

PERCEPTIONS OF DESIRABLE GRADUATE WORKPLACE SKILLS FOR COMMERCE STUDENTS

BY

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16717708

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

M.COM HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

in the

FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ADMINISTRATION

at the

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY

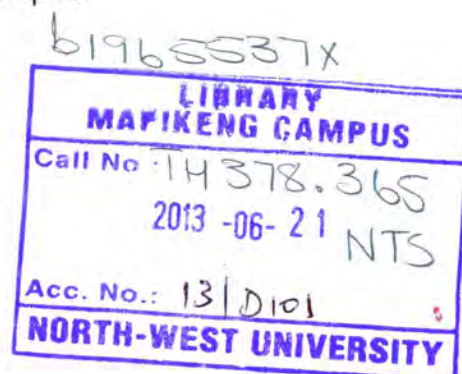


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November 2012



DECLARATION

DECLARATION

I, Lungile Patricia Ntsizwane declare that the dissertation for Masters in Commerce titled "perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates" has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other institution. I further declare that this is my own work and that all material used herein is acknowledged.

Signature.....

Date: 19 November 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people who made it possible for me to complete this study:

- To my family, thank you for your love, inspiration and believing in my ability to succeed.
- To Professor Nicolene Barkhuizen, you have been so supportive and helpful to me throughout this study. You are a great motivator and I admire to be associated with a focused individual like you. I did not have a passion for research, but through you, my views about are different. You made this study easier for me through your professional guidance.
- To Professor Swanepoel, thank you for believing in me when I thought it was the end of the road.
- To the students and academics in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration who took their time to complete the questionnaires to make this study possible, your time and efforts are highly appreciated.
- To the Graduate School team, thank you all for your understanding and support throughout my endurance to complete this study.
- Lastly, to the Mighty God. Thank you for the strength you blessed me with that kept me going even in tough times.

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aim:

South Africa is currently experiencing serious challenges relating to youth and graduate unemployment. Some of the reasons cited for this problem are the inability of Higher Education to produce graduates that meet employer needs. As a result there is a great need for higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop approaches to address the issue of graduate employability skills. The main aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates.

Method:

A cross-sectional research design was followed with data collected by means of surveys.

The survey drew responses regarding the topic from a broad cross-section of respondents at one point in time, making the approach practical and reasonable for pursuing the exploratory and descriptive aims of the study. A sample of 244 final year students, 94 postgraduates and 21 academics participated in this study.

Results:

The research findings indicated that graduate employability is significantly dependent on the soft and technical skills required in the workplace and that the university does provide some of the skills as part of its commerce programmes. The following specific results were obtained:

- The results showed that in general all three groups of respondents perceived that the higher education institutions equipped them to a large extent with the soft skills needed in the workplace

- The findings indicated that the skills which final year students perceive to be the most important are not as the same as the one rated most important by academics and postgraduates.
- The findings reflected a significant gap between current soft skills training and the desirable soft skills
- Based on the study findings, the three stakeholders mentioned one common technical skill (computer literacy) which they gained throughout their studies
- Generally, results showed that undergraduates, postgraduates and academics perceive that students have gained some technical skills during their studies which will prepare them to a large extend for employability
- The respondent's results from chapter 5 indicated that there is a great need for HEIs to provide technical skills training relevant to one's career that will help graduates to be prepared for the workplace
- Based on the study findings from chapter 5, the results showed a high need for WIL programme to be part of the undergraduate student's curriculum

Practice Relevance:

Studies in the related field of graduate employability skills have been previously conducted by different researchers globally. Despite the previous studies, the topic "perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates" have not been researched before. The study attempts to identify if Higher Education Institutions provide graduates with the necessary soft and technical skills required to enhance their employability. This study contributes to the literature where the benefits of conducting it can be experienced by students, HEIs, employers and the country in general through determining what skills are required for being employable.

Keywords:

- Graduate employability
- Employability
- Soft skills
- Technical skills
- Work integrated learning

