to ensure that the use of language was appropriate and that questions were easy to understand. I

also wanted to get an idea of the approximate length of time the interview might take. In considering suitable candidates for the pilot test, I was looking primarily for a recent graduate who is working. In the interests of time, efficiency and ease of access, I did not specifically seek out someone who met all the criteria of my participants, i.e. a media graduate from a private higher education institution. I felt that it was appropriately representative and comparable (Bryman, 2016) to test the questions on any working graduate who had completed his/her qualification within the relevant timespan of my participants, as I was able to adapt my interpretation regardless of the context. My pilot test participant was a graduate from a public higher education institution who is currently working as an intern in a media company. I conducted the test interview with her over the telephone as we were in different cities at the time.

The pilot study served to affirm the function of the instrument as a whole, i.e. both the process and the content. By hearing the test respondent's answers I found I was able to get a sense of the type of information my interviews might elicit and so to ascertain the relevance and appropriateness of the questions, as well as to identify any unintended gaps or absences. It also enabled me to test the flow and sequence of questions (Bryman, 2016). The pilot interview exposed where I needed to make slight adjustments to the wording and sequence of questions, and revealed an element I could include to supplement the depth of information obtained. I made the necessary adjustments to the interview schedule which gave me greater confidence in the instrument.

5.3.6 Qualitative data analysis

Informed consent was provided by all participants (see Appendix G: Participant consent form⁴⁵), and a total of 31 interviews were conducted. Ethical considerations pertaining to the data collection is described in section 5.5.1. The interviews were recorded and stored as digital voice files on my password-protected computer. I transcribed each interview verbatim and the transcripts

⁴⁵ Graduate interview participants were asked to sign this particular form at the time of the interview. The written/email correspondence with institutions and employers served as their consent. Survey participants provided consent in the survey, which granted them access to the questionnaire.

were stored on my computer as Microsoft Word documents in preparation for analysis. During the process of data collection and transcription, I took the opportunity to do some pre-coding (Saldaña, 2016). This comprised highlighting significant participant quotes, noting repeated words and concepts, and listing preliminary codes framed by my conceptual framework.

The coding process was eclectic (Saldaña, 2016). This approach involves a hybrid of different coding methods used as exploratory first cycle coding. The coding process was done using NVivo software. This software does not analyse data but provides a system for managing and organising the data. The coding process comprised initial or open coding, descriptive coding, in-vivo coding and concept coding. I followed an iterative process of thematic analysis as the first cycle codes were refined, merged, and revised. And the second cycle coding led to the emergence of patterns that I identified as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done firstly within each case of participants i.e. graduates, institutions and employers, and then as a body of cross-case data. This preliminary analysis served to underpin the development of the survey. In preparing the survey, I was concerned to identify data that required further probing or corroboration, asked questions that needed to be answered, and found gaps that needed to be explored further, in order to be sure that the survey would add value to the broader body of data. This followed a recursive process of analysis, while re-reading transcripts, referring to the literatures and relating the coding and thematic analysis to the conceptual framework. Sequentially, the research process then moved on to the second phase of the data collection process.

5.4 Quantitative data collection

The second phase focused only on the media graduate population. The purpose of this second phase of the research process was more exploratory than confirmatory. I chose to use a survey to collect quantitative data that would both complement and supplement the qualitative data through identifying relationships and patterns, but not specifically seeking out causal relationships or doing

hypothesis testing (Cohen et al., 2007). The collection of quantitative data was useful to define the prevalence and frequency of variables that emerged from the qualitative data amongst a broader population of graduates.

The survey comprised five sections (see Appendix K: Graduate survey). The first section captured biographical information, which was important for obtaining a wider profile of private higher education media graduates, and rendering the graduate data more representative of the larger population. This important demographic information provides significant information for analysis, as according to the capability approach, it relates to conversion factors in the lives of individuals. Other sections of the survey collected data about graduates' employment, their career navigation, internship experience, and their work-related values. I also included three open-ended questions at the end of the survey which sought qualitative data to sum up graduates' perspectives on their employability and quality of life, and how they feel about their future.

5.4.1 Questionnaire pilot study

Prior to conducting the survey, I conducted a pilot study to test the instrument and the process of its administration. The pilot study was conducted electronically with a racially diverse group of four media graduates from a private higher education institution, not included in the research project. These graduates had all completed a degree in marketing and communications programmes in 2015 and 2016. As such, they closely matched the demographic profile of the media graduate participants.

The purpose of the pilot study was not to evaluate the responses of the pilot participants, but to get their feedback on the questionnaire in order to evaluate and refine the questions, and to facilitate the administration of the survey. This included testing the efficiency of the online system, including access to and submission of the questionnaire, measuring the approximate amount of time taken to complete the questionnaire, and obtaining feedback on the language and clarity of instructions, as well as the questions and response scales (Cohen

et al., 2007). Based on the feedback provided, I then refined the questionnaire accordingly.

5.4.2 Survey sampling

Ideally, and as per the orientation of a quantitative approach, I wanted the largest possible sample for this phase which implied probability sampling (Kemper, Stringfield & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Unlike many sequential mixed methods studies where information from the first sample is required to draw the second sample (Kemper et al., 2003), in this study, the sampling process was less deductive and not based on the qualitative data. Theoretically, a probability sampling technique ought to have been appropriate (Kemper et al., 2003). In reality, however, having ceded the communication with graduates and the distribution of the survey to the institutions – thereby being dependent on the currency and accuracy of their databases – I realised I could not determine a known probability for every member (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, the sampling was opportunistic and emergent (Bryman, 2016; Teddlie & Yu, 2007) depending on how effective the distribution systems were. I hoped for as many responses as possible, simultaneously being aware that a survey is “an unwanted intervention into someone’s life” (Male, 2016, p. 203) and inclined to a poor response rate (Bryman, 2016).

5.4.3 Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed and hosted on Evasys, the University of the Free State’s electronic survey management platform. A letter inviting media graduates to participate in the survey was sent to each of the institutions (see Appendix J: Graduate survey invitation). As per the initial letter of invitation for the interview, the survey communication was distributed by the institutions via their databases. The invitation was sent to all 2013 to 2017 graduates from the specified media programmes at all three case institutions, which comprised approximately 2 746 graduates. The letter included a hyperlink directly to the survey, which was completed online, and I received responses from 115 participants of which 114 were valid. The survey reports were exported from Evasys in SPSS and Microsoft

Excel CSV formats for analysis. The data was stored on my password-protected computer. The raw data was electronically locked and stored on my password-protected Evasys file on the university server.

5.4.4 Quantitative data analysis

My first step was to clean the data prior to analysis. This was done in Excel and SPSS, and comprised a process of identifying and removing irrelevant, inappropriate and incomplete information to make the analysis more efficient. I removed one survey from the dataset, as it was submitted by a student who was still studying in 2019, and therefore not as yet a media graduate. Therefore the dataset comprised 114 valid responses. Further cleaning of the data comprised converting the coded responses into a meaningful answer, for example, 1 = male; 2 = female, and so on. I used both SPSS and Excel for analysis, which was predominantly in the form of descriptive statistics, and I used Excel to create visual representations. The qualitative responses were thematically analysed and integrated with the interview data. The analysis of the quantitative data was integrated with the qualitative data analysis in the discussion presented in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

Having presented the practicalities of conducting the research, the final part of the chapter reflects critically on the process.

5.5 Reflective considerations

Reflexivity within the research process means that a researcher reflects critically on his/her own self, including any biases, values and personal background that potentially shape the interpretations made during the study (Cohen et al., 2007). Cohen et al. explain the reflective process as the “raising of consciousness of the purposes and effects of the research” (2007, p. 35). As such, in this section, I consider the ethical principles that were followed during the process of the study, and reflect on the ways in which I ensured that the process was trustworthy and credible. I reflect on my personal positioning as the researcher, and conclude the

section with reflective consideration of the methodological limitations. Reflexivity is a form of scrutiny that serves to validate and legitimate research practice. It also moves beyond interpretation, and is seen as a methodological tool (Pillow, 2003) that has value in the axiological and epistemological contribution of research and its transformative potential, not only of society, but also of research processes and researchers alike (Pillow, 2015).

5.5.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles in research primarily ensure a process that protects the participants from harm. Conducting real world research involving people in their daily lives and work requires implementation of sound ethical principles at all stages of the process, in all interpersonal interactions, and in the reporting (Bryman, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016). As a first step, I sought and was granted ethical clearance from the faculty ethics committee prior to embarking on the data collection process (see Appendix C: EMS Ethics approval letter). While awaiting ethical clearance, I approached the selected institutions. I provided them with detailed information about the study and requested permission to conduct the research (Appendix D: Institution information letter). One of the institutions required me to follow their institution's formal ethical clearance procedures, for consideration by their own internal ethics committee and in line with their institutional *Research and Postgraduate Studies Policy*. This process included providing them with, amongst other things, my research proposal and the draft interview schedules. In the interests of fairness, I offered the same to the other two institutions, one of which accepted and the other declined. Written permission to conduct the research was granted by each of the institutions.

Throughout the research process, I ensured that all information pertaining to the nature of the project was openly communicated to all the participants. I obtained informed consent from both interview and survey participants prior to their participation. Interview participants signed a consent form (Appendix G: Participant consent form) and graduates were unable to access the survey if they had not provided consent. The initial interview invitation to graduates offered

reimbursement for transport to the interview by arrangement. This was done to avoid the cost of travel preventing a potential participant from volunteering to be interviewed. No participants took up this offer.

Pseudonyms and generic institution acronyms were used to ensure the anonymity of all participants and to prevent identification of the institutions⁴⁶. Survey participants did not provide any personal information by which they could be identified. The media graduates who volunteered to be interviewed were asked to provide personal information solely for the purpose of making contact to schedule the interviews. The response form on which this information was provided reassured them of my commitment to anonymity and confidentiality. I received this information electronically where it is only accessible to me via my password-protected access to the system. No personal information was shared or used in the reporting. Interview audio files and electronic documents are stored on my password-protected computer, and the hard copy transcripts are stored in the privacy of my home office.

5.5.2 Trustworthiness and credibility

The trustworthiness and credibility of social research reflect the quality and accuracy of the data and its interpretation (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Stake, 1995). Strategies I used to enhance the reliability and validity of this research include data and methodological triangulation, conducting pilot studies (testing), and keeping an audit trail. Triangulation is a strategy by which the rigour of research is enhanced through the use of multiple sources (Robson & McCartan, 2016). It is well-suited to case studies (Yin, 2018) and has variable uses in mixed methods research (Denzin, 2012; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). As described earlier, both the design and the sequencing of data collection were structured in such a way as to enable cross-checking of data between the perspectives of different interview participants. In addition, I made sure to corroborate information and clarify my understanding of participants' responses with them during the

⁴⁶ While I have taken care not to use specific identifiers, the pool of private institutions that deliver media programmes is relatively small. It is not possible to mitigate the possibility that a reader might guess or infer the identity of an institution from descriptions in the report.

interview to ensure my interpretation of their perspective was accurate (Bryman, 2016).

I conducted pilot studies of the graduate interview schedule and the questionnaire respectively, prior to the data collection processes. These processes were described in section 5.3.5 and section 5.4.1. In both instances the trial run helped to validate the instrument, improve the questions, and ensure an efficient process (Bryman, 2016). During the entire research process I have maintained an audit trail with a full chain of evidence of the activities, communications and documentation (Bryman, 2016; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Yin, 2018). I recorded my activities and the details of the research process in a research journal. I have also kept and stored all records of raw data. In addition to this, I have been accountable to a supervisor and co-supervisor with whom I have had regular contact throughout the duration of the project, and been able to discuss and confirm protocols and processes to ensure they were credible and trustworthy.

5.5.3 Personal positioning

Objectivity is a standard requirement of the traditional, scientific approach to research, however, in social research, creating distance between the researcher and the participant would be unnatural and “lethal for any real understanding of phenomena involving people in social settings” (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 111). Increasingly, the principle and possibility of complete objectivity in research is called into question, however it is important to recognise that values and bias can intrude at any stage (Bryman, 2016).

My reflective process brought to the surface questions about my “insider/outsider” positioning as researcher (Obasi, 2017, p. 2). My identity as an educator, puts me on the inside and means that I cannot be a completely objective outsider. I have worked in, and am familiar with private higher education, and with many of the private providers. Furthermore, I have previously done work on a contract basis for two of the participant institutions, where I was involved with new programme development, and the accreditation and quality assurance of existing

media programmes. I also taught work-integrated learning for a year in one of the institutions. My familiarity with the sector, the institutions, and with the programmes⁴⁷, has both advantages and disadvantages. It worked in favour of gaining access to conduct the research, as there was a level of trust between the management and myself. It also gave me a depth of contextual insight and knowledge that was beneficial in understanding the participant perspectives and interpreting the data. This is a form of “cultural competency” and valid contextual understanding (described in section 5.1.2) that underpin the epistemological assumptions of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010, p. 471). On the other hand, there are disadvantages to familiarity that lie in assumptions based on implicit knowledge. I was very aware that there was a risk that staff informants might provide abbreviated explanations on the grounds that I would already know. More importantly, I was cautious to avoid inserting my own assumptions into hearing and interpreting what participants said based on my prior knowledge, hence interfering with what was actually being said.

At the outset of the project I was not equally familiar with all three institutions, and I was sensitive to the fact that I should not allow my experience and knowledge to either favour or prejudice any of the institutions. In addition, I became aware during the planning process that I was inclined to want to ‘defend’ private higher education. However, once I recognised and confronted this explicitly, I found I felt liberated to be more objective and allow the research to do its work (which was not ever intended to be a value judgement of the sector in any way).

5.5.4 Limitations

Notwithstanding the contextual contribution this study makes to the under-researched sector of private higher education, the diverse nature of the sector itself (discussed in Chapter 2) and the differences between public and private higher education limits the generalisability of the empirical findings of this study. I am cognisant of the limitation of case studies for lack of generalisability (acknowledged in section 5.2) and these findings are specific to this case of

⁴⁷ I did not personally know, nor had I taught any of the graduate participants.

institutions, and these media programmes. That said, the findings show that it is precisely the subjective, contextual and culturally-specific nature of the graduates' experiences that highlights the important role played by different conversion factors in enabling employment opportunities for individuals. It is possible, therefore, that the conceptual framework can be generalised and applied in conceptualising and realising graduate employability across all higher education in South Africa. As such, the conceptual principles that emerge from the specificity of this case regarding graduate employability have the potential to be transferred to other institutional and programme contexts.

Methodologically, the value of the mixed method design was the potential to add rich data of graduate experiences to measures of job destinations, and also to complement narrative data with numbers and statistics that could identify patterns and relationships. The potential of the quantitative data to confirm causal relationships was limited by the lack of inferential statistical analysis. Nonetheless, this provides scope for future research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a theoretical and practical account of the research design and methodology. I provided the rationale for positioning the study within a transformative paradigm, which aligns with the conceptual framework of the capability approach, strongly rooted in the values of human rights and social justice. The capability approach prompts us to ask alternative questions and focus on different dimensions when making observations or gathering data for making evaluations (Robeyns, 2017). This approach framed the formation of 'fruitful' research questions (Nixon, 2017) that guided the study and informed the development of the data collection instruments. The sequential nature of the mixed methods design was appropriate for the transformative approach in addressing current issues, but with a lucid awareness of how these represent a continuity from historical contexts through to future visions of transformed lives. Mirroring the convergence of past, present and future in the

reporting, the chapter concluded with my reflective retrospection and critical consideration of the ethical principles that informed what has taken place in the process of the research, and what this means for both the project and the research outcomes going forward. In the next two chapters I present the empirical findings based on the integration and analysis of the rich qualitative and quantitative data that was collected.

CHAPTER 6

Private higher education: choices and expectations

Introduction

This first chapter of analysis and interpretation draws on the empirical data related to private higher education. It provides a snapshot of this dynamic sector, and a real-life contextual setting for the development of graduate employability. At the core of this study are graduates, their experiences and their perceptions. The methodological framework was based on a transformative and pragmatic approach to getting the “real picture” (Mertens, 2010 p. 472). The aim of this chapter is to avoid representing graduates as a homogenous body or to leave a lacuna to be filled by notions of a stereotype, but rather to personalise the sample so that the reader is able to get a picture of the real people and lives that the rest of the analysis refers to. Throughout this chapter the qualitative and quantitative data are intertwined in the construction of a profile of the graduates. The mixed methods design allows for a breadth of realities while also enabling a depth of analysis of the choices, lives and activities of the people being talked about. This design presents significant challenges at all stages of the process, with particular concern for the integration of the qualitative and quantitative data (Bryman, 2007; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Yin, 2006). Together with the complexity of integration comes further difficulty in the need to unravel and present the integrated data in a way that is understandable for a reader (Leech, 2012). I have attempted to do this by interspersing the graduates’ personal narratives with the descriptive statistics. This chapter forms a background to the rest of the data analysis, while also contributing an updated profile of graduates to the literature on South African private higher education (Kruss, 2007; Tladi, 2010).

The chapter has three sections. The first section builds a biographical profile of private higher education media graduates. It reveals *who* the individuals are that choose to attend private higher education institutions. Having a broad picture of

the graduates' biographies, the next section delves into *why* they chose to enrol in private higher education. It explores specific choices of study programme and institution, and the factors that influence those decisions. Choices raise expectations for individuals of what an institution and a qualification can and will do for them, particularly in realising their career aspirations (Bezuidenhout et al, 2013; Shah et al., 2013). The analysis draws a distinction between choices made freely from more than one option and those that lack substantial alternatives. Constrained choice may influence not only a student's higher education path but also the choices he/she makes in the future (Sen, 1988). In the context of the purposeful choices made on entry to higher education, the third section of the chapter reveals *what* outcomes private higher education has enabled for graduate participants. It provides a broad view of their engagement with the labour market, their reflections on the expectations they had of the opportunities higher education would give them, and how this has translated differently into the lives they are currently able to live. The findings presented in this chapter shape a response to research question two: *'What are the capabilities that diverse media graduates value for participation in the workplace and in society?'*

6.1. Who are private higher education graduates?

In South Africa, not much is known about who the students are who choose to enrol in private institutions. From a 2002 study of private higher education providers conducted by the HSRC (Kruss & Kraak, 2002), Kruss proposed a profile of students based on a typology of distinctive forms of private provision (Kruss, 2007). Her argument was that providers cater for particular student target markets, so that the type of student who enrolls at an institution is aligned with what providers promise to offer. She identified two distinctive institution-and-student types. Firstly, the mobility sub-sector where predominantly historically privileged and middle-class students enrol seeking elite education, ease of access to the workplace, and upward socio-economic mobility. Secondly, the credential sub-sector, where predominantly non-traditional and working-class students enrol seeking vocational training and a qualification. There has been

significant growth and change in the private higher education sector in the 18 years since that study. This section provides an updated profile of private higher education graduates.

6.1.1. The graduate sample

The combined databases of the three institutions comprised approximately 2 746 media graduates. It was from this sampling frame that 78 respondents volunteered to be interviewed, and from the volunteers, a sample of 21 interviewees was drawn for the qualitative data collection. The details of the sample of interview participants is presented in Table 3 below. In the subsequent quantitative data collection phase, a survey was conducted with the same sampling frame from which 114 completed questionnaires were received. The details of the survey participants is presented in Appendix A: Table of survey participants. Being the larger and more statistically representative sample, I have predominantly drawn on the survey data for the demographic profile as representative of private higher education media graduates and their employability status⁴⁸. However, this is complemented with insights provided by the interview sample where it substantiates the quantitative data. In presenting the data I have made use of race-based descriptors to identify individuals⁴⁹. I acknowledge that these classifications are problematic, but have chosen to do this in order to keep the terminology consistent with the reporting by the DHET, which enables clearer tracking of shifts and comparisons of demographic data in the interests of race-based transformation.

⁴⁸ Note: I have rounded figures off to facilitate reading without decimal places. In some instances this might account for slight inaccuracies in cumulative totals.

⁴⁹ Key for ethnicity/race descriptors in Table 3: A (African); I (Indian/Asian); W (White)

Table 3: Interview participants

NAME	GENDER	ETHNICITY	PRIVATE HE INSTITUTION	QUALIFICATION	SUBJECT SPECIALISATION	YEAR OF COMPLETION	CITY (currently resident)	CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS	CORE BUSINESS	GAP BETWEEN SCHOOL & HE	FIRST-GEN HE (if not, parent who graduated)
Briana	F	W	PHEI 1a	BA	Visual Communication	2015	JHB	Self-employed (own business)	Social media & digital marketing	2yrs	No (mother)
Esther	F	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2017	JHB	Unemployed – (hustle)	Sells yoghurt / studying	None	Yes
Jon	M	W	PHEI 1a	BA	Visual Communication (Advertising)	2015	JHB	Employed	Advertising in property sector	None	No (both parents)
Keegan	F	I	PHEI 2	Diploma	PR & Marketing (to add to Sound Eng & Music)	2015	Durban	Employed	Digital video production in education sector	±5yrs	No (mother)
Kgotso	M	A	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Print & Publishing	2017	Cape Town	Freelance	Graphic design & DTP	±7yrs	No (mother)
KG	M	A	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing (TV & Radio)	2016	Durban	Self-employed (own business)	Media & entertainment	±3yrs	No (mother)
Lihle	F	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2016	JHB	Unemployed (ad hoc temp projects)	Events	±5yrs	Yes
Maggie	F	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2017	JHB	Employed	Public Relations	4yrs	Yes
Mamaroke	F	A	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production & PR	2015	Durban	Intern CBO	Community radio station Youth development	1yr	No (mother)
Melody	F	A	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production & PR	2017	JHB	Intern (with offer of employment)	Radio broadcasting	1yr	No (mother)
Mlungisi	M	A	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production	2016	Durban	Self-employed (family business)	Retail (motor industry)	2yrs	Yes
Ntombi	F	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2016	JHB	Unemployed		None	No (father)
Nonku	F	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2016	JHB	Further study	Post-graduate student	None	No (mother)
Portia	F	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2017	JHB	Unemployed	Parenthood	None	No (mother)
Shireen	F	I	PHEI 1a	BA	Graphic Design	2017	Cape Town	Employed	Mobile application & web design	None	Yes
Sinethemba	M	A	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2016	JHB	Further study	Post-graduate student	None	Yes
Sibusiso	M	A	PHEI 1a	BA	Copywriting	2017	JHB	Employed	Copywriting & marketing for brand specialists	1yr	Yes
Sunette	F	W	PHEI 1a	BA	Graphic Design	2016	Cape Town	Employed	Graphic design in publishing & events	None	No (father)
Thulasizwe	M	A	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio & Video Production	2017	Durban	Employed	Audio-visual production	None	No (mother)
Ulwazi	F	A	PHEI 1a	BA	Graphic Design	2017	JHB	Intern	Advertising & design	None	No (mother)
Xaba	M	A	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Game graphics & Multimedia	2017	Cape Town	Employed	E-learning video production	±7yrs	Yes

6.1.2 Gender and age

The graduate sample was drawn from three private higher education institutions. These cases were described in Chapter 5 (section 5.2.2). As Kruss (2007) found, each of the institutions has a particular student demographic and they differ from each other. It is not the intention here to draw direct comparisons between the case institutions, and the diversity within the sample reflects the demographic diversity characteristic of the private higher education sector. The gender ratio within both public and private higher education enrolment currently is 58% female to 42% male (DHET, 2019a, p. 10, 25). The purposive sampling of the interview participants fairly closely reflected the proportional consistency of the gender ratio (62%:38%), but the survey sample did not. The 114 respondents who completed the questionnaire comprised 82 females (72%) and 32 males (28%). This gender skewedness is possibly only indicative of females more willingly choosing to complete the survey.

The respondents ranged in age from 20 to 47 years⁵⁰. The wide age distribution of the survey sample is shown in Figure 11.

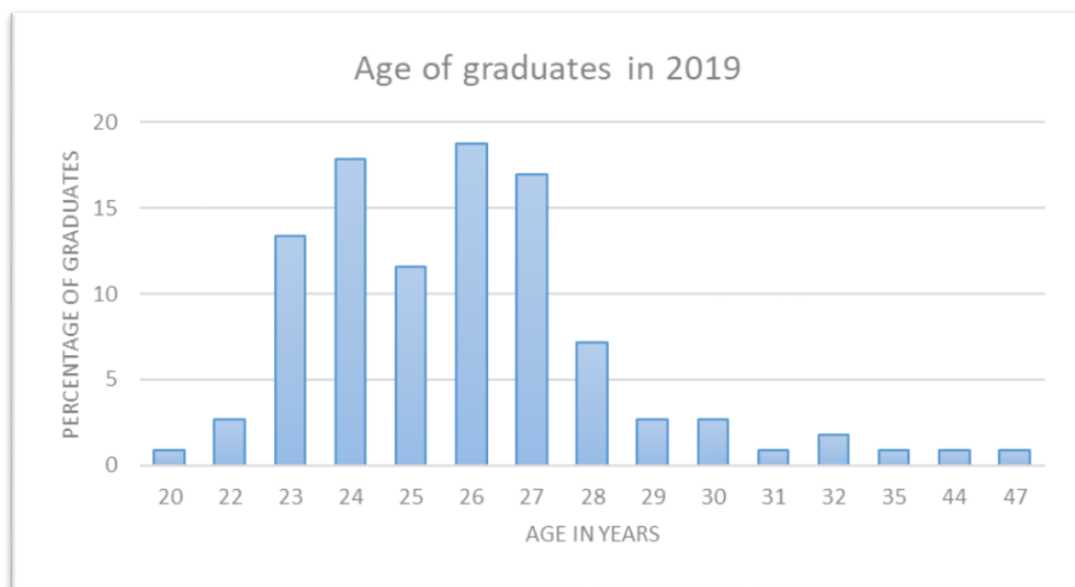


Figure 11: Graduate sample - age distribution

⁵⁰ This is the age of the participants in 2019. Based on their recorded year of completion, their ages ranged between 19 and 44 at the time of completion of their study programmes.

Private institutions provide a particular niche for mature students. These are identified as students who are 23 years or older at the time they start an undergraduate qualification⁵¹ (Matriculation Board, 2019). Widened access to higher education opened the way for increased numbers of this type of non-traditional student in higher education (February, 2016; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Treinienė, 2017). Even so, the enrolment of mature students in public universities has declined since 2011 due to increased competition for access by school-leavers and limited capacity in the institutions (CHE, 2018b). On the other hand, mature students may comprise 30% or more of the enrolment in private institutions (Shah et al., 2013, p. 8). Private providers that offer career-orientated training and recognised credentials in a variety of modes, including options for distance and part-time learning, provide a range of viable alternatives that may more suitably accommodate mature age students and working people (Kruss, 2007). This includes individuals who for various reasons did not transition directly from school to higher education and later decide to obtain training or a qualification. It also includes qualified professionals who want to update or upgrade a previous qualification and seek out specific work-related skills and training. Of the interview participants, just over half⁵² (11 of 21) did not go directly from school to higher education but had a gap of between one and seven years before enrolling in private higher education (see Table 3).

6.1.3 Race / Ethnicity

The DHET (2019a) reports exponential increases in the enrolment of African, Coloured and Indian/Asian students in private higher education since 2011. These figures are becoming more representative of the national population, in line with the objectives of White Paper 3 (DHET, 1997). Figure 12 shows a comparative breakdown of population groups, nationally, in public and in private higher education.

⁵¹ There are no regulated age categories for higher education enrolment. Thus, any application or exemption criteria relevant to individuals over a particular age would ultimately be the prerogative of the institution, and be made explicit in the institution's admission policy.

⁵² This proportion is higher than would generally be the case in a public university.

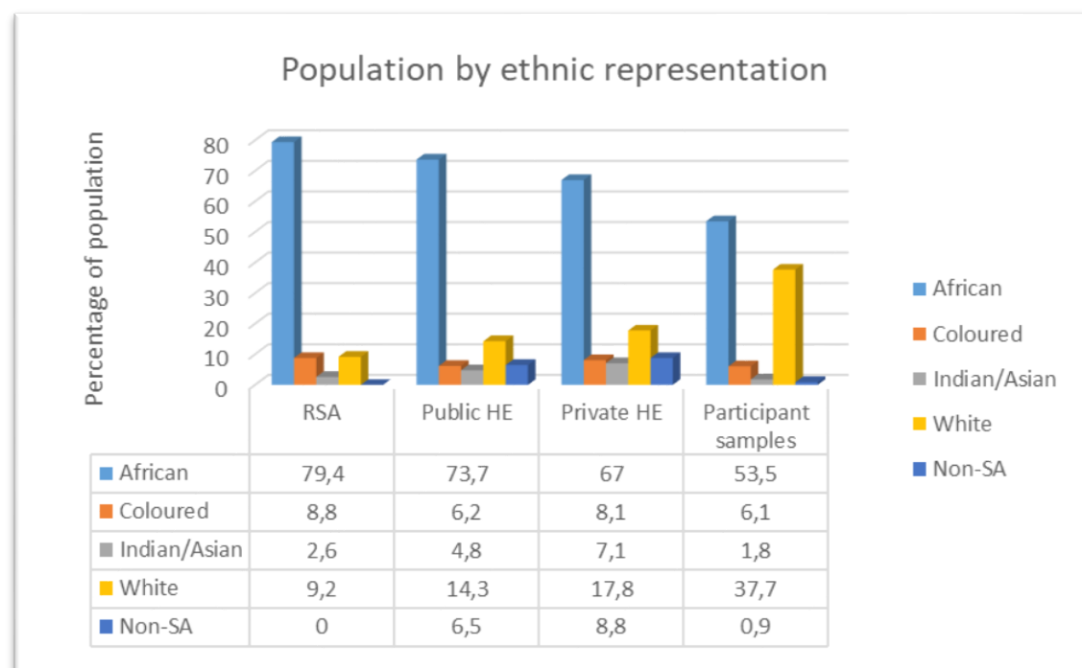


Figure 12: Comparative table of population groups

Source of RSA data: <https://worldpopulationreview.com>

Source of HE data: DHET, 2019a

The participant sample reflected ethnic diversity, although relative to the higher education sectors, African, Indian/Asian and Non-South African graduates were proportionately under-represented in the sample, and White graduates were over-represented.

6.1.4 Geographical location

The institutions have campuses in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town⁵³. On average, two-thirds of the participants were enrolled in institutions in Johannesburg. The remaining one-third enrolment was distributed equally across institutions in Durban and Cape Town⁵⁴. Campuses differ from each other only in the design of the buildings and surrounding space. The CHE's quality assurance processes ensure equivalence of delivery across different sites for which a

⁵³ The largest of the case institutions is represented in all three cities, as well as in other locations, while the other two case institutions have campuses in one or two of those cities.

⁵⁴ Tladi (2010) reported more than twice the number of registered private institutions in the Western Cape compared with KwaZulu-Natal, which together comprised just over one-third of the registered institutions in the country.

programme is registered (CHE, 2004). Therefore, besides the physical environment, for students there is no difference in the teaching and learning at different campuses of an institution. Graduates had generally enrolled at a campus closest to where they lived, however some had chosen to study away from home, in some instances attracted by the culture of another city or a particular campus⁵⁵. While some graduates have relocated since graduating – with minor movements between these three cities, and including a handful who have taken up residence overseas in Europe and the UK – most graduates are still currently resident in the city where they studied (see Table 3 and Appendix A). One of the unemployed interviewees spoke of thoughts of moving to a different city (from Johannesburg to Cape Town) in the hope of better employment options, but other than that, there was no indication from any of the interviewees (both employed and unemployed) that their city did not offer them employment opportunities in the media industry.

At the time of the study, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape are the provinces with the highest employment rates (StatsSA, 2019a). Gauteng has the highest employment figures in the country, with nearly double that of either the Western Cape or KwaZulu-Natal (which have figures similar to each other). However, Gauteng has also recorded relatively high levels of unemployment nationally, possibly due to the density of population in that province. KwaZulu-Natal was the only province to show a (slight) decrease in the unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2019. As the largest cities, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town make a significant contribution to their respective provincial GDP figures, but are not solely representative of them (StatsSA, 2019a).

6.1.5 Family background: socio-economic status and schooling

Family background, socio-economic status and schooling are integrally interconnected factors that play a strongly influential role when it comes to higher education. Educational pathways have, to a large extent, been determined by our

⁵⁵ For example, Johannesburg is the economic and business hub of the country, while Cape Town is seen as the 'design capital' of the country, offering graduates a combination of lifestyle and work opportunities in creative industries.

country's political history, which created race- and class-based distinctions as to who had access to higher education. Increasingly wider access now gives opportunities to more people who were previously excluded. Figure 13 shows that more than half the graduate sample had one or both parents who had graduated from university. Yet, 44% of the participants are the first in their family to attend higher education. This latter figure is in line with the 42% of first-generation students recorded in a recent study at a public university (Ruswa, 2018).

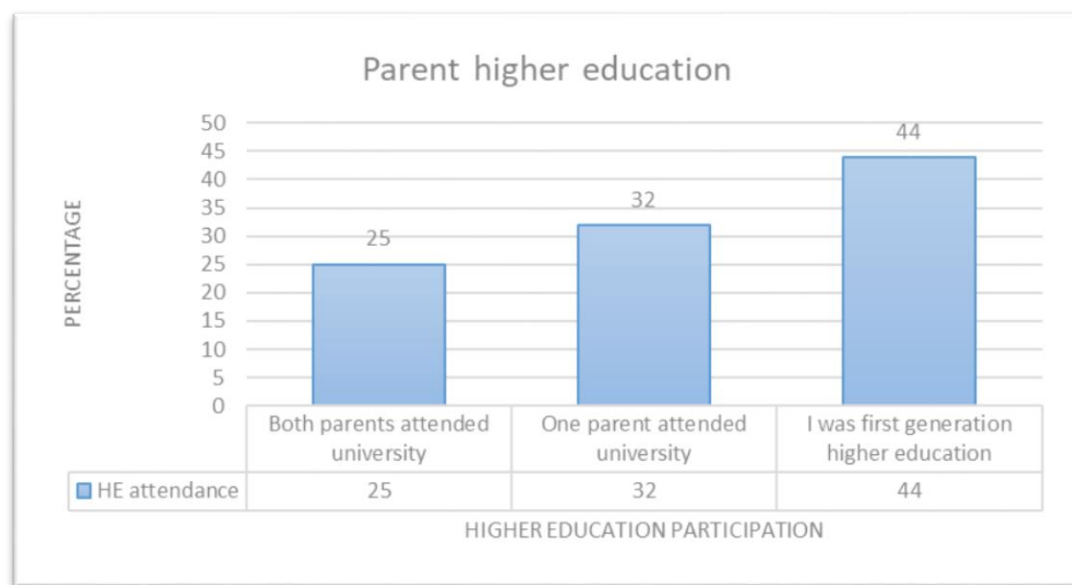


Figure 13: Graduate sample - parent participation in higher education

First-generation and non-traditional students do not have “knowledge in the blood” (Jansen, 2009, p. 170) when it comes to higher education. This is deeply rooted, embedded knowledge that is both explicitly and implicitly transmitted from one generation to the next. As such, it favours second- and third-generation students who benefit from the guidance and support of family members who have direct knowledge and experience of the institutional processes and culture of higher education. First-generation students do not inherit this knowledge or enjoy the same level of informed support from their families. Consequently, these students have been shown to face significantly more complex challenges than traditional students when it comes to making decisions about, and participating

in, higher education (Calitz, 2015; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Pillay, 2019). They are at a disadvantage in meeting the social, emotional and academic demands of higher education, and it affects the choices they make, how they manage their higher education experience, as well as their success (Luckett & Luckett, 2009; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004; Walker & Fongwa, 2017).

An individual's family background and socio-economic status determines his/her schooling. The type of school – whether private or government, as well as the type of government school – can in turn determine quality of teaching and learning, and an individual's consequent academic achievement. These personal, social, economic and educational factors are therefore very tightly bound, and often have a compound effect when it comes to the implications for higher education (Walker & Mathebula, 2019; Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Schooling background shapes how well students are prepared for and manage their journey through higher education. Good schooling at well-resourced schools gives students an advantage by providing good academic preparation, as well as career guidance and direction. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, on the other hand, are more likely to have attended poorly resourced schools, with a higher likelihood of being under- or unprepared for higher education. Consequently the latter are also more likely to have constrained options in meeting their higher education aspirations, which could influence their choices of institution and programme of study, and re-direct their career paths (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). This also has implications for their employability outcomes (Baldry, 2016; CHEC, 2013; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Walker & Fongwa, 2017).

The participants in this study came from varied schooling backgrounds with the majority (72%) having attended government schools (Figure 14). The overall profile of the sample reflects a predominance of schooling privilege, in the form

of ex-Model C⁵⁶ government schools (51%) and private (independent) schools (28%) having been the feeder institutions.

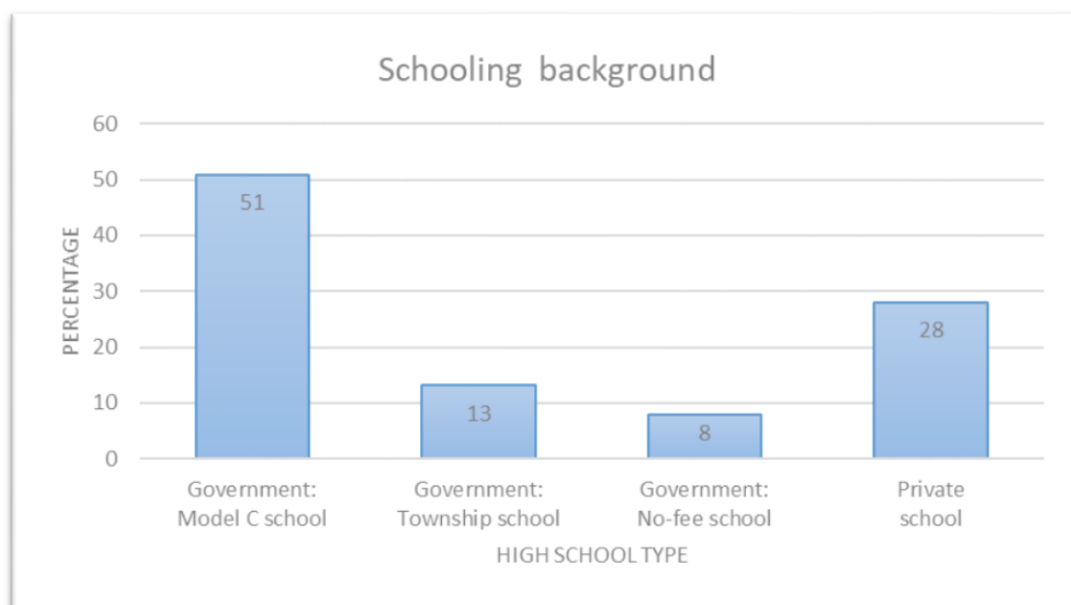


Figure 14: Graduate sample - school background

Notwithstanding the relative privilege of their schooling, just fewer than half the sample i.e. 47% of the graduates, report a household income at the time they were studying of less than R30 000 per month (Figure 15). This level of household income would potentially make these individuals eligible for NSFAS funding⁵⁷ if they were enrolled at a public university. At the other end of the spectrum, one-fifth (20%) of the sample comprised students from wealthier middle-class families whose household earnings exceed R50 000 per month. Within the sample, 33% fall into the “missing middle” category for public university funding i.e. this classifies such individuals as too poor to afford higher education fees, but above the income threshold to qualify for government financial aid

⁵⁶ Model C is the term used to refer to public/government schools, formed in the early 1990's, that were previously for White pupils only under the Apartheid government but are now non-racial schools. They receive some government funding but are administered and funded by the parent body. As such they are state-aided or semi-private schools that are better resourced than the average government school and retain an ethos of privilege (Christie & McKinney, 2017).

⁵⁷ To qualify for NSFAS funding applicants must have a combined gross household income of less than R350 000 per annum i.e. under R30 000 per month (DHET, 2019d). This funding is not available to students who enrol in private higher education.

(DHET, 2017). In other words, even if these students had enrolled in public universities they would have been liable to pay fees for their higher education. As shown in Appendix B, the fees at some private institutions are lower than those at public universities for the equivalent programme, which makes the choice of enrolling at a private institution a feasible alternative.

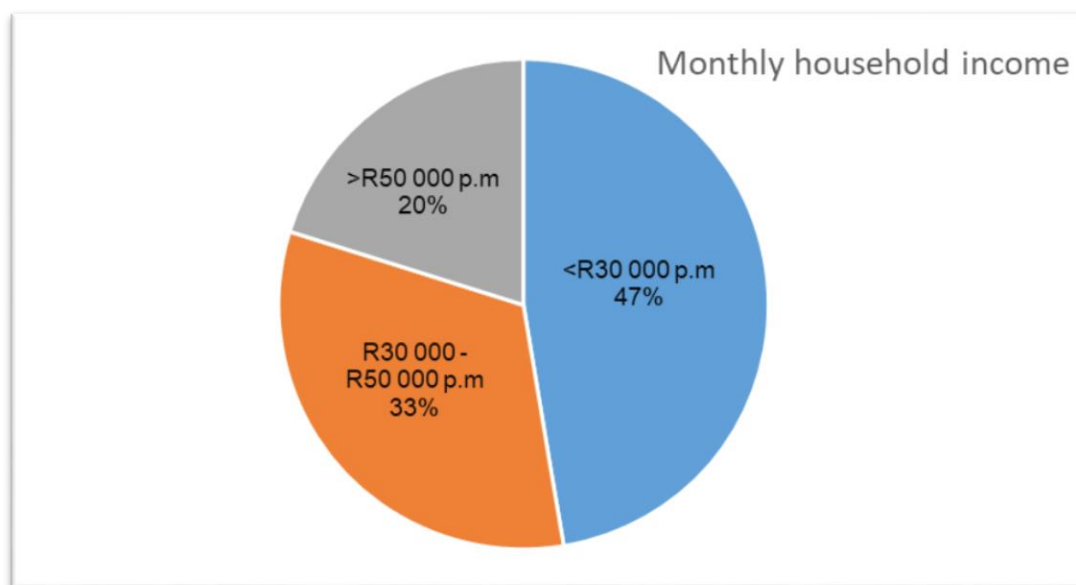


Figure 15: Graduate sample - monthly household income

6.1.6 Affording private higher education

The data showed that most of the graduates' fees were paid for by the family (67%) with five individuals having accessed alternative forms of funding (Figure 16). Alternative funding sources include investment funds, family trust, pension schemes and education policies from deceased parents, or any combination of these. Financial aid increases educational opportunities for students from less privileged backgrounds, and some graduates indicated they had tapped into different sources of funding over the different years of study. Many of the interviewees spoke of how difficult it had been for their parents to manage to

afford the fees, particularly if they did not have disposable income. One of the interviewees, **Esther**⁵⁸ (PHEI 1b, Journalism), explained:

Not that [my parents] were able to [pay the fees]. It strained them but they did the best they could. They made sure by the end of the year all my fees were paid up and I could come to school every day... My dad had to sell his cows. Oh my gosh... yeah, but I came to school.

Her father traded in his cows⁵⁹ to finance her fees and invest in her education. If a family is struggling financially, fee payments are made as and when money is available through the course of the academic year. If students complete their programme owing a debt to the institution, their qualification is withheld until such time as the debt is paid. This hinders transition into the labour market, where graduates are required to show their certificate and transcript as evidence of their qualification for recruitment to internships and graduate-level jobs.

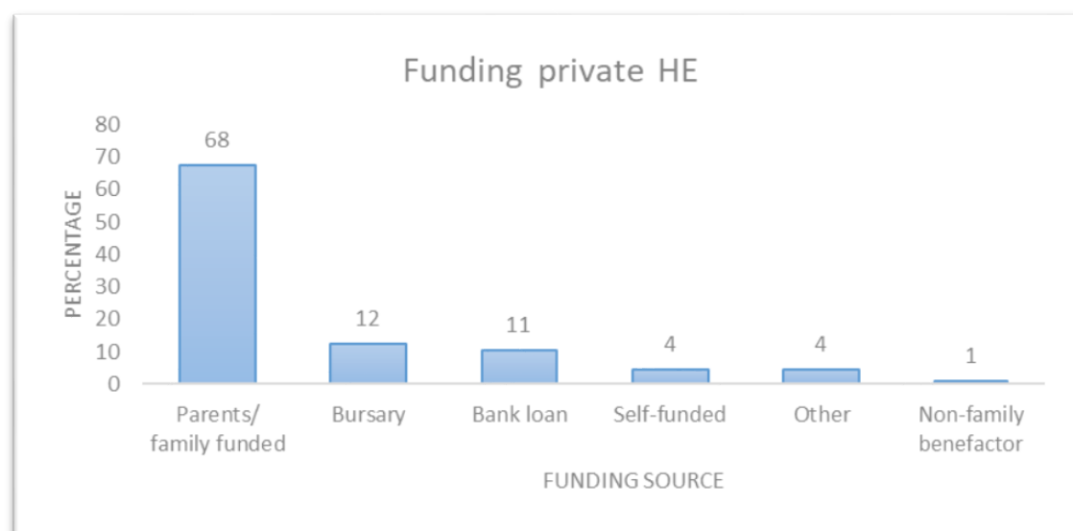


Figure 16: Graduate sample - sources of funding for higher education

Calculating the cost of higher education assumes that a student will complete the programme of study within the regulation time i.e. three years for a 360-credit

⁵⁸ Pseudonyms have been used for all participants. The name is formatted in bold on introduction, together with the institution attended and field of qualification. At the risk of repetition, I have retained this short form of higher education biography all the way through the thesis because of the importance and relevance of the institutional and programme context to the arguments being made.

⁵⁹ Cattle have social, cultural and economic significance in Africa. In traditional, rural custom they are considered a form of wealth and represent value as a commodity for exchange (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1990; Hutchinson, 1992). In modern day they are also becoming a form of investment for urban residents who purchase shares in the livestock of small-scale farmers (Heiberg & Skweyiya, 2019).

Bachelor's degree. However, South African higher education has been shown to be a very inefficient system when it comes to graduate completion rates, with only 27% of students completing a three-year undergraduate degree or diploma programme in regulation time. Within five years, only 52% of students graduate with a degree and 42% with a diploma (CHE, 2016, p. 145). This means that only half the number of students who enrol in universities actually graduate in a reasonable time period. Taking longer than regulation time to complete a study programme increases the costs. The data showed that 70% of the participants completed their programme in the regulation time, with the balance taking between four and six years to graduate. These rates are markedly better than those in the CHE statistics of public universities. Private providers are required to record their throughput rates in the annual report to the DHET, but I am not aware of any empirical research that has been done on the throughput and completion rates of private higher education graduates, to know whether this is a feature of private institutions.

Often, the reasons for students taking longer than regulation time to complete their study programme are academic. For example, if a student fails a course and needs to repeat it the following year. However, extending the study period might also be a financial decision. Interview participants spoke about reducing the subject load in a particular year in order to manage the fee payments. This strategy brings the expenditure in a year down to make payment more manageable, but extends fee payments over more years (and at the risk of course fee inflation). There were three participants in particular who reported completing their studies seven, nine and ten years respectively after enrolling for their diploma. If funds are not available to afford the fees, students might 'stop-out'. Stopping out occurs when students defer their studies during the course of the programme with the intention to return. Studies show that the most common reason for doing so is the inability to afford the fees (Schatzel, Callahan, Scott & Davis, 2011; Terriquez & Gurantz, 2015). Other reasons include family and work responsibilities. Of the approximately 30% of students who are likely to stop-out (Stratton, O'Toole & Wetzel (2008) cited in Schatzel et al., 2011, p. 47) there are

two distinct groups, namely young students with financial concerns, and older students who are working and doing part-time studies, or have children (Schatzel et al., 2011). These groups represent many of the non-traditional students who access private higher education. The study by Terriquez and Gurantz (2015) found that getting financial aid greatly reduced the likelihood of students taking a break from college. The corollary is that without financial aid, the missing middle and those from poorer families who are absorbed into private institutions, will continue to experience their disadvantage.

6.1.7 Qualification type

Higher education qualifications are classified into 11 types – five at undergraduate level and six post-graduate qualifications. Each type has a clearly specified purpose and characteristics that guide the implementation and quality assurance of the programmes leading to those qualifications (CHE, 2013). The majority of the graduates in the sample (60%) obtained Diploma and Higher Certificate programmes. These are qualifications with a strong vocational orientation incorporating industry-specific knowledge for the purpose of workplace preparation. These vocational qualifications are less common amongst graduates from public universities than Bachelors' degrees, which are orientated for general and professional employment or in preparation for post-graduate studies (CHE, 2013). In 2017, the DHET reported that 26% of university graduates obtained Diplomas and Certificates, where almost half the total number of graduates (46%) from these public institutions completed a broader more theoretical Bachelor's degree (DHET, 2019a, p.20). The comparison of the different undergraduate qualifications obtained by the sample (private higher education) participants and the 2017 graduate cohort from South African public universities is shown in Figure 17.

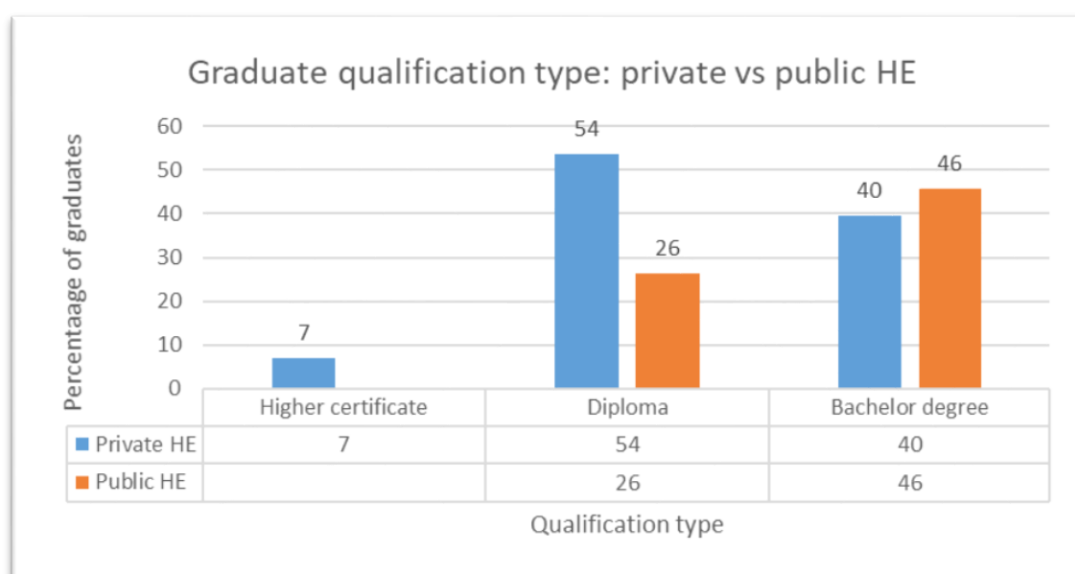


Figure 17: Qualification type – graduate sample in comparison with public universities

Higher levels of qualification hold greater academic status, and graduates may pursue further qualifications in the hope of enhancing their employability. Symptomatic of this quest for credentials, 84% of the graduates who completed the survey indicated that since graduation they have subsequently pursued further study, or intend to do so. And yet when it comes to employability, increasingly questions are asked about the value and sufficiency of a higher education qualification (Ross, 2020; Tomlinson, 2008). While graduates strive for higher qualifications, research has shown – and the participants in this study affirmed – that when it comes to job opportunities they will take any job, even if they are overqualified for it (Ndebele & Ndlovu, 2019). Employers seem less concerned with the level of the qualification that graduates have; increasingly it serves merely as a screening device in the face of a flood of job applications (Brown, 2003; Cai, 2013).

In sum, this section has presented a general biographical profile of private higher education media graduates. The next section reports on their choice to enrol in private higher education and the factors that influenced their decisions. These are varied and made in the context of their individual lives, and as shown towards

the end of the chapter, the choices of institution and study programme have implications for their employability in the workplace.

6.2 The multiple choices of higher education

One of the dominant themes in the literature review was the influence of neoliberalism on higher education (Chapter 3, section 3.1.3). Increasing marketisation of higher education has created a model of the student as an enterprising and self-interested consumer (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Lynch, 2006; Nixon et al., 2018; Olssen & Peters, 2005). For many school-leavers, higher education has become the expected next step after school. They approach higher education as a commodity they need to have, which will connect them to the workplace. As such, they are seen to act as rational consumers who make higher education choices in the same way they make other purchase decisions (Molesworth et al., 2009, Tavares & Cardoso, 2013). Such choices include whether to attend higher education or not, the choice of particular institution, and choice of study programme and modules/courses. Studies have shown that enrolment decisions are uniquely individual, and involve a complex and iterative process, influenced by a range of personal, social, economic, as well as academic and institutional factors (Bhardwa, 2017; Tavares & Cardoso, 2013; Tavares & Ferreira, 2012; Sojkin et al., 2012; Stephenson et al., 2016). Overall, however, the consumer culture is such that enrolling in higher education is a market exchange that is weighted in favour of the instrumental value of the institution and programme rather than the intrinsic worth of the pursuit of knowledge and learning (Molesworth et al., 2009). The motivation behind students' choices frames their expectations of institutions as service providers, and their consequent satisfaction with the institution of their choice (Baliyan, 2016; Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014; Judson & Taylor, 2014; Nixon et al., 2018; Sojkin et al., 2012).

During the interview, I asked graduates, '*Why did you choose to study at a private higher education institution?*' (refer to Appendix I: Interview schedules). Reasons

given by participants were varied, and graduates each described their own range and combination of factors that led them to enrol in a private institution. The specific choice was primarily driven by the contribution that the institution and the programme would make to their employability. The choice factors that emerged from the data are strongly supported by other empirical studies, which show that students enrol in private higher education as a deliberate and specific choice (Baliyan, 2016; Shah et al., 2013; Zain, Jan & Ibrahim, 2013). For the majority of the interviewees (12 of 21), the choice to attend private higher education was made in preference to going to a public university. Many of these participants acknowledged and had considered the public university options that were available to them, and ultimately made a choice to enrol in private higher education. For some, the decision was based on the attraction of particular 'pull' factors that drew them to private higher education. However, reasons for choosing private (over public) is also determined by the political, socio-economic and religious or cultural context that prevails (Tamrat, 2020). An example would include factors such as political unrest and protests that create a sense of lack of safety on campus. Tamrat (2020) explains that such factors might be seen as deficiencies in the public sector, and serve as 'push' factors, as a result of which a student might choose not to attend a public university and decide to enrol in private higher education instead. And yet others found they had little choice. There were 9 of the 21 interviewees who indicated that private higher education was not a preferential choice but their only option for access to higher education.

6.2.1 Private higher education: a consumer choice

The economic rationale is a process in which consumer decisions are based on consideration of the costs and benefits of an investment. For student-consumers this assumes their higher education choices are determined by weighing up the value of enrolling in a particular institution or study programme (Tavares & Cardoso, 2013). One of the key attractions to private higher education is the perception that the particular institution and study programme will enhance graduates' employment and career prospects. Graduates described the

perceived benefits that a private institution held for them in meeting employment goals that guided their enrolment decision.

(i) *Meeting job aspirations*

Jon (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) had aspirations for a career in media and knew what programme he wanted to study. He said he had considered both public and private institution alternatives in deciding where to enrol:

I had the choice to go to one of the big universities or stay private, and going to a government school and dealing with strike action and being one of 47 in a class, I just said to my parents 'I've kind of known what I wanted to do since I was little... I wanted to make TV adverts'. So the best place to do that was at [a private institution]. And, one of the enticing things about [that institution] was that they promise 90% conversion ratio that you'll get a job straight out the gates of leaving.

The prospect of large classes and possible campus protests at a public university inclined him towards private higher education. Amongst private providers his decision was made on what he thought was “*the best*” institution for his choice of programme, which was based on the perception that the institution would enhance, if not guarantee, immediate employment for him after graduating.

(ii) *Choosing the advantage of institutional reputation*

Across the board, studies show that for students, the key measure of choosing the most suitable institution is its reputation (Loo et al., 2017; Sojkin et al., 2012; Tavares & Cardoso, 2013; Tavares & Ferreira, 2014). Institutions build a reputation for themselves based on their graduate employment figures. This then becomes a marketing strategy used to attract students, who, like Jon, believe that the institution will enhance their own employability. As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.2) a strong link is drawn between institutional reputation, teaching quality and graduate employability that influences student enrolment, particularly for private providers. **Briana** (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) chose an institution prior to deciding on her study programme, as, for her, the institution's reputation was her top priority:

So, I went to [name of institution] for the pure reason of its reputation. I did my research, I phoned agencies. I went and found out, and I went to look for the best place that could afford me the best opportunity upon leaving. So it wasn't

just a case of rushing and getting into university to do a degree to then sit with a degree in my lap and not find a job.

Briana knew how hard it is to find a job, and wanted to secure positional advantage for herself. Therefore, to guide her enrolment decision, she made direct contact with several large media agencies and asked them where they scout for new graduates. They gave her the names of two private higher education institutions. Based on the agencies' responses Briana made her choice of where to study. She was not choosing a higher education experience, she was securing herself employment advantage. She did not want to find herself with a qualification but without a job, and so she needed to find an institution that would be instrumental to ensuring she had the best employment opportunities when she completed her studies. Briana's choice was strategic and business-like. She would do her part (work hard) and she believed the institution would do the rest in ensuring she got a job.

(iii) Choosing practical skills

For **Sunette** (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) her enrolment choice was all about having the practical skills needed for the workplace. She wanted to study Graphic Design and felt that the more practical nature of the vocational programme and teaching offered by private providers would give her greater advantage in the job market:

Ok, because graphic design is project-based, so a lot of the things that we do, it's better to do it hands-on rather than learning it out of a book and that's where all the private universities stood out for me. My parents wanted me to go study at Stellenbosch, and I told them that unfortunately that's not happening because there you get to learn everything out of a book for the first year I think.

Sunette acknowledged the need for and value of the theoretical learning that was part of her programme, but she had no intrinsic interest in theoretical knowledge or self-development (Molesworth et al., 2009). It was the opportunity to have hands-on, work-based learning and experience that she wanted for its workplace relevance to enhance her employment prospects, and which she thought would not have been part of her programme in a public institution. She had been

accepted to study at Stellenbosch University⁶⁰, but notwithstanding the university's academic reputation or her parents' wishes, she decided that a private institution would be of greater instrumental value to her career.

(iv) *Choosing non-traditional routes to earn a living*

Ulwazi (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) had in mind a career in performing arts that would not have seen her go to private higher education. However, unlike Sunette, she said it was her mother who persuaded her to change her mind and to study Graphic Design at a private institution:

The reason why my mother also pushed me into graphic design, besides me being a creative, is because she always preached that you should have a degree that can allow you to have your own business... which graphic design does offer. And in the design industry there's always posts, there's always vacancies, there's always going to be someone looking for a designer and a writer, and freelance work. So, generally I won't be out of a job.

Ulwazi appreciated her mother's influence on her higher education choice, which she says "...is rare for Black parents, cos Black parents push their kids to do typical degrees, Law, Accounting..." believing that is the only way to make a good living.

(v) *Choosing by professional identity*

Melody (PHEI 2, Radio Production & PR) had strong aspirations for a career in media. As if confirming Ulwazi's statement, she explained that her father thought she ought to study a traditional career that would ensure a steady income, rather than pursuing her own dreams. However, she has a fear of blood and knew she could not be a doctor. Driven by her "*inner passion*" she explained how she decided on her institution:

And for those qualities that I saw in myself, I was like, ok, media is who I am. Universities like University of KwaZulu-Natal and other universities that offer Media Studies, are more so on the theory basis as opposed to a more practical basis. So when I heard about [private institution] then I was like "Ok, let's go and see what they're all about". And I went there and saw the place, and when I saw their [facilities], I saw all the cool kids... and I was like, "This is me. I'm not doing anything else. This is who I am". So... I registered at [that institution].

⁶⁰ The University of Stellenbosch is an elite public university. It is ranked in the top 300 in the world (Times Higher Education, 2020), and in the top three in Africa and South Africa (Times Higher Education, 2019).

It is not only the nature of the programmes offered by private institutions that attracts students, but also the nature of the physical environment and the institution's culture. A campus visit plays a significant role in influencing institution choice as it provides the prospective student with an opportunity to get a feel for the atmosphere, the teaching and learning environment, the physical space and facilities, as well as their sense of 'fit' and belonging (Shah et al., 2013; Stephenson et al., 2016). Students who have the freedom to choose between different institutions are likely to choose the one where they feel a personal fit with the culture of the institution and the programme (Tavares & Cardoso, 2012). Melody's strong sense of fit with the institution was based on her personal and aspirational professional identity, and an alignment of values. Understanding students' higher education choice factors is important for private providers too who want to align themselves to employers' needs and market themselves to students (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014; Nixon et al., 2018; Ozbal & Konakli, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2016; Tavares & Ferreira, 2012).

(vi) *Mature choices and career longevity*

Private higher education has several characteristics that are attractive to mature students. This applies not only to the modes of delivery but also to the learning environment, with smaller, more personal classes, practical pedagogy, and a gentler culture for older, non-traditional students to negotiate (Kruss, 2007; Mallman & Lee, 2016; Shah et al., 2013). The enrolment choices of mature students differ from those of school-leavers. As discussed in section 6.1.2, private institutions are often a preference for mature students who might already be working. In which case, these individuals may seek a particular study programme that enhances the skillset they require in order to advance their career. Or their choice might be guided by the need to find an institution that offers part-time classes, which they can attend outside of working hours. As late entrants to higher education, mature individuals are likely to take time to 'shop around' and find a particular institutional offering that suits them, meets their professional needs, and fits the context of their lives.

Keegan (PHEI 2, PR & Marketing) typifies the mature student and explained his path and choices:

I took a gap year. I studied, I qualified in Sound Engineering, music production and then I did a bit of work after that for I think two... three years. And then... I only attended [the private institution] really late once I said I needed to get a bit more paper work under myself. And that's when I went for the diploma.

In spite of the fact that he had a qualification, a job, and several years of experience, Keegan felt the need to further his qualifications to ensure his longer-term career prospects. This was not only to meet his own ambitions but he said he also realised it was necessary to give him “*some sort of weighting*” with employers. Higher levels of qualification are used by employers to signal superior ability (Di Pietro, 2017) and graduates see certification as a means to secure positional advantage in the competitive labour market. This becomes all the more important for mature graduates in the face of stiff competition for jobs with newly qualified young graduates (Purcell, Wilton & Elias, 2007).

(vii) *The privilege of freedom of choice*

In light of the argument that students approach their higher education investment with an economic rationale, what is notable in the vignettes provided so far – and that represent this category of graduates who chose private higher education by preference – is that financial considerations did not feature as a factor in weighing up their choices. In making her choices, **Shireen** (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) had weighed up all the factors that were important to her, and compared her options between a public and private institution. She decided she felt “*most comfortable*” with one of the private institutions, and was quick to add “*Not that I would put a Tech College down. It's just if you have the resources and finances and means to go into a [private] College...*” Like her peers, these individuals come from middle-class families who have financial resources, and thus their choices were not constrained by affordability. Without the barrier of financial constraint, they had freedom of choice as to what programme to study and where to enrol. However, there are many other graduates who do not have the same degree of freedom of choice.

6.2.2 Private higher education: no alternative

Notwithstanding the consumer choice, school leavers need to qualify for access to higher education. This means that irrespective of an individual's preference, the choice is determined to a certain extent by factors outside of his/her control. In South Africa, access to any form of higher education is conditional on meeting firstly, the minimum requirements of the Grade 12 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, and secondly, the criteria set by higher education institutions themselves (based on the APS⁶¹ score). The NSC grants individuals access to specific higher education programmes, either Higher Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor's degree, based on the percentages obtained for the summative (Matriculation) NSC examinations (Department of Basic Education, 2019). Institutions determine admission for applicants accordingly, and in conjunction with their specific admission criteria for each of their programmes (University of the Witwatersrand, 2019). School leavers who don't earn sufficient points for access to the institution or programme of their preference face other choices. For example, they could either spend a further year of study at school before re-writing certain NSC exams in an attempt to upgrade their marks and APS score, or they could select an alternative study programme or institution for which they do meet the criteria.

Some private providers have flexible entrance requirements to enable access for school-leavers who, for either financial or academic reasons, do not meet the requirements for access to public universities. This is what Kruss (2007) calls the credentials sub-sector of private higher education that provides a demand-absorbing function and caters predominantly for non-traditional students whose higher education choice is motivated by a strong desire for credentials. The data revealed a group of individuals who were committed to enrolling in higher education as a means to a qualification and a better future, yet when they applied

⁶¹ APS stands for Admission Point Score. It is a score calculated from the Grade 12 examination marks in which the percentage obtained for each subject is weighted and converted into points. The cumulative point score is used by universities to determine admission. Subjects are differently weighted between programmes and institutions, and thus the weightings and points allocation vary from institution to institution.

to study at public university they found they were denied access, and private institutions became a default choice.

(i) *Desperate choice*

Ntombi (PHEI 1b, Journalism) was not sure what she wanted to do when she left school. Her father has a Fine Arts degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, her older sister is a university graduate, and she made application at two public universities. However, she did not qualify for the courses that she had applied for. She knew she had the option to upgrade her NSC marks, but did not want to take what she called a “*gap year*” in order to re-write the examinations and meet the criteria. Notwithstanding her vague career aspirations, she looked for an alternative route into higher education with her existing results:

...what led me to choosing [the private institution] is I didn't have any options at the end. I felt like time was not on my side as well. So I just had to choose or I'd be home, which wasn't an option.

For participants like Ntombi, private higher education was the only option in the absence of access to a public institution. Under the guidance of her older sister, she chose the private institution with the lowest fees, and opted to study Journalism. Her other option was Public Relations, but she said she had heard that PR graduates are not able to find jobs. (This statement held an irony given that she had not been able to find work in Journalism in the three years since graduating.) She explained her rationale for her programme choice:

So then I had to weigh my options. Like ok maybe journalism was more aligned to the stuff I could do, writing, and maybe I could do broadcast journalism at some point, or radio... anything.

Becoming employable as a journalist required her to develop the attributes and skills for work in journalism, yet she chose a career that she knew very little about, either with respect to the skills required or the potential job prospects. A journalism qualification might equip her with basic knowledge of broadcasting and radio as forms of communication, but not, as she expected, with the skills to be able to work as a broadcaster⁶².

⁶² The prospectus for the Diploma in Journalism from her institution does not include any suggestion of work in radio or broadcasting in the description of “What you can become” with this qualification.

There were several participants whose higher education choices followed a similar process to Ntombi's. Individuals with financial constraints have restricted choices too, and ultimately the choice of private higher education became the means to a future determined by the affordability of the fees and aspiration for a higher education qualification, to which the choices of study programme and career were secondary. Choices made in this way, can feel burdensome and risky. Sen distinguishes between an opportunity, when a choice "*can* be made by oneself" and a burden, when the individual feels they "*have* to be made by oneself" (Sen, 1992, p. 63, italics in original). Ntombi's approach that she *had* to enrol in higher education, despite not being fully aware of her own purpose in doing so, nor of the real possibilities it offered her, led to a desperate choice to study, merely in order to avoid sitting at home unemployed.

(ii) *Risky choice*

Esther (PHEI 1b, Journalism) wanted to study Psychology or Law but her university applications were not accepted. She shared the same restricted options in accessing higher education, described by Ntombi (PHEI 1b, Journalism). She decided to "*just go try my luck*" at a private institution that she had heard about from someone living in her neighbourhood. She enrolled for a Diploma in Journalism, although it was not a programme she had planned to study. She made a strategic decision about the role it could play in meeting her broader aspirations. She explained:

I came, I checked it out. Seemed ok and cool, so I thought, argh, I could go to this school you know. Because I had a plan written down to say it could be my step-up level, so if I start at [this college], obtain something and then it could give me passway to say, 'You got a Diploma but you have a qualification, when we put them together you can do whatever it is that you want.' So that's what I did.

Putting her enrolment in the context of the consumer rationale, investments can be risky, and it was Esther's father who had sold his cows in order to afford her higher education (section 6.1.6). It is difficult to weigh up the costs and benefits of the investment in higher education. Brynin (2012, p. 288) states: "From the individual's point of view the process is often akin to fortune-telling, and yet the pressure to work something out increases; rising costs force the calculation of the

incalculable". At the time I interviewed Esther she was still unemployed, and therefore yet to see any return on the investment. However, she said she has no regrets about the choices she made:

I don't regret coming to [this college] because... ja well overall these things just turn out alright I guess. I explored my potential, I could see that I could do this, which is why I'm furthering my studies right now.

Her diploma gave her a qualification and has been a stepping stone for access to further studies, and the hope that this will improve her options in achieving what she wants to do.

(iii) Turning restricted choice into opportunity

When options are constrained, so is freedom of choice. However, even limited choice can have intrinsic importance and instrumental relevance for a person, and has the possibility to serve as a means to different ends (Sen, 1988).

Sinethemba's (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) choice of higher education was constrained in multiple ways. He was born with cerebral palsy, lost his parents when he was young, and moved from rural KwaZulu-Natal to Soweto to live with his grandmother where he completed his schooling at a school for learners with physical and learning disabilities. He aspired to a career in Biochemistry or Geography, but his application to university was rejected. His research on higher education alternatives took him to private higher education. His choices were determined by his financial circumstances. He chose the college with the lowest fees, and enrolled in a Diploma in Public Relations, which he funded by combining his disability grant with his grandmother's pension. He admitted that PR wasn't his first or second choice of study programme, but stated:

I found myself doing it and fell in love with it. Choosing PR was a blessing in disguise for me because it challenged me as a human being and opened channels for me in terms of motivating other people. I now have a vision of becoming an advocate for people living with disabilities. I would not have done that if I was in a science lab doing biochemistry... I think PR chose me.

Sinethemba's default choice of private higher education served as a means to a different career that he had not imagined for himself, but it turned out to be a choice which he realised gives him future career options and choices that he would not otherwise have had.

The interview participants' responses to the question why they chose to study at a private higher education institution showed a distinct pattern that linked with motivation and preference, and which was ultimately directed by their background and socio-economic status. On making the economic choice to invest in higher education, those with financial capital were able to seek out "the best" institution and study programme to maximise their positional advantage and the return on their investment. Those from poorer families had very little choice, defined by what they could afford. On the whole, they made a risky investment based only on the hope of further advantage and the increasing pressure to work something out (Brynin, 2012).

6.3 Employment status

At the time of data collection, the graduates had spent between one and five years in the labour market. The reason I selected this timeframe was I felt it is sufficient time for meaningful navigation within the labour market, and yet also significant should any graduate not have been able to start navigating a career path within this period. In selecting the interview sample, I distinguished between those who declared themselves 'employed' or 'unemployed' as one of the criteria for the purposive sampling. While I was conducting an interview with an 'unemployed' graduate, I heard him telling me of various forms of work he had been involved in from the time he had enrolled as a student. This speaks to the different ways in which employment might be defined and understood by different people. Based on this awareness, I broadened the categories of employment status in the questionnaire to distinguish between forms of formal employment such as permanent and temporary contracts, self-employment, freelance work, voluntary work, being involved in an internship, holding multiple jobs (which could involve project work), and being unemployed.

The current employment status of the graduates is represented in Figure 18. Eighteen (of 114) graduates are unemployed (16%) – one person is occupied in

(unpaid) voluntary work. The remainder of the sample, i.e. 84% of the graduates are employed and earning in one capacity or another.

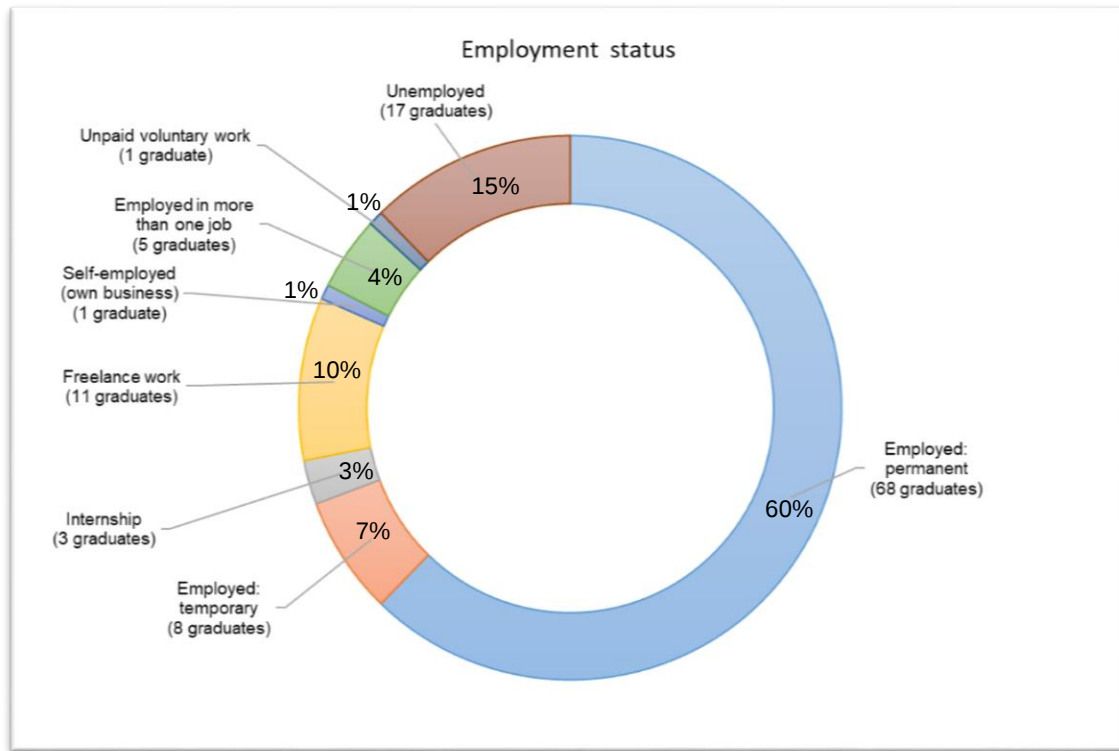


Figure 18: Graduate sample – current employment status

6.3.1 Finding work

Private higher education institutions commit to preparing graduates to be work-ready. As has been mentioned, Jon's (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) motivation for his choice of institution was the likelihood of being amongst the 90% who would be employed on graduating. This high conversion rate directly into employment from graduation was not reflected in the survey data, which showed that only 34% of the graduates went straight from college into a job (see Figure 19). However, extending the timeline, the data showed that 82% of the respondents were employed within the first year after graduating, and within five years, 84% of the graduates are employed. Fourteen graduates spent more than a year looking for employment, and for three of them it took up to three years to find their first job. Some graduates opt for further study when they lose hope of

finding work. The two interviewees who went back into higher education in lieu of persisting with looking for work, did so within a year of graduating. The decision to pursue further education was a deliberate strategy to enhance their employability.

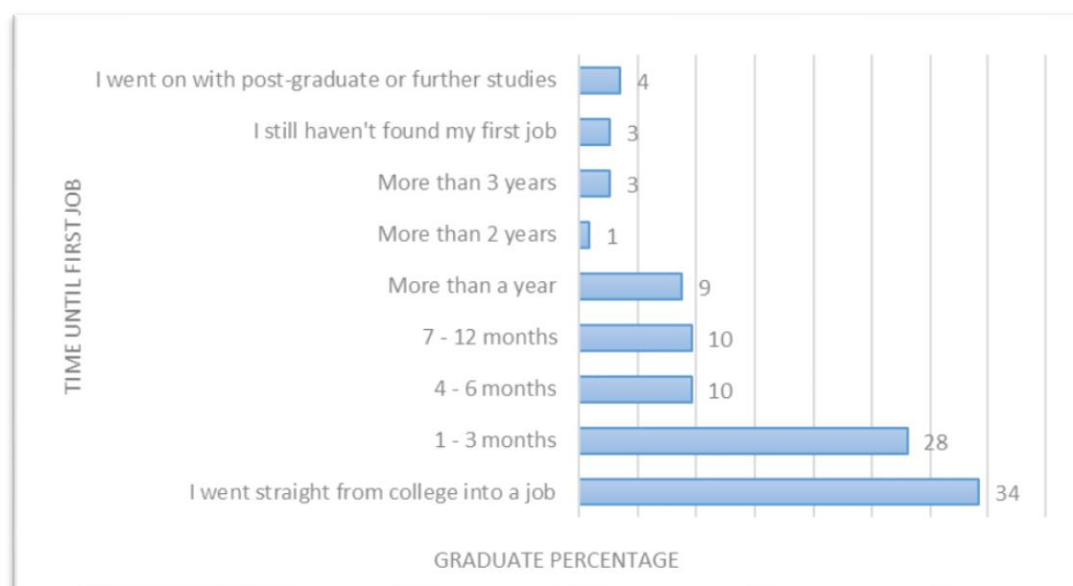


Figure 19: Graduate sample - time between graduation and first job

Individuals who struggle for more than a year to find work, have difficulty staying motivated in the job hunt. The interviewees said that on the whole, job applications are met with no response (this was also reported by Bangani (2019)). Over time, this accumulates into a silent message of felt rejection. In the few instances when they do get a response, no reason is provided as to why the application was not successful. Unsuccessful applicants make the assumption that they lack something the employer requires, for example, their CV is weak, their communication skills are inadequate, or the qualification from a private institution is not recognised. They try to work out what is required to improve their employability, and **Nonku** (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) described it as “*playing mind games*” with employers⁶³. For Esther (PHEI 1b, Journalism) who hasn’t yet

⁶³ Wilton’s exploratory study on the perspectives of employers, refers to the “unknowable and shifting criteria” (2014, p. 1) used in their recruitment processes.

found a job, the lack of feedback to applications is discouraging and makes her question the value of her qualification and of herself:

What is it that you do not have that they need? You probably need to knock on their doors directly and they could just tell you that this and this is what you need and then you get it done. But overall, it's like my diploma means nothing, it doesn't count. But when I look at the people who did the same diploma and they work, I think again, it's probably something that I'm missing as a person.

Graduates expect their diploma to open doors for them. This is the promise of higher education, which is supposedly preparing graduates to meet the needs of employers. And yet, in the competition for jobs and livelihoods, the value of the diploma is diminishing (Brown, 2003; Dore, 1976).