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

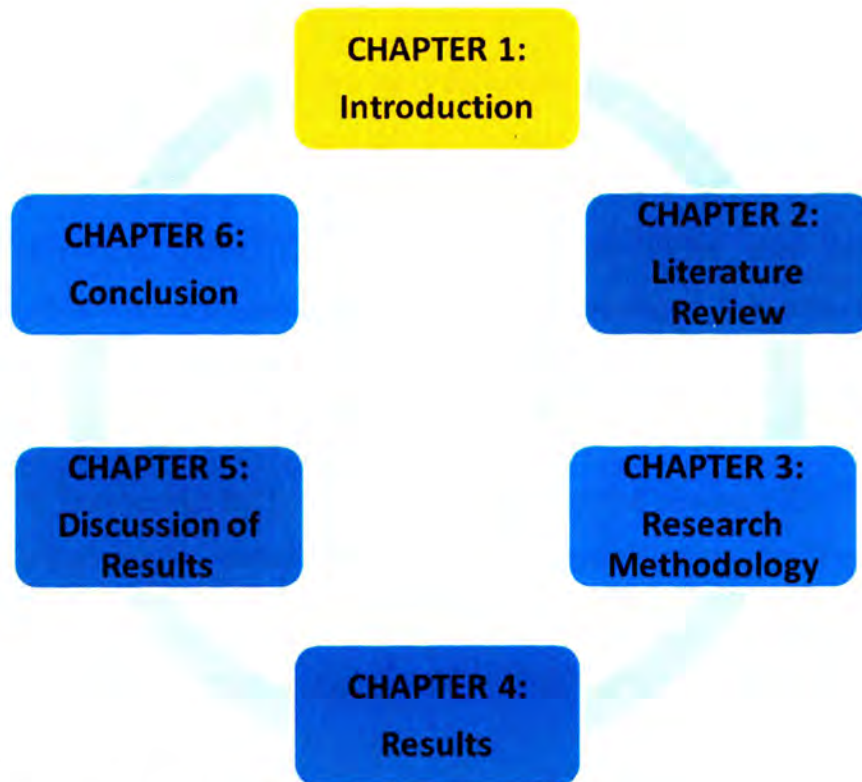


Figure 1.1 Chapter 1 in Context

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a basis for the entire research project on the desirable graduate workplace skills in a South African context. It is investigative in nature and focuses on determining whether South African graduates possess the desired workplace skills that can enhance their employability. A problem statement is provided which gives a brief discussion on graduate workplace skills and how they contribute to unemployment and what can be done to address the problem. This is followed by the research questions which led to the development of the research objectives. The expected contribution of the study is also given which highlights the benefits which the study could have on

various groups and individuals. The chapter further offers an overview of the study, limitations and the layout of the whole research project.

1.2 BACKGROUND

South Africa is currently experiencing serious challenges relating to youth and graduate unemployment. A recent survey by the Development Policy Research Unit indicated that the South African youth unemployment rate stands at 35.9%. In addition, the Adcorp Employment Index (2012) highlights that there are currently 600000 unemployed university graduates in South Africa mostly in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

A recent study conducted by the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (2012) highlighted some reasons for the high unemployment among graduates and youth:

- Employers look for skill and experience - unskilled and inexperienced job seekers are risky;
- Low-quality education feeds into poor workplace learning capacity;
- Lack of networks among black African youth makes it difficult for job seekers to be absorbed into the working environment; and
- Mismatch between type of workers demanded by companies and those supplied by the labour market.

When looking at the above, the challenge arguably presented to South African Higher Education is to present graduates with both the theoretical knowledge and skills required for professional practices within a chosen field (Bates, 2008). Botman (2011), points out that Universities have the mandate and the intellectual resources to plan, stimulate and get involved in activities that will ensure service delivery to the poorest of the poor in society thus improving their economic status.

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As a result there is a great expectation for higher education institutions to proactively engage with the skills needs by the economy and to address this through knowledge generation and innovation (Griesel & Parker, 2009). However in many cases higher education institutions are criticized for not producing graduates that are workplace ready. Employers and graduates are of the opinion that a tertiary qualification does not necessarily prepare students for the work environment and that students lack practical skills, are not of high quality or suited for specialist positions (Griesel & Parker, cited in Pop & Barkhuizen, 2011). As pointed out by Holmes and Miller (2000) apart from academic qualifications, additional qualities and competencies of individuals that will facilitate the most successful and speedy transition from higher education to the workplace.

Graduate employability skills are considered of paramount importance in assisting graduates to secure employment. Employers often complain about a lack of soft skills among graduates from tertiary institutions. The British Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), for example, made an outcry in 2008 which reported that “employers say graduates lack soft skills such as team working”. They go on to explain that candidates are normally academically proficient but lacking in soft skills such as communication as well as verbal and numerical reasoning. Other important soft skills highlighted by researchers are interpersonal skills, motivation, good inter-personal communication skills, business skills and etiquette, team spirit and cohesiveness and showing interest (Coll & Zegwaard, 2006; Griesel & Parker, 2008; Pop & Barkhuizen, 2010; Raftopoulous, Coetzee & Visser, 2009).

In addition to soft skills some researchers have also identified academic and technical skills as important skills required of graduates in the workplace (Clymer, Roberts & Strawn cited by Pop, 2009). Soft skills alone are not sufficient to make one employable; they need to be supplemented with hard skills. Hard skills are technical or administrative procedures related to an organization's core business. These include skills such as

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machine operation, computer protocols, safety standards, financial procedures and sales administration. Hard skills are typically easy to observe, quantify and measure. They are also easy to train for, because most of the time the skill sets are brand new to the learner and no unlearning is involved. Companies are continuously assessing their current staff and future recruits on their soft and business/hard/technical skills (Collective Resources cited in Pop & Barkhuizen, 2011).