The impact of credential inflation is the need for a qualification to enter the labour market yet increasingly it only provides access to non-graduate work. Graduates who are unable to find employment said they lose interest in continually applying for jobs. They lose hope of finding work, and they lose confidence in themselves and the value of their qualification. Ntombi (PHEI 1b, Journalism) and **Lihle** (PHEI 1b, Journalism) have both been unemployed since completing their programme in 2016. Lihle said she used to apply for 10 positions a day, but she has become despondent:

Sometimes I'll even skip a day, not applying. Because I sometimes lose hope you know, that even if I can apply I know I'm not going to get a response.

Ntombi also admitted to losing interest in finding work in her field:

To be honest, I'm not applying every day. I did go on an interview, where my sister works... and then unfortunately I didn't get the job. That's like customer specialist jobs. I kept applying for dispatcher jobs. ...To be honest, I don't think I'm even as excited for Journalism.

Ntombi is now putting her hopes in other types of (non-graduate) work just to secure some form of income – including trying to draw on her sister as social capital. The survey data showed that one-third of the graduates (34%) are not working in their field of study. The overwhelming majority of these indicated that the reason for the change of direction was that they had been unable to find a job in media. Some were drawn by an opportunity in a different field, while others chose to leave media. This has seen graduates move into jobs in retail, basic

office administration, and finance and banking, with a few individuals working in education, manufacture and production, and travel.

There were several anomalies in the data about the alternative fields where graduates are now working. On closer analysis I found that more than half of those who claimed to have moved out of the field, are in fact working in media. They are either doing media-related work in a non-media organisation, or working in media but not in their preferred area of specialisation. For example, one of the graduates who qualified with a Media Diploma having majored in Journalism is now self-employed doing social media management and copywriting. She classifies her work as Marketing and therefore outside her field. Another graduate with a Diploma majoring in Public Relations is working in a Marketing company doing service promotion. She makes the comment that she would like to work for a PR company to get the relevant experience and seems to consider Marketing and PR as unrelated sub-fields of media. This narrow interpretation of a specific role in the field has implications for employability if graduates limit their employment choices and expectations to working only in a particular sub-field, rather than understanding the broader value and application of their media skills and knowledge in different contexts. Consequently, although 66% of the graduates stated that they are working in the field of media, my amended calculation indicates that the number of graduates working in the broad field of media (even if they stated they are working outside of the field of media and are working outside the immediate sphere of their qualification) is probably closer to 75% of the graduates.

6.3.2 Earning a living wage

The ability to work enables people to earn a livelihood and be economically secure (UNDP, 2015). In the context of private higher education where providers promote high graduate employment rates, it is necessary to draw a distinction between being employed and earning a decent livelihood. A closer look at the data of graduates' employment situations shows wide disparities in their monthly earnings (see Figure 20). After three years of study (and probably some time

spent as an intern), participants reported that their entry level salaries in the media industry are between R5 000 and R10 000 per month. One-third (31%) of the employed graduates are earning less than R10 000 per month. Of those, 11% earn less than R5 000 a month, and 13% are not earning at all. At the other end of the scale, a few graduates are earning in excess of R40 000 per month, a salary that is on par with that of a Senior Engineer or Senior Accountant (BusinessTech, 2020c; Maidment, 2018).

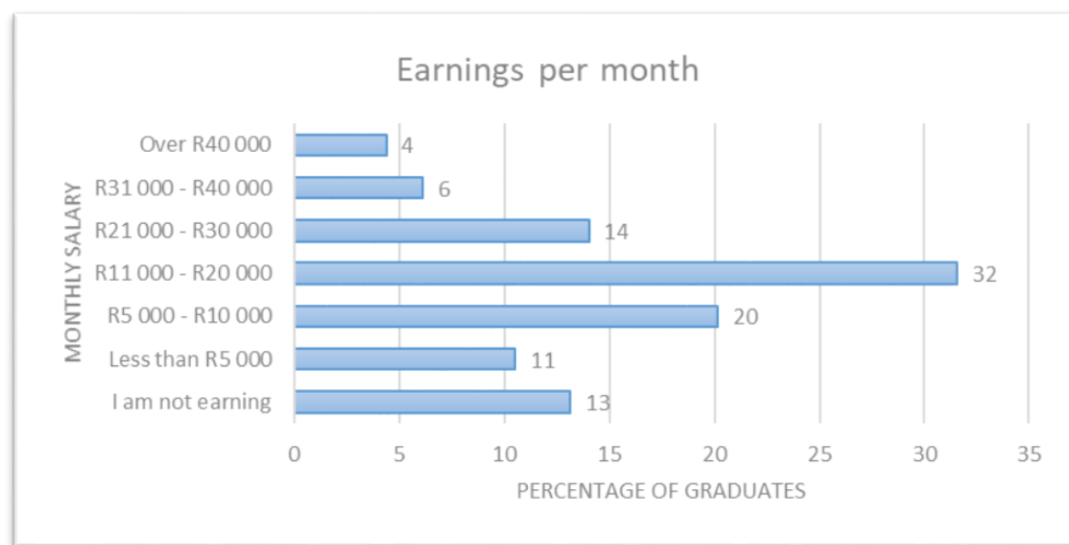


Figure 20: Graduate sample - monthly earnings

To put these figures in context, the average wage in South Africa is R21 455 per month⁶⁴ equivalent to USD1 391⁶⁵ (Trading Economics, 2020). At the start of 2020, the average take-home pay for South African professionals was R14 577 per month (BusinessTech, 2020b) and the median starting salary for graduates is R220 000 per annum or ±R18 000 per month (SAGEA, 2020). South Africa has a national minimum wage of R20.76 per hour, brought into law in 2019, to protect workers from unreasonably low wages (BusinessTech, 2020a; RSA, 2018). Accordingly, a person working in unskilled labour could potentially earn up to

⁶⁴ This was the measure in the second quarter of 2020. Earnings measured in 2020 have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the labour market and economy.

⁶⁵ Exchange rate calculation updated in November 2020 was R15.42=1 USD (<https://www.xe.com/>).

R3 360 per month. Hence, there are graduates who are not much better off than unskilled workers with respect to their earnings, and some are worse off.

My search on job portals for media-related salary comparisons⁶⁶ (Ad Talent, 2020; Indeed, 2020) found that intern positions in graphic design, marketing, and advertising are stated to pay between R5 000 and R8 000 per month. The data did not support this, and participants reported receiving stipends of between R2 000 and R4 000 as interns. Some interns only received money for transport. All of them reported that it was insufficient payment to sustain a livelihood⁶⁷. The job portals show that a retail sales consultant and a call centre representative – where no qualification is required – earn R5 000 to R8000 monthly. This possibly explains why several of the unemployed participants indicated that they resort to looking for work in these positions when they fail to find media jobs. Junior and Assistant positions in media generally start on double-figures, i.e. upward of R10 000 per month. Salaries differ from city to city, with the highest salaries paid in Johannesburg, although certain industries (including creative and design fields) are more lucrative in Cape Town⁶⁸. Salaries paid in Durban are consistently several thousand Rand per month lower in all fields, and at times half that of what people in Johannesburg earn, however, Durban also has the lowest cost of living of the three cities (Numbeo, 2020).

The monetary return is largely what underlies the drive to invest in education, and graduates expect to earn a better salary than those without a qualification. Whether education is able to offer a financial return on investment has come under question (Ionescu, Ionescu & Jaba, 2013; Klees, 2016). Notwithstanding low entry-level salaries, the graduate premium is rationalised on the potential of future earnings, which ought to improve over time (Kemp-King, 2016). **Survey**

⁶⁶ The information on these websites is based on salaries calculated from job advertisements placed over a period of three years.

⁶⁷ There is further discussion on internships in Chapter 7.

⁶⁸ The Numbeo (2020) comparison showed that while consumer prices and local purchasing power are higher in Johannesburg than Cape Town, rent and grocery prices are higher in Cape Town than Johannesburg.

participant no. 68 (PHEI 2, Television Production) graduated in 2014, and is still earning less than R10 000 per month with an ongoing debt burden:

I'm currently employed but not for what I studied for. It can be depressing at times because I'm still paying for the student loan for a qualification that never got me a job, and I sometimes feel like it was a waste, and wonder if I'll ever get a job for that qualification.

She lives with her pensioner parents, yet indicated that she is able to live financially independently of them. Many young Black earners bear the burden of 'black tax', a cultural norm that a salary ought to contribute to the household and family costs (Magubane, 2016; Ngwadla, 2018). This money is used to pay for living expenses and education of younger family members, often leaving little personal spending, or savings, for the income earner. Consequently, it ties the graduate into a cycle of inter-dependence. The survey data showed that within five years of graduating, 40% of the graduates claim to live entirely independently on their salary. More than half of the graduates are living inter-dependently, either supporting or supported by family. This is shown in Figure 21.

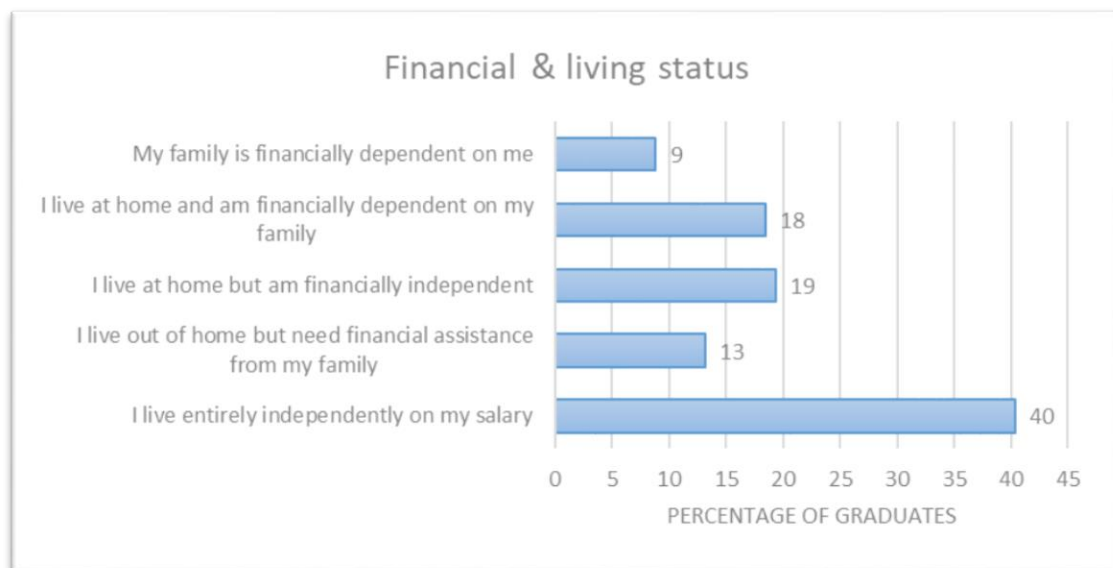


Figure 21: Graduate sample - financial status and level of independence

The ability to live financially independently is more likely for middle-class graduates who come from families where others are earning. The level of independence is not only influenced by the salary level but also the lifestyle and

spending habits of an individual. But middle-class graduates are able to draw on their parents for financial support to live 'independently'. Shireen (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) left her parents' home in Durban to live and work in Cape Town where she thought there would be a better lifestyle and more opportunities in the creative field (see footnote 50). This is made possible as her parents contribute to her living expenses

I think you'd have to be on a certain level, not a Junior, to be able to live off your own salary in Cape Town in particular, unless you are able or willing to split an apartment rent. Cos I think if I were to live with someone else and split rent I would definitely be able to still live in Cape Town, it's just that currently I am fortunate to have my parents support that part of my life.

Working-class graduates, on the other hand, may be the only income earner in the household, and even if other members are working, salaries are likely to be lower, making it harder to earn a decent living.

6.3.3 Being under-employed

Higher education is portrayed as a social and economic equaliser (Jaschik, 2017; Winkle-Wagner & Nelson, 2009). Accordingly, the development of vocational skills and knowledge gives all graduates a fair opportunity in the labour market, and reduces the influence of family background, hence narrowing the advantage/disadvantage gap (Xu, 2018). In section 6.3.2 and Figure 20 it was evident that there are significant disparities in earnings between individual graduates, and although the graduate premium ought to enable salaries to improve over time, this is not a linear progression (Abel, Deitz & Su, 2014). This study was restricted to the first five years after graduation, which is not sufficiently long to evaluate the effectiveness of the graduate wage premium, which takes 10 to 15 years, if not more, to realise (Elias & Purcell, 2004). However, it does show the job earnings base from which graduates start, which has implications for how salary growth might progress.

A highly competitive and over-crowded labour market, together with general conditions of high youth unemployment in the country, can drive a culture of getting a job at any cost. Interviewees mentioned that after looking for work for six months to a year, they start to get desperate and lower their expectations of

the kind of work they will get, and take. Eventually any job is considered better than nothing. The incongruence between a graduate's level of formal education and his/her job is described as under-employment (Abel et al., 2014; Cunningham, 2016; Jackson & Collings, 2016; Nunley et al., 2017; Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2011). The terms 'over-qualification' and 'over-education' are also used interchangeably, and typically apply to a situation in which a graduate works in a job that does not require a degree (Baert et al., 2013; Baert & Verhaest, 2014; Jackson & Collings, 2016; Steffy, 2017). This would include jobs such as those the media graduates have taken in administration, retail, customer care, data capture, and factory line work (see Table 4). As a global labour market phenomenon, under-employment has risen significantly since the early 2000s, even in countries with more stable economies and lower rates of unemployment than South Africa. Not only has the rate of under-employment been on the rise, but there has also been a concomitant decrease in the quality of low-wage jobs, so that on the whole, job prospects for graduates have worsened in the last two decades (Abel et al., 2014).

There are several factors that characterise under-employment when measured relative to the job level. It includes a mismatch with the level of education or qualification, the field or discipline, the level of skill, the type of employment e.g. part-time, temporary or intermittent; or the level of earning – or any combination of these factors (Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2011). The data on graduates' current work position does not provide adequate information to determine relative levels of under-employment for those working within the field of media. However, it was possible to identify 17 instances of under-employment⁶⁹ relative to graduate-level work, for individuals working outside the field of media. These are shown in Table 4 below.

⁶⁹ This indicates a rate of under-employment of approximately 15%. However this cannot be accurately calculated as there may be other instances of under-employment within this group that are not identifiable due to absent or insufficient information.

Table 4: Graduate underemployment

Survey participant no.	Gender	Ethnicity	HE institution	Year of HE completion	Media field	Current position / job title	New field	Reason for moving out of media	Earning per month
6	Female	White	PHEI 1a	2018	Graphic Design	Stewardess on private yacht	Chief Stewardess	I was not happy with my final year of college which made it hard for me to be confident in my field of study	>R40 000
19	Female	White	PHEI 1a	2017	Visual Communication	Private Banker	Banking	Could not find a job in media	R11 000 - R20 000
26	Female	Black	PHEI 2	2013	Television Production	Marketing Assistant	Education	Lack of job opportunities	R5 000 - R10 000
27	Female	Coloured	PHEI 2	2015	Advertising	Administration Clerk	Public sector	Low income jobs	R11 000 - R20 000
34	Female	Black	PHEI 2	2014	Video Production	Copywriter and Social Media Coordinator	Information Technology & Services	Not enough opportunities due to nepotism and being hired based on who you're connected to	R5 000 - R10 000
40	Male	White	PHEI 2	2015	Journalism	Optical assistant (Frontline)	Optometry	Parents moved to the Free State, didn't get an internship in time with funds to support living alone	R11 000 - R20 000
43	Female	Black	PHEI 2	2016	Radio Production	Quality Assurer	Banking	I have never had an opportunity to be in the media space	R11000 - R20 000
44	Female	Black	PHEI 1b	2017	Public Relations	Admin Assistant	Administration	No work in the field, saturated Industry	R5 000 - R10 000
51	Female	Black	PHEI 1b	2017	Journalism	Unemployed	I worked in retail	Lack of employment	Not earning
53	Male	Black	PHEI 1b	2015	Journalism	Warehouse Clerk / Stock Manager	Motor industry, specialising in marine (boats) and bikes	Was only because I couldn't get a job in that field so I got a proper paying job in the Motor Industry. But I'm still interested in media	R5 000 - R10 000

56	Female	Black	PHEI 1b	2017	Public Relations	Digital customer care consultant	Customer care	Had no choice, no available positions	R5 000 - R10 000
67	Female	Black	PHEI 2	2015	Video Production, Journalism, Public Relations	Coordinator/Office Administrator/Social media admin	I'm working for a dispute resolution firm	There are not many opportunities if one is not connected to a network of people within the field and while in it, it does not pay very well which is discouraging, taking into consideration the country's tough economic struggle currently	R31 000 - R40 000
68	Female	Black	PHEI 2	2014	Television Production	Linkage officer	Health (Advertising)	I'm struggling to get a job in that field	R5 000 - R10 000
87	Female	Black	PHEI 1b	2016	Public Relations	Business Development Officer	Finance		R5 000 - R10 000
99	Female	Black	PHEI 2	2016	Public Relations	Data capture	Capturing data at a clinic for Anova health institute	I couldn't get a job in media due to lack of experience and when I graduated, the first job I got was the one I'm currently in	R5 000 - R10 000
112	Male	Black	PHEI 2	2014	Radio Production	Stock counting clerk	Retail	I love media but it was hard finding a job. Having both parents being unemployed, I had to get work that will put food on the table. It was a decision of circumstance	<R5000
113	Male	Black	PHEI 1b	2016	Public Relations	Operating	Factory line worker	I was unemployed and wanting to make money so can support my family	<R5000

It is not unusual for new graduates to find themselves in positions of under-employment as they transition into the labour market, with the potential for their status to improve with time and experience (Abel et al., 2014; Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2019). However, a distinction has been drawn between under-employment that is voluntary and circumstances in which it is involuntary (Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2011; Steffy, 2017). It is possible that some graduates may choose under-employment voluntarily. As such, they take on work for which they are overqualified, but view this as a temporary measure in which they have an opportunity to earn some income and build experience while they take time to adjust to adult life and find employment more suited to their qualification. There may also be graduates who opt for a more permanent form of under-employment if they decide not to pursue a career with their qualification. This applies in the case of **Survey participant no. 6** (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design – see Table 4) who stated: *“I was not happy with my final year of college which made it hard for me to be confident in my field of study”*. Instead she opted for a job as a stewardess on a yacht/ship with no intention of taking up a career in media. This work does not require a qualification but she feels her choice offers her a better future⁷⁰. She explained:

I feel optimistic in my choice to not go into media. I am earning a much higher salary as a stewardess and I can save to open my own business after a few years. It has helped me to buy my own car and be on the way to purchasing my first home before the age of 25. I feel very optimistic that this choice has been the best one.

She feels sure that this position has set her up financially to move into self-employment and a secure future. However, pursuing this option would have required a great deal of financial support, as she would have needed to go overseas in order to apply for the position as stewardess, and to afford her own living expenses there until such time as she got the job and was able to start

⁷⁰ A job such as this is colloquially referred to as “golden handcuffs” (Martin, 2017) as after a year or more of such work and earning it becomes very difficult to settle back into a mundane job with significantly lower income. Inevitably in the interests of not being unemployed, and wanting to retain a certain lifestyle, they return for another year (or more) in this job. Eventually, after a length of time being out of their field of study they become less employable and so they become unable to break away from the work, the lifestyle and the earning of the job. Yet the nature of that work, in and of itself, also becomes less viable and hence less secure as they get older. It is not a life-course career.

earning the high salary. This is not an option that is available to the majority of graduates. And for some, their status of under-employment persists.

Underemployment is generally perceived to be involuntarily if the graduate senses a lack of any alternative. With the exception of participant no. 6, most of the participants who had taken jobs outside of media did so for lack of opportunity to work and earn in the field. For example, in the case of **Survey participant no. 56** (PHEI 1b, Public Relations), who indicated she has taken a job as a digital customer care consultant because she *“had no choice”*. Some were able to find jobs that enable them to earn salaries commensurate with, if not higher than those reported by their peers working in media. And a couple of these graduates indicated they will stay in their new field. **Survey participant no. 43** (PHEI 2, Radio Production) is working in banking and earns between R11 000 and R20 000 per month. She stated: *“I feel out of place, I do not have passion for banking and I know that I belong in media”*. Despite her discomfort, she knows it is difficult to find employment, and having a secure income helps her feel confident about her future. **Survey participant no. 26** (PHEI 2, Television Production) feels uncertain about her future but has settled for work with a steady income in order to be able to provide for her family. However, the situation is quite different for **Survey participant no. 112** (PHEI 2, Radio production) and **Survey participant no. 113** (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) who both took on menial work earning less than R5 000 per month out of desperation to support their families. This data supports Steffy’s (2017) findings of a class-based distinction between voluntary and involuntary under-employment. In South Africa, this distinction also falls along racial lines. Survey participant no. 113 said: *“My line of work is depressing, there is no growth at all... more racism and nepotism”*. Graduates from working-class backgrounds are more likely to experience involuntary under-employment than their middle-class peers, particularly when temporary under-employment becomes permanent.

Studies have shown evidence of the negative effects of under-employment on the longer-term employment and earnings prospects for graduates (Baert et al.,

2013; Baert & Verhaest, 2014; Kahn, 2010, Scurry & Blenkinsopp, 2019). Employability is influenced by structural factors in the form of the economy, and shifting occupational boundaries. It is also influenced by social factors in the form of graduates' personal circumstances and employers' perceptions and processes. Higher education may give graduates a better chance at employment, but in a labour market with more graduates than jobs, there is no guarantee of the nature and quality of that work. When graduates take on work that is not matched to their qualification, what is perceived to be a temporary arrangement to avoid joblessness, has the potential, swayed by social and economic structures, to become a persistent mismatch (Baert et al., 2013; Nunley et al., 2017).

Up to this point, this section has presented the data on graduates' employment status – their experiences finding work (section 6.3.1), their earnings (section 6.3.2) and the link between their qualification and level of job (section 6.3.3). This final part, sums up the section with an analysis of expectations versus reality for different graduates.

6.3.4 Great expectations

The choices students make when they enrol in higher education are framed by each individual's personal context and circumstances but also moulded by what the institutions market to them. Consequently, each one has expectations of what their higher education will do for them, and what they might be able to become with their qualification. As the data showed, primary amongst those expectations is getting employment and a job of their choice. In the course of their higher education, students' conceptions of the workplace are structured by the input from institutional messages, educators, and the pedagogy. They construct their own notion of where they will work and what they will do, projecting their aspirations into an imagined future. In addition to their own expectations are those of their families – particularly for first-generation students – so that graduates face a particular burden of responsibility for achieving successful work outcomes and a salary that the family can rely on (Lehmann, 2009; Ngwadla, 2018). As

graduates, this shapes their expectations of their career pathway. On transition to the workplace graduates are left to manage those hopes and expectations, and the reality is not always what they anticipated.

(i) More than human capital

Dominant employability discourse promotes the development of human capital, and its value as a resource in gaining employment. Participants expressed the expectation they had when they graduated that part of the private higher education 'deal' was that their institution would get them a job. Whether it was stated explicitly by the institution or not, it was the perception held by two-thirds of the interviewees. As part of the marketing strategies used by private institutions to attract students, they display their international accreditation, promote their alumni success, and appoint those working in high-profile positions around the world as brand ambassadors. Understanding that higher education is the route to the labour market, school leavers are led by what is marketed by institutions.

Maggie (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) explained her misunderstanding:

So, it's internationally recognised, but we're not helping you [referring to the institution]. So we didn't get any of that part where they said, "We're not helping you. You're going to have to be on your own after that" [referring to the students].

Standing on the threshold of the labour market, graduates found that reality differs from their expectations, and for some graduates there were limits to what the institutions did, and could do, in helping them get a job.

Jon (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication), whose expectations were resting on the institution's graduate employment conversion ratio, managed to make it into the 90% who got a job on graduation. He commented:

...they kind of open the door and let down the red rope but you've got to get past the bouncer yourself. So they provide you with the opportunities but they don't put their foot in the door and open it up for you.

"Getting past the bouncer" meant drawing on the institutional network, and his own social, cultural and economic capital to get his foot in the door. Once in the labour market, graduates found that employers do not recruit them for their skills. Tomlinson (2017a) proposes that employability is constituted by the multiple

capitals, encompassing a range of human, social, cultural, identity and psycho-social dimensions, which serve as resources that graduates need to draw on and which shape their labour market outcomes. This applies not only to getting into a job, but progression within a job and navigating a career. Jon was able to draw on the institutional capital to get into an internship, which became a junior position. However, he is ambitious and when he felt his position in the company was not progressing commensurately with the quantity and quality of work he was doing, he decided to express himself. He explained: *“I kind of... like battered my way into the board room and punched down the door”*. However, having the social and cultural capital to hammer on the boardroom door is not a resource that all graduates have. Survey participant no. 112 stated:

I'm at a place where who you know is your gateway to a better position. For some of us we don't have that luxury and have to work a hundred times more to get our foot in the management door. It also affects our life away from work because we take more hours at work in order to get recognised.

The way in which graduates approach the door of employers, and how they are able to move through it, depends on more than the skills that higher education has helped them to develop. Graduates' employability also depends on the resources they have and how they are able to convert the opportunities that higher education has given them into employment.

(ii) *“Reality for us is very privatised”*

The discussion of private higher education in Chapter 2, showed how diverse the sector is when it comes to types of private institution. While all institutions are held to the same standards of quality assurance processes by the CHE in their programme structure and content, there is more to higher education than the visible pedagogy (Bernstein, 1975). The skills of the craft that graduates are required to possess may be observable, however there is much in the teaching, and in the development of graduates' identities, that is implicit and hidden in the curriculum. The data showed a strong middle-class orientation in the teaching and learning. **Sibusiso** (PHEI 1a, Copywriting) attended an elite private institution, which he described as *“a privileged space”* where everyone shares

similar ideas about the world. He reflected on a comment made by a lecturer who told the class of students:

“...because of, number one, the families most of you come from and the institution itself, you are within a system or a network that enables you to thrive quicker than others would be because you're in [this institution]. And then that's a privilege by itself because you get introduced to our people”

The way the lecturers teach and interact gives students a sense of where they stand in the labour market. They are drawing on the human, social, cultural, identity and psycho-social capitals of the institution, which become their own (Tomlinson, 2010, 2017). Sibusiso realised how this was different from the way things are for graduates from other institutions:

I think [the institution] shelters us a lot. It's because we're in this very idealised space ...Because reality for us is very privatised... So even how you conceptualise the world is from a very privileged space. I think we don't get really stabbed with what reality has and how you have to contend with the world.

In his opinion, the elite institution he attended prepares graduates very well for middle-class privilege and work in the private sector. This privilege includes being able to build networks and being prepared for particular roles and levels of work in the industry.

In contrast, Nonku (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) and Esther (PHEI 1b, Journalism) who attended a non-elite institution, seemed disillusioned, as though the systems had let them down. For Nonku, the promise of the potential of higher education was broken. She said:

It was hard. For me, personally it was hard because like they say "Go and study". You go... you come back. They say we should get good marks and all that. We do that, but still it becomes harder.

She had invested in higher education and worked hard to make herself employable, yet to no avail. Esther felt that employers make demands for skills, and make it look as though recruitment is a fair competition, yet have already decided who they are going to employ. She said:

They [employers] say "study this" but they're not opening doors for us. They take out posts but they already have someone in the circle to say, you're our person but just to make things fair let's just put it out, but then overall you're the person we're going to take.

Her comment resonates with Ingram and Allen's (2019) findings on the pre-hiring practices of employers in which social mobility is just an illusion (discussed in section 3.2.3). In less privileged spaces, invisible pedagogies fuel the illusion, as they shape particular graduates for particular employers and create the impression that employability lies in the talent of individuals. However, rather than the skills or qualification that employers say they need, the "graduate elite" is an institutional type (Hesketh, 2000, p. 257). This means employers recruit from elite institutions so that graduates from other institutions have limited employment prospects (Sadik et al., 2020).

(iii) *"I'm thinking of America but I'm in Cape Town"*

As higher education has taken on the role of labour-supplier, it is expected to respond to the needs of the labour market. At the same time, spurred on by the ideal of serving social justice objectives through widening access, it is also expected to respond to its expanding graduate constituency. The development of skills, and particularly knowledge of new technologies, is seen to enhance the employability of graduates and produce fit-for-purpose workers. The world of high-tech multimedia and gaming is a relatively new field of media. It serves a middle-class target market in the form of PlayStation video games and entertainment. However, applications of multimedia transcend the home console to include education, training, arts, culture and communication, as well as medicine, engineering, science and technology, and research (Pavithra, Athilingam & Prakash, 2018; Sloan, Stratford & Gregor, 2006).

Xaba (PHEI 3, Game graphics and Multimedia) comes from a working-class family. He was unable to attend higher education but won a bursary as a mature student to study at an elite institution. Like Sibusiso (PHEI 1a, Copywriting), his higher education experience had a strongly middle-class orientation. The focus of his training was specifically on work in the creative gaming industry. When asked what he felt his institution could have done better, he said:

I think they're doing all well. However, I think they could do more with just talking to people [students] in terms of the industry, where they see themselves, where they'd like to be. Just get them understanding as to how

would you go about going there, and what kind of work would you be able to do to get in there. Because not everybody wants to build AAA games⁷¹. And yeah, some people want to build simulations, to teach. I mean... it's multimedia, it's game design. I'm thinking of AAA gaming but I'm thinking of the top line and I can't see what I can actually use it... how in my surroundings, you know. I'm thinking of America but I'm in Cape Town.

Xaba's aspiration is to create an interactive visual artwork that could be used in education or drama. Given the many different applications of multimedia, he feels he was prepared with an unrealistic focus on international-level gaming, rather than being prepared for the realities of alternative ways in which he could use his skills and knowledge in his local community.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a profile of who private higher education graduates are, why they chose to enrol in private higher education, and what their employment status is as a representation of the contribution made by their higher education. This is important in two respects. Firstly, it provides information on a sector that has only sporadically been the context of empirical research in the last decade. Secondly, this overview of the individuals is the introduction to the next chapter which takes a deeper look at how higher education prepared the graduates as media practitioners and for their navigation through the media workplace.

The data has shown that media graduates from private institutions are a demographically diverse group, no different from the graduates that emerge from public universities. They come from widely different backgrounds which significantly influenced where each person enrolled for higher education. Those from wealthy, middle-class families had the freedom to follow their passion and choose the best institution and study programme to ensure their employability. Individuals from poorer and working-class households had a very limited choice

⁷¹ In the video game industry, AAA is an informal classification to describe games produced by larger producers with high budgets. These games would be comparable to a blockbuster in the film industry or a bestseller book.

due to resource constraints. For some students, private institutions gave them access to higher education that they would not otherwise have had, but their choices were based on the lowest costs with limited allowance for the individual's particular aspirations, abilities or preferences. Consequently, they enrolled for programmes with little understanding of what this meant for their future.

The data showed that the rate of employment of private higher education graduates is relatively high, at 85% of those surveyed and interviewed. The pattern of conversion factors that emerged is one that shows the stratification of quality of job, level of wages, and how long it takes to find employment, correlates with the hierarchy of institutions, the field of study, and the graduate's own biography. The expansion of capabilities and functionings is thus uneven and so then is human development which seeks to advance making valued life choices under conditions of equity, empowerment, participation and sustainability. The next chapter provides a more detailed analysis of the resources and factors that determine how graduates are able to convert their higher education opportunities into what they are able to be and do in the labour market.

CHAPTER 7

Employability: at the intersection of higher education and the labour market

Introduction

The data presented in Chapter 6 gave insight into how and why graduates embarked on their higher education journeys, and provided a snapshot of their current employment status. The aim of this chapter is to critically consider graduates' experiences, and the processes that took place between enrolment in higher education and their current position in the workplace. Much research on employability takes a prospective view of employability from the higher education side. It is less common to look back on higher education and evaluate employability from the labour market side. The analysis draws predominantly on the qualitative data obtained in the interviews with the three groups of stakeholders viz. graduates (see Table 3 and Appendix A), staff as key informants from the institutions (see Table 5), and employers (see Table 6).

This chapter has three parts. The first part takes the combined perspectives from the graduates' and staff to consider education for employability. Institutions strive to make graduates industry-ready and graduates expect that higher education will equip them with the skills and knowledge to ensure employment. The analysis builds a discussion of the opportunities provided in and through private higher education for developing employable graduates. This section of analysis builds towards a response to research question one: *How does private higher education contribute to enhancing equitable opportunities for media graduate employability and well-being?* The second part considers the labour market as the domain of employers and employability outcomes. Graduates enter the labour market where employers have their own expectations of what makes an individual employable in their organisation. I sought to find out from employers what they

think higher education ought to do, or to have done better or differently, in preparing graduates as media workers. The analysis of these perspectives starts shaping a response to research question four: *What are the capabilities that employers in the media industry value (from private higher education graduates)?* The final section focuses on the reality of employment in media and what this means for graduates as qualified media practitioners. This is where the realisation of higher education outcomes intersect with the labour market demands and processes. This section of analysis builds towards a response to research question three: *What are the factors that enable or constrain media graduates' participation in the workplace?*

7.1 Education for employability

In this section, I consider the qualitative data drawn from the perspectives of institutions (via staff informants) responsible for the delivery of higher education, and from the retrospective views of graduates as to how that delivery has played out for them in the labour market. In responding to the research question of '*how*' private institutions enhance media graduate employability, it is not the intention (or within the scope) of this study to evaluate the detail of the pedagogy, but rather to understand '*what*' private institutions are doing and '*how*' this has contributed to the quality of lives of their graduates. In the methodological design, I decided to involve staff as key informants of institutional processes. The selection was described in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.2). Each institution put forward a representative staff member to present his/her perspective, and the details of the four key informants are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Private higher education staff as key informants

Institution	Institution type	Key informant⁷²	Role
PHEI 1a	Large corporate owned entity. Academic subsidiary comprises several higher education institutions with multiple campuses, governed by a Senate. ±5 000 students	Les	Programme manager
PHEI 1b		Precious	Career centre manager
PHEI 2	Medium, multi-campus entity, individual owner/CEO, managed by a Board of Directors. ±2 000 students	Jamie	Head of graduate placements
PHEI 3	Small, single-campus entity, individual owner/manager. <150 students	Karl	Managing Director; co-founder; owner

The data collection from graduates required them to reflect on their experiences and the role played by their higher education institutions in contributing to their career development and opportunities for employment. Input was also obtained from staff about the institutional strategies and mechanisms to prepare students for employability. Graduates' experiences of their higher education were found to be closely aligned to the institutions' intentions and processes as described by the staff. As such, I have used the graduates' voices, complemented by some of the data from the higher education key informants, in describing the opportunities for employability offered by private providers.

7.1.1 The commitment to employable graduates

Media programmes offered by private institutions are vocational, with a strong industry orientation and specificity. Together with conceptual-theoretical principles, the higher education programmes are aimed at developing procedural and craft knowledge for application in the workplace (CHE, 2013). While higher education programmes are differentiated according to their specific purpose and characteristics, the underpinning academic orientation distinguishes these programmes from those offered by Technical and Vocational Education Training

⁷² Pseudonyms have been used, and each person is introduced in bold on the first mention.

colleges (TVET) which are part of the Further Education and Training (FET) sub-framework (CHE, 2013). Within the higher education band, it is the combination of general and specific procedural knowledge application that characterises vocational undergraduate programmes from more theoretical academic programmes offered by public universities. It is this niche, bridging the vocational and the academic orientations, balancing theory with practical application that private providers are able to fill, and that serves as a strong drawcard for individuals who have aspirations for a career in media.

Across the diverse spectrum of private higher education provision, institutions are differentiated according to the programmes they offer, the internal culture of each institution, and the demographic of their target market. This applies not only between institutions but also within the different brands of large multi-entity institutions (such as PHEI 1a and PHEI 1b in this study). Notwithstanding the diversity of the entities and the programmes on offer, the interviews with the higher education informants from the different institutions revealed a common voice. Influenced by neoliberal policies and driven by the dominant skills discourse, the consistent message amongst them was a committed focus on the teaching of vocational skills, work-integrated learning (WIL) and graduate employability. This is both an educational and a marketing strategy. As an educational responsibility, **Les** (PHEI 1a) stated that the strong employment focus of the programmes and pedagogy is their *obligation* (her emphasis, but not her word) to their clientele. She said: *“I mean people are making a significant investment, so they want to know what their return on investment will be”*. She explained that the agility of private institutions (more so than public institutions) enables them to respond to market needs in meeting their obligation.

As market-driven institutions, private providers compete with each other for their clientele, and graduate employment forms part of their marketing strategy. **Precious** (PHEI 1b) explained that her role is to find job opportunities for

graduates, and she is given a target of placing 80% of the graduates each year⁷³. Employment as an outcome soon after graduation produces satisfied graduates, and is seen as a measure of institutional effectiveness and quality. This helps to attract new enrolments, which is important for their business models⁷⁴. **Karl** (PHEI 3) described the “*fierce competition*” that exists specifically amongst private providers. The competition is not only to have a unique selling point within the sector, but private providers also compete for students with public universities. Facing this stiff market competition raises challenges for providers of what programmes to offer, what niche to fill, and how to ensure their programmes are affordable. Halliday (2016) cautions that marketisation of higher education is creating an “educational arms race” (p. 151) more focused on selling positional advantage than on educational development. As was evident in Chapter 6, private institutions provide opportunities for access to higher education and for graduate-level entry to the labour market. However, the instrumental value of access to educational resources is not synonymous with being able to convert the resources into competitive advantage (Brown, 2003; Halliday, 2016).

The primary mechanism used by private providers to enhance employability is a core of work-integrated learning (WIL) and work-based learning (WBL) embedded in the pedagogy. The data shows that on the whole, the employability strategies and processes described by the staff from the institutions were aligned with the graduates’ perceptions of the contribution their institution made to their employability. In contrast to Mobarak’s (2019) study, which found that even employed graduates from eight South African universities did not feel adequately prepared for the workplace, graduates from the private institutions felt well-prepared and work-ready. They said they had the knowledge of their field, felt competent to perform the practical and technical skills required for their craft, and had been given opportunities for exposure to the workplace. By the time they

⁷³ Precious acknowledged that they have not met this target for the past two years, but have placed about 70% of the graduates.

⁷⁴ The business model is generally based on the teacher-student ratio, with a minimum number of enrolments required in order for a module to be financially viable, and to determine what they are able to deliver.

graduated, they had a sense of what they are able to do in the industry and who they could become. From the interview data, I have distilled three main mechanisms by which private institutions provide opportunities for the development of graduate employability, these include: (i) building knowledge and skills; (ii) building networks; (iii) building experience and identity.

7.1.2 Opportunities to build knowledge and skills

The staff spoke of their study programmes comprising a strong vocational orientation and skills-based curricula. This takes the form of theoretical learning units with practical exercises in which students apply their knowledge in a ‘real-life’ or simulated work context. They also spoke of the involvement of industry partners in the design and assessment of industry-related tasks, which helps to ensure the learning outcomes are aligned to the requirements of the workplace. Returning to the definition of employability drawn from the literature (Yorke, 2006, p. 8), graduates reflected on the “set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes” they had achieved in higher education. They specifically described what they thought their own institution had done well in preparing them for the workplace. On reflection they were able to contextualise their higher education in their subsequent workplace experiences.

(i) Workplace skills

To the extent that employability lies in graduates’ skills, the data shows that private providers are meeting those outcomes, with 79% of the participants reporting that they were equipped with the skills to cope in the workplace – this included some graduates who had not yet found jobs. By way of corroboration, 70% of the participants disagreed (and strongly disagreed) that they were unprepared for the realities of the workplace.

Sunette (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) explained her success in finding employment. She put it down to experience first and foremost (she had been able to work while studying) and also her skill in producing work quickly:

...because they give you projects to do as like a test. So you go for your interview and then they set you like a small project to do. Most of the people couldn't believe how quickly I got a project done and how good the quality was. So that's also what kind of advanced me, I think, to the rest... and that's something that I got out of varsity. Because we had a lot of projects that we had to do in a very short time and that's literally how our industry is.

Kgotso (PHEI 3, Print & Publishing) expressed a similar sentiment. He said:

The best experience that I got from [my institution] was the ability to produce work at a fast pace, that I actually felt that I needed.

A thread that ran through most of the responses was that their learning had given them the practical competence for what is required in the workplace. This learning often involves group projects. **KG** (PHEI 2, Marketing) recognised the value of learning the skills for group work, despite the fact that he did not enjoy it:

I think [what they did well was] the group work that I hated [laugh] cos it was a true reflection of how the workplace is because you get to work with people you don't like but for the sake of... but you find that circumstances dictate that you have to.

On the whole, it was the instrumental rather than the intrinsic value of higher education these graduates were after. And yet, almost without exception they expressed how much they had enjoyed their university experience and valued what they had learned.

(ii) Soft skills

Being able to work with others in a group involves a range of tacit skills in addition to the practical, technical and IT (hard) skills of the craft. Given how quickly technology and the labour market is changing, employability is seen to lie increasingly in the soft skills (Artess, Hooley & Mellors-Bourne, 2017; Osmani et al., 2015; QS, 2019; Shields & Chugh, 2018; Tymon, 2013). These include skills in communication, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, as well as interpersonal skills, digital skills, adaptability, time management, amongst others. They are overarching abilities, attitudes and dispositions that can be applied in different contexts. Some of the skills the graduates attributed to their higher education were personal work ethic, confidence, communication skills, and knowing how to work with diverse groups of people.

Recognising the value of the soft skills over technical skills, Sibusiso (PHEI 1a, Copywriting) admitted:

The assignments they give us are very related to a campaign. So... one of my colleagues was saying that she feels that [graduates from my institution] have an edge in terms of understanding how to develop a campaign. And I think this is true... we may not have the best technical skills in the design or whatever, but in terms of thinking, and approaching a campaign we... yeah, [the institution] does that pretty well.

Briana (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) said her institution taught them to “*think very differently*” so that she added ‘strategy’ to her list of creative and design abilities. Shireen (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) recognised this form of thinking as one of a range of specific outcomes of the team work. She said: “*We did a lot of strategic work as a team. We had to work on the strategic side, the creative side, the brainstorming side, execution, and that's what I enjoyed the most.*” She later added that her experience in higher education had developed her character and given her a different perspective on life.

Nonku (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) said her training for PR required her to develop the skills to communicate in public and have confidence. She added: “*So it improved me personally as a human and as an individual... to improve myself in the public space*”. Despite the fact that her qualification had not led to a job, she felt that higher education had contributed positively to her ability to make risky decisions and to take the steps she has since graduating, including taking on further study towards her career direction. It was her opinion that had she not become a critical thinker and a risk taker, there is a chance that “*maybe I would be somewhere somehow roaming around somewhere*”.

(iii) Lifeskills

Soft skills extend beyond the work environment into life. Keegan (PHEI 2, PR & Marketing) spoke of the lifeskills he had learned in addition to job skills. **Mamaroke** (PHEI 2, Radio Production & PR) expressed confidence that she had learned how to “*actually survive in a place or a workplace*”. She explained:

...when I got out there, even though I wasn't in the industry, I was just like ok, all the things that they taught us they're happening. And you kind of knew, 'ok,

I'm going to handle this situation like this, and when it happens like this, I'm going to do this'.

Mamaroke felt that she has developed the skills to adapt and handle different situations that come her way. Teaching practical and technical work skills is explicit, and the outcomes are visible and measurable. Soft skills and lifeskills, however, are tacit. A critical look at the way in which the graduates reported on their soft skills, shows distinct differences between the extent to which these were recognised and developed by the different institutions, or not. Which does not imply that they were lacking from any institution or individual per se. It is possible that the invisible skills and pedagogies were less explicitly taught and realised at non-elite institutions or in working class graduates who enrolled in more elite institutions (Bernstein, 1975).

Karl (PHEI 3) had first-hand experience of the differences between middle-class and working-class students who were learning side-by-side when his institution provided bursaries for disadvantaged students to enrol at his high-fee institution. He stated:

It was very challenging. It was also... it was very big, and it was like from 0 to 100 basically in a snap.

The metaphorical '0 to 100... in a snap' applied equally to working-class students learning to cope with the demands of higher education, as it did to educators learning to manage the student diversity. Notwithstanding the differences in educational backgrounds between their paying and funded students, Karl said they found that the quality and output of all student work was enhanced through the stimulation and interaction resulting from the diversity in the classroom (more so than when the groups were separated by ability level). However, it did not guarantee 100% success rates, nor did it mitigate the ongoing life challenges that impact the teaching and learning for some individuals:

We had a few dropouts of the programme, and that due to... sort of unfortunate situations, as in, 'sorry I can't carry on with the programme because my brother got shot so I need to take over the spaza shop'⁷⁵. That is what you are not necessarily used to from your paying students. So some of these

⁷⁵ A spaza shop is an informal convenience shop that sells everyday household items. The name spaza derives from township slang meaning an 'imitation' of a real shop. They are often run from home and serve the purpose of supplementing the household income of owners (<http://livelihoods.org.za/infographics/>).

circumstances made it very challenging for the guys that were funded. ...it's one thing to pay for your study fees and it's the next thing to survive. So there's also that saying like you need to eat first and then you need to be educated, because a hungry stomach doesn't get you anywhere.

Karl was describing the different realities that students from less privileged backgrounds face in their daily lives, and that impact on their higher education, which are not faced by middle-class students. The bursary covered fees and included transport to ensure students could get to college, but recipients needed to afford their own living costs for themselves, and beyond their learning they had to be able to “survive”.

The skills gap (or skills mismatch) discourse is used to explain high levels of graduate unemployment. The apparent gap between the skills graduates have and those that employers need is ascribed to poor quality teaching in higher education (Tran, 2018). While higher education and/or graduates shoulder the blame for their perceived shortcomings, Gibbs et al., (2011) found that the mismatch can as easily lie in employers' expectations and the way they communicate the skills that they need. The data shows that the graduates acknowledge that media employers require specialised skills, however more than half the graduates (56%) felt that employers have unrealistic expectations of graduates.

7.1.3 Opportunities to build networks

Private institutions establish partnerships with businesses in industry. They build networks of people, organisations and other entities that form a web of connections and interactions related to industry as part of institutional processes and outcomes. The institutions explicitly mobilise these partnerships and engagements with industry to create institutional capital that enhances employability for graduates. Mostly, this is driven within the programme structure through the pedagogy. In some institutions, as is the case of Precious's role (PHEI 1b), building and managing ties with industry is performed as a specific marketing function. Having a network and social capital is an important constituent of graduate employability and significant in the transition to the

workplace, therefore it forms a valuable resource (Tomlinson, 2017a). There is evidence from empirical studies of the value of social capital in creating positional advantage for graduates when it comes to finding employment (Abrahams, 2017; Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Bathmaker, Ingram & Waller, 2013; Hurst, 2018; Walker & Fongwa, 2017) and indeed the corollary of the negative impact on employment for individuals who lack social capital (Burke, 2016; Lehmann, 2019; Merrill, Finnegan, O'Neill, & Revers, 2020).

(i) *Institution-industry ties*

The data showed differences between the institutions with regard to how explicitly students are exposed to these networks, how strong the ties are, and the extent to which the ties are managed by the institution or the students. Karl (PHEI 3) described the strong relationship his institution has with industry as they engage with practitioners and industry-related work in various ways.

...we resemble the workplace but just in a safe education environment. We work very close together with the industry, and in fact we are the industry because most of our lecturers are freelancing or they work within an agency ... Hence we've got very good ties into the industry, we know what they want and we adjust our curriculum to exactly what the industry wants. And that's where we've sort of got a good reputation within the industry and hence our students are very much employable.

As a result of the tie to industry he is able to brag that “*roughly 90% find a job within 3 months*”. The industry is embodied within the institutions in the form of lecturers and guest speakers, and industry-related work is integrated into the pedagogy and curriculum. Karl describes ties with industry that are so close that the institution is barely discernible from industry. The other staff also spoke of very close ties and pedagogical integration with industry, however, their references to industry involvement included descriptors such as “*partners*”, “*clients*”, “*guests*” and “*contacts*” implying a separation between the institutional and industry identities⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ This could possibly have to do with the fact that PHEI 3 is a small single-purpose institution where the industry focus is narrower with a more embedded identity than in the other larger and multi-purpose institutions, giving them a more embedded identity.

Social capital and its advantages generally lie with middle-class and privileged individuals. Brunello and Cappellari (2008, p. 565) describe the value of the “network effects” of private institutions, when institutional networks combine with the family network to give even greater advantage to privileged individuals. To the extent that, for these graduates, the value of the network supersedes the quality of education on their employment outcomes. Briana (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) chose her institution because of its reputation and connection with industry (see section 6.2.1 part ii). She said:

I feel like for the networking part it was a lot more beneficial going to a private institution and I definitely, definitely feel a lot more qualified than someone that went to like a UJ [public university].

For Briana, being linked to the network adds to her level of qualification, and gives her an advantage over public university graduates. As described earlier by Sibusiso (PHEI 1a, Copywriting) the institution mediates the network for students in order to facilitate access to the workplace (see section 6.3.4 part ii). The integration of the network into students’ higher education experience was intended to establish and strengthen ties that they continue to access after they graduate in finding employment – mostly successfully so.

Jamie (PHEI 2) explained that they involve industry partners in the design and assessment of projects to ensure workplace alignment of students’ academic outputs. They also mediate the networking with hosts for experiential learning for those students who are unable to find their own placements. Although this form of networking is indirect, **Thulasizwe** (PHEI 2, Radio & Video Production) explained how he experienced the network facilitated by his institution:

When I was doing my second year, I don't know who organised that but there was a pilot shoot that we did. When we were doing that pilot shoot, I was there and the person who was actually shooting that and directing the whole thing that was happening there is the guy that I'm working for now. Then... the following year I came to [a TV production company], then they also introduced me to this guy that I was working with at Gaming Expo, of which that guy as well... he used to own a Production company, of which that guy that I work with now, they're kind of close friends, you know. So it just somehow links together. But if [my institution] wasn't there, I don't know if I would be able to know the people that I know now.

Thulasizwe said he was taught a lot about the importance of networks, and through the experiential learning he made connections. But, he said: “...*the rest I had to do it by myself*”. The institution introduced him to the network but he did the networking that finally got him a job.

In PHEI 1b, the network is mostly managed by the career centre for marketing rather than pedagogical purposes. This function is made explicit to graduates by means of career coaching given to students and graduates for job hunting. It also serves an important role in liaising with employers for graduate recruitment. There appeared to be little integration of the network into the pedagogy, and even when it came to experiential learning, mostly students had to find their own way in connecting to hosts for placement. Therefore, while the ties between industry and the institution (career centre) were strong, the network ties between students and industry were weak. Yet, the role of institutions in building networks and bridging experiences is very important for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds whose social ties are weak or non-existent.

(ii) *The lecturer connection*

Sunette (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) was accepted to study at an elite public university, but chose instead to enrol for a vocational programme at a private institution (see section 6.2.1 part iii). As though to vindicate her enrolment decisions, she explained the advantage her institution had given her:

So what [the institution] did particularly well was a lot of their stuff was based on industry, cos as you know a lot of people that work at [the private institution] used to be in the industry and then they came and did some lecturing. A lot of [the lecturers] were still in industry, so a lot of their projects were industry-focused which was phenomenal because it gave you... it just gave me a little bit of confidence when you started working.

Lecturers hold a dual position, on the one hand representing industry, and on the other, they also represent the institution. The graduate interviewees spoke in unison of the significant and positive role their lecturers had played in their learning, their preparation for the workplace, as well as their overall higher education experience. Unlike the academic staff who teach in public universities, the educators in private institutions are generally industry practitioners and media

specialists. As students establish relationships with their lecturers they are given a direct link to that industry. Private providers have different employment models, but generally subject lecturers include part-time appointments who continue to practise their craft. Jamie (PHEI 2) explained the rationale of their institutional staffing model that comprises a large number of part-time lecturers. She said it provides *“the freshness of industry engagement”* and enables the delivery of current knowledge of industry practice in the classroom with *“a hands-on, up-to-date industry approach”*.

The smaller class sizes in private institutions help to make the student-educator relationship a more personal one. As graduates’ spoke about their lecturers, they described a relationship role that ranges from teacher to mentor, role model, advisor, counsellor, and recruitment specialist. Educator-practitioners supplement the teaching of theoretical content with their knowledge and experience of the practice of the craft. Because of lecturers’ intimate knowledge of the media industry (in some instances, highly specialised) graduates felt the teaching was practical, relevant and credible. **Mlungisi** (PHEI 2, Radio Production) stressed the credibility of the teaching from a lecturer who *“knew exactly what he’s doing. And he knew how to make you understand”* and as far as Maggie (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) was concerned, her lecturers made students feel comfortable because they have *“an understanding of what’s happening”* in society, particularly around new media. In the classroom, lecturers use their experience and knowledge of the industry to advise, encourage and direct graduates’ expectations, for example, when it comes to salary levels or job suitability. They assist students with job hunting skills, job applications and interview practice. Esther’s (PHEI 1b, Journalism) journalism lecturer is a journalist for the Mail & Guardian⁷⁷. In addition to teaching the skills for the profession, Esther said her lecturer also notified them of available positions, gave them interview role play and guidance, and generally *“...they pointed us in the right direction”*.

⁷⁷ The Mail & Guardian is a South African weekly newspaper and online news publication in South Africa. It focuses on political analysis, investigative reporting, Southern African news, local arts, music and popular culture (<https://mg.co.za/>).

Beyond the curriculum, the lecturers are instrumental in helping students find employment. Esther's lecturer assisted students by encouraging them to complete applications in class where they were able to access wi-fi connectivity. Keegan's (PHEI 2, PR & Marketing) Marketing lecturer hosted him for his experiential learning practicum in her own events company. Once he graduated, she gave him an internship for six-months until she moved overseas. When Briana (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) was looking for a new job, she turned immediately to one of her lecturers:

I contacted an old lecturer. And I was like, "Do you have any contacts? I'm looking for a job." So he gave me about 3 or 4 of them and then he told me about this place, and he said, "Listen, they're good, try them out".

The strong ties enable graduates to call on their lecturers, and to tap into their network. From the graduates' accounts, the lecturers are happy to refer individuals to jobs, or allow graduates to use their names to connect with an employer. The lecturer's referral serves as an endorsement of the company (for the graduate) and of the graduate (for the employer), sealing a new tie. Having educators who are high-profile and popular media personalities adds status to the institution. It also appeals to students and contributes to their 'customer satisfaction' ratings of the institution (Bezuidenhout & De Jager, 2014; Nixon et al., 2018). Therefore, media personalities, who become the (successful) face of the institution, are not only employed for the teaching but also serve as a useful marketing tool for institutions.

(iii) The bond of reputation

Graduates from all three institutions reported that their institution had a good reputation in the industry. It was evident in Chapter 6 how important the institution's reputation is in influencing students' enrolment choices. Reputation and status are important for the institution too, as securing new enrolments generates income. Graduates also found that they become beneficiaries of the status of their institution. Ulwazi (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) realised that being associated with the name of her institution marked her as competent and employable. She described it "*like a stamp*" of recognition and approval with

employers. At the same time she was aware that it was a signal to employers of what they might expect of her.

Closely linked with the reputation of the institution is the reputation of alumni, particularly those who attain media celebrity status. Again, they become a significant drawcard for new enrolments at their alma mater. Melody (PHEI 2, Radio Production & Public Relations) explained that successful alumni endorse the brand of an institution. Students aspire to be like them and believe that the alumni's success can become their own success because they are all *"a product"* of that institution. As KG (PHEI 2, Marketing) put it: *"[the private institution] has a strong resumé in terms of media practitioners who come from there. So it made sense at the time to rather go for those who are tried and tested"*. It was his institution's track record that helped him decide where to enrol, based on the success of alumni already in the industry. In this way, the reputation of the institution and of its alumni can influence not only the enrolment choices but also the career choices of new students. It is not only the famous alumni who carry the institution's reputation. It is embodied in all graduates. KG explained that he and his friends from college help each other out with jobs. The affiliation with the institution is sufficient for graduates to choose to employ and work with other graduates, as they know first-hand what each one knows and is able to do.

Lecturers also contribute to the reputation of an institution even if they are not media personalities. When Xaba (PHEI 3, Game graphics & Multimedia) completed his Higher Certificate, he found a job through an online recruitment platform. His new employer knew some of the lecturers from his institution, which Xaba said: *"...just made it better for him to trust me"*.

The reputation of the institution carries into the industry and plays a very important role in graduate employability. This will be discussed further from the perspective of the employers in the next section.

7.1.4 Opportunities to build experience and identity

The development of identity capital is integral to graduates' career orientation and their employability (Tomlinson, 2017a). Employability is not only about what graduates are able to do but also about who they are. Education plays a vital role in the process of identity shaping and construction. Walker describes the role of education in identity formation as a process "of becoming and being this kind of person, rather than that kind of person" (2005, p. 108). This formation of individual identity does not only take place within the walls of the institution, ongoing identity (trans)formation takes place over the course of life. As such, graduate employability comprises the development of the personal, social, intellectual, emotional and professional self that takes place within and beyond higher education as a process of becoming (Bowen, 2018; Hinchliffe, 2013; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Holmes, 2001, 2015; Jackson, 2016). This wholeness of being is described as 'graduateness', and is the essence of those who complete a higher education programme (Chetty, 2012; Steur, Jansen & Hofman, 2012). It is a dynamic process of personal transformation that results from intellectual development. In other words, graduateness is what graduates become through the growth encompassed in what they learn to know, what they are able to do, and who they are. It emerges in the process of the development of skills and attributes, but is not defined by them.

Identity capital, as a dimension of personal capital, is developed through experience, and mediated by the organisational cultures in which those experiences are negotiated (Tomlinson, 2017a). When graduates enter higher education, their individual identities are shaped by their backgrounds – their home upbringing, schooling and life experiences to that point. Once in higher education, individual identities are influenced by the institution and its culture, comprised of the people and processes. In Chapter 6 (section 6.2.1 part v) we saw that for some individuals, where there is a choice of institution, enrolment decisions are influenced by an individual's sense of 'fit' with the institution. This fit is formed by identifying a cultural synergy with the institution and its values. Les (PHEI 1a) pointed out the different cultures of the various institutional brands and

programmes that fall under the umbrella of their larger institution. PHEI 1a and 1b are part of the same centrally managed institution, with centrally developed academic content. However, while they are both identified by the institution's name, they each have their own specific identity and draw a different demographic of student that identifies with the specific brand culture – which are not dissimilar to the 'credentials' and 'mobility' identities described by Kruss (2007). In describing his institution, Karl (PHEI 3) referred to the specific “DNA” that defines what they do and who they are. The DNA also defines the “vibe” which is the internal culture of the institution. He explained that when they develop new programmes they work to integrate them within the same identity and culture. The DNA also influences their values and how they interact with students and each other, to create a sense of belonging. He explained why this sense of belonging is important:

Our culture is very like mentoring, teamwork, seeing and not bullying, being independent, be self-driven, self-motivated but you belong to a... we call it "find your tribe". Like you belong to this family, and you feel it. But... those people who haven't found this spark, finding their tribe, they're some lost souls somewhere. And they don't get that whole energy of 'hey we can do it'.

Karl explains that the sense of belonging provides support and encouragement that can contribute to success. Sibusiso (PHEI 1a, Copywriting) and his classmates were encouraged with a similar sense of belonging in his institution, where students are assimilated within the identity of “our people” (Chapter 6, section 6.3.4) which is a system that enables them to thrive. As such, private providers play a strongly influential role in the formation of social and cultural resources that help develop graduates' personal and professional identities.

Through their working partnerships, private providers align their institutional culture and identity with media organisations. In this way, they are developing graduates who are 'fit-for-purpose' (Sin & McGuigan, 2013) and who will 'fit' culturally into those organisations. Jon (PHEI 1a), Keegan (PHEI 2, PR & Marketing), Kgotso (PHEI 3, Print & Publishing), Shireen (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) and Thulasizwe (PHEI 2) all spoke about the match between themselves and their job or workplace as a factor that had made them successful in finding employment. On the other hand, Sibusiso (PHEI 1a, Copywriting) found there

was a mismatch between himself and the organisation, which caused him to leave an internship after only two days. He explained:

I went there and... the team and how things were engaged, I did not like how they did their business. Like internally you get to see from how people engage with their staff, and I thought "I don't want to be here".

Walking away from the opportunity to get valuable internship experience is a risky choice for a graduate when experience and jobs are hard to get. However, Sibusiso had confidence in who he is and what he wanted to do. He had made other connections through his institution and felt sure that he would find his match through alternative choices. While ‘fit’ is a two-way dynamic, the authority to determine the ‘fit’ generally lies with the employer. Shireen (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) gave the insight she had gleaned from her job hunting experience:

The thing I've learned from those interviews is, once you get the interview and the email response, whatever it is, especially as a creative... basically what it's saying is, when they respond to your email it means 'I've looked at your portfolio, I'm happy, now I want to know if you're going to fit into my agency and my company'. ...And you're not selling your work when you go into that interview, you're selling yourself. In a good way, of course.

The implication is that the employability of the graduate does not necessarily lie only in his/her skills, but on having to become what employers see as a good fit – and being able to ‘sell yourself’ as such. Being able to present as the person that employers want to hire, requires individuals to have the ‘right kind’ of capitals. Higher education ensures that all graduates have human capital, but employability also includes social, cultural, identity, and psycho-social dimensions (Tomlinson, 2017a).

Identity formation depends on graduates’ ability to draw on experience to build up what Tomlinson (2017a, p. 345) calls “a personal narrative” aligned to their anticipated field of work. The WIL pedagogies and experiential learning in higher education are beneficial mechanisms for student identity formation due to their practical and performative nature. The ‘hands-on’ experience becomes a resource for the development of self-awareness of what the individual can do and who he/she wants to become. Graduates spoke enthusiastically of the experiential learning module that was part of their study programme, with most describing it as one of the best ways in which the institution had prepared them

for the workplace. It is in the practice within the relevant context, where students can engage with the roles and practices that the potential identity becomes embodied (Hinchliffe, 2013; Holmes, 2015; Tomlinson, 2017a). More so than through observation or reproduction of the description of skills. To this end, it ought to be of concern for institutions to ensure that graduates find placements that are relevant to the practice of the craft, and that are of sufficient duration to develop a sustained narrative. In most institutions, students are responsible for finding their own host placement. Graduates reported significant challenges in this regard, particularly for those who did not have family connections to draw on. This resulted in some students not participating, others taking on placements that were not relevant to their field of study where they spent the time doing observation rather than working, and yet others who did not participate at all, but got their forms signed off, merely to meet the requirements to graduate.

Tomlinson (2007, 2017) states that the more strongly students invest in their careers, the higher their level of identity capital. Returning to the enrolment choices of students discussed in Chapter 6 (section 6.2) this has particular implications for identity formation for students whose enrolment choices are made by default based on cost rather than those who are able to follow their career aspirations, as the identity work would come more easily to the latter. In this respect we could consider the strong sense of identity confidence shown by Sibusiso (PHEI 1a, Copywriting) in leaving an internship because he did not like the way the company operated. In contrast, Ntombi (PHEI 1b, Journalism) whose enrolment choices were made at the last minute determined by the lowest fees, is unemployed and remains uncertain of what she wants to do, also having lost interest in her field of qualification (see Chapter 6, section 6.3.1). The study by Moriña (2017) found that identity formation and reinvention in higher education requires institutions to recognise the barriers faced by non-traditional students like Ntombi, and to manage individual difference in an inclusive way to enable them to participate and have equal opportunities to build the necessary capitals.

This first section of the chapter has been an analysis of the data provided by graduates and the staff from private providers to consider some of the mechanisms by which institutions prepare graduates for employability. From higher education, graduates transition into the workplace. The next section discusses the perspectives of employers on the employability of graduates, and their recruitment processes and expectations.

7.2 Employability and the labour market

Current discourse of graduate employability gives primacy to the labour market so that the expectation made of higher education is the supply of graduates in response to employers' demands (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Reinforcing this as the purpose of higher education, the annual QS global skills gap report draws on data from large scale surveys to try to understand employer expectations of graduate skills in the labour market. The aim of the report is to highlight the gaps that exist in meeting employers' needs so that in response "universities can explore areas of improvement, reflect on the responsibilities they hold to prepare graduates for the world of work, and identify where this ends and employer training begins" (QS, 2019, p. 3). Employers' needs are field- and context-dependent, and the report provides insights from six different industries (excluding Media and Communication, but including Technology) and seven different countries (excluding South Africa)⁷⁸. The report concludes by proposing that universities should adjust their curricula to address the skills gaps. However, it also suggests that employers have a role to play in understanding their own needs and communicating their expectations to institutions and graduates.

⁷⁸ The Global skills gap report states that "countries were selected based on robustness of dataset and regional representation" (QS, 2019, p. 25). In the absence of specific data on South Africa and the Media and Communications industry, other countries and industry can serve as proxies respectively. Such as, Brazil and Russia represent South Africa as BRICS nations. Media would possibly align with the Technology industry.

7.2.1 The employers' perspective

The section of analysis that follows is based on the six face-to-face interviews conducted with media employers. This was either the business owner, CEO, or the person responsible for recruitment, at the discretion of the organisation. The employer perspectives are interspersed with the graduates' perspectives, being on the receiving end of employers' choices and decision-making. A list of employer participant details is provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Media employer sample

Employer / interviewee	Position	Size of organisation	Media field	Nature of business
E1: Thabo	Analytics translator (brother of CEO/founder)	Small company (SME)	Advertising and digital marketing & media	Web design, content creation, marketing, social media, search engine optimization (SEO)
E2: Collette	Owner & founder	Small company (SME)	Public relations, events & retail marketing	PR, digital communication and social and digital marketing, events and promotions
E3: David	Owner	Small NGO	Radio broadcast	Community radio station
E4: Thabang	HR Manager	Medium-sized brand owned and operated by a large corporation which is a subsidiary of a large investment holding company	Television and film production	Full value chain of television production – pre-production, content creation, editing, post-production, audio post-production and broadcast
E5: Samantha	Owner & founder	Small company (SME)	Digital creative communications	Digital content creation, branding, marketing and media management
E6: Songezo	HR Manager	Large corporation – incorporates a media investment company as part of the group holding which in turn owns a news and media organization comprised of smaller brands	News, print and online media	Technology. Print and digital publication of news and information

My purpose in interviewing media employers was to hear directly from them about their perspectives of higher education graduates, rather than making a generalisation based on the literature (Cai, 2013; Shah et al, 2015; Wilton, 2014). The selection of employers was described in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.3). In relation to the expansive empirical work on graduate employability worldwide there is relatively little focus on the role or perspective of employers. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with employers (see Appendix I: Interview schedules), and the questions sought to explore what employers are looking for in graduate recruits, where they draw graduates from, and how they identify the attributes they are looking for in potential recruits. In other words, the intention was to get an in-depth understanding from the perspective of the employers of their recruitment processes and employee criteria that meet their organisational needs and expectations. More broadly, I also sought to understand how media employers perceive the position and role of their organisation in the wider field and/or industry, in the development of media workers, and their relationship with higher education institutions.

In the interviews, I sought to understand the employers' 'insider' perspective on whether the media industry is driving changes in society or merely responding to them. This is important because given the rapid changes in digital technology, and as private providers strive to produce employable graduates who are relevant to society, media programmes are preparing graduates for jobs that do not yet exist, or will be significantly changed two or three years hence. These are changes to which higher education can only respond, and I wondered about the extent to which such changes are driven by, or within the control of employers (particularly in light of their relationship with higher education institutions). On the whole, the employers all admitted that they are "*just trying to keep up*" and are responding to changes that are being driven predominantly by technology and the market/consumers. **Collette**⁷⁹ (PR, Events & Retail marketing) was the exception. She presented a contrasting view, saying that media is driving the

⁷⁹ As for all other participants, pseudonyms have been used for the employer participants and on the first mention in-text, they are introduced in bold, together with the media sub-field in which their organisation operates.

changes from the coalface. This is perhaps an expected (or necessary) response from someone whose work is public relations and managing information and reputations. Although, a contradiction crept into her explanation when she stated that as a result of the ready access to information, trends “*snowball*” and socio-economic factors shape the industry. The non-verbal signals that accompanied all the employers’ responses indicated a bashful acknowledgement of not being fully in control of their own industry. **Thabang** (Film & Television Production) was quick to add that while everyone strives to be a disruptor, the nature of the environment means that “*you can’t work ahead of everybody else... you need to be in line.*” However, ‘keeping up’ and ‘being in line’ with the industry requires employers, and higher education, to understand how to ride the wave of digital disruption (Bondarenko, 2019; Forbes, 2018).

7.2.2 Recruiting media graduates

Graduates had reported that job advertisements state that candidates must have a minimum of two (or even three) years’ experience as a pre-requisite for employment. Individuals who are unable to meet this criterion perceive it as a barrier to employment. How to get a job in order to gain experience when you can’t get a job without experience is a conundrum that frustrates and disheartens graduates. WIL and the experiential learning practicum provide students with opportunities to gain exposure to the workplace. For some students, that exposure may provide the gateway to a longer stay or an internship, but in most instances it comprises only a short-term, informal arrangement, the value of which lies chiefly in meeting a qualification pre-requisite. For most graduates, these experiences do not contribute to the requisite duration, experience or competence per se to meet the requirement for employment (Jackson & Collings; 2018; Palmer, Young & Campbell, 2018; Wilton, 2012).

On the whole there are three avenues by which employers in media enterprises recruit graduates. These were enumerated by **Thabo** (Advertising & Digital media) as:

- (i) the portfolio event or graduate showcase, which is the end-of-programme event and presentation of graduates' work that takes place at higher education institutions, to which employers are invited;
- (ii) referral from another (media) organisation;
- (iii) a graduate's direct application with submission of a portfolio of work.

It became apparent from all the employers that it is a rarity for media organisations to recruit new graduates directly into a permanent contracted position. Thabang (Film & Television Production) elaborated:

...no, no, so we do employ directly, but the people that we employ directly are usually not fresh out of university. It's people with a few years of experience. I think our minimum years of experience is like 2 years' experience. But if somebody has come out of an internship from somewhere else, then we do consider them... But for [our organisation] we don't recruit graduates into permanent positions straight out of university... they all go through an internship programme.

Jobs are given to people with experience who apply or are referred from another organisation in the industry. A graduate whose portfolio is earmarked at a showcase event, or those who apply directly to an organisation for a job, are initially taken into an internship. Not all media organisations run structured internship programmes but do recognise the experience that comes from having spent time in an internship at another organisation.

All the employers concurred that the internship is the gateway to employment in their organisation. In this way graduates have the opportunity to build the experience required to become employable and to access jobs. And yet, when discussing graduates' transition into the workplace, there was very little mention by either the graduates or the higher education staff of the priority of internships as a first step in the process⁸⁰. This may be what led one of the graduates to comment: *"It's sometimes not pushed enough on just how important internships are for your future"* (Survey participant no. 93, PHEI 1a, Graphic Design). Graduates spoke of having applied for internships in conjunction with applying for jobs, part of the same process, occurring simultaneously as a process of finding

⁸⁰ It is possible that this is a matter of semantics and that those in higher education perceive an internship to be synonymous with a job or employment. However, in the light of the significant role the internship plays, and the differential in status and earning between the two positions, it is important to approach it as a distinct step in the development of an individual's employability.

employment. Nuanced understanding of this expectation from employers may help to direct graduates in their search for opportunities that will build experience, and it may go some way to addressing the concern of higher education staff that employers have unrealistic expectations of higher education to produce graduates as a ready-made skills package.

7.2.3 Employers' expectations

Private providers and employers claim to work in close relationship with each other in preparing graduates' for the workplace. Notwithstanding the pedagogical interactions between them, the data showed an apparent mismatch between the perceptions of employers and providers (as well as graduates) when it comes to the important role that internships play in graduates' employability. At a micro-level, the gap between the skills graduates have and those required in the labour market, becomes a "game of blames" between graduates, employers and higher education providers as to who is responsible for the mismatch (Tran, 2018, p. 302). The responsibility is frequently placed on the doorstep of higher education for the inadequate preparation of graduates (Cai, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2011; Mobarak, 2019). When the higher education staff were asked about the graduate attributes they think employers need and that contribute to graduates' success in the media industry, 'experience' was not one of the factors mentioned. Their perceptions were that employers are demanding skilled graduates who display performative competence. Les (PHEI 1a) and Jamie (PHEI 2) were both of the opinion that employers in the South African media industry expect graduates to be able to "*hit the ground running*" and are not willing to train them for themselves. Les's opinion is that employers' expectations of graduates, and hence of institutions, are unrealistic:

They want them ready-made. They want them to hit the ground running. They want everything, and if you look at the job ads, the shopping list is extensive. I think very often it's very unrealistic... It's the full spectrum of skill. We can't... well nobody has that.

In contrast, when I asked employers what they expect in the graduate 'package', on the whole, they did not make those expectations of the colleges. As a whole,

they were sympathetic to the wide variation of needs that are specific to different enterprises, and how changeable they are. **Songezo** (News, Print & Online media) stated: *“Whatever the industry is looking for is not readily available there outside.”* He explained that their needs are so cross-disciplinary that they do not expect any institution to have a single curriculum that would cater accordingly, and therefore to expect graduates to come as a ready-made package, he said: *“You’ll never find that. That would be a very unfair cost”*. In fact, Thabo (Advertising & Digital media), Collette (PR, Events & Retail marketing) and Thabang (Film & Television Production) specified they do not want graduates who *“know it all”*. Mostly, what employers expect is a foundation of ‘graduateness’ on which they can build the specific requirements of their own context. They do expect graduates to have been taught theoretical aspects of media, to understand the media context and to have some basic skills. But when it comes to the specific requirements of his organisation, Songezo says: *“Institutions won’t teach you that. We can only teach you that here, once you get the opportunity to come and showcase how adaptable you can be”*. And he added: *“But he or she already comes with a little, almost 50% of what we need, we just need to customise it to what we need in the business”*. It was clear from other employers too that they prefer to ‘customise’ the graduates for their specific needs. As such, the attributes they require graduates to display would be evident in how they manage tasks and situations more so than in what they are able to do. Specifically, this includes the willingness to learn and to be able to adapt, in other words, to take whatever it is that they know from higher education and adapt it to the work context.

The perception that employers make unreasonable demands of higher education and of graduates was not apparent from the employer data. Some of the employers expressed a concern for, and corporate responsibility towards the unemployment issue in the country. They are aware that it is very difficult for graduates to get jobs, and are making an effort to increase their capacity to train graduate interns. But at the same time they face considerable budgetary constraints, and must themselves be adaptable to the changes of the labour market. For those who can, however, contrary to the views of Les (PHEI 1a) and

Jamie (PHEI 2), employers are willing to train graduates. Songezo stressed “*We train them because we want to give them something at the end of the day*”. In his view, employers have a role to play in the development of graduates, which is a mutually beneficial process for the individual and the industry.

7.2.4 Internships as opportunities for training

An internship⁸¹ is a formal, structured, full-time programme of workplace training and experience. The duration is determined by the employer and may vary between 3 months and a year, and it may be paid or unpaid. Internships provide graduates with practical, context-specific work that builds on their skills and experience to supplement their qualification and enhance their employability (MICTSeta, 2019). The term is often loosely used for any type of work-based learning, but an internship is generally a contractual appointment and differs from the short-term work experience done by students while studying that is a relatively informal arrangement for work exposure. Internship also differs from a learnership, which is a regulated occupations-based learning programme that has clearly defined specific outcomes (Isaac, 2018; MICTSeta, 2019). In a crowded labour market, internships provide valuable – and necessary – opportunities as a gateway to employment (Lindberg, 2013; O'Connor & Bodicoat, 2017; Rose, 2018).

(i) The value of internships for employers

The primary focus of internships is their role as a context-specific training mechanism delivered in the labour market. Internships have a performative as well as a social dimension to them (Lindberg, 2013) and Songezo (News, Print & Online media) prefers to call it their “*graduate development programme*”. During this period, interns are exposed to the range of jobs and processes in an organisation, and are trained in the specific skills, technology and know-how required for particular jobs. Interns are expected to work ‘hands-on’ and they

⁸¹ The term ‘internship’ is sometimes used interchangeably to describe the WIL modality of experiential learning practicum done by university students. This is the case in the USA higher education system, but in South Africa they are distinct. An internship is a contracted period of work and training performed *after* graduation and separate from the context of formal higher education.

perform the tasks as ‘employees’ (which distinguishes an internship from the experiential learning practicum done in higher education). Employers are able to observe interns at work and in interaction with others. They identify their abilities and groom, refine and custom-train them for a role in the business, while also reaping the benefit of their productivity. In this process employers are able to evaluate an individual’s “job fitness” (Lindberg, 2013, p. 434). This is measured by the credentials and competence that ensure a candidate is suitably qualified to carry out a specific job. Internships also provide opportunities for employers to evaluate the intern’s “organisational fitness”, which is the social fit of the individual within the organisation (Lindberg, 2013, p. 434). Thabo (Advertising & Digital media) stated: “...*though we dub it internship it's almost like a probation because we're trying them out to see whether they are a good fit for us or not*”. Internships are used by employers as a recruitment strategy (see section 7.2.2). It is not only the ability to perform the job that opens the way into employment, but an intern needs to demonstrate that they have the personal qualities to fit the cultural, social profile of the organisation.

The training and ‘customisation’ of interns is done with the intention of absorbing suitable candidates into positions within the organisation as needed. Thabang (Film & Television Production), explained his organisation’s strategy:

So, I think the biggest challenge, as with most companies, is that the business would like to get graduates, bring them into the business, teach them the ins and outs of the industry, as well as operations. And with the aim in mind of getting them to a point where they are so employable that [the organisation] actually absorbs them into the business - right? And that has happened quite a bit. And that's why we've tried to make sure over the past couple of years that we grow our intern base, you know, because we've got the capacity and the capability.

Taking graduates into internship gives employers the opportunity to train and induct them into the organisation, and also into the broader industry. Thabang’s comment implies that it is this training that makes graduates employable. He says that the interns they are not able to absorb into their own organisation, become trusted for employment by other media companies. In other words, they are not only training graduates for themselves but making them competent and employable for the industry. In her small business of seven people, Collette (PR,

Events and Retail marketing) says she is always open to having interns. Many of her current employees were once interns in her company, some of whom were interns 13 years ago, and are still working with her. She described an initial phase of a “*three-month washing machine*” when interns metaphorically get spun through all aspects of the business, to learn what PR practitioners do. In this way interns are exposed to the workings and culture of the organisation. Both Collette and Thabang spoke of how well their interns had been taken up by other employers.

(ii) *The value of internships for graduates*

Internships are promoted as a means of developing valued capitals⁸² required for employability (Lindberg, 2013; Nunley et al., 2016; Rose, 2018). Graduate interns have the opportunity to apply what they learned in higher education, and to showcase their skills and abilities in the context of the workplace. They can learn new skills and develop hands-on experience in working with others. The employers explained that interns are initially exposed to the wide range of operations in the organisation, following which, training becomes specific. In some instances, interns are given a choice as to the direction they would like their career to take, which may even differ from their field of qualification. This choice is guided by employers according to interns’ strengths, and the skills gaps in the business that need filling. Benefits for graduates include opportunities to learn, to build experience, to distinguish themselves, and, in some instances, to earn. Internships, therefore have the potential to provide graduates with opportunities for performance, allowing the respective demonstration and recognition of professional attributes. This is important for graduates’ ongoing process of identity transformation – from student, to graduate, to media practitioner.

Notwithstanding the apparent value of internships, not all graduates choose this route. The interviews signalled some anomalies surrounding the internship experience and consequently I used the survey to get some further insight into

⁸² In his study, Lindberg (2013, p. 435) uses the term ‘capital’ for employability, in its widest sense to mean “that which is of value”.

this phenomenon. Of the graduates surveyed, 81% of graduates reported that they had done at least one internship (see Figure 22). It is particularly striking that of the graduates who have not participated in internships, the majority are from one institution i.e. PHEI 1b.

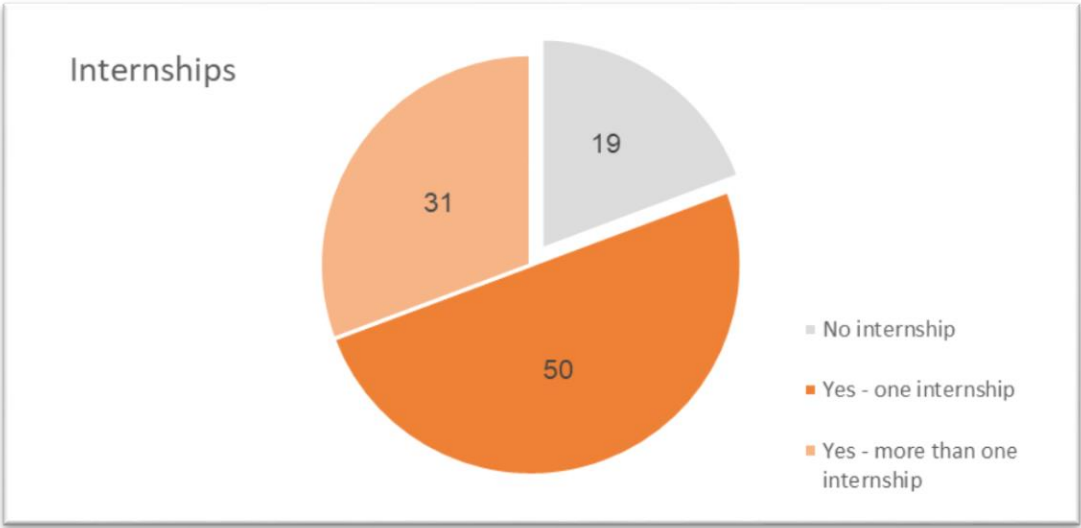


Figure 22: Internship participation

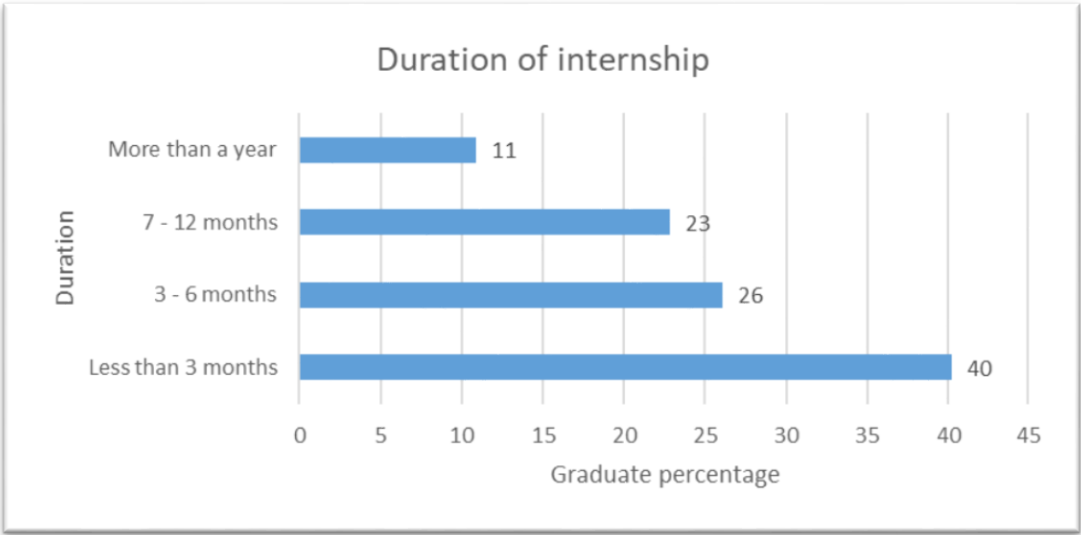


Figure 23: Duration of internship

Almost half of those who did participate in an internship spent less than three months in internship (Figure 23). As has been mentioned previously, how

internships are conceptualised is open to interpretation, but given this very short duration, it is difficult to know whether these respondents were referring to a formal training internship or using the term 'internship' to describe their student work experience. Irrespective of the name given to this experiential stint, a duration of less than three months is insufficient to fulfil employers' requirements for recruitment. Moreover, it is questionable as to the effectiveness of this short duration for meaningful skill and identity development.

In addition to the variable type, duration and number of internship experiences across the graduate participants, the data also showed that not all graduates who chose to participate in internships found it the valuable learning pathway to employment that the employers espouse it to be. The following are extracts from questionnaire responses where participants were given the opportunity to add a comment about their internship experience:

I was not awarded the opportunity to really prove myself whilst at my internship. It felt as though I was back in pre-school and they just needed to entertain me for the time being (Survey participant no. 5, PHEI 1a, Visual Communication).

The internship was for 4 weeks at 2 different agencies... the first internship was not as valuable as I thought it would have been. Companies that want interns need to be prepared to take time out and mentor interns, there's a lot of improvisation when it comes to the briefs interns receive but if there had been preparation, mentorship and a stipend then I would have considered working there (Survey participant no. 107, PHEI 1a, Visual Communication).

... you will meet people that aren't patient with you and mistreat you and require you to act like the intern you are (Survey participant no. 28, PHEI 2, Advertising)

Internships were created to save on employment costs with the intention of not hiring (most of the time) the talent selected or picked for the position for the duration of the [internship] employment (Survey participant, no. 34, PHEI 2, Video Production).

For these graduates, their internship experience did not meet up to the promises or expectations of the level of work given, and the quality of training and mentorship received. In contrast, however, there were two respondents who found their internship valuable for their employability:

During my internship I was mentored more than I was at varsity and made me realise all the skills I should've been taught in my degree (Survey participant no. 94, PHEI 1a, Visual Communication).

For this graduate, the value lay in the training and skills that she gained from the experience. For another participant, the value of her multiple internship experiences lay as much in finding out where she did not want to work.

I hopped from one internship to another until I got one with a company I shared the same values with plus the salary was good enough motivation to make me stay in the job until I got promoted to a permanent position (Survey participant no. 33, PHEI 2, Graphic Design).

Through the experiences she was able to find her fit with a company where she felt she had a future.

7.2.5 Internships as opportunities for employment

Internships offer the potential of being converted into employment, but this is not a guaranteed outcome. At the end of the internship period, employers absorb interns into the company where suitable and viable. However in most instances, the capacity that organisations have to host interns exceeds their capacity for absorption. Thabang (Film & Television Production) explained that his organisation has increased their intern intake from 13 in 2016, to 25 in 2019. While this might look like more employment opportunities for more graduate interns, where they absorbed 10 of the 13 interns in 2016, they only had the capacity to absorb 50% of the interns in 2019, i.e. 12 interns. Therefore, while it gave more graduates the opportunity of an internship, there was little difference in the employment rate. Thabang explained that interns are taken into various modes of employment – a few into permanent employment, while others are given freelance and project work⁸³ (which strictly speaking are forms of self-employment). The larger organisation where Songezo (News, Print & Online media) works, takes in 15 interns and he said they are able to absorb them all across the various subsidiaries.

⁸³ Thabang stated that of the interns that are absorbed in their organisation, half will go into freelance work and the other half will go into either permanent contract work or project-based work. This means that at best, only one in four of the original interns moves into full-time contracted employment.

The delivery of an effective internship programme requires resources such as availability of funding, as well as mentors within the organisation. Small organisations with limited budgets, are constrained in offering these opportunities. **David** (Radio broadcasting) explained that it is purely financial constraints that prevent his community radio station from providing internships. They used to run a successful internship training programme that produced approximately 60 interns over six years, and of those, about 30 found employment in large commercial radio stations. They received external funding of half a million rand a year to fund the training programme, however the programme ceased with the funding. When I asked whether they could access SETA funding, he said their attempts to do so have been unsuccessful; they were not considered favourably by the SETA because they are an English radio station with a predominantly white board. It seems he has not persisted with the SETA applications as he is apprehensive about whether they actually release funding to organisations (Setena, 2020). Small organisations have particular value to offer interns by way of a more intimate working environment, where interns are exposed to the work in all aspects of the business. This had been Maggie's (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) internship in a small PR firm which gave her hands-on experience in all areas of the business. She said that would not have been possible in a large organisation, where an intern might be allocated one task and possibly only admin work.

The impact of the economy on the labour market trickles down to impact on graduates. Notwithstanding government rhetoric of creating jobs, in a weak economy organisations are scaling down operations and budgets are restricted, which is a significant barrier to entry for graduates. Instead of each company struggling to afford their own training, David (Radio broadcasting) has a vision of a collaborative arrangement between higher education providers, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) as the trade association, and broadcasting/media entities creating a development hub, and working together to train and develop graduates. His idea matches Bridgstock's (2016) model of a distributed knowledge network, proposed for meeting the needs of learners in the

digital media space of the 21st century. It is a learning ecosystem comprised of industry professionals, business organisations, training providers and graduates, with higher education providers as the hub. Rather than gatekeeping access to the labour market, institutions facilitate processes of formal and informal learning in the development of the critical capabilities that graduates require to function effectively within the wider communities of practice. In David's opinion, without such a collaborative network effect *"it's going to be tough for new graduates to get into the space"*.

7.2.6 Internships as opportunities to earn

An internship may be paid or unpaid at the prerogative of the employer, who, in the case of the former, also determines the amount of the stipend. Employers reported stipend payments that ranged from R2 000 to R15 000 per month, with the scale increasing commensurately with the size and budget of the organisation⁸⁴. Graduates reported receiving stipends that ranged from R800 to R7 000⁸⁵ per month, with the majority having received between R2 000 and R3 500⁸⁶ per month. This means that as interns, graduates were working for less than the national minimum wage (RSA, 2018; Tom, 2019) and well below a living wage. This contributes to the debate raised in Chapter 3 (see section 3.2.3) to show that the possibilities of the graduate discourse in higher education can equally be pitfalls. The promise of a higher education qualification as a credential for social mobility, may not provide opportunities for better life chances, and the potential of the graduate premium (that rationalises the cost of higher education), may not realise a return on the investment. On the whole, graduates used the stipend to contribute towards transport and/or food costs, but in all instances, they agreed that the financial burden of their internship landed on their parents or family on whom they were dependent. As such, internships privilege graduates from well-off families who are able to benefit from the training opportunity and the

⁸⁴ Where the stipend is paid by the SETA, one graduate reported receiving an amount of R3 500. Companies then top this up at their discretion.

⁸⁵ R7 000 was not the starting rate, it was what the graduate was earning towards the end of two years of internship work.

⁸⁶ The same amount being paid to unqualified youth through government's Youth Employment Service (YES) initiative (IOL, 2019).

promise of access to employment. While those whose families do not have the financial resources to afford their participation in the internship are excluded from the opportunities. This may explain why so few graduates from PHEI 1b participate in internships, but this would require more specific and in-depth investigation.

The lack of payment and underpayment of interns is sometimes rationalised by employers on the basis of the interns' status as trainees rather than employees (BusinessTech, 2016). In turn, graduates who choose to engage in an internship may accept the low stipend and the cost of it, viewing it as an ongoing investment in their future. Debates about paid and unpaid internships draw on semantics, such as the legal definition of an employee and who the primary beneficiary of the internship relationship is (Durack, 2013; Prymak, 2017⁸⁷). There are potentially moral and ethical questions that could be asked of the longer term effect of internships on graduates' lives and careers, if the role of internships in employability is focused on serving the labour market rather than expanding opportunities for graduates.

A further case in point is the use of interns as “conveyor belt labour” (Jacobson & Shade, 2018, p. 331). **Samantha** (Digital Creative communications) commented that some employers do this in order to benefit their BBBEE scorecard⁸⁸ (DTI, 2019). In South Africa, internships fall under the skill development pillar on the government scorecard. Therefore, it is possible for organisations to provide short-term internships in regular and overlapping cycles, in order to increase the number of interns that pass through the organisation. This

⁸⁷ I use these USA sources with caution, given the different conceptions of 'internship' (see footnote 75). On the whole, the principles of training and preparation for employment are relevant whether the graduates are still in higher education or have graduated. However, specifically the debate around unpaid internships differs when referring to graduates who are needing to earn a living and possibly support family members on the earnings from an internship, as opposed to students who are generally still living at home and financially supported by family.

⁸⁸ BBBEE is a legislated racially inclusive empowerment initiative to diversify business. Different levels of compliance depend on the size and turnover of a business. The level of compliance is measured according to various pillars, such as ownership, management and skills development. Entities are scored on different weighted elements. The scorecard rating determines the level of certification, and the higher the score the greater the business opportunities (DTI, 2019).

mechanism is used to maximise the point allocation and obtain state funding for skill development. The interns become instruments for scorecard points with less concern for the training or their employability. In such instances, organisations might prefer non-graduate interns, in which case the positional advantage of higher education for access to the labour market is undermined.

Ulwazi (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) was one of two interviewee interns⁸⁹. She was recruited as part of a large group of interns, and the organisation had subsequently taken in other intern groups in different months, many of whom had no qualification. She said the management of the company was adopting a new system to only hire interns with no background training, and the intention of recruiting 90 people by the end of that year. From the previous year's intake only two interns had been taken into employment. Ulwazi's initial stipend of R3 500 is less than was promised by the organisation, but she thought it would be worth it because she was also assured of appealing opportunities for training and employment. However, she described it as "a sweatshop" and there had been no training. In addition, when she questioned the undelivered promises of training and payment increases, she was told she was an "ungrateful cow" and called a "Clever Black" who was influencing others. When I asked her how she responds to the insults, she said she has chosen to ignore them and keep her head down out of desperation to notch up the year of experience on her CV. She added:

*...because it's exhausting and you can't fight a battle that's already been won.
So just to have that one year experience in my CV. Because it doesn't matter
how good my portfolio is, companies and agencies are looking for experience.*

Reflecting on the discussion so far on internships and their potential as opportunities for training, employment and earning, for Ulwazi, her internship seemed to offer her none of those. She said: "*I had so much knowledge and skills to bring but I had to size it down. Now I feel like I lost all of that*". Yet she knew that without that year behind her, she had even less chance of future employment.

⁸⁹ The second interviewee intern was Mamaroke, whose learning experience was more fulfilling than Ulwazi's but who was being paid a stipend of R800 a month – the lowest stipend reported.

This section of the chapter has focused specifically on the labour market. The data analysis provides a snapshot of what confronts graduates when they enter the workplace, and what is expected of them. The next section considers the reality for graduates of accessing and participating in the media workplace.

7.3 Employment in media

When graduates were asked what employability means to them, the majority of the responses linked employability with the purpose of higher education to enable economic opportunities in the labour market. The development of employability is not a process in which students are passive recipients. Nor are graduates merely “useful machines” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 2) to be used or not at the discretion of employers. Graduate and employment outcomes also depend on graduates’ own efforts and the way in which they are able to access and make use of the opportunities provided by higher education for employment in the labour market.

7.3.1 Attributes graduates value

In the survey, from a long list of attributes, graduates were asked to indicate the three attributes they felt had played the strongest part in securing their own attainment of a job. The most popular selection was their qualification (degree or diploma). This response is aligned with a human capital conceptualisation that having a qualification provides evidence of knowledge and skills required by employers, and is sufficient to provide access to employment. Indeed, it would appear that this message is reinforced by employers for whom the qualification plays an important instrumental role. Songezo (News, Print & Online media) explained his notion of graduate employability:

Employability is all about having those attitudes, the attributes that the business can see that you will be part and parcel of the solution making process in the business. Forget your degree. I speak to you and I speak to a young graduate... But what earned you the appointment with me is that qualification. What earned you the appointment or the opportunity to come and speak to me was that piece of paper. When you get here I forget about it,

now I'm talking to you because you bought a ticket to get into the event. Now I'm giving you the music.

Apparently contradicting himself about the value of the degree, he indicates that it is not the nature of the qualification that is important, but its instrumental value as a signalling and screening tool for recruitment (Cai, 2013). Being able to get the appointment or interview is an important first step for a graduate, but the qualification alone is not sufficient to ensure employment (Tomlinson, 2008).

In addition to having a qualification, other attributes that graduates consider important for their employability include innate personal qualities, and they specified willingness to learn, personality, experience and creativity (see Figure 24). Attributes such as their knowledge, technical skills and specialist ability were not highly rated as a whole⁹⁰. Somewhat paradoxically, very few respondents selected 'the reputation of my higher education institution' as having played a role.

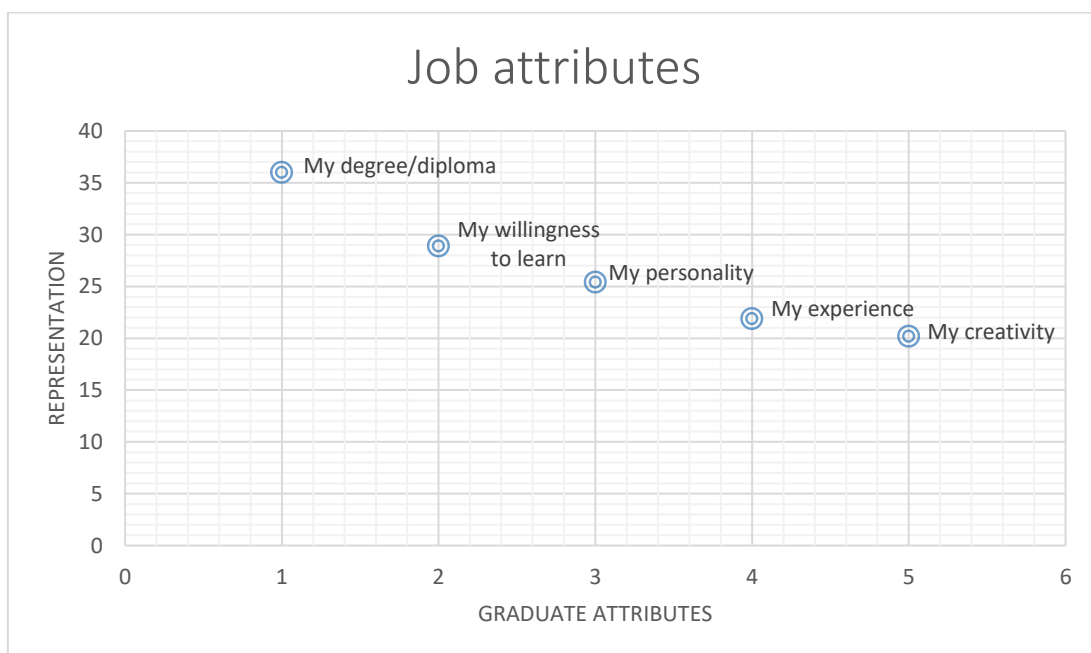


Figure 24: Graduate attributes valued by graduates

⁹⁰ I acknowledge that a low rating does not mean the attribute is not valued by individuals, particularly as respondents had to make a limited selection of items from a long list of alternatives.

7.3.2 Attributes employers value

In the interviews with employers, I asked about the kind of graduate they would employ. I also asked employers what they think the attributes are that a graduate requires to manage a career in the industry (see Appendix I: Interview schedules). These questions are similar, but I was looking for a nuanced distinction between the specific needs of their work context and the broader attributes that might enable graduates to manage a career in the industry. The previous section showed how important internships are for employers. The reason for this is because when it comes to finding potential employees, employers prefer to train, customise and re-work what the graduate knows and can do to suit their own specific needs. In the recruitment strategy, therefore, the qualification and the reputation of the institution are key 'attributes' that employers identify to signal suitable candidates. However, the qualification has further value, as employers also recognise and value their "graduateness" (Chetty, 2012; Steur et al., 2012).

Analysis of all the attributes that employers named can be condensed into three categories, namely soft skills, technical skills, and experience. However, as employers elaborated on the attributes they consider are important, there was a strong focus on personal qualities, outweighing what graduates know, their hard, technical skills or experience. As David (Radio broadcasting) said: *"I don't care if you have no knowledge of any of the system because that can be taught. I can't teach you the passion for it"*. The list of soft skills mentioned by employers is long and includes traits such as authenticity, integrity, accountability, a positive attitude, communication skills, personality (in the sense of demeanour, character, maturity and 'fit'), adaptability and agility. Unsurprisingly, given employers' desire to train up new graduates, 'willingness to work' and 'work ethic' were a priority attribute for all the employers. It appears to be less important if graduates do not have highly advanced technical skills because basic technical skills in combination with the willingness to learn and a good work ethic means that the graduate would be able to adapt within the work environment.

The employers expressed a wariness for the challenge of working with graduates who feel they know it all and want to come in and “*hit the ground running*”. Interestingly, this was exactly the expression used by two of the higher education staff to describe what they thought employers expect of graduates (see section 7.2.3). Employers find it challenging to work with graduates who take this approach, and it was evident that graduates should expect to start out at the entry level and be willing to learn ways of working in the new context, rather than feel they know (or have to know) everything already. The misalignment of expectations between employers and institutions is surprising given the close working relationship between industry and the institutions.

In sum, the message from employers was: (i) a higher education qualification is important to signal possession of soft skills; (ii) knowledge and skills are less important because employers want to train graduates for their specific needs. To this end, (iii) internships are an important, if not vital, mechanism for training and access to employment, however, not many interns will make it through to a job; and (iii) personal qualities and soft skills are of key importance in the ultimate recruitment decisions.

7.3.3 Opportunities in the media industry

Assessing the attributes that graduates value i.e. their qualification, their willingness to learn, personal qualities and experience, relative to those valued by employers, it would seem that the graduates mostly do have what employers are looking for. Despite that, there was a sense from graduates that employers' expectations of graduates are unrealistic. **Portia** (PHEI 1b, Journalism) who has been unemployed since graduating in 2017, stated:

There's too many graduates and they can't help us all, I think. And they expect too much from us... I think the institution's done its job but they expect more from us and we can't just give more because we are recent... we just learned these things. There's more we can implement in their companies I think, if they would give us a chance.

She is aware of the competition that exists between graduates for jobs, however, she expressed frustration at the lack of opportunity to demonstrate her skills and

her willingness to learn. Another graduate expressed the opinion that the inability to get a job without experience is a form of discrimination by employers:

Employers seek graduates with years of working experience, however aren't willing to consider the fact that it's not possible to build experience in your particular field of study when companies aren't willing to hire recent graduates, or the fact that companies are only willing to pay peanuts for employment because we 'lack experience'. Employers need to be realistic and consider their responsibility (Survey participant no. 104, PHEI 1a, Visual Communication).

And yet, from the employers' perspective, Samantha (Digital creative communications) said they get “*inundated*” with up to 300 applications for one position. Recognising the nature of the labour market competition, Esther (PHEI 1b, Journalism) commented that her cohort (two groups of final year Journalism graduates) knew that they would not all get employed, but everyone hopes they will be one of the lucky ones.

Employers spoke about the restrictions they experience due to the weak national economy. Budgets are being cut which means that companies are cutting back on their expenses. These cuts impact media companies, which in turn cut back on their staff. Samantha stated: “*Remember we're a service industry, so our biggest cost is our staff*”. She explained that there are two things that employers do when they have to tighten their financial belts. Either they do not hire staff, or they hire interns. They can get two to three interns for the cost of one mid-level employee. But if the work exceeds their capacity, then they would rather take on skilled freelance workers, who do not come with the same costs to the company. She said: “*because then we just send them the thing [brief] and they send it back and it's perfect. Versus this hands-on coaching and helping interns*”. She admitted that organisations do not necessarily intend, or feel obliged to absorb interns “*because profitability's what we're driving... But I think at the end of the day it comes down to rands and cents, and your budget... bottom line.*” She commented on how the economy had not only reduced budgets, clients and staff, but also increased the length of time it takes to receive new work orders and payments. Therefore, she relies on people she knows in the industry in order to bring in work for her company.

It was made evident by employers that two key mechanisms on which the industry functions are connections and reputation. The way graduates get work is through the network. The empirical data presented in this chapter so far has shown the value of the institutional network, and the reputation of private providers for access to internships and jobs. If graduates can get into the industry, they are likely to be able to stay in because an industry recommendation is valued above all else, according to Samantha (Digital creative communications), Thabo (Advertising & Digital media) and Thabang (Film & Television Production). Once in the company, Samantha said her staff are building their networks off her network. She feels the pressure of that responsibility for her younger staff whose ability to earn and their futures rely on her social currency.

With such a strong influence of networks to make it into and through the media industry, it is clear that graduates without that form of capital are disadvantaged in getting employment. Irrespective of how open media employer recruitment policies are, even if a graduate is lucky enough to be selected from amongst the 300 applicants for an interview, he/she needs to demonstrate the personality, and the traits of passion, authenticity, and the cultural fit to a panel of interviewers. As Maggie (PHEI 1b, Public Relations) pointed out, some of her peers have lost this competition from the outset:

Most of my classmates, even half of them... they're from the rural areas. So it's their first time in Jo'burg and they came to this school. I remember first year, there were students who couldn't even operate on a laptop, a computer. So you can imagine the kind of student who is only just passing with grades and now you put them in a company and say, "Ok, you have to go for an interview". Chances are they're not going to be so great.

What this means for higher education provision that aims to enhance opportunities for graduates is that institutions need to recognise differences in personal biographies. While higher education is not able to address background disadvantage that students bring into higher education, they could do more to realise that some students need more resources than others in order to ensure conditions that do not perpetuate their disadvantage (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020). For example, students who are granted access from rural schools may need

additional training in fundamental computer skills prior to learning the advanced technical skills relevant to their field. Providing the same inputs to students with widely varied backgrounds will not produce equal or equitable employment opportunities, irrespective of how hard students work or of how good the pedagogy is. What this means for graduate employability is that WIL pedagogies and experiential learning on their own are not enough to enhance employment opportunities in media. Students need opportunities to foster specific capabilities for networking and to enhance their employability capitals, which currently advantage some graduates more than others when it comes to meeting the needs of media employers.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on different dimensions of graduate employability. The first section focused on education and the preparation of the graduates for employment in the industry, this was followed in the next section by a discussion of the employers' perspectives on graduate employability and the criteria they use for recruitment of graduates, and the final section discussed the attributes valued by graduates and by employers in the context of the media workplace. The juxtaposition of the educational perspective with its applicability for employers and the reality of the industry is important for assessing the extent to which the opportunities provided by private higher education equip graduates to be employable. That includes graduates being able to find a job, and then being able to navigate their way over time through the workplace.

The data showed that there are many variables at play within higher education, the labour market, and the media industry specifically that influence graduate employability. Higher education prepares graduates well with skills and knowledge relevant to their respective media fields. The applicability of the preparation is enhanced by close institution-industry ties. Networking with the industry not only guides private providers in their curriculum and the pedagogy to ensure that graduates are prepared for the actual needs of employers, but it also

contributes to enhancing the institution's reputation, which is an important factor when it comes to recruitment. Notwithstanding the benefits of the industry connections to private providers and graduates, there are social and economic factors in the labour market that are beyond the influence of higher education that impact on employability (Khan, 2010).

In the media work space, changes in technology are continually shifting how media enterprises work, what they do, and hence, what they need by way of staff and skills. Some of these changes move faster than a three-year qualification. It is more expedient, therefore, for employers to train graduates for themselves in their specific and current needs. However, given the influx of graduates into the labour market, employers rely on the higher education qualification as a screening mechanism for recruitment purposes. Employers need workers to enhance their economic productivity, and at the same time they are subject to the economy. South Africa has a weak and fragile economy – high levels of inequality, high unemployment, declining global competitiveness, and economic uncertainty, all of which impact on business (Whiting, 2019). Employers described an industry that is subject to difficult economic conditions with budget cuts, dwindling work and diminished income. One of the most effective cost-cutting measures is to reduce staff and take on interns who cost less. As the country tries to confront issues of unemployment, the issue itself contributes towards economic conditions that make the prospects for employment even worse for graduates. In addition to current economics, there are deeply entrenched socio-economic and political barriers that continue to either constrain or privilege different individuals.

The analysis of the empirical data in this chapter, has shown that private higher education can be effective in developing graduate employability and the corresponding capabilities and functionings, but that this can be unevenly realised when intersecting with personal and other conversion factors. It has also shown that there are opportunities for employment for graduates in the labour market, but these are not equal or necessarily equitable. In addition, the media

industry is subject to macro-level economic influences and as such there are limits to what higher education on its own can do to change labour market structures. However, this is not to say that there is not something different or more that private providers could do. In the next chapter, I theorise the analysis to make meaning of the empirical data, and what the implications are for graduate employability and private higher education policy frameworks in relation to human development and private higher education's contribution.

CHAPTER 8

Graduate employability from a human development and capability perspective

Introduction

Chapters 6 and 7 presented the empirical data, both qualitative and quantitative, drawn from multiple perspectives of graduates, staff, and employers in order to bridge private higher education processes, relationships and outcomes with the workplace. In this chapter, I use a human development and capability approach as a framework for an alternative conceptualisation of employability that moves beyond the notion of human capital. Understandings of employability are not uniform or clear cut. I conceptualise employability in terms of the opportunities (capabilities) created in and through higher education for graduates to become and to be employable, i.e. their functionings, how these are mobilised in what graduates are able to be and do in the workplace, and importantly, what this says about how private higher education advances the well-being and quality of life of graduates. As such, I perceive employability as a matter of the contribution of private higher education to human development. Consideration is given to the factors that lie at the intersection between higher education, the workplace, and different individuals' lives to explain the variations and inequalities in employment outcomes between graduates.

There are two spaces in which I explain graduate employability, and the chapter is structured accordingly. The first section considers the space of higher education where students have enrolled with aspirations for a career in media. Private higher education's pedagogy and processes are orientated around workplace preparation – perhaps more so than public universities, with the exception of professional degrees. Arguably then, private higher education is an excellent site to explore how employability plays out. This research shows that

the benefits that accrue to graduates are not equal, because they are shaped by what individuals bring into the higher education space, which then influences how they are able to convert their resources to capitalise on their higher education opportunities. In this section, I discuss the key capabilities for employability that are valued by graduates and which have been fostered in and through private higher education. The second section is set in the space of the labour market and media workplace where graduates mobilise their higher education capabilities and functionings. I discuss the key observable functionings for employability and the conversion factors that influence the variable ways in which graduates have been able to convert the capabilities into employment achievements in the media workplace. In order to understand these differences, in the final section of the chapter, I present a matrix to discuss the intersection of higher education capabilities with labour market functionings. I describe higher education opportunities in terms of an enrolment typology of students, and I describe labour market achievements in terms of an employment typology of graduates. The combined employability matrix shows the ways in which agency and choices based on personal circumstances weave through graduates' experiences to influence their capability formation and employment outcomes. Finally, I discuss what this means for private higher education, and for the development of graduate employability.

8.1 Private higher education: choices and opportunities

Central to this thesis is an understanding that higher education can contribute to human development (Unterhalter et al., 2019). As such, outcomes ought to expand graduates' choices and what they are able to do and become. Following Walker (2012) I argue for human capabilities rather than human capital as the ends of higher education. Robeyns reminds us "...the capability approach does not focus entirely on ends, but rather on the question of whether a person is being put in the conditions in which she can pursue her ultimate ends" (2017, p. 49). Therefore, identifying capabilities for employability is important not only for determining what graduates are able to be and to do. It is also useful as a

framework for making inter-personal comparisons and contributing to understanding what this means for what ought to be done differently by higher education in order to create the conditions for all graduates to flourish. From this perspective, inclusive development of employability involves all graduates having opportunities that enable them to achieve valued outcomes, one of which is employment.

In the context of higher education outcomes, I refer back to Chapter 4 (section 4.2.1) for a reminder of the distinction between graduate attributes and human capabilities. It is easy to conflate attributes and capabilities, but they differ philosophically and conceptually. As previously discussed, there are different conceptualisations of graduate attributes. I use the term in the more simplified notion related to the skills, characteristics and traits individual graduates have that are developed pedagogically in higher education and used as a measure of an individual's competence. Capabilities on the other hand may include graduate attributes, but they are a much broader notion that include the opportunities or substantive freedom people have to do and to be what they value doing and being, and to pursue well-being. More specifically, in this study, I have used Nussbaum's (2011) notion of combined capabilities, in which internal capabilities (which include personal attributes) are integrated with the external environment that enables (or restricts) capabilities and their functioning achievements.

From the data analysis, I identified a capability set comprising four key capabilities fostered in and through private higher education that are valued by graduates and higher education institutions for graduate employability. I discuss each of these in turn, briefly describing the characteristics of the capability and the way it enhances graduate employability.

8.1.1 The capability of access to vocational education

The capability of access to vocational education comprises more than opportunities to be admitted to a college. It also includes the development of workplace-specific skills and knowledge, participation in practical teaching and

learning, the development of industry affiliation, opportunity for access to a career of choice, and ultimately, access to opportunities enabled by having a qualification. These opportunities are then realised in a range of functionings which includes employment. The abovementioned opportunities may to an extent be applicable to other forms of education and training provision. What private higher education specifically offers, is to fill the gaps in those forms of provision. In other words, the demand-absorbing function of private higher education expands opportunities for access to higher education for students who are unable to gain access to public universities, or choose not to do so (Bjarnason et al., 2009; Levy, 2010, 2018b). Within the structures of post-school education and training, and the national qualifications framework (NQF), private higher education provides opportunities for access to higher education qualifications (within the HEQSF), namely Bachelor's degree, Diploma and Higher Certificate, where alternative forms of training fall within vocational and occupational frameworks (GFETQSF and OQSF) shown in Figure 25 (CHE, 2013). These higher levels of qualifications provide graduates with further opportunities to articulate to other qualifications, including access to post-graduate study. The capability of access to vocational education could be described as an architectonic capability, in that it supports a range of other valuable capabilities, creating "a condition necessary in order to enable people to accomplish valuable goals in their lives" (Van der Klink, Bültmann, Burdorf, Schaufeli, Zijlstra, Abma, Brouwer & Van der Wilt, 2016, p. 72).

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK		
LEVEL	SUB-FRAMEWORK AND QUALIFICATION TYPES	
10	DOCTORAL DEGREE DOCTORAL DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL)	*
9	MASTER'S DEGREE MASTER'S DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL)	*
8	BACHELOR HONOURS DEGREE POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA BACHELOR'S DEGREE	*
7	BACHELOR'S DEGREE ADVANCED DIPLOMA	*
6	DIPLOMA ADVANCED CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 6)
5	HIGHER CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 5)
4	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 4)
3	INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 3)
2	ELEMENTARY CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 2)
1	GENERAL CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 1)

Key to sub-frameworks

Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
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Figure 25: National Qualifications Framework showing Sub-frameworks and qualification types
(Source: CHE, 2013, p. 6)

The data analysis in Chapter 6 (section 6.2) showed that there are multiple personal, social and environmental factors that influence students when making the choice to enrol in private higher education. Private providers enable admission by means of wider criteria for access, a range of fee options (including some fee structures that are lower than public institutions), and niche vocational programmes. Some individuals had greater freedom of enrolment choice than others, and all had different aspirations and motivations for their choices. Yet their enrolment in private higher education (a functioning) afforded them all access to opportunities for vocational education, and opportunities for expanding their capability sets and developing their employability in ways that may not have occurred in a different institution, or outside of higher education.

8.1.2 The capability of connection

The capability of connection is focused on the development of social relations in both informal and formal contexts. It incorporates elements of Nussbaum's architectonic capability of affiliation and of narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 2006, 2010, 2011). Achievement of this capability is seen in the ability to build relationships and to relate interpersonally with others. Within higher education there is a range of levels at which students are able to connect with others and build what Weithman calls "academic friendship" (2015, p. 52). These are utility-based relationships with peers, lecturers as well as other staff and industry experts⁹¹, as described in detail in section 7.1.3. These relationships extend into the labour market. This capability involves not only being able to build and maintain personal and professional relationships, but also to be able to harness them for mutual well-being. It requires individuals to be agentic, to have strong interpersonal skills and to be able to strategically navigate social networks in a creative and enterprising manner (Bridgstock, 2013).

At a personal level, the effectiveness with which this capability is converted into real employment opportunities and jobs depends on having the requisite social capital. Social capital is a resource developed through personal relationships and social networks. It plays an important role in employability to the extent that it helps graduates mobilise their human capital to access and exploit labour market opportunities (Tholen, Brown, Power & Allouch, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017a; Tymon & Stumpf, 2003). The development of social capital is influenced by an individual's culture, values and background, and differently mobilised accordingly. Social capital is operationalised in a synergistic manner, so that the capability for connection involves interpersonal engagements, and these relationships generally (but not always) serve mutual benefit. According to Tymon and Stumpf (2003) social capital has the inclination to decline or deteriorate unless it is maintained. In other words, individuals need to work at creating and

⁹¹ Weithman (2015) uses the term "academic friendship" to refer only to the teacher-student relationship. However, as the purpose of such a relationship is the student's learning and development, I consider that this notion could equally apply to students' relationships with others who are part of the pedagogical process, and as a result of which interaction those same ends might be achieved.

sustaining relationships through ongoing interaction with others in the network. The key element in developing strong and ongoing social capital is trust, which may also be engendered by the reputation of an individual or an institution.

The capability of connection is strongly mediated by private institutions that use their industry connections to build “bridging ties” for students (Putnam, 1999, cited in Tomlinson, 2017a, p. 342). This gives graduates access to the institutional networks and social capital, which facilitate opportunities to find jobs and enhance employability (Tholen et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2017a). Where this capability is made explicit by the institution and centralised visibly in the pedagogy, the bridging ties are stronger and more widespread for more students. Some institutions are less explicit in fostering this capability, hence the ties that students establish may be weaker, uneven, and the development of social capital is more constrained. However, as a resource, networks do not automatically convert to social capital or employment (Batistic & Tymon, 2017; Tholen et al., 2013). Therefore, exposure to industry experts does not automatically create opportunities for employment unless students know that they need to develop these skills, and know how to build and maintain such relationships. Consequently, students with the ‘wrong’ kind of social capital (which cannot be mobilised when it comes to employment), and students who are not aware of how important networks are and how to build them, need more opportunities to build their social capital and develop the capability to connect. As such, they may require more explicit teaching on how to build relationships, to exploit connections, and to develop weak ties into stronger links for enhancing employment and work opportunities.

8.1.3 The capability of professional identity formation

Capabilities enable people to do more with their lives, and the capability of professional identity formation ought to enable graduates to do more with their working lives. Preparing graduates to engage in the professional practice of an occupation requires more than having the skills to perform tasks in a job, it requires the construction of a legitimate identity (Hinchliffe, 2013). Professional

identity is the concept that students develop of themselves in a professional work context and capacity (Chin, Phillips, Woo, Clemans, & Yeong, 2020). It is a component of personal and graduate identity, based on values, attributes, beliefs and experiences. The formation of professional identity is a form of professional socialisation. It is fostered through interactions with others who are able to teach, mentor, and who serve as role models. In this way the graduate is brought into a professional network, and given opportunities to develop important social capital. As such, the capability for professional identity complements the capability for connection in enhancing graduates' capability set for employability.

At a personal level, the development of professional identity requires students to be willing to learn, which enables identity to take shape. But identity is not fixed and therefore it is also important that graduates are able to adapt their identity if required, which gives them greater flexibility in the roles they are able to perform and the types of work they are able to take on. To this end, being equipped with a range of skills that can be mobilised is useful in enhancing an individual's employability. Achieving professional identity formation means that students' practical learning experiences need to be contextually relevant. Therefore, students who do not participate in experiential learning, or those whose time is spent observing others working rather than being actively engaged in a job, and those who are given mundane tasks instead of the practical or technical work of their field, will find the development of their identity formation compromised. Given the importance of this capability within the capability set for employability, it becomes very important that where students are lacking appropriate resources (and confidence) at a personal level, the institution becomes an important conversion factor in enhancing more equitable opportunities for graduates' professional identity formation.

In private higher education, the formation of professional identity is fostered through work-integrated-learning pedagogies. It is particularly in the application of vocational skills and knowledge through experiential learning in the workplace, and through opportunities for connection that professional identity is shaped and

consolidated. As students and graduates build experience in different work contexts, they learn from and with others about the roles, cultures and practices within organisations, and they also develop an understanding of the industry as a whole. This experience provides them with opportunities to reflect on what they aspire to be and do, and are able to be and do. When students review their practice and experiences (and that of others) this forms the basis on which they are able to take future decisions and actions (Dyke, Johnston & Fuller, 2012). Development of the capability of professional identity is important in expanding graduates' freedom to participate in the workplace, and their confidence to pursue their choice of employment options (as discussed in section 7.1.4). Opportunities for the development of professional identity is a formative component of the broader capability for work, which is the freedom to choose the job one has reason to value (Bonvin, 2012). As an individual's professional identity evolves, it opens the way for the development of a longer-term career identity.

8.1.4 The capability of career navigation

The capability of career navigation is focused on the ability to build and manage a career over a lifetime. The focus of graduate employability often only goes as far as the point at which graduates land in a job, however, graduates need to be able to manage their careers and their employability for themselves over the long-term (Bridgstock 2009; 2013; Tien & Wang, 2017). They need to know what to expect on entry to the industry, and that a low paid entry level job can be used as a platform. A career is a life course, and therefore the capability of career management involves the ability to manage the interaction of work with other aspects of life. This capability extends graduates' opportunities beyond getting a job, to focus on staying in the job, developing in the job, moving to another job/field, and leading a life of choice. It also includes expanding opportunities for employability through further study, professional and lifelong learning (Alves, 2017).

In the changing world of digital technology, the labour market is now referred to as a 'gig economy'⁹² characterised by portfolio careers. This means that career patterns have shifted away from traditional linear career paths to freelance, flexible and on-demand work (Bridgstock, 2013; BusinessTech, 2017). As such, instead of working on a permanent contract with a regular salary, people are given work as independent contractors and paid for each project ('gig') that they do. The nature of this labour market is unpredictable and inconsistent, and there is a blurred line between who is an employee and who is not. In essence, workers are self-employed and need to manage the range of employment engagements themselves (Bridgstock, 2009).

At a personal level, achieving the capability of career navigation requires the ability to reflect, to adapt, to think critically, and to respond to circumstances or opportunities with agility and confidence. In this way the individual negotiates his/her ongoing learning and career activities, shifting in response to changing needs and new experiences, based on past experiences and future imaginings (Bridgstock, 2013). These changes also require the development of an adaptive career identity, so that as graduates perform work in different projects, organisation and contexts, they are able to adapt their professional identity accordingly. This capability is driven not only by what graduates choose to do, and how they act, but also with whom they interact. Therefore, the capability of career navigation works in co-ordination as part of a capability set, together with the capabilities of professional identity formation and connection, in the development of graduate employability.

In some private institutions, the skills for career navigation are developed explicitly through career guidance and coaching services. Career guidance has been shown to contribute to personal development in ways that can enhance employability (Pitan & Atiku, 2017). It contributes particularly to developing self-awareness, as well as the ability to reflect, plan, recognise opportunities, and

⁹² 'Gig' is a slang term coined in the music industry to refer to a job that lasts a specified period of time (<https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/gig-economy>)

make decisions. Yet the data in this study showed that, where formal career guidance and support is offered by institutions, it is generally an underutilised resource by students and graduates, and somewhat ineffective. The skills for career navigation are also implicit within pedagogy, and developed informally by lecturers who discuss their experiences and offer advice. Career navigation is underpinned by aspiration. As this capability is future-focused, it may only be realised over time in the labour market. As such, institutions play an important role in initiating the development of what Walker and Fongwa describe as “thick aspiration” (2017, p. 223). This is the ability to review career aspirations and to slide aspirations forward as individuals imagine future possibilities.

Capability formation in higher education is variable and dynamic, and capabilities and functionings oscillate within an individual’s capability set. This means that in the course of the educational journey, new capabilities (and functionings) are formed, existing capabilities can expand and/or contract, and some remain stable (Hart, 2018). In addition, some capabilities formed in the course of the higher education experience develop tacitly and may only be realised at a later stage in the labour market. As discussed in Chapter 4, the development of capabilities is influenced by conversion factors, which create conditions that are enabling for some and constraining for others. These multiple factors intersect with personal biographies so that some people get more opportunities to convert their resources into capabilities than others (Robeyns, 2017). Consequently, graduates differ in the functionings they are able to achieve in and through higher education. In the next section, I will discuss four key functionings to enhance graduate employability

8.2 Functionings in the workplace

Graduate employment depends on the alignment of what graduates have learned in and through higher education, and on the labour market. However, to reduce graduates’ labour market achievements simply to what employers need, is to deny the full intrinsic and instrumental value of higher education and to diminish

the worth and agency of graduates. Employability as conceptualised in this study is a far wider notion than employment, as graduate employability focuses on what graduates value being able to do in relation to work and other aspects of their lives, in addition to what employers value of graduates. The analysis of graduates' workplace experiences and the data on employers' perspectives revealed four key valued functionings for employability in the context of the media workplace. These include: (i) being able to earn a decent livelihood; (ii) being able to connect and collaborate; (iii) being adaptable; and (iv) being agile.

8.2.1 Being able to earn a decent livelihood

The empirical data presented in Chapter 6 (section 6.3) showed how variable the employment outcomes are for graduates. These differ not only between institutions but also between graduates from the same institution. Notwithstanding the fact that the data showed an employment rate of 84% (see Figure 18) which is high relative to the national youth and graduate unemployment statistics, from a moral perspective, it is important to be concerned about the 16% who are unemployed. Amongst them are individuals who have been trapped in unemployment and unable to earn for the five years since graduating (and in all likelihood, also a family that is dependent on their earning an income). Also, statistics on job destinations give no indication of the types of jobs graduates have, the extent to which they value their jobs, or whether their jobs enable graduates to enjoy a sense of well-being and quality of life. From a human development and capability perspective, higher education ought to expand graduates' opportunities and enable them to flourish in life. This includes being employable and having the ability to earn a living, choosing what they value doing, and who they want to be in their career.

After graduating, one of the first things that graduates discover is that they do not have freedom of choice of jobs. An excess of graduates relative to jobs makes for an extremely competitive labour market environment. In addition, employers will only recruit graduates with years of experience, and they are urged into internships or some other form of (low-paid or unpaid) work to build experience

before they are able to find a decent job. Without experience, this work is often deemed by employers as ‘training’ and therefore only worthy of a minimum-wage-equivalent stipend to cover the cost of transport. One of the graduates stated:

With the all-time high unemployment rate in South Africa, young people are holding on to low-paying, exploitative work, and positions. We keep jobs because we have to survive and support ourselves and our families, not because we enjoy the work we do (Survey participant no. 34, PHEI 2, Video Production).

This graduate is earning between R5 000 and R10 000 per month. She has little sense of having an alternative in an environment of few opportunities. The job is purely instrumental, as she needs to earn an income as a matter of survival for herself and her family. She is choosing to compromise her own employment well-being for that of her family. This was the case for many graduates, particularly from poor and working-class backgrounds.

The empirical data shows that, on the whole, salaries in media are below the average wage in South Africa (section 6.3.2). From the analysis, there are two distinct patterns linked to earning levels that relate to race, class and institution. Firstly, white graduates dominate the higher earning groups (upward of R11 000 per month and particularly over R20 000 per month). The Coloured and Indian graduates fall in the middle earning group between R11 000 and R30 000. And Black graduates are spread across the entire spectrum, but they dominate the low earning groups. Secondly, graduates from elite institutions are weighted at the top end of the earnings scale, and graduates from the non-elite institution are weighted at the bottom end. Therefore, there appears to be a correlation between the institution graduates attend (which also links with race and class) and the level of earnings. It is also of interest that notwithstanding the gender earnings differences reported in the creative industries in South Africa (Lutshaba et al., 2020), there was no apparent gender gap in earnings amongst the participants.

Most of the graduates studied full-time and lacked substantial work experience when they graduated. By the time Sunette (PHEI 1a, Graphic Design) graduated, however, she had built up two years’ of experience. This was possible because while still a second-year student her father had contacted a friend who took her

into his company as an intern for the duration of her studies. Students without the social capital generated by family connections do not have the same opportunities. In fact, they even struggle to find a host for the two-week experiential learning. Without experience, the main option for graduates is to find an internship. However, as was evident in the data analysis in Chapter 7 (section 7.2) the stipend is so low that it is not feasible for disadvantaged graduates, whose families are unable to support them financially, to participate in the internship. While they aspire to a career in media, these graduates have little option other than to find any form of paid work, including low-paid unskilled factory labour or admin work, as they are often the sole breadwinner for the family (see section 6.3.3, Table 4).

In sum, when it comes to being able to earn a decent livelihood, graduates' capabilities are constrained by social and systemic factors that restrict their freedom of choice and impact their well-being in employment. Consequently, in order to enable graduates to be able to earn a decent livelihood, the capability of access to vocational education needs to prepare graduates for diverse ways to work, to be creative and enterprising, and to interact with others, in order to expand their opportunities both outside and within formal structures of employment.

8.2.2 Being able to connect and collaborate

Employability in media necessitates various forms of communication and is inherently relational. All media work is performed in teams and requires graduates to be able to interact and work effectively with other people. This includes being able to engage with diverse others, the ability to work co-operatively, and to engage in "active networking" (Coulson, 2012, p. 254) which is the dynamic and deliberate construction of connections for enterprising activity. There are two dimensions to the relational notion of employability. One is the vertical dimension of the employer-employee relationship. This is usually a formal relationship with a top-down structure, where the authority lies with the employer, positioning the graduate as a beneficiary of employers' recruitment strategies and choices. The

second dimension is the peer and collegiate relationships characteristic of collaborative teamwork. These are enacted in horizontal relationships that are less formal and where choices and responsibilities are shared amongst group members. The empirical data from the perspectives of all participants showed that the essence of private higher education employability outcomes is strongly focused on the one-on-one employer-employee relationship, with less emphasis on fostering one-to-many horizontal working relationships. Consequently, graduates are prepared with a mindset of dependence on being employed.

In the classroom graduates are given opportunities to work with others. Assessments are done in groups, students engage in class discussions, and interact with others – both colleagues and employers – in their experiential learning. The capability to connect and collaborate is more than a pedagogical technique (Furlong & Johnson, 2003). It provides graduates with opportunities and abilities to create, build and maintain working relationships, which can serve for mutual benefit (Bridgstock, 2013). Furlong and Johnson (2003) include collaborative capabilities as part of a collective work-based learning process within a community of practice. This is a participatory process in which people combine resources to mutually generate new opportunities and outcomes. As such, it is an empowering process for individuals. An example of this has emerged in a recent study of a business community in Cape Town where creative enterprises⁹³ have been established comprising small inter-disciplinary clusters of four or five people working together (Snowball, 2020). Group members draw on each other's skills, combining digital technology with creative inputs to produce innovative goods and services, enabling each person to work and earn. Such collaborative communities are significant in the context of a changing and competitive labour market environment, where, through collective effort, individuals are able to respond and adapt to change (Bridgstock, 2013; Furlong & Johnson, 2003; Snowball, 2020).

⁹³ This includes enterprises related to graphic design, film, television, video and radio, music, photography, advertising and marketing, amongst some others, which touches on all the sub-fields covered by the qualifications incorporated in this study.

It was evident from the empirical data that where institutions are able to put individuals directly in touch with employers, there is a higher likelihood of him/her being employed in a job. The value of the institutional network adds to the graduates' social capital on which they can draw. Job placement relies on the network more than the competence of the individual, which is assumed to be in place based on the reputation of the institution and the surety of the connection. In this way, one job leads to the next for those graduates, as employers prefer to recruit via recommendation from other employers. For institutions, this might seem an efficient mechanism for maintaining high graduate employment statistics. It also suits employers, who see it as a means to recruit good quality graduates who are well-prepared to meet their needs. However, for the majority of graduates, it is not a fair mechanism, particularly if their higher education investment remains untested and they are excluded from this network loop because they are not from a chosen institution. This mechanism perpetuates a system such as that identified by Sadik and Brown (2020) in which elite institutions serve the needs of a handful of employers, creating a narrow pool of employable graduates but with limited prospects for the wider graduate workforce.

Employability that is conceptualised from a human development perspective rather than a human capital policy agenda, subsumes procedural principles and values of equity, efficiency, empowerment, participation, and sustainability (Alkire, 2010). Therefore, enhancing the employability of graduates in a more equitable manner includes preparing them in ways in which they are empowered to participate in the labour market rather than being reliant on being given access to jobs by employers or institutions. The data from graduates' experiences and employers perspectives corroborates data from the broader industry in South Africa (Lutshaba et al., 2020) to show that there are real opportunities for peer-based collaboration in the media workplace that will enable (more) graduates to work and earn (more)⁹⁴. Freelance workers work *with* employers but not *for*

⁹⁴ Thabang indicated that a freelance worker could earn in 10 working days what an employee (in a specialised function such as a camera operator) would earn in a month. Freelance workers have the potential

employers, and they work with others. Therefore, the ability to connect and collaborate provides graduates with opportunities to form different working relationships with a range of people, to be creative and innovative, to earn, and to build generative networks of their own in ways which they value. Graduates who have resources of social and cultural capital draw on these resources to connect with others. However, working-class and disadvantaged graduates may lack social capital and the capacity for active networking. Therefore, preparing these graduates to work in a middle-class orientated environment, requires institutions to pay particular attention for such students to develop the capability to connect and collaborate. This would include explicit teaching on how to build working ties, and enabling opportunities and support to access networks and collaborative relationships to enhance their employability, and to put them on a more level playing field with those who have inherited social networks on which they can draw.

8.2.3 Being able to adapt

The discussion so far has shown the strong influence of private institutions and WIL pedagogy as conversion factors in influencing graduate employability. Conversion factors determine the extent to which a person can transform the resources they have into functionings (Robeyns, 2017). These factors are value-free, therefore it is not the institution or pedagogy per se, but the conditions they create that are either enabling or constraining for different individuals. Other conversion factors that were shown to be significant for graduate employability are social class, socio-economic status, and employers themselves. Most of these factors are outside the control of individual graduates to alter. Innate personal factors such as race, age, gender, and family background are what individuals are born into. Social factors, such as class, socio-economic status, employers' recruitment strategies, and a stratified higher education system, are deeply entrenched structures that are extremely difficult to shift, and might only do so over time. In South Africa, widened access to higher education is an

to earn in excess of R35 000 per month, which is significant if we compare the graduates' earnings discussed in sections 6.3.2 and 8.2.1.

attempt to operationalise systemic change to enable transformation in people's lives. Yet, in this study, as in previous South African studies on graduate employment and unemployment there is evidence that employment inequalities persist (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat et al., 2010; CHEC, 2013; Letseka et al., 2010; Moleke, 2010; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Wider access to higher education has added more graduates to a struggling economy and created more competition for jobs. In this labour market, white, middle-class, wealthy and well-connected graduates continue to have the employment advantage.

Higher education has been tasked with the responsibility of producing employable graduates in the hope that it will make a difference to youth unemployment in the country. However, higher education on its own cannot compensate for society or its entrenched and unfair structures. There are also limits to what even good quality pedagogy can do in a few years for an individual, given students' social, economic and academic backgrounds (which may extend over generations (Jansen, 2009)). Higher education alone is not able to solve the unemployment issues in the country, but it can make a difference in some ways – and needs to do so more effectively. Making a difference to graduate employability requires graduates to be able to adapt within the system. In addition to graduates having the skills and identity to perform in particular work environments, this means also being able to apply them in a range of contexts. The data showed that some graduates were either resistant to working outside their field of specialisation, or unable to recognise how their skills are applicable in different contexts. If graduates learn that media work can be done in non-media contexts, or that there is an overlap between different media disciplines, this expands their employment and work options. The capability of professional identity formation requires graduates to be willing to learn, to be able to reflect on themselves and circumstances around them, and to think critically so that they are able to respond to opportunities when they arise. Developing the ability to shift identity in response to opportunities, will potentially provide graduates with greater versatility as media workers.

The disadvantage of being self-employed and working in informal arrangements with frequent changes is that it lacks the security of tenure and income that formal employment provides. Graduates expressed the need for certainty, security and stability in employability. When functionings are insecure it is a form of corrosive disadvantage, which affects other functionings (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). Graduates with limited resources and restricted choices are exposed to greater risk than their more advantaged counterparts. It is understandable, therefore, that these graduates particularly seek the financial security of a job and fixed income. Graduates from wealthier backgrounds might be more willing to take risks with alternative forms of work because they have their family's financial resources in reserve. For this reason, institutions would need to specifically prepare disadvantaged and working-class graduates with the ability to shift identity and be adaptable, exposing them to a range of different media-related work contexts so that they can practise being able to adapt in low-risk situations supported by the institution. They would particularly need assistance with experiential learning placement with relevant hosts in order to ensure that the mentoring and learning in those environments is identity-appropriate. These graduates who are the least employed have the most to gain from learning to connect, collaborate, shift identity and earn from more flexible forms of work as an alternative to waiting to get a job.

8.2.4 Being agile

Agility is the ability to think and respond quickly and efficiently. It is a notion most strongly associated with the contexts of sport science (Sheppard & Young, 2006) and organisational management (Agarwal, Shankar & Tiwari, 2007; Nafei, 2016). Being agile implies both physical and intellectual acuity. In other words, it requires quick-thinking and quick-action while also being effective. In the business context, Agarwal et al. (2016) state that agility is fundamental to an organisation's survival in a volatile and highly competitive market environment. Being able to respond in ways that bring about change and adaptation could ensure financial survival for media graduates too – as shown in Snowball's (2020) pilot study of the creative clusters in the Cape. Agility and adaptability are not the same, but

are closely associated notions. In terms of employability, agility and adaptability are different functionings within the employability capability set (see Table 7). Unlike in the sporting context where agility is demonstrated in individual competence, in the workplace it is usually a collaborative endeavour (Agarwal et al., 2007). The ability to be agile therefore, includes the ability to work with others both within and across disciplines. This means that, as part of the employability capability set together with learning to be adaptable, media graduates ought to be prepared with the skills to critically evaluate their position relative to others and to be responsive to the environment.

Agility and adaptability are attributes that employers who were interviewed said they look for in recruiting versatile employees who can fit into multiple roles and adapt to different environments and situations (see Chapter 7, sections 7.2 and 7.3). Songezo (News, Print & Online media) explained that agility ensures that individuals are able to be responsive and productive in a creative work environment and modern office space:

We are agile. That's why... you see our office? This one comes and sits with me there at that desk or in the kitchen, we have coffee. An intern can come here and you can plug yourself here and do all that. There's no corner office here, bureaucrats and all that. I mean there's no start and ending time. We just say to you make sure that you work 40 hours a week. Whether you do it in your house, whether you come here, or not, but only as since there are those disciplines that we put in place to make sure that you know the discipline needs to be there.

Whether it is working in a job in a flexible office environment, or managing a career portfolio, these are the characteristics of the 21st century media workplace (Bridgstock, 2013). Graduate employability is enhanced if individuals have the abilities to be flexible, to be able to 'see' alternative work possibilities for themselves, to respond and adapt accordingly. These abilities are developed over time and with experience underpinned by soft skills that comprise graduate attributes.

The ability to cope with risk is important in developing these abilities. Disadvantaged individuals face considerable risk in their daily lives (Sen, 1999; Wolff and De-Shalit (2007). There are multiple ways in which risk multiplies

disadvantage and makes functionings insecure. Taking a job on a production line in order to reduce the risk of unemployment may alleviate the anxiety of being jobless and enable the graduate to buy food for the family. But this choice has longer-term consequences because there are costs involved, such as the financial cost of physically getting to work, or opportunity costs. The corrosive effect of underemployment was discussed in Chapter 6 (section 6.3.3). When disadvantaged individuals face the risk of joblessness, and its implications for their financial and physical well-being, they may suffer what Wolff and De-Shalit (2007, p. 69) call “planning blight” or “paralysis of the will” which results in their being unable to plan other aspects of their life. Over time, such an individual would not only be jobless but also risk becoming unemployable. Developing the abilities to be agile and adaptable would increase the ability of an individual to be able to navigate his/her way within the existing system, creating and responding to opportunities that are fertile and generative.

To recap thus far, the value of the capability approach in this study was to enable the identification of four key capabilities for an employability capability set. These capabilities contribute to the multi-dimensionality of employability. Each one plays an important role in developing graduate employment opportunities, and when realised as functionings they complement each other to enhance employability. By evaluating the functionings that correspond to capabilities, it is possible to make interpersonal comparisons of graduate employability, which have shown the ways in which conversion factors, such as social, economic capital, and cultural (class) capital, reproduce rather than transform states of privilege and disadvantage. Notwithstanding graduates’ skills and knowledge or their qualification, institutions target particular student markets, and their achievements and employment outcomes are stratified along the lines of the institution. Employability lies at the intersection of individual graduate biographies and what private institutions do. While WIL is made explicit, there is much in what private providers do, and how they do it, that is implicit. As such, assumptions are made of what students learn and how it is made known to all graduates. The differences in the functionings reveal that working-class graduates and those at

non-elite institutions, are disadvantaged by invisible pedagogies which favour the employability of middle-class graduates at elite institutions. The different capabilities, their corresponding functionings, and the conversion factors that influence the conversion of resources into capabilities and employment achievements at private institutions are summarised below in Table 7.

Table 7: Capabilities and functionings for employability

Employability capability set	Conversion factors	Labour market functionings
Capability of access to vocational education	Personal: - Race - Values, motivation - Personality	- being able to earn a decent livelihood - having skills & knowledge of the craft - having technical skills - being creative - being able to communicate
Capability of connection	Social: - Socio-economic status - Social class - Schooling background - Influence of other people - Family background - Social capital	- being able to collaborate & work with others - being able to participate in society - being able to relate to others - being able to build & maintain ties - being able to work with diversity - social networking - teamwork - being able to exploit relationships for mutual benefit - being able to trust and to be trusted
Capability of professional identity formation	Institution: - HE institution type – culture & processes - HE institution – status & reputation - Pedagogy	- being able to adapt - being willing to learn - career identity - ability to reflect - think critically, solve problems - resilience, grit - multi-disciplinary skills
Capability of career navigation	- Lecturers - Alumni - HE qualification - Experiential learning - Internship mentoring - Career guidance & support mechanisms	- being agile - being self-aware - critical thinking & reasoning - being adaptable - being able to aspire; 'thick' aspiration - ability to work in inter-disciplinary manner - career self-management - determination, motivation

Moving away from graduate employability focused on human capital, the contribution of this study is to conceptualise employability as capabilities within the human development role of higher education. In the next section, I bring together higher education opportunities with graduates' labour market achievements.

8.3 Employability capabilities and functionings

Higher education institutions aim to develop well-skilled, knowledgeable and highly employable graduates. Private providers give students access to vocational education with good quality teaching and relevant WIL pedagogy. And yet it is only in the labour market that the possibilities of higher education are realised and the success of the graduate outcomes can be fully assessed. The empirical data showed that not all students are able to capitalise equally on their higher education opportunities. Using the capability approach as an evaluative framework enables inter-personal comparisons between students to understand how the different capabilities for employability are fostered in higher education. The comparison showed that students bring personal, social and economic background factors into higher education with them. Social class, socio-economic status, schooling background, career knowledge, aspirations and values are particular factors that influence the choices students have, and the decisions they make on enrolment. Once enrolled, institutions assume a homogeneity amongst students in the way they are prepared for their roles in industry, which appears to take a predominantly middle-class orientation. However, the diversity of students' personal biographies means that there were variations in the ways in which different individuals engaged in the pedagogy, and how they were able to take up the opportunities offered by their institutions. Understanding the different conversion factors that influence the way different individuals are able to convert their bundle of resources into the higher education opportunities revealed a typology of students with distinct characteristics.

8.3.1 An enrolment typology and conversion of higher education capabilities

A career direction starts to take shape as students enter higher education when they make choices of what programme to study and at which institution. The particular factors that guided these choices for participants were discussed in detail in Chapter 6. It is evident that background factors influence the agency freedom of individuals when it comes to making choices of institution and study programme. Policies to transform higher education in South Africa prioritise the expansion of access and participation in order to promote equality of opportunity (DHET, 2013), yet students do not start on a level playing field when they enter higher education due to social and economic inequalities that pre-exist access. Consequently, there is disparity in the opportunities that access to vocational education provides each person. Based on these differences, and the key conversion factors that influence the enrolment in private higher education, I classified an enrolment typology. There are three types⁹⁵ that I have named: (i) *Reputation seekers*; (ii) *Identity shifters*; and (iii) *Hobson's choicers*. These typologies provide generalised descriptions of graduates that reflect the intersection of personal biography, available resources, and enrolment choices in private higher education institutions.

(i) *Reputation seekers*

Reputation seekers are predominantly middle-class students with strong aspirations for a career in media. Their enrolment choices prioritised the institution's reputation and its instrumental value to enhance their opportunities for employment. Because of their family backgrounds and socio-economic status, these individuals have access to financial resources. These resources gave them the advantage of better quality schooling to enable good academic performance, which added to their bundle of resources so that they had freedom of choice of

⁹⁵ I chose these terms as descriptors based on my interpretation of the data. Before claiming them, I did a scope of the internet to determine their originality. I found one reference to 'Identity shifters' only. This was used to title a report on the characteristics of Generation Z for marketing purposes (RPA, 2018). The youngest participants in this study lie on the early cusp of this generation, and Gen Zers are the upcoming graduates. Therefore, this epithet may become all the more appropriate and relevant for graduate employability as that generation comes through.

where and what to study. Consequently, their access to higher education was unconstrained by the type of institution or the cost of the programme. These participants spoke about being able to enrol at ‘the best institution’ and being able to ‘follow their dreams’ and pursue their chosen careers. When it came to making enrolment decisions, they were able to exercise their agency freedom and autonomy in the process. This was exemplified particularly by Sunette and Melody whose choices went contrary to their respective parents’ wishes. In Melody’s case, she enrolled for a media qualification, putting her personal career goals ahead of the cultural values of her father, who she describes as “*a very traditional Zulu man*” and who expected his daughter to follow a traditional career in medicine or teaching. In Sunette’s case, she chose to enrol in a private institution, knowing that her parents’ preference was for her to enrol at a highly reputable (globally ranked) public university.

Once enrolled, these students benefited from the vocational programme and the WIL pedagogy which was aligned to their values and middle-class orientation. They were given access to the institutional network, and built ties with the industry through the social and pedagogical interactions. In this way they were able to strengthen and add to their own reserves of social and cultural capital to enhance their opportunities for employment and take the first steps in their careers. The specialised vocational focus of the programme and its practical pedagogy, together with the capability of connection, contributed to developing their capability for professional identity. As discussed in Chapter 4, combined capabilities comprise the interaction between the external environment and a person’s internal dimensions (Nussbaum, 2011). Therefore, for these individuals, their resources served as conversion factors that made a substantial contribution to enabling the formation of the valued capabilities for employability. Of the 21 interview participants, I would classify ten of them as *Reputation seekers*.

(ii) *Identity shifters*

Identity shifters form a widely diverse group (more so than the other types). These are students who come from a range of backgrounds, and a mix of lower-middle-

and working-class families. For these students, their priority lay in getting access to higher education to get a qualification. Unlike *Reputation seekers* whose enrolment choices were determined by strong career aspirations, these students' career aspirations were mostly shaped by their higher education enrolment decisions. Most of these individuals applied to study at public universities but found their enrolment options were restricted by weak academic achievement and/or financial constraints. On the whole, these individuals had attended good quality (Model C) government schools, nonetheless not all of them had achieved APS scores that enabled access to university. Some amongst them, who met university access requirements, found it was unaffordable. Consequently, their access to higher education was constrained by lack of available academic, socio-economic and financial resources. They were unable to enrol for their first preferences of institution and study programme, and had to make new choices, from a different and smaller range of feasible options, as to where to study and what programme to choose. Facing restricted freedom of choice their enrolment decisions were based on the affordability of the institution and prescribed by the range of programmes it offered. This meant choosing a new direction of study, a shift towards alternative career goals and a different future – for some of them, a direction with which they were entirely unfamiliar.

For these individuals, private higher education enabled the capability of access to vocational education and provided opportunities to shift identity in the quest for social mobility. The WIL pedagogy contributed to shaping their new professional identity, although their poorly-defined career knowledge, underpinned by notions of meritocracy and the belief that social mobility is realised through their own hard work and efforts, were constraints on the capabilities of connection and career navigation. However, by means of those same values of self-reliance and hard work, these individuals demonstrated high levels of resilience, agency, adaptability, and strategic deliberation in facing constraining conversion factors. They were willing to learn and to take a chance in order to change the narrative of their lives. Of the 21 interview participants, I would classify four of them as *Identity shifters*.

(iii) *Hobson's choicers*⁹⁶

Hobson's choicers are working-class, poor and disadvantaged students. Their aspirations are for a better life and economic opportunities that a qualification might bring. However, lack of financial resources, poor quality schooling background and weak academic achievement constrain their options. Their schooling background leaves them academically and vocationally poorly equipped and unprepared for higher education. With tenuous career aspirations, and agency that is constrained by absence of financial empowerment, lack of knowledge in the blood (Jansen, 2009) and a sense of 'otherness' in the middle-class sphere of higher education, their enrolment selection is characterised by the absence of real freedom of choice of where and what to study. 'Affordability' is the singular most important directive in their decision-making. Consequently, their decisions are determined by a process of elimination and risk aversion that leaves them with a very limited range of alternatives from which to choose. Ultimately, their enrolment decisions, and future career direction, are made by default or last resort, and they make-do with whatever they can get. This choice is a "forced" risk due to the lack of a reasonable alternative (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007, p. 67).

The capability of access to vocational education provides these individuals with the opportunity to aspire and hope. Like the *Identity shifters*, in this meritocratic environment, they are willing to work hard, learn and try to adapt. However, the curriculum and the pedagogy are orientated for the middle-class. It is a social environment in which the odds are generally stacked against them, and notwithstanding their efforts "they find themselves 'in' but not 'of' the university" (Jin & Ball, 2020, p. 77; see also Ray, 2016). In their determination to 'make it' they work harder to improve themselves, believing in the promise of the higher education opportunities and the hope of their aspiration. The institution, having enabled access to the opportunities of vocational education, leaves their success up to their own individual efforts. As such they are exposed to greater risks, for

⁹⁶ Hobson's choice is defined as an apparently free choice in which there is, in fact, no real alternative (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>)

example, having to find their own experiential learning placement, or afford additional transport to a host organisation. If they avoid the risk, they lose the opportunity. This is what potentially distinguishes them from risk-taking *Identity shifters*. Without being able to fit into the institutional and class structures, capabilities for connection, professional identity, and career support, remain constrained. Disadvantage accumulates and becomes corrosive (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). Of the 21 interview participants, I would classify seven of them as *Hobson's choicers*.

This typology describes the ways in which the choices made on entry to higher education are influenced by a range of conversion factors, and in turn, influence how different students approach and engage in higher education. Consequently, there are differences in the ways in which they capitalise on the opportunities that private providers enable, and ultimately in what they are each able to achieve. There was a close association between *Reputation seekers* and elite institutions, and *Hobson's choicers* and non-elite institutions. The problem with creating generalised types, however, is that it blurs individual traits and distinctions. Each individual is different, and key among their differences is each one's agency and how they use it. Agency freedom is the freedom individuals have to pursue their educational goals and aspirations. Central to this notion is the element of choice and the extent to which an individual is able to decide for him/herself and bring about change in his/her own life (Sen, 1985, 1992, 1999).

8.3.2 The important role of agency

Agency is embodied in people who, as agents, are active participants, making choices in the way they act that determines their own lives (Sen, 1985, 1992, 1999). In contrast, a person with reduced agency is someone who is "a passive and docile recipient of instructions or of dispensed assistance" (Sen, 1999, p. 281). Differing levels of agency freedom were evident in the three enrolment typologies, influencing the choices students made on entry to higher education. This also played out in their subsequent participation and capability formation in that context, influencing what they are able to do and to be as graduates. Based

on Sen's notion of agency, Crocker and Robeyns (2009, p. 80) distilled four dimensions that portray agency, namely (i) self-determination: demonstrated when an individual makes his/her own decision on a course of action; (ii) reason orientation and deliberation: when an individual takes purposeful and goal-directed action following critical deliberation and reasoned reflection; (iii) action: it is in the active participation, rather than only the intention to act or participate that agency lies; and (iv) impact on the world: as the decisions and actions of individuals have an influence on others. These dimensions are illustrated in Figure 26. Each of the dimensions fulfils a condition of agency, with the potential to compound each other. As such, it is possible to have varying degrees of agency depending on the compound effect of the dimensions. Combinations of more of the dimensions contribute to stronger agency.

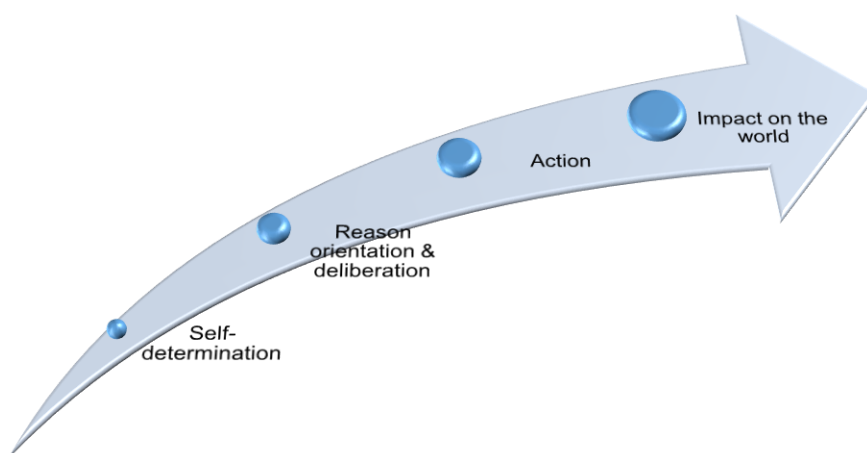


Figure 26: Dimensions in the exercise of agency (adapted from Crocker & Robeyns, 2009)

The dimensions were evident in each of the enrolment types. It was the agency to self-determine their futures that brought each individual to enrol in a private institution. All dimensions were particularly strong in *Reputation seekers* whose agency was not only intended to determine their higher education actions but they were using it in a way to control and direct their future impact on the world. The agency of *Identity shifters* and *Hobson's choicers* was more immediately directed towards their higher education actions, with some uncertainty of what lay beyond that. While their agency freedom appears weak due to their limited freedom of

choice in the face of financial and other constraints, it is, in fact, in overcoming these barriers that they display their agency achievement. Notwithstanding that, constrained agency and freedom of choice constitutes comparative disadvantage.

The value of agency for graduates is not only instrumental i.e. in their enrolment actions, but also intrinsic in the sense of well-being achieved (Crocker & Robeyns, 2009). Freedom of choice is important for quality of life and well-being (Sen, 1992). To this end, the enrolment well-being of *Identity shifters*, and particularly of *Hobson's choicers* is constrained. While the freedom of choice of *Reputation seekers* to make decisions for themselves and take action that is realised in determining their futures, provides them with a sense of who they are and can be. Instrumentally, agency gives graduates control over the direction of their lives, and the confidence to possibly take further action. The development and enhancement of agency occurs through action and participation. Simultaneously, a platform of capabilities can empower graduates to be more agentic and enhance their well-being. The complex and related ideals of agency and empowerment (Crocker & Robeyns, 2009) have the potential to fuel each other, in a virtuous and enabling circle (shown in Figure 27), so that more capabilities make more alternatives available and enable more well-being (Sen, 1992).

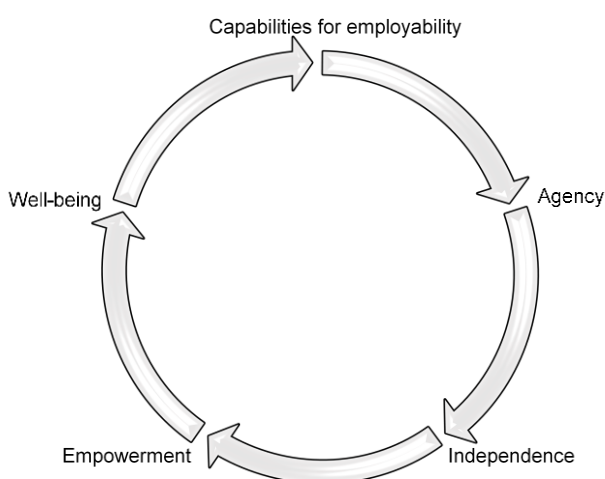


Figure 27: Virtuous circle of an agent-oriented approach to employability and well-being

Individual success in achieving employment outcomes is dependent on the way in which graduates, as active agents, have the capability set for employability, and are able to realise the opportunities provided by higher education as functionings to become employed and employable in the labour market. It is important, therefore, that higher education fosters agency and capabilities for employability that can be further developed and practised in the workplace. In the next section, I will discuss the way in which the fostering of higher education capabilities and agency play out for *Reputation seekers*, *Identity shifters*, and *Hobson's choicers* in directing their employment outcomes.

8.3.3 An employment typology

On completion of their study programmes, graduates have skills and knowledge, and they obtain a qualification – these attributes constitute their human capital and ought to make them more employable. By all accounts higher education has given all graduates the same employment options when they enter the labour market. And yet, the enrolment typologies describe three very different graduate profiles. The purpose of the typologies is to demonstrate the marked way in which each individual's background and personal circumstances intersect with higher education to reveal the distinct differences in the ways in which their higher education opportunities and functionings enable their labour market achievements, or not. As *Reputation seekers*, *Identity shifters*, and *Hobson's choicers* enter the media workplace, their aspirations, agency, capabilities and functionings come together in interaction with the dynamics of the labour market to direct their employment outcomes. Based on these differences, and the key conversion factors that influence their employability capability set, I classified an employment typology. There are three types that I have named: (i) *those who 'make it'*; (ii) *those who 'make it happen'*; and (iii) *those who 'make application'*. I will describe the characteristics of each of these types by means of a vignette from the empirical data. I also show how these link back to the enrolment typologies. Although each vignette only presents one story of each type, their story is typical and representative; I could have written a similar story for any individual in each type.

(i) *Those who 'make it'*

Briana (PHEI 1a, Visual Communication) comes from a middle-class family, lives in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg with her family, and attended a Model C school. Her school-leaving achievements did not qualify her for university entrance, but a bridging course set her on a path to elite private higher education. She chose to study Visual Communication and had ambitions to become a creative director. In order to be successful she knew she had to go to the college with the best reputation in the industry. She was highly strategic in her efforts and the use of her agency to select the institution that would maximise her chances of employment. She worked hard through her programme, and at the prestigious final student showcase event, which not all students were invited to attend, she had the opportunity to present her portfolio to various directors from industry. She said:

I showcased my portfolio to various art directors and creative directors. And they basically started giving me tips on how to better it, and it was all just that... listening, taking in information, asking the right questions. I took a lot of tips from the creative directors that looked at my portfolio and what they said... So I did in a way gain a bit of knowledge of how to proceed after and what they were looking for in particular.

After graduation, she was immediately offered an internship. This was the start of a journey through the industry network that she had self-determined from enrolment, and operationalised through her own academic and other efforts. Having completed her internship and needing a job, the first thing she did was to contact one of her lecturers who put her in touch with a couple of agencies. He gave her a referral, and with that she secured a new job. Her next job came through a friend in the industry who contacted her when his company needed a new designer. So her journey went from one job to the next, guided by conversations, referrals and connections within a network. In describing her journey, she stated: "...although I'd been working a very long time, I hadn't gone to actually look for jobs". After three years as an employee she decided to start her own business. She explained how it came about:

I was killing myself. Pretty much leaving the office 10, 11, 12 o'clock at night, sometimes 2 o'clock in the morning. And I came home the one day and I said to my mom, "Listen, if I'm killing myself for everybody else to make their dreams come true, why can't I do it for myself?"

She took confidence from her experience and what she had been able to learn from colleagues in the companies in which she had worked.

And just from listening and trying to involve myself in their business and this and that, and understanding what business decisions they were making about this client, etc. how they were dealing with that, gave me the confidence that I could also do that on my own. So then I decided, literally one day to the next, I'm like, "Mom, I'm resigning. I think I can do this on my own and it's going to be a learning experience". So I did.

She now runs her business from home, which she admitted would not be possible without financial assistance from her family.

Briana enrolled in higher education as a *Reputation seeker*. As graduates, these students are aware of how competitive the labour market is, and they mobilise their agency and well-endowed (often inherited) bundle of resources to position themselves to 'win' the competition for jobs. Simultaneously, the institution mediates and legitimises their dispositions towards the labour market by driving the importance and exclusivity of the network and carving out a pathway for graduates on which they are destined for good jobs (Tholen et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2010). *Reputation seekers* are highly strategic in making use of opportunities to maximise the instrumental value of the higher education structures to achieve their desired ends. This was exemplified by Briana choosing to enrol at an institution that she knew had a good reputation with big agencies in the industry. Also, in spite of having been out of college for a couple of years, when she was looking for a new job, her first port of call was to ask her lecturer to refer her to positions he knew were available. These were both strategic moves on her part, knowing that the reputation of the institution and the personal reputation of the lecturer would enhance her likelihood of employment success. Ultimately, *Reputation seekers* draw on the resources at their disposal in order to '*make it*' into the industry in a virtually seamless and direct trajectory.

(ii) *Those who 'make it happen'*

Thulasizwe (PHEI 2, Radio & Television Production) grew up in the rural KwaDumisa region, approximately 100km south-west of Durban. He was educated at a multi-cultural government fee-paying school in the city, which

required a long daily commute by bus. His aspiration was to “*do music*” but his working-class parents were concerned, and wanted him to study so that he would be more employable. They mutually agreed on a qualification in media (majoring in Radio), and he chose a private college in the city inspired by a radio advertisement he heard in the voice of his favourite DJ. Thulasizwe describes himself as a technical and kinetic person, rather than academic, and his progression through higher education required him to repeat a few subjects along the way, which added to the time and cost of his studies. On completion of his academic programme he was unable to graduate due to outstanding fee payments. Consequently, Thulasizwe’s pathway from higher education to employment was indirect, convoluted and extended. He was not deterred by these setbacks and reflected on the opportunities that had arisen from them. For example, his repeat year became an opportunity to take Television Production as an additional major subject, a direction he ultimately chose to pursue because of the employment implications. He explained:

One thing that I've realised... in television sometimes you can... even if you're not employed but you can make means, you can freelance, you can get money. ...the first thing about video is that you can make money out of nothing. With radio you need to be hired by a radio station... or sometimes you need to work at a local radio station, of which they don't pay you.

One of the first things he did when he started earning was to buy himself a camera.

Thulasizwe took some risks, and made active and meaningful choices to ‘*make things happen*’, and in the process he shaped a new career identity (Tomlinson, 2010, 2017). After a couple of years of doing freelance and project work, he was offered a job by someone with whom he had worked on a project during his college experiential learning practicum. His journey is characterised by grit, determination and deliberative agency. He also acknowledges having had some luck along the way, such as inheriting a high-end Mac laptop in lieu of payment for a project, and discovering an unclaimed old tripod in the garage of new accommodation he moved into. He reflected on his journey that led to his *identity shift*:

...the way things happen, it's like every week something new comes up. Then I need to ride from what came, you see. So, I do have dreams and goals but then what I'm trying to say is that I don't just focus on that goal. I always try to look for the opportunities that I can find now, then I decide which one is better. Then I choose one which would take me to another level. As I told you that at first I wanted to do music, but you see where I am right now?

Through engagement with the labour market, Thulasizwe was continually negotiating his response to opportunities. Unlike *Reputation seekers* who have the resources or capitals to be able to 'play the game', *Identity shifters* need to be adaptable, aware and strategic in responding to their context with agility. Unlike *Reputation seekers* who work towards a future vision and use the social structures to 'make it', *Identity shifters* set short-term objectives and work around and within the constraints of social structures '*to make things happen*'.

(iii) Those who 'make application'

Lihle (PHEI 1b, Journalism) grew up in Siyabuswa, a rural town, ±200km north-east of Johannesburg, in the province of Mpumalanga. Her background is one that represents multiple dimensions of disadvantage (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007). She attended a government 'no-fee school'⁹⁷, and looked after a younger brother while her single mother worked as a domestic worker in Johannesburg. After completing school, with few opportunities in Siyabuswa, she sought work and learning opportunities in Johannesburg. In a period of eight years after school, she lurched from one opportunity to another. This included a failed attempt at a government-funded artisan training, which she undertook "*just trying to make my mother happy*", and a short stint doing commission-based work at a call centre, which she left as she did not earn enough to be able to survive financially. She finally got a higher education qualification from a private institution, which was the only college she could afford based on her financial situation. For the three years since graduating with a Diploma in Journalism, she has been unemployed. She moves between Siyabuswa and Johannesburg as finances allow, continually job hunting.

⁹⁷ The government has declared a list of 'no fee schools' based on the economic level of the community around the schools (Department of Basic Education, 2020).

Given Lihle's limited resources, choice is a luxury she does not have. Like other *Hobson's choicers* her decisions are based on coping with the present rather than making any type of career plan. Activities are driven in an *ad hoc* manner by opportunities provided by others. For Lihle, one such opportunity included a short media training programme for young women run by a global NGO. It is a media literacy development programme, yet Lihle said: "...*they promised to find us jobs*". In desperation she reads that promise into everything – and she was not the only participant who came to my research interview with the misconception that there might be a job riding on it. As graduates, these individuals are more "victim" than "responsible agent" (Christie, 2019, p. 335) and having a qualification does not change much for them. They have been led to believe that a qualification will make them employable (Dore, 1976; Lewin et al., 2019), and thus they '*make application*' for jobs. Swayed by the meritocratic discourse that success comes to those who work hard enough, and the promise that a qualification equalises opportunities, Lihle spends more hours and whatever money she has on data to make innumerable job applications. She interprets the lack of employment success as due to her own shortcomings, which she must work at to resolve. Lihle thinks her CV might be the problem [Ntombi (another *Hobson's choicer*) thinks she needs to get a different qualification because the one she has is not working]. Their tenuous social connections are also apparent, as, without employment, they gradually withdraw from social contact with their friends. Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) found that social exclusion due to unemployment has damaging effects on the well-being of individuals. This includes the inability to plan, as much of the world feels to be beyond their control. However, the one thing they can do is to '*make application*' for jobs.

Lihle summed things up, trying to show an attempt at control, but in a mix of desperation and misdirected agency it was more a demonstration of the cognitive disorientation characteristic of Margaret Archer's 'fractured reflexives' (Vandenberghe, 2005):

I'm not sitting just waiting for their response you know. But I do apply a lot. I think it's appropriate for me to go back to them and ask, because I cannot just wait for them. Maybe they do remember me, they're just busy with some other

stuff so I just have to keep on reminding them that I'm still on the line. I'm still waiting, I need this so desperately.

With uncertain career identity and high levels of anxiety associated with exposure to risk, *those who 'make application'* have no clear purpose or direction. Vandenberghe (2005, p. 236) describes them as “passive agents’ who are at the mercy of their social environment”. I have argued that their agency is not passive, although it may seem that way. It is indeed active, deliberate and self-determining agency that seeks opportunities and gets disadvantaged students into and through higher education (Ellery & Baxen, 2015; Pym & Kapp, 2013) despite lack of financial resources that leaves them at the mercy of their social environment. And so, drawing on that same agency, albeit often constrained or misdirected, they continue to *'make application'* (for any job) and live in “a messy and volatile hope” (Ray, 2016, p. 311) that they will eventually make it into a job.

Social mobility refers to the notion that social circumstances can change. This is particularly important in unequal societies and is relevant to people who live in conditions of disadvantage being able to improve their lives. Graduate employability can be a means to achieving social mobility for individuals, but it is not guaranteed. Boni and Walker (2016) state that for higher education to be able to lift people out of poverty and social exclusion, educational attainment has to translate into social mobility. In Table 8, I present a matrix of the enrolment and employment typologies. Using this as a heuristic device it is possible to get an indication of social mobility relative to the typologies. Of the ten *Reputation seekers* I identified, all ten made it successfully into employment in the industry. I identified four *Identity shifters*, and seven *Hobson's choicers* at enrolment. Based on their employment outcomes, it appears that four *Hobson's choicers* have been able to shift and *'make it happen'* (tallying eight *Identity shifters* in the labour market). It is specifically the preparedness to take risk in combination with their agency that enables these individuals to adapt and respond to opportunities – and that distinguishes them from *Hobson's choicers*, of which three remain, and continue to *'make application'*.

Table 8: Summary of graduate typologies at the intersection of higher education and the workplace

Reputation seekers	Those who ‘make it’	Identity shifters	Those who ‘make it happen’	Hobson’s choicers	Those who ‘make application’
	• High levels of agency for self-determination and action • High confidence • Strong media career aspirations and identity • Strong social and cultural (middle-class) capital • Strong capability to connect • HE institution reputation to meet employment end • Use network to build experience and find jobs • High employment success • Ability to move from job to job (sometimes without making application) • Reliance on social capital		• High levels of agency with reason orientation & deliberation • Strong & varied skillset • Adaptable career identity • Emerging identity capital • Capability to collaborate and capability of professional identity formation • HE as means to other opportunities • Slowly builds own network through opportunities • Agile. Prepared to take some risks in response to opportunities to earn • Engages in different types of work together with others. • Self-reliant; expanding social capital		• High levels of agency although constrained • Generally lack confidence • Tenuous career identity • Lack of financial resources. Weak social capital. Poor fit with prevailing social class & culture • Need to develop capabilities to adapt and aspire • HE fuels hope but expectations are unfulfilled • Dwindling social connection • Risk aversion. Unemployed & likelihood of underemployment • Defined by disadvantaged background • Reliant on others for employment & for secure income

8.3.4 What does this mean for employability and higher education policy?

Using a human development and capability approach as an evaluative framework for graduate employability combines a focus on outcomes together with processes and opportunities (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). Linking graduates’ higher education and labour market experiences shows ways in which the capabilities developed in and through higher education correspond with functionings for

graduate employability. From the graduate typologies we see the dynamic interplay between individual agency and social structure that determines employment outcomes (Christie, 2019; Tholen, 2015; Tholen et al., 2013; Tomlinson, 2010). Backward-mapping from the graduates' workplace experiences, it is evident that those outcomes can be aligned with enrolment typologies, influenced by a host of personal and social background factors. Therefore, graduate employability, rather than being only a set of embodied and individual graduate attributes, is a complex and continually evolving personal and social process. It is a process in which individuals manage their educational and labour market opportunities, driven by structural forces and their own agency. In the context of South Africa, historical political and social factors significantly shape personal biographies and influence the way people are able to live. Educational and labour market structures can serve to either reproduce or transform those lives.

The potential of the higher education system to reproduce privilege – and the empirical evidence that it is still doing so (CHEC, 2013; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Walker & Fongwa, 2017) – has implications for higher education in meeting the transformative mandate of government and institutional policies (DHET, 2013). Achieving greater equity and social justice in higher education does not lie only in wider access, which is inclined to legitimate the perception of equal opportunities, while retaining the effects of vertical stratification (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; McCowan, 2016). Equity also does not lie specifically in the skills, knowledge or qualification obtained, even if graduates achieve the attributes that employers need, because the labour market itself is unequal (Hooley, 2015). Access and participation are important, and higher education needs to prepare graduates to understand how political and economic structures work, so that they may be agentic in navigating their own way through the structures (Brown, 2018; Hooley, 2015). For media graduates, this means paying more attention to the capabilities that enable graduates to engage co-operatively in active networking, to collaborate with others, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to respond with agility, in order to provide graduates with employment opportunities as well

as options to earn rather than waiting to be employed. This is particularly important given firstly, the limited capacity in formal employment, and secondly, the changing nature of work in the media industry.

The system caters for *Reputation seekers* who inevitably 'make it'. These individuals contribute to building the institution's reputation on which they have built their success. In turn, they become marketing material for the next generation. *Hobson's choicers* give cause for concern, these graduates, who are at the mercy of the social environment, are the ones for whom access to higher education has been widened, and for whom part of the unique purpose of private institutions exists. Yet higher education is making less difference in enabling their employment opportunities than for others. Institutions ought to be developing all graduates as *Identity shifters* in order to remain employable given the rapid changes taking place in technology and in the media industry.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explain and give meaning to the empirical findings of the study. To do this I described graduate employability in the distinctive spaces of higher education and the labour market. The analysis was located firstly in the space of higher education, to understand the opportunities fostered for employability by private providers, and secondly, in the space of the labour market, where higher education opportunities are mobilised in graduates' employment achievements. In each of these spaces, conversion factors shape people's opportunities for employability differently, influencing their choices, agency and well-being. The opportunities fostered in and through higher education are realised in a range of functionings and further opportunities in the workplace. I used a typology matrix to frame an understanding of how the differences between individuals on enrolment in private higher education translate into different employment outcomes for graduates, mediated by their higher education opportunities. The findings have implications for the development of graduate employability as a means to a range of different ends

that include employment, but are not limited to a job destination only. It also speaks to what private higher education could do better in developing employable graduates, and ensuring that employment outcomes are more equitable for all their graduates.

CHAPTER 9

Reflections, implications and the way forward

Introduction

This research project was conceptualised in response to a concern for high levels of graduate unemployment in South Africa, in the context of widened access and the high expectations made of higher education to contribute to economic development and social mobility. There is a growing discourse internationally, particularly in neoliberal systems, centralising graduate employability as a key purpose of higher education (as discussed in Chapter 3). While there is not much focus on graduate employability in public universities in South Africa, it is becoming prevalent in the expanding private higher education sector. In particular, my focus is on the contribution made by private higher education to human development, focusing on the provision of employment-focused vocational programmes, using media as a particular case (presented in the problem statement in Chapter 1). Regulatory frameworks for both public and private higher education are guided by national policy objectives that are concerned with economic and political development. As such, higher education is understood to be responsible for promoting equality of opportunity to allow economic, social and cultural development (DHET, 2013). Taking a position that education is not only a driver, but also constitutive of development (Boni & Walker, 2016; McCowan, 2019) I used human development and the capability approach as the conceptual frame (presented in Chapter 4) to interrogate the opportunities provided by private higher education for media graduate employability and employment in the workplace, as a contribution to human development.

From a numerical perspective, it has been argued that the relatively low number of unemployed graduates does not constitute a crisis, and the attention in higher education ought rather to lie with issues of skills development (Van der Berg &

Van Broekhuizen, 2012). A higher education qualification may enhance a graduate's chances of finding employment, however, I argue that graduate employability is not an issue of relative numbers, nor is it solely a matter of skills. The rationale for this study is underpinned by a deep concern for the qualitative impact of higher education outcomes on individual lives, and a commitment to a national higher education system that is effective in addressing issues of equality, transformation and social justice, not only as a policy statement but also in practice in the development of people. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the research, what it reveals, the contribution it makes, its limitations, and the directions for future research. I start by revisiting the research questions that directed the study, and relate the empirical findings to addressing the questions.

9.1. Reflections on addressing the research questions

There were four research questions that guided the study. I address each based on a synthesis of the empirical data and the findings. Quantitative data and statistics that measure job destinations and employment are inadequate on their own to provide an understanding of graduate employability. Therefore, the intention in formulating the questions was to supplement the numbers with qualitative data. Acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of graduate employability, the questions ensure that the perspectives of different role players – graduates, higher education staff and employers – are represented, while also accounting for context specificity. Each question foregrounds a particular role player, however, it is not possible to present the perspectives in isolation as they are inextricably linked, and the implications for graduates are woven throughout. The research questions have been acknowledged to a greater or lesser extent in the various chapters, and the more specific sub-questions (2, 3, and 4) bolster the response to the overarching question 1.

9.1.1 The private higher education dimension of graduate employability

Research question 1:

How does private higher education contribute to enhancing equitable opportunities for media graduate employability and well-being?

This thesis challenges the human capital approach and I conceptualise graduate employability not only as an end, but also as a process of human development. Therefore in asking this question, the purpose was to consider the means and ends of development through higher education, where private higher education is the means to graduate employability as and for human development. The intention is to make a contribution to what private higher education is doing, and could do better. Taking a normative approach to evaluations of social justice in higher education is not intended to try to attain absolute justice, but, given the systemic and structural inequalities still evident in the country, to try and achieve outcomes that are more just and fair (Sen, 1992, 2009; Walker, 2012).

In considering graduate employability as an outcome for private higher education, I sought insight on what private providers are doing, how they are doing it (including with whom, by whom and for whom), and for what purpose. This was the focus of the empirical data presented in Chapter 7 (section 7.1) that provided the perspectives of key informants from the institutions, as well as those of graduates, based on the in-depth interviews conducted with these groups of participants. The most notable feature of the provision by private higher education providers is their very close working relationship with industry partners. Closely tied with this is the reputation that institutions build with employers⁹⁸. The institution-industry relationship is one of mutual benefit that determines what the institutions deliver (by way of programme and curriculum); how they deliver it (by way of pedagogy and educators); and where graduates might find employment (mediated by the institution-industry network and the institution serving a

⁹⁸ As will be discussed later, in the response to research question four, 'reputation' is an equally important form of capital for employers (Sadik & Brown, 2020).

recruitment function). With those relationships driving their curriculum and pedagogical strategies, the private providers structure their delivery with a strong work-integrated learning orientation, which embeds practical skills together with the disciplinary knowledge within a range of fields of media practice. This is a human capital orientated approach that serves the interests of employers. As pointed out in section 7.1, what the institutions describe they do, directly matched the graduates' reported experiences. By way of augmenting their personal value to contribute to the workplace, graduates reported feeling confident and satisfied that their institution had prepared them well for employment in their respective fields of practice. This corroborates other empirical studies that have shown the effectiveness of WIL pedagogies in employability development (Freudenberg et al., 2010; Ibrahim & Jaafar, 2017; Jackson, 2015). This was the view of all graduate participants, including those who are unemployed. It appears, therefore, that the processes of private higher education work in favour of equitable outcomes for all graduates. However, this does not provide any indication of how educational attainments translate into employment opportunities or social mobility.

To this end, we need to look at the second, broader interpretation of the question 'how' as the means-end question of graduate employability. This involves consideration of the extent to which the higher education employability outcomes contribute to the personal and social development of each graduate. This response is drawn from the graduates' employment experiences reported in section 6.3. Notwithstanding an employment rate of 85%⁹⁹ for this group of graduates, in various forms of work and occupation, a closer look at the opportunities enabled by that work showed variation amongst graduates, both within and between institutions, with regard to the ease of access to employment, types of jobs, earnings, and lifestyle. The patterns of difference are predominantly class and race-based, not dissimilar to previous South African graduate employment studies (CHEC, 2013; DPRU, 2006; Letseka et al., 2010; Moleke,

⁹⁹ For clarification if this figure seems inconsistent with what was previously reported, the employment rate amongst survey participants was 84%. The employment rate increases to 85% when survey and interview participants are combined.

2003, 2005; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2012; Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Interestingly, unlike those other studies, there was no evidence of distinctive gender differences with regard to these criteria.

Higher education holds the promise of equal opportunities in the labour market. Wanting to validate unemployed graduates' sense of preparedness despite their joblessness, I asked participants what their institutions could do better. They were quick to suggest that they need more skills or knowledge, or more practical experience. In other words, when an individualised discourse of skills and knowledge does not produce the sought-after outcome, the graduate is left to assume responsibility for making up for the deficit (Brown, 2013). Yet the findings show that the possession of skills and knowledge has little influence in securing a job for graduates. In other words, graduates with the same amount of human capital do not have the same employment opportunities. WIL may be effective for the development of individual human capital, however, more of the same does not mitigate the structural barriers that graduates from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds face in accessing employment. Therefore, the extent to which higher education contributes to enhancing graduate employability does not lie solely in the curriculum and the pedagogy, but is influenced by social and structural factors within and beyond higher education, which determine graduate employment outcomes.

9.1.2 The graduate dimension of graduate employability

Research question 2:

What are the capabilities that diverse media graduates value for participation in the workplace and in society?

Research question 3:

What are the factors that enable or constrain media graduates' participation in the workplace?

The purpose of these questions was to interrogate the valued opportunities provided for media graduates both in and through their private higher education.

The findings emerged through the integration of the qualitative and quantitative data, which required graduates to reflect retrospectively on their higher education experience, and to make assessments of its value based on their subsequent labour market experience. According to Sen (1992, 1999) it is possible to base an evaluation of a capability set on the assessment of the chosen combination of functionings from that set. The qualitative data provided an in-depth account of the higher education choices made by students (reported in Chapter 6) and their higher education and labour market experiences (reported in Chapter 7). Methodologically, the sequential nature of the data collection enabled the survey to expand and diversify the graduate perspective, providing a broader exploration of the workplace opportunities (reflected on in more detail later in section 9.2.2). This allowed for a more reliable inter-personal comparison of graduates' capabilities and functionings, to reveal the factors that enable and constrain employment outcomes (reported in Chapter 8).

The analysis of the data in the context of higher education brought the perspectives of higher education staff together with the graduates' experiences. Four key capabilities for employability were identified. The capability of access to vocational education is an architectonic capability that supports a range of other valuable capabilities. This includes the capabilities of connection, professional identity formation, and career navigation that comprise an employability capability set. The analysis showed distinct differences in the freedom students had in the choices they were able to make in their opportunities for accessing private higher education, which influenced variations in the fostering of the other capabilities. It is not a new finding to know that access to higher education is unequal, being significantly easier for middle-class and white students than it is for students from working-class and disadvantaged backgrounds, who are predominantly black (Walker, 2019, 2020a; Wilson-Strydom, 2012). Yet, the fact that private providers enable access by removing barriers that have kept students out of public universities comes with expectations that the higher education itself will contribute significantly to the resources of these individuals. As such, I presented

a typology of three enrolment types (presented in Chapter 8) in private higher education.

A separate analysis in the context of the workplace brought the employers' expectations together with the graduates' experiences to reveal four key functionings. These are the ability to earn a decent livelihood, the ability to connect and collaborate with others, the ability to adapt, and being agile. These functionings correspond with the higher education capability set, and manifest the extent to which capabilities for employability have been achieved. As such, they assess the effectiveness of private higher education in the fostering of the capabilities. With the pedagogical gaze firmly fixed on meeting the demands of employers, the findings show a strong middle-class orientation in the way in which private providers prepare graduates. Assumptions are made that all students will inherently understand and operate within the same mores both within the classroom and the workplace. But, for example, students from poor township schools do not enter higher education possessing or knowing how to operate a laptop. Their skills in presenting work, how they conduct themselves, or even knowing how and when to ask for help, are not equivalent to their Model C school peers to whom these attributes come 'naturally', having been learned already in school. Individuals who carry such disadvantage are not likely to win over a panel of directors in an interview without a lot of specific coaching and preparation. Variations in students' personal, social and economic circumstances give them unequal ability to convert resources into actual freedoms, even if they have the same higher education resources. Therefore given the diversity of students' social and academic backgrounds, inclusive development and ensuring equitable opportunities means that disadvantaged students need more resources and more opportunities to achieve similar, fair and equitable employment ends (Sen, 1992, 1999; Walker, 2006).

The findings show disparities in employment outcomes that are aligned with enrolment choices. As such, I presented a typology of three employment types (presented in Chapter 8). The matrix of enrolment and employment types

contributes to understanding different pathways through higher education and into the labour market. It identifies personal and social conversion factors that enable and constrain employment outcomes. Again, it is not a new finding to know that the outcomes are unequal, however, these findings make a contribution towards what institutions could do better. Firstly, by being aware of ways in which their own structures constrain outcomes differently for diverse graduates, and secondly, by adjusting their processes to be more enabling for students with disadvantages.

9.1.3 The employer dimension of graduate employability

Research question 4:

What are the capabilities that employers in the media industry value (from private higher education graduates)?

The purpose of this question was to understand the employers' perspectives on the employability of graduates. The drive for a supply of graduates that meets labour market demands dominates the employability discourse. Yet the literature on employers' expectations and actual needs is relatively limited, leaving higher education institutions chasing the approval of a rhetorically dissatisfied collective of employers (Cai, 2013). By understanding the specific needs, expectations and recruitment processes of media employers, the findings contribute towards a broader awareness of the industry as a whole, and what employers too can do better in enabling more equitable employment outcomes for graduates.

In Chapter 5, I explained the methodology of the sampling procedure for the selection of employers. Although it was only a small sample, it did represent a range of fields of media linked to the graduates' qualifications (see Table 6 in Chapter 7). The analysis of employers' recruitment processes and the attributes they look for in new recruits (Chapter 7, section 7.2 and 7.3) showed, first and foremost, that media employers do not recruit new graduates other than into internships. While this counts as a job, and is a necessary portal to employment, on the whole, internships do not enable graduates to earn a decent living. In

addition, in contrast to the skills gap discourse, the data showed that media employers do not, in fact, expect higher education to produce job-ready graduates. This is primarily due to the dynamic shifts in media work pre-empted by rapid changes in digital technology. Instead, employers prefer to custom-train employees in their own specific skill requirements through internships.

Finding that internships play such an important role to employers is important in preparing graduates' for that route as a transition into the industry. Neither higher education staff nor graduates seemed to be aware of the important role played by internships for access to employment, seeing them merely as an option that graduates apply for when job hunting – and more of a default that is taken if they are unable to find a proper job. These findings also have social justice implications because many internships are socially and economically exclusive, and exploitative. The findings showed that employers select interns according to their relationship with an institution and its reputation. Therefore participation is not equitable for all graduates. Secondly, with such a low stipend, working-class and disadvantaged graduates cannot afford to participate in internships, and yet the alternative is to be unemployed. The low stipend advantages middle-class graduates whose families support them financially, while they also benefit from building the experience that will make them more employable. Finally, both graduates and employers indicated that many internships are exploitative in terms of the level and quantity of work given to interns to do. In some, the work is well below graduate level and more like a production line. In these instances, graduates are competing with non-graduates for positions. In instances where the work requires high levels of skill, interns are being paid a low stipend for work that benefits the organisation economically, and ought to be done by a properly paid employee. These findings indicate a need for more specific and detailed research on internships and graduate employability.

Understanding the attributes that employers value and seek out in new recruits contributed to identifying the valued workplace capabilities and functionings discussed in section 9.1.2 above. Employers value employees who are

adaptable, agile and willing to learn. They also look for individuals who ‘fit’ the culture of their organisation. They view a higher education qualification as a proxy for trainability and other important personal attributes, such as interpersonal and communication skills, critical thinking, tech-savviness, time management, and so on. All of these point to attributes that favour employment of middle-class graduates whose higher education was able to build on a foundation of good schooling so that they have honed these skills over time and gained the confidence to apply them in new and different contexts.

The perception that a qualification is what opens the door to employment, makes it appear as though all graduates¹⁰⁰ have an equal opportunity to get an interview. However, employers use their networks for recruitment, and here institutional reputation, and the higher education institution-industry relationship play an important role. Employers’ involvement with private providers serves their own interests. It enables them access to a pool of skilled talent. This means, in an environment where employers are uncertain about rapidly-changing technologies, they are able to draw on newly trained graduates with specialised vocational training and skills in new technologies. The relationship with particular institutions also enables an efficient recruitment process for employers as they can hand-pick recruits who are a good cultural fit. For higher education institutions, this “narrow talent model” (Sadik & Brown, 2020, p. 98) means they can tick off a successful job placement. However, it denies opportunities to many skilled and competent graduates to show the contribution they could make to the company.

Overall, the findings from employers show that the employers’ own processes have the potential to create structural barriers to graduate employment. It was evident that employment opportunities are greater for graduates from elite

¹⁰⁰ Employers said they do not distinguish between public and private institutions as a criterion for recruitment. All the employers were aware of the private institutions, most had engaged with some private institutions in some way (either with an experiential learning placement, graduate showcase, or internship), and most of the employers recognised private institution graduates as having better practical skill application than graduates from theoretically orientated programmes at public universities.

institutions than they are for those from non-elite institutions, and also for middle-class graduates from non-elite institutions than their working-class peers.

9.2 Further reflections and recommendations

In this second part of the chapter I take a step back from the detail of the content to reflect on the study as a whole. Broadly speaking, this study contributes to the expanding literature on higher education and human development. Framed by a less frequently used conceptual framework, the capability approach was valuable as a lens for evaluating higher education, and revealed the relationship between employability and capabilities. The identification of employability capabilities and their corresponding workplace functionings for media graduates, has the potential to contribute to higher education policy and practice beyond instrumental outcomes. In this way, the thesis also makes a contribution to the wide body of work on higher education and graduate employability. In the context of South Africa the study specifically adds to the limited body of research on private higher education, and it takes the literature on private higher education in Africa forward, not only by providing current data, but also by responding to questions that hang heavily over the sector regarding its legitimacy and validity in the broader higher education sector. Next, I give consideration to the theoretical and methodological contributions and limitations of the study, as well as the broader implications for further research and for private higher education policy.

9.2.1 Theoretical reflections

This study makes a theoretical contribution through the use of human development and the capability approach as a framework to interrogate graduate employability. Without dismissing the human capital and skills discourse, the study shows that these are insufficient to ensure fair employment outcomes for graduates. Therefore, in considering the contribution of private higher education to human development and social change, it takes a broader perspective of graduates, beyond the notion of human capital and economic ends (Walker, 2012). Rather than using jobs as a measure of higher education outcomes, it

uses capabilities to make interpersonal comparisons to evaluate the equitability of graduate employment opportunities. The human development lens adds a nuanced understanding to employment outcomes, by focusing on employment as a means to social mobility and well-being rather than as an end in itself. Graduate employment rates of above 80% make an impressive record for an institution, and certainly enhance its reputation. However, it is also important that those jobs enable graduates to earn a decent livelihood and enjoy quality of life. The study shows the reality of underemployment for many graduates, particularly those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, which enables individuals to survive rather than thrive. Institutions, therefore, ought to be concerned not only with the number of graduates who are employed, but also those who are unemployed, and underemployed.

By positioning employability at the intersection of higher education and the labour market, the study contributes an original retrospective view on graduate employability at the point where the processes of higher education converge with their labour market application. Theorising the graduate typologies shows that access to an institution does not, in and of itself, create equal learning opportunities for students. Nor does the delivery of high quality WIL pedagogy enable equal employment opportunities in the workplace. These typologies show the significant influence of social and structural conversion factors on the learning and employment opportunities that individuals have, as well as on their agency freedom in the choices they make in realising those opportunities. This reveals the potential for institutions to unwittingly (or not) reproduce privilege and disadvantage, and highlights the importance of the removal (or circumnavigation) of structural barriers to employment rather than placing the responsibility on the individual to fit the system. It further highlights the need for additional higher education support in the face of variation in student outcomes. Acknowledging that this is not a quick or simple solution to issues of unemployment, nor one that institutions can resolve beyond their own system and structures, what the study shows is that agency plays a significant role in enabling graduates to navigate

their way despite systemic constraints, and is therefore an important and worthwhile outcome of higher education, albeit insufficient on its own.

Unlike most employability studies, internationally and in South Africa, which are conducted in public universities, this study is situated in the specific context of private higher education. Although the findings are not generalisable, lessons can be drawn for other institutions and higher education generally, regarding WIL pedagogies, the institution-industry network, and the potential of a human development and capabilities framing to advance equality and social justice in higher education. The study highlights specific capabilities of connection and identity formation, and specific abilities of collaboration, adaptability and agility for career navigation and enhancing employability. These are highly applicable in a digital and inter-connected working world, which makes them relevant to the reality of employability in fields beyond media. What this study also shows is that as the private sub-sector increases its stake in higher education in the country generally, and with the significant increase in enrolment in private institutions, not only in absolute terms but also relative to public universities, the contribution of private higher education towards graduate employability outputs can no longer be considered “negligible” or excluded from investigation (Van Broekhuizen, 2016, p. 1).

The data collection produced a rich volume of data for analysis. As I reflect on the findings and what it means for private institutions and graduates going forward, I am aware that another round of coding, or alternative coding methods, may have revealed different capabilities for reporting with slightly different conclusions. Thus, I am aware that the study also has limitations. The methodological ones will be discussed in the next section. Theoretically, any approach would have its limitations, and I chose the capability approach aware of the critique of its shortcomings in explaining causal mechanisms when evaluating advantage or well-being (Martins, 2006; Powell & McGrath, 2019). As such, Sen (2009) and Robeyns (2017) propose that the approach could link with other theories to fill this gap. Herein lies a potential limitation of this study, in that

I chose not to draw on other theoretical constructs. I gave consideration to the supplementation of conceptual tools from other theorists such as Bourdieu and Archer, which would have been relevant to theorising the findings of this study. However, I felt that human development as embedded within the capability approach provided a sufficiently robust and relevant framework to adequately address the title and scope of this study, and to be able to make a contribution to higher education policy considerations. Addressing the merits and limitations of different approaches to evaluations of social policies, and rationalising the value of a general approach, Sen (1999, p. 86) states: “It is this combination of foundational analysis and pragmatic use that gives the capability approach its extensive reach”. As such, I acknowledge a limitation that the analysis and findings remain normative rather than explanatory. Greater theorisation of the findings, particularly related to agency and structure, are an area for further research.

9.2.2 Methodological reflections

The body of South African research on graduate destinations has predominantly made use of quantitative data from surveys conducted with final year students as they transition into the workplace. The wider employability literature also includes qualitative studies to incorporate a depth of understanding on graduates’ experiences of the transition. The use of a mixed methods design in this study, was a considered and purposeful methodological choice (discussed in Chapter 5). Firstly, it weighted the volume of data and voice in favour of graduates, who are the central role players in the study. Secondly, it added breadth to the depth of the graduate data. The qualitative data from interviews alone, even if conducted with more graduates, would not have provided the range of diversity of graduate experiences that I was able to elicit through the survey. While I could control the interview sample selection to a certain extent to ensure fair representation of variables such as geographic location and institution, despite my intentions, the same did not apply to ensuring equal representation of those who are employed and unemployed, due to the different interpretations individuals have of what it means to be unemployed (reported in Chapter 6,

section 6.3). The merit of the survey was to expand the graduate sample and enable an exploratory process. The early analysis of the qualitative data contributed to the construction of the survey (reported in Chapter 5). Therefore, relying on qualitative data collection alone would not have ensured a diverse and representative sample of graduates, nor the breadth of data on their employment and post-graduation experiences.

By the same token, to have used quantitative data only would have provided breadth of data at the cost of depth. From the interviews I was able to elicit details about the participants' higher education experiences that I was then able to correlate with the data from the institutions. Some interview participants gave me extremely detailed accounts of their respective journeys in higher education, in finding work, and about their employment experiences. In addition to the insights, this also gave me information that I could cross-reference with institutions and employers. In the interviews I was able to probe for more detail on unique and interesting issues, particularly in trying to understand what made the difference between someone being employed or being unemployed.

A further value of the sequential design, was the opportunity to adjust the questionnaire design to follow up on (unplanned) information that arose through the interviews. This applied specifically to the role of internships, which, prior to the interviews, I had not realised were so significant. I had concern about the two phases of this design and the response I would get from graduates for each, particularly as I was entirely reliant on the institutions to mediate the communication with them. On reflection, I was extremely fortunate to find how efficient the institutions' systems of communication with their graduates are. I see this as partly due to the recruitment function played by institutions that makes graduates willing to read and respond to communications they receive from their institutions.

There were also limitations to the research design and methodology. These were disclosed in Chapter 5, and relate to the lack of generalisability and transferability

of the findings. They are limitations that are inherent to the design, of which I was aware in advance, and took into account when planning the study. Further to that, as the end of the study draws closer, and I reflect on the entire process in the context of the findings, I am aware of my shortcomings in the statistical analysis of the quantitative data, which was largely restricted to descriptive statistics. I am not concerned that this affected the substance of the overall findings in any way, and remain committed to the value of having used a mixed methods design (Maxwell, 2010). However, I do feel that the use of more rigorous inferential statistical analysis would have contributed to understanding the significance of race, class and gender as conversion factors, and also added value in determining the possible correlation between variables for unemployed individuals. That said, I found the volume of data generated by the mixed methods design somewhat overwhelming to manage and time consuming to analyse, and having more of it, given the time and space constraints of the study, may have served to complicate rather than elucidate. In addition, the fact that this level of inference has not been included in this study, does not preclude it yet being done as further research.

9.2.3 Reflections on further research

Some recommendations for further research relating to the theoretical and methodological limitations have been mentioned above. Other suggestions for further research arising from this study include the following:

- As I have alluded to previously, interesting data emerged on the phenomenon of internships, their role and value for employability. The scope of this study precluded this from deeper investigation or analysis, and this is a topic worth further investigation.
- Equitable employment outcomes are unlikely to be possible if the WIL pedagogies favour particular graduates and institutions. Further investigation could start with research on the institutional processes, particularly pertaining to accessing experiential learning placements, and including alternative forms of collaborative experience.

- Given the findings of the value of developing abilities of connection and collaboration, adaptability and agility, and their potential role in career identity formation and ‘making things happen’ in the workplace, further research is warranted on how these capabilities can be developed by private media institutions.
- Further research on career guidance for the *Hobson’s choicer* typology during the course of higher education, may be able to provide insight as to how institutions can help develop agency and shift career identity to expand employment outcomes for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

9.2.4 Implications for private higher education providers

Policy that is located in a human development and capability approach would prioritise expanding graduates’ choices so that, beyond having a qualification, graduates are equipped with agency to make use of opportunities to secure decent employment and to participate actively in society. Importantly, some nuance is required in the practical application of this approach. Guided by human development values, students/graduates would not be viewed as a homogeneous group, but differences in individuals and their backgrounds would be taken into account in the pedagogy. Institutions would need to recognise that some students require more resources than others in order to achieve particular outcomes. Also, effective participation for diverse students needs to take into account differences in individuals’ financial and social resources. While access to a private institutions undoubtedly gives students some advantages, inclusive access may require paying specialised attention to those with disadvantages. The findings of the study have implications for the employability policies and practices of private providers. Some suggestions are provided below.

- The primary drive of private providers is to prepare graduates for formal employment. Therefore, notwithstanding their progressive pedagogies, dynamic curricula, and the currency of the teaching and learning enabled by media practitioner-educators, more could be done to prepare graduates for a range of alternative ways to work and earn. This ought to include freelance work, which is growing in the South African creative industries (Lutshaba et

al., 2020), or developing abilities to collaborate with others as a means to enterprise and earning, such as the creative innovators in Cape Town (Snowball, 2020). Also, for example, instead of going to a host for experiential learning, students could form working co-operatives with each other. Such enterprises could include investigating needs in township areas and contexts other than upmarket organisations and suburbs. These alternatives ought not to be default options for graduates who are unable to find a job, but rather a valued career path and earning opportunities that graduates specifically prepare for. Preparing for informal employment would also require helping graduates develop the abilities to be adaptable and agile, and to be able to manage risk.

- In the same vein, entrepreneurship education ought not to be an add-on module or default option. Nor should it be conflated with self-employment. Entrepreneurship is a particular form of self-employment that requires capital and involves risk in running a business. It does not equate to freelance work or other forms of “own account” work (Lutshaba et al., 2020, p.18). If institutions do offer entrepreneurship education, they need to take into account the social and economic circumstances in which graduates might set up their own business (DeJaeghere & Baxter, 2014). And, as mentioned, it is worth considering preparing graduates for entrepreneurship and enterprise opportunities in the township economy.
- Beyond the development of skills and knowledge, the development of agency in individuals is important. This is not an additional outcome or attribute. It is already inherent in higher education pedagogies and student development (Walker, 2006) – but could be done better, particularly in assisting disadvantaged students in directing their existing agency more appropriately.
- Given the comments on the experiential learning practicum made by employers and graduates, there would be value for institutions to re-examine this element apropos the duration, the authenticity of experience, and the actual participation by graduates who are unable to find placement for themselves. Diverse students have different pedagogical requirements. This

is particularly important when it comes to support for disadvantaged students in the experiential learning practicum module.

- There is no “royal road” (Sen, 1999, p. 85) to employability. Higher education cannot do everything in bearing the burden of high unemployment in the country. The purpose of higher education is not purely in service of preparing human capital for employers’ needs. Institutions ought to make expectations of industry too as to the role of employers in training graduates for their own specific needs, and in addressing the purpose and nature of internships.

Conclusion

Graduate unemployment is not an issue that is easily resolved, and its multi-dimensional nature means that the solution does not lie with higher education alone. What this study has shown is that deeply entrenched historical social and economic barriers are still having an impact on people’s lives despite a democratic dispensation and a range of regulatory reforms. Macro-level social and structural constraints are beyond the ambit of higher education to address. However, private institutions have a particular opportunity, through the delivery of their vocational programmes, to contribute to the employability of a diverse range of graduates. It is important, therefore, that they ensure that, to the extent that they can address their own systemic constraints or unfair practices, they do so. The value of the human development and capability approach in this study has been to show that good workplace preparation is neither sufficient nor good enough for everyone, particularly if it assumes all graduates are the same and sets them up to compete with each other in a race that has already been won by those with a (middle-class) head-start. The dynamic shifts in the media industry expose many new work opportunities that show how important the attributes of agility and adaptability are for graduates. The future for private higher education in preparing employable graduates and contributing to human development is to prepare graduates to be agentic and able to navigate in uncertainty rather than relying on the certainty that they will get a job, which may possibly only qualify them to stand with a placard on a street corner.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Table of survey participants

Appendix B: Comparative table of fees

Appendix C: EMS Ethics approval letter

Appendix D: Institution information letter

Appendix E: Graduate information letter and invitation

Appendix F: Graduate interview participant online response form

Appendix G: Participant consent form

Appendix H: Employer information letter

Appendix I: Interview schedules (graduates, institutions, employers)

Appendix J: Graduate survey invitation

Appendix K: Graduate survey

APPENDIX A: Table of survey participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	High school	Private HE institution	Qual Level	Subject specialisation	Year of completion	Age (in 2019):	Campus	City (currently resident)	Current employment status	Monthly household income (while in HE)	First-gen HE
1	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
2	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	23	DBN	Durban	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
3	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2013	27	CT	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
4	Female	Coloured	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2016	26	CT	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
5	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
6	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2018	23	DBN	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
7	Male	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Multimedia	2016	24	DBN	Durban	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
8	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2016	24	DBN				No - both parents
9	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2015	25	Pretoria	Pretoria	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
10	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
11	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1b	Degree	Copywriting	2013	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	No - 1 parent
12	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2017	23	Pretoria	Pretoria	Freelance	>R50 000	No - both parents
13	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Multimedia	2017	24	CT	Cape Town	Freelance	<R30 000	Yes
14	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2013	27	JHB	Älmhult, Sweden	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
15	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	24	Pretoria	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
16	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2017	26	CT	Cape Town	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
17	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2014	27	JHB	Pretoria	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
18	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2016	24	CT	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
19	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	No - both parents
20	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Brand Communication	2018	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	No - both parents
21	Female	Black	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2016	26	JHB	Pretoria	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
22	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2016	47	Pretoria	Cape Town	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
23	Female	Indian	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	23	DBN	Durban	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
24	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Multimedia	2016	24	DBN	Cape Town	Employed	>R50 000	No - both parents
25	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2016	25	JHB	JHB	Freelance	>R50 000	No - both parents
26	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Television Production	2013	26	DBN	Durban	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
27	Female	Coloured	Govt-Township	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2015	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
28	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2015	25	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
29	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Video Production	2014	28	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
30	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Film & Television	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
31	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Public Relations	2015	30	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
32	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2015	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
33	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Graphic Design	2015	25	JHB	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
34	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Video Production	2014	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
35	Male	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing	2014	26	JHB	Durban	Employed	>R50 000	No - both parents
36	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Public Relations	2015	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
37	Male	Coloured	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Video Production	2015	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
38	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2015	28	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes

39	Male	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing	2014	32	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
40	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Journalism	2015	25	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
41	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	27	Pretoria	Cape Town	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
42	Female	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Graphic Design	2014	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
43	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production	2016	30	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
44	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
45	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
46	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Journalism & Radio Production	2015	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
47	Male	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 2	Diploma	Video Production	2017	28	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
48	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2016	26	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
49	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2017	25	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
50	Male	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Animation & Design	2014	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
51	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
52	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2015	26	CT	London, UK	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
53	Male	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2015	23	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
54	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2017	28	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
55	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Intern	<R30 000	Yes
56	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
57	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Graphic Design	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	No - both parents
58	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2016	26	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
59	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2017	25	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
60	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Public Relations & Journalism	2015	27	JHB	JHB	Freelance	R30 - R50 000	Yes
61	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Journalism	2014	27	JHB	JHB	Intern	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
62	Male	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production	2016	27	JHB	JHB	Unpaid volunteer	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
63	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2014	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - both parents
64	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production	2015	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
65	Male	White	Private	PHEI 2	Degree	Media Operations	2016	27	JHB	Berlin, Germany	Freelance	>R50 000	No - 1 parent
66	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Public Relations	2015	25	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
67	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Video Production, Journalism, Public Relations	2015	30	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - both parents
68	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Television Production	2014	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
69	Male	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Graphic Design	2018	27	CT	Cape Town	Freelance	<R30 000	Yes
70	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Freelance	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
71	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Game Graphics & Multimedia	2016	44	CT	Cape Town	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
72	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production	2017	26	DBN	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
73	Male	White	Private	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Game Graphics & Multimedia	2012	27	CT	Cape Town	Employed	<R30 000	No - both parents
74	Female	White	Private	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Print Design & Publishing	2018	22	CT	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
75	Male	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Animation	2014	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
76	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Graphic Design	2018	20	CT	Cape Town	Freelance	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
77	Male	Coloured	Govt-Model C	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Visual Design	2018	25	CT	Cape Town	Intern	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
78	Male	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2011	29	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	No - 1 parent
79	Male	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Audio Visual		32	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
80	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Graphic Design	2017	25	DBN	Port Shepstone	Unemployed	R30 - R50 000	Yes

81	Female	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Journalism	2015	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
82	Male	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing	2015	28	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	No - both parents
83	Female	Coloured	Govt-Model C	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Web Design & Animation	2019	29	CT	Cape Town	Freelance	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
84	Female	Coloured	Govt-Township	PHEI 2	Diploma	Advertising	2016	26	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
85	Male	Non-SA	Govt-No fee	PHEI 3	Higher Cert	Game Design	2018	22	CT	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
86	Female	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing	2014	26	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
87	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2016	25	JHB	JHB	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
88	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Journalism	2018	23	JHB	JHB	Freelance	<R30 000	Yes
89	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Multimedia	2015	25	DBN	Durban	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
90	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
91	Male	Black	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2016	25	Pretoria	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	No - both parents
92	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2015	28	JHB	Edinburgh	Unemployed	>R50 000	No - 1 parent
93	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2016	24	Pretoria	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
94	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Self-employed	>R50 000	No - 1 parent
95	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2013	27	DBN	Durban	Employed	>R50 000	Yes
96	Female	Black	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Multimedia Design	2015	27	DBN	Durban	Employed	>R50 000	No - both parents
97	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2013	29	CT	Cape Town	Employed	<R30 000	No - both parents
98	Male	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2016	22	Pretoria	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
99	Female	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Public Relations	2016	35	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
100	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2013	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	>R50 000	No - 1 parent
101	Female	White	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2017	24	JHB	Cape Town	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - 1 parent
102	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2013	31	Pretoria	Durban	Employed	R30 - R50 000	Yes
103	Male	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Copywriting	2017	23	CT	JHB	Freelance	>R50 000	No - both parents
104	Male	Coloured	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	23	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	>R50 000	Yes
105	Female	White	Govt-Model C	PHEI 1a	Degree	Graphic Design	2018	24	Pretoria	Pretoria	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
106	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing	2016	24	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
107	Female	Black	Private	PHEI 1a	Degree	Visual Communication	2017	26	Pretoria	Pretoria	Employed	R30 - R50 000	No - both parents
108	Female	Black	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Marketing	2015	28	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
109	Male	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production, Journalism & Public Relations	2015	28	JHB	Whittlesea, EC	Unemployed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
110	Female	Indian	Govt-Model C	PHEI 2	Diploma	Public Relations & Journalism	2014	27	JHB	JHB	Employed	<R30 000	Yes
111	Female	Black	Govt-No fee	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2017	24	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
112	Male	Black	Private	PHEI 2	Diploma	Radio Production	2014	26	JHB	Pretoria	Employed	<R30 000	No - 1 parent
113	Male	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Public Relations	2016	25	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes
114	Male	Black	Govt-Township	PHEI 1b	Diploma	Journalism	2018	26	JHB	JHB	Unemployed	<R30 000	Yes

APPENDIX B: Comparative table of fees

Annual fee structure for Graphic Design¹ programmes for the first year of study in 2020.

Institution	Qualification	Tuition fees per year	Additional fees
Private HEI 1a	Bachelor degree (Graphic Design)	R95 000 (incl. R12 000 deposit)	Application fee: R700
Private HEI 1b	Diploma (Public Relations)	R27 490	Application fee: R150 Reg fee: R1 600
Private HEI 2	Diploma (Graphic Design)	R53 680 (incl. textbooks)	No application fee Reg fee: R1 000
Private HEI 3	Higher Certificate (Graphic Design)	R76 800	Reg fee: R3 000

Public (University of Johannesburg)	Bachelor degree (Graphic Design)	R46 587 (incl. R3 870 deposit)	Application fee: R200 Reg fee: R610 ICT levy: R430 Equip: R6 000–R9 000
	Diploma (Public Relations)	R28 290	As above but no equipment
Public (Tshwane University of Technology)	Diploma (Graphic Design)	R31 240 (2019) This programme is being phased out	Application fee: R240 Reg fee: R1 500 Confirmation payment: R500 Extracurricular fee: R580 Teaching & Learning equip maintenance fee: R150 Student services fee: R280
Public (Wits)	Bachelor degree (Digital Arts)	R47 440	Application fee: R100

¹ Where an institution does not offer Graphic Design I have selected a cognate design programme e.g. Digital Arts, or alternatively Public Relations to provide a general idea of the public-private institution comparison

APPENDIX C: EMS Ethics approval letter



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

22-Nov-2018

Dear **Ms Fenella Somerville**

Ethics Clearance: **Capabilities for media graduate employability: the case of private higher education**

Principal Investigator: **Ms Fenella Somerville**

Department: **Centre for Development Support Department (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2018/1358**

This ethical clearance number is valid from **22-Nov-2018** to **21-Nov-2023**. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nel', is written over a large, diagonal, semi-transparent red watermark that says 'APPROVED'.

Dr. Petrus Nel

Chairperson: Ethics Committee Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences

Economics Ethics Committee

Office of the Dean: Economic and Management Sciences

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P.O. Box/Posbus 339, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa/Soud Afrika

www.ufs.ac.za



APPENDIX D: Institution information letter

4 November 2018

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Fenella Somerville and I am a doctoral research fellow at the University of the Free State. I am conducting a research project titled *Capabilities for media graduate employability: the case of private higher education*. The study aims to research employability of media graduates from private higher education institutions based on graduate experiences in the workplace and in society. The intention is to collect data from graduates and staff from the institutions, as well as from media industry employers. (There is no intention to assess the academic programmes.)

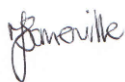
I have selected three different private higher education institutions that offer media-related programmes from which graduate and staff participants will be drawn. The project is a mixed methods design that will comprise an initial phase of interviews with all categories of participants, followed by a survey conducted electronically with graduates. I would like to include graduates from your media programmes from the past five years. Staff participants would preferably include an educator, an academic manager and a senior manager.

My research proposal has been approved by the Faculty Research Committee and I am currently awaiting ethics clearance from the Faculty Ethics Committee. Once all the official processes are complete I will be able to provide you with the official details and documentation. The reason for this communication is to make an initial enquiry as to your amenability.

I am an educator with many years' experience in private education including private higher education. Private higher education is an under-researched area generally and in South Africa specifically. This study will make a contribution to expanding knowledge on the sub-sector in the dynamic and rapidly changing higher education landscape in our country. Researching the employability experiences of graduates will hopefully contribute to addressing the critical issue of youth and graduate unemployment in our country.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require further information on my research project. I hope that my request will receive your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards



Fenella Somerville

Email: fenella@mweb.co.za / Tel: 083 288 7278

APPENDIX E: Graduate information letter and invitation

15 March 2019

Dear Graduate

You are invited to participate in a research project on media graduates' employment experiences in the workplace. I would love to hear your story.

My name is Fenella Somerville and I am a Doctoral Research Fellow in the SARCHI Chair in Higher Education and Human Development Research Programme at the University of the Free State. ***I am conducting research on the employability of media graduates from private higher education institutions. The purpose of the study is to investigate the opportunities and experiences of media graduates in the workplace and the factors that enable and/or constrain graduate employability.*** Based on a better understanding of your experiences, this study will contribute to current knowledge on the preparation and employment of media graduates for the media workplace.

I am looking to interview media students who graduated in the five years from 2013 to 2017. You are receiving this invitation via the database of your institution that has identified you as being within that group of graduates. The interview will ask about choices you have made regarding your field of study and selection of higher education institution, as well as your experiences in finding employment and being employed. The interview will take about an hour.

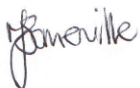
Please click on the following link to indicate your willingness to be interviewed. This will take you to a short online form that is quick and easy to complete and the information will assist me with the selection of 20 interview participants. <http://surveys.ufs.ac.za/evasys/online.php?p=P551D>

Please note that the identity of interview participants will be kept anonymous. Participants will not be able to be identified and the information provided will be kept confidential. If you incur transport costs for attending the interview this can be refunded by arrangement.

It is important for you to know that this research project has been approved by the University of the Free State, and the research data and results will be used primarily for academic purposes.

If you have any concerns or queries regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the details below. I hope you might be willing to participate and look forward to the interviews.

Thanking you in anticipation.



Researcher: Fenella Somerville / Email: fenella@mweb.co.za / Tel: 083 288 7278

Research supervisor: Prof Melanie Walker / Email: walkermj@ufs.ac.za / Tel: +27 (0)51 401 7020

APPENDIX F: Graduate interview participant online response form

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
March 2019

EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH PROJECT 01
GRADUATE RESPONSE

☐ Activate contrast mc

1 Media graduate employability

1.1 I AM WILLING TO BE INTERVIEWED ☐ YES ☐ NO

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION IS FOR CONTACT PURPOSES ONLY. IT WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND YOU WILL NOT BE IDENTIFIABLE IN THE RESEARCH.

1.2 Name:

1.3 Cellphone no.:

1.4 Email:

1.5 City where currently resident:

1.6 I prefer to be contacted on... (choose 1)

☐ Phone call ☐ WhatsApp ☐ SMS ☐ Email

1.7 Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

Please complete the following information relevant to your qualification:

1.8 Higher education institution attended:

1.9 Qualification obtained:

1.10 Year of completion

1.11 Monthly household income level while you were studying:

☐ Less than R30 000 ☐ R30 000 to R50 000 ☐ Over R50 000

1.12 Are you currently working (including unpaid work)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

1.13 Current work status:

☐ Employed ☐ Self-employed ☐ Voluntary work ☐ Internship
☐ Unemployed

1.14 Terms of employment, if employed. Mark up to 2 items that apply to your current work position:

☐ Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐ Permanent ☐ Temporary

1.15 Type of organisation where you work:

☐ State owned enterprise ☐ Private sector
☐ Public sector ☐ NGO
☐ Community-based organisation ☐ Other (please specify below)

1.16 If you answered Other (above) please specify the type of organisation where you work:

1.17 Core business of your place of work:

Submit

APPENDIX G: Participant consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H: Employer information letter

2 June 2019

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Fenella Somerville and I am a doctoral research fellow at the University of the Free State. I am conducting a research project titled ***Capabilities for media graduate employability: the case of private higher education***. The purpose of the study is to investigate the opportunities and experiences of media graduates and their employability.

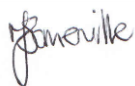
The study is focused on media graduates from a selection of private higher education institutions, and interviews have been conducted with a sample of graduates to understand their experiences in the workplace since graduating. My intention is to supplement the graduate data with information from higher education institutions pertaining to the preparation of graduates, as well as from employers to understand their expectations of graduates and the attributes that make employees valuable contributors to the workplace.

In obtaining data from employers in the media industry, I would like to conduct an interview with someone in the organization who is involved with appointing and working with new recruits. My intention is to include a random selection of employers that represent a range of sub-fields within media, and that differ in size and the sector that they serve. The focus is not on any particular sub-field, and the intention is not to compare or evaluate organisations in any way but rather to understand the general needs and expectations media employers have of the graduates they employ. The research data and results will be used primarily for academic purposes. All information will be kept confidential and all organisations and participants will be anonymous.

This study will make a contribution to expanding knowledge on private higher education as well as to policies on media graduate employability. It may potentially also assist your organisation to understand what makes graduates more employable, and on a wider scale contribute to addressing the critical issue of youth and graduate unemployment in our country.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require further information on my research project.

Kind regards



Researcher: Fenella Somerville

UFS Student number: 2017476116

Email: fenella@mweb.co.za

Contact number: 083 288 7278

Research supervisor: Prof Melanie Walker

APPENDIX I: Interview schedules

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: GRADUATES

Background:

- a. Where did you grow up?
- b. What type of high school did you attend?
- c. What is your parents' level of education?
- d. Parents' occupations?
- e. Are you the first person in your immediate family to go to university?

Why were you interested in participating in this research project?

Employment:

1. Tell me about your employment/work journey since graduating?
Time taken to find job/work?
Job search strategies?
How many jobs since graduating?
 2. In your view, what factors have made you a successful applicant? / Feedback on unsuccessful applications?
To what extent do you think your qualification / institution contributed to you finding work?
 3. How relevant do you think your qualification is for your current job?
Do you have the necessary skills and knowledge to do your job?
 4. Based on your experience, what do you feel your institution (i) did well, and (ii) needs to do better, in preparing you for work and life after higher education?
What are the factors that have restricted you finding work?
 5. What have you added to your workplace that wasn't there before?
 6. What did you learn in the workplace (in job hunting) that you did not know before?
 7. What role (if any) do you think work in media has to play in society?
How does your work contribute to society, if at all?
How do you feel your work benefits you?
-

Higher education:

8. In what ways did your higher education prepare you for the working world?
work experience? / Internships? / Interview skills? / CV? / Career support
 9. Why did you choose to study at a private higher education institution?
How would you describe the reputation of this institution in the media industry?
Did the institution's reputation contribute to your employment experience?
 10. Why did you choose to study media / this particular programme?
 11. Did you work while you were studying?
 12. What is your dream job / career?
 13. What are your classmates doing? What were their choices w.r.t. work, study, jobs etc.?
-

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: INSTITUTION – Key informants

Preliminary questions:

- a. What is your (i) position and (ii) role in the institution?
 - b. How long have you been working in this institution?
 - c. Why do you choose to work in private higher education?
 - d. Fees for the relevant programmes?
 - e. Profile of average student?
-

1. What mechanisms do you have in place to prepare your graduates for employment?
[WIL? WBL? Practicum? Career choice/guidance?]
How do you ensure your graduates are industry-ready?
[career related support? CV, interview prep, career guidance?]
2. What attributes make a successful graduate from this institution? Skills?
3. What factors do you think contribute to a graduate's success in the media industry?
4. Does the institution take any responsibility to assist or support graduates in finding employment? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
5. Are there mechanisms in place by which your graduates' experiences feeds back into your programmes?
6. In what ways is media education in this institution responding to changes in the field of media? What more should happen?
7. How would you describe the relationship of your institution with employers in the industry? [Is this NB? What contributes to this?]
8. Based on what you know, what do you think employers / media employers are looking for in graduates?
9. What role, if any, do you think employers play in the education of graduates?
10. In your view, what role do you think private higher education plays in higher education in SA? Is private HE able to address previous disadvantage? If so, how?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: MEDIA EMPLOYERS

Preliminary questions:

- a. What is the core function of your organization?
 - b. What does your work in the organization entail? [how long have you been doing this?]
 - c. How often do you take on new graduates? [any specific fields? Why?]
-

1. Describe the kind of graduate you would employ? Not employ?
On what grounds might you employ a graduate rather than someone from the field?
2. Where do you draw your graduate employees from?
[why from these places? And why not other places? Does institution reputation matter?
Does private or public HE institution matter?]
3. Take me through your recruitment and interview process
4. What are the **attributes** that graduates require to manage a career in media?
5. What mechanisms do you have in place to train/integrate new graduates/staff?
[internship programme?]
6. Does industry have a role in training or is that the work of institutions?
[How would HE know what industry requires?]
7. Are you familiar with the curricula of higher education media programmes? Do you have any input in these curricula? If not, should you have? How?
8. What are institutions doing (i) well, (ii) not well in preparing (work-ready) graduates?
What should they be doing differently?
9. Do you have particular expectations/perceptions of private higher education institutions and their graduates? Different from public universities?
10. Media is a rapidly changing industry – to what extent do companies drive these changes, or is it a matter of following and responding?
How should institutions best prepare graduates for media jobs that don't yet exist?

APPENDIX J: Graduate survey invitation

10 October 2019

Dear Graduate

You are invited to participate in a survey on media graduate employability. This survey is the second phase of my doctoral research project on the employment experiences of media graduates from private higher education institutions. It follows the input received from individual interviews conducted in May and June this year. The purpose of the survey is to gather information from a larger body of media graduates in order to further investigate elements that arose from the interviews. **I hope that both interview participants as well as those who did not participate in the interviews will complete the survey.**

The survey is online and will take ±15 minutes to complete.

Please click on the following link to access the survey.

<http://surveys.ufs.ac.za/evsys/online.php?p=422AR>

Please note that you are not required to reveal your identity so your submission is anonymous.

Participants will not be able to be identified and the information provided will be kept confidential.

I remind you that this research project has been approved by the University of the Free State, and the research data and results will be used primarily for academic purposes. If you have any concerns or queries regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor on the details below.

Thanking you in anticipation.



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Research supervisor: Prof Melanie Walker / Email: walkermj@ufs.ac.za / Tel: +27 (0)51 401 7020

APPENDIX K: Graduate survey

EvaSys	Graduate Employability Survey	
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE September 2019	EMPLOYABILITY RESEARCH PROJECT Graduate Survey	

Mark as shown: ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Please use a ball-point pen or a thin felt tip. This form will be processed automatically.
Correction: ☐ ☒ ☐ ☒ ☐ Please follow the examples shown on the left hand side to help optimize the reading results.

1. WELCOME

Dear Media Graduate

Thank you for your willingness to complete this survey on the employment experiences of media graduates from private higher education institutions. **Please note, this survey applies to your undergraduate private higher education experience only** and not to any subsequent post-graduate studies.

Please reflect on your personal experiences at college and in the workplace to respond to the questionnaire. The survey will take ± 15 minutes to complete.

This is a reminder that your participation is anonymous, and the information received will be kept confidential. The data and results will be processed by the researcher only, and used primarily for academic purposes.

If you have any questions about the research project or the questionnaire, please contact Fenella on 083 288 7278 or fenella@mweb.co.za

- 1.1 I understand this survey is part of a doctoral research project on media graduate employability and I am willing to participate ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- 2.1 Private higher education institution: ☐ Boston Media House ☐ Friends of Design ☐ IIE - Rosebank College
☐ IIE - Vega
- 2.2 Qualification level: ☐ Higher certificate ☐ Diploma ☐ Bachelor degree
- 2.3 Qualification title:
- 2.4 Location of campus where you attended: ☐ Cape Town ☐ Durban ☐ Johannesburg
☐ Other (please specify below)
- 2.5 Other location:
- 2.6 Year of enrolment:
- 2.7 Year of completion:
- 2.8 Major subject(s) if relevant:
- 2.9 Age (that you turn/ed in 2019):
- 2.10 Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

2. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION [Continue]

- 2.11 Disability: ☐ Dyslexia / learning disability ☐ Intellectual disability ☐ Physical disability
☐ No disability
- 2.12 Ethnicity (assumed South African unless you select the Non-SA option): ☐ Asian ☐ Black ☐ Coloured
☐ Indian ☐ White ☐ Non South African
- 2.13 High school attended: ☐ Government - Model C school ☐ Government - Township school ☐ Government - no fee school
☐ Private school ☐ Home school
- 2.14 Parent(s) higher education: ☐ Both parents attended university ☐ One parent attended university ☐ I was first generation higher education
- 2.15 Parent(s) occupation(s):
- 2.16 Monthly household income level when you were studying: ☐ Less than R30 000 ☐ R30 000 - R50 000 ☐ Over R50 000
- 2.17 How did you fund your higher education? ☐ Bank loan ☐ Bursary ☐ Parents/family funded
☐ Non-family benefactor ☐ Self-funded ☐ Other (please specify below)
- 2.18 Other source of higher education funding:
- 2.19 City or town where currently resident?
- 2.20 Have you pursued further study since completing your media qualification? ☐ Yes ☐ No - intend to ☐ No - don't intend to
- 2.21 Career advice received at school: ☐ None ☐ Some, but inadequate ☐ Satisfactory
☐ Excellent
- 2.22 Career advice received at university: ☐ None ☐ Some, but inadequate ☐ Satisfactory
☐ Excellent

3. EMPLOYMENT

- 3.1 Current work status: ☐ Employed - permanent ☐ Employed - temporary ☐ Unemployed
☐ Internship ☐ Unpaid voluntary work ☐ Freelance work
☐ Self-employed (own business) ☐ Employed in more than one job
- 3.2 How many jobs have you had since you graduated? ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2
☐ 3 ☐ 4 or more
- 3.3 Approximately how long did it take you to find your first job after completing your qualification? (If you haven't yet found your first job, how long have you been job hunting?)
☐ I went straight from college into a job ☐ 1 - 3 months ☐ 4 - 6 months
☐ 7 - 12 months ☐ More than a year ☐ More than 2 years
☐ More than 3 years ☐ I still haven't found my first job ☐ I went on with post-graduate or further studies
- 3.4 What field of media are you currently working in?
- 3.5 What is your current work position / job title?

3. EMPLOYMENT [Continue]

3.6 Are you working in your field of study? ☐ Yes ☐ No (please specify below)

3.7 If you answered 'No' above, what is your current field of work?

3.8 Reason for moving out of media:

3.9 Size of organisation (no. of employees) where you currently work: ☐ No other employees (work alone) ☐ 1 - 10 ☐ 11 - 50

3.10 Which workplace type do you aspire to? ☐ 51 - 250 ☐ More than 250 ☐ Large private corporation ☐ SMME ☐ My own business ☐ Freelance or project-based ☐ State owned enterprise ☐ NGO or community-based organisation

3.11 Have you ever been promoted? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

3.12 Current monthly earning: ☐ I am not earning ☐ Less than R5 000 ☐ R5 000 - R10 000 ☐ R11 000 - R20 000 ☐ R21 000 - R30 000 ☐ R31 000 - R40 000 ☐ Over R40 000

3.13 Financial standing: ☐ I live entirely independently on my salary ☐ I live out of home but need financial assistance from my family ☐ I live at home but am financially independent ☐ I live at home and am financially dependent on my family ☐ My family is financially dependent on me

3.14 If you have had more than one job, which of the following are actual reasons you have had for leaving paid employment? Select as many as are relevant to your experience.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ☐ Retrenched | ☐ Salary too low | ☐ Offered a better opportunity |
| ☐ Wasn't working in the field of my choice | ☐ Health issues | ☐ Transport issues |
| ☐ Interpersonal issues at work | ☐ Lack of fit with organisational culture | ☐ I was fired/asked to leave |
| ☐ Further study | ☐ Took time out from work | ☐ Family responsibilities |
| ☐ Travel | ☐ Relocation | ☐ Work was not challenging |
| ☐ Work was too challenging | ☐ I wasn't doing what I wanted to do | ☐ Overworked |
| ☐ No personal satisfaction | ☐ No room for growth | ☐ The work was not aligned to the position I applied for |
| ☐ My values differed from the company values | ☐ I wasn't given the promotion I wanted | ☐ Other (please specify below) |

3.15 Other reason(s) for leaving paid employment not listed above:

3.16 I have experienced the following discrimination in getting employment:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ none | ☐ age | ☐ gender |
| ☐ race | ☐ nationality | ☐ culture |
| ☐ socio-economic background | ☐ higher education institution | ☐ qualification |

3.17 If you are willing to share, please comment on your experience of discrimination:

4. CAREER NAVIGATION

For each of the statements below, indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Private higher education				
4.1 Private higher education gave me a distinct career advantage	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.2 I chose my private higher education institution based on my career goals	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.3 Non-career factors such as fees and transport determined my choice of private higher education institution	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.4 My private higher education institution has been instrumental in helping me find work	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.5 My private higher education experience gave me access to a network in the industry	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.6 I am overqualified for my job	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.7 Private higher education did not equip me for an entrepreneurial career	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.8 Media was not my first choice of study	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.9 A person with a diploma or higher certificate is less employable than someone with a degree	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.10 A 3-year qualification in media is too long	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.11 Employers don't trust qualifications from private higher education institutions	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.12 I work with other graduates from my private higher education institution	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.13 Private higher education has equipped me for life beyond the workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.14 My higher education has equipped me with skills to cope in a range of different jobs	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.15 My qualification has increased my earning power	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.16 I am able to adapt	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.17 My private higher education did not prepare me for work options outside of formal employment	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The media workplace				
4.18 I am satisfied in my work	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.19 I am not able to be as creative in my work as I expected given my training	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.20 I was completely unprepared for the realities of the workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.21 Employers require graduates to have specialised skills	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.22 Employers have unrealistic expectations of graduates	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.23 In my work I am able to make a contribution to society	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.24 I have little independence and autonomy in my work	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.25 My work has enabled me to build a network	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.26 I know that I add value in my workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.27 I struggle to find work so there must be something wrong with me	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.28 I have been in a position to choose the job I want	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.29 There's no room for new talent in the media work space	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. CAREER NAVIGATION [Continue]

4.30	If I were to leave my job now I'm confident of finding another one	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.31	I have found at least one job through a friend or family member	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.32	Having work is more important than having a job	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.33	Graduates these days should be creating their own work rather than looking for jobs	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.34	I have contacts in the industry but don't want to make use of them because I want to make it on my own	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.35	Having the security of a fixed salary is my top priority	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.36	It is important to me that I fit into the culture of the organisation where I work	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.37	I am able to earn within the range of my expectations	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strongly disagree Disagree Agree Strongly agree

Career plans

4.38	My career aspirations have changed since I studied	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.39	I have clear career goals in media	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.40	I feel there are career opportunities open to me in media	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.41	I aspire to be an entrepreneur	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.42	I feel uncertain about my future career	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.43	I have made good career choices	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.44	I'm considering moving out of media so that I can earn a better salary	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.45	I don't know if I'm cut out for work in media	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.46	Who I know makes me more employable than what I know	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.47	Media is what I have always wanted to do	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.48	I'm confident that I'll always be able to get work in media	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.49	Building my social media following can make me more employable	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.50	Success in media is more about personality than hard work	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.51	My media job earns my income. I have to find other ways to make a difference in the world	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.52	Getting employment in media requires being very tech-savvy	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.53	I work hard on expanding my network	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.54	I feel daunted by the technology of the future	☐	☐	☐	☐

4.55 Which of the following played the most significant role in influencing your choice to work in media?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ My parent(s) | ☐ A family member other than parent | ☐ My lecturer(s) |
| ☐ The media itself | ☐ A friend | ☐ A media personality/celebrity |
| ☐ My desire to serve society | ☐ My desire to have a voice | ☐ My higher education training |
| ☐ Other (please specify below) | | |

4.56 Other influence on your career in media:

4. CAREER NAVIGATION [Continue]

4.57 From the attributes listed below, choose the 3 that you think played (or will play) the strongest part in getting you the job:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ my private higher education | ☐ my degree / diploma | ☐ my personality |
| ☐ my academic performance | ☐ my ability to work with others | ☐ my willingness to learn |
| ☐ my passion | ☐ my experience | ☐ my creativity |
| ☐ my technical ability | ☐ I know the right people | ☐ my social media influence |
| ☐ I'm a quick learner | ☐ my reputation in the industry | ☐ the reputation of my HE institution |
| ☐ my attitude | ☐ my drive to make things happen | ☐ my critical thinking |
| ☐ my inter-disciplinary ability | ☐ my specialist ability | ☐ my knowledge |
| ☐ I have a lot to offer | ☐ my communication skills | ☐ my talent |
| ☐ my craftsmanship | ☐ my portfolio | |

5. INTERNSHIP

The following questions relate to internships

- 5.1 Have you done an internship? ☐ No ☐ Yes - one internship ☐ Yes - more than one internship
- 5.2 How much time have you spent in internship? ☐ Less than 3 months ☐ 3 - 6 months ☐ 7 - 12 months
- ☐ More than a year ☐ More than 2 years

Indicate the extent to which the following statements apply to your experience:

	Not at all	A little	To a fair extent	Very much so
5.3 My internship afforded me an opportunity to demonstrate my value to the company	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.4 My internship assisted me with my job choice	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.5 My internship led directly to an employment opportunity	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.6 My internship was exploitative of my skills and knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.7 My internship contributed to my personal development	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.8 I was given good mentorship	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.9 The stipend I received was on par with what I was promised	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.10 The location of my internship was convenient	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.11 My internship made me feel like cheap labour	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.12 My internship gave me the experience I needed	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.13 My internship has been an integral part of my career development	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.14 My internship came through my higher education institution	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.15 I learned work specific skills & knowledge that I could not have learned in higher education	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.16 My internship was closely aligned to my qualification	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.17 My internship was a negative experience	☐	☐	☐	☐

5.18 Is there any additional comment you would like to make about your internship experience(s)?

6. VALUES

Read the following pairs of sentences and for each CHOOSE THE ONE that you relate to most strongly:

- 6.1 ☐ I'd rather earn a little doing what I love than have a well-paid job I don't like ☐ Earning a good salary is more important than liking my job

6. VALUES [Continue]

- | | | |
|------|--|---|
| 6.2 | ☐ It's worth waiting for the right job | ☐ There's no such thing as the right job. I'll take any job |
| 6.3 | ☐ My work is very demanding there isn't time for anything else | ☐ I make time for leisure activities |
| 6.4 | ☐ I'm ambitious and want to climb the corporate ladder | ☐ I'm a creative and want to refine my craft |
| 6.5 | ☐ I can't see myself doing anything other than media | ☐ I can't see myself staying in media |
| 6.6 | ☐ Media is a means to live my purpose in the world | ☐ Media is a means to earn an income |
| 6.7 | ☐ I know I shouldn't wait for others in order to get work but I don't know how to make it happen for myself | ☐ As a graduate I feel capable, empowered and have confidence that I can make things happen for myself |
| 6.8 | ☐ I need the financial stability of fixed employment | ☐ I'd rather have variety and freedom of freelance work than do the same thing every day |
| 6.9 | ☐ I would turn down a job if I didn't think it was suitable for me | ☐ It's up to me to make myself suitable for the job |
| 6.10 | ☐ As a graduate I have value to add to the workplace | ☐ As a graduate I have to build experience before I will be able to add value |

6.11 What does employability mean to you as a graduate?

6.12 Please write a comment on your work situation, how you feel about your work-life balance and general quality of life.

6.13 Please write a comment on how you feel about your future.

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE
YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS VALUED**