Therefore it comes as no surprise that there is an increasing demand for workplace-based experiences to be built into undergraduate degrees (Bates, 2008). Bates further describes that universities should come forward with innovative experience-based learning models to ensure that students undergo the same challenges, events, crises, decision-making and ethical dilemmas in various role plays and reflect their maturity by taking accountability, making decisions and invoking actions. Carliner et al. (2008) emphasize that the focus should be on defining, building and assessing core competencies in the learners and the resulting influence on the quality of work. In addition, they also emphasize that workplace-based learning programmes should be designed to enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy of the learners in the workplace.

Swanepoel (2008:1) further emphasises that the assessments of workplace-based learning programmes should be carried out in such a way that the results tangibly demonstrate application and integration of theoretical principles with the practical challenges facing the industries. In this context, Holtzhausen and du Toit (2009:155) explained that the theoretical framework of work-integrated learning programmes should comprise self-regulated learning, coordinated learning, flexible learning and constructivist learning styles. In addition Young, Stengel, Chaffe-Stengel and Harper (2010:13-15) maintain that graduate programmes should have provisions for internships offering the students various opportunities of exposure to industrial experience. Internship programmes should be designed to provide practical experience to students in real world business settings and prepare them for future employment in the

companies offering internships. This in turn will produce graduates that are more “work ready” and will optimise their transition into the workplace.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the light of the preceding background it is clear that South Africa is experiencing serious challenges relating to graduate employability. One of the main causes is related to inability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to produce graduates who are workplace ready and meeting the requirements of organisations. This arguably challenges HEIs to equip graduates with the appropriate soft and technical skills required by the various industries to enhance graduate employability. Therefore the investigation of desirable graduate workplace skills is imperative from a research point of view. The main purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question of this study is: What are the desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates?

The following are the specific research questions for this study:

- To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that HEIs equip commerce graduates with the desirable soft skills needed for the workplace?
- Which graduate soft skills do final year students, postgraduate students and academics view as most important in the workplace?
- What is the perceived gap between the current graduate soft skills offering of the HEIs and the desirable soft skills?

- To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that HEIs equip graduates with the desirable technical skills needed for the workplace?
- To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive technical skills training as a way of enhancing their employability?
- To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics view the need to have a work integrated learning component as part of undergraduate studies?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 General research objective

The main objective of this research is to determine the perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for Commerce graduates.

1.5.2 Specific research objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that Higher Education Institutions equip graduates with the desirable soft skills needed for the workplace;
- To determine which soft skills final year students, postgraduate students and academics view as most important in the workplace;
- To determine the perceived gap between the current soft skills offering of the HEIs and the desirable soft skills;

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- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that HEIs equip graduates with the desirable technical skills needed for the workplace;
- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive technical skills training as a way of enhancing the employability of graduates;
- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics view the need to have a work integrated learning component as part of undergraduate studies.

1.6 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This research makes a contribution on theoretical, methodological and practical level. From a theoretical point of view this research makes an important contribution to the limited knowledge that exists on graduate employability skills and work integrated learning practices in the South African Higher Educational Context.

This research makes a methodological contribution in the sense that a new questionnaire will be tested to assess three groups of respondents (i.e. final year undergraduates, postgraduates and academics) perceptions of the current offerings of employability skills at a higher education institution and the importance thereof. This study will determine if this measurement is a valid tool for the assessment of graduate employability skills.

From a practical point of view this research makes an important contribution to curriculum development in HEIs by indicating the importance of soft skills as well as technical skills in preparing work-ready graduates. In addition this research will also highlight the need for the implementation of work integrated learning programmes in the

undergraduate curricula of final year students to enhance graduate employability. The results of this research can be taken further and tested among the various employers of the graduates. This, in turn, can narrow the gap between the current programme offerings of HEIs in South Africa and the expectations of organisations employing graduates.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN

The next section of the Chapter focuses on the research design employed for the present study.

1.7.1 Research approach

The research approach of this study is quantitative in nature since the intention of the researcher is to explore the perceptions of graduate workplace skills for commerce students. To achieve this, the researcher uses a non-experimental research design which will provide numerical data for the statistical analyses gathered by means of a questionnaire (Cresswell, 2009). According to Cooper and Schindler (2011:726), quantitative research is the precise count of some behaviour, knowledge, opinion or attitude.

1.7.2 Research Method

The research method applied in this study is discussed next.

1.7.2.1 Literature review

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) describe that a research needs to be built on the results of work done by other researchers in the field. They further explained that a literature review is an interactive process comprising of generating and refining relevant keywords, conducting a literature search, short-listing the most relevant literatures,

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evaluating them by comparing and contrasting and finally recording the findings (Saunders et al., 2009). They further describe that the cycle should be repeated multiple times till the researcher perceives that a sufficient amount of literature has been collected and reviewed (Saunders et al., 2009). In this study, it is proposed that the literature review will be conducted in two steps: desirable graduate workplace skills in general and graduate workplace skills in the South African context. The literature will be collected from various sources:

The review cycle will begin from the general concepts and then will gradually narrow down to the findings pertaining to South Africa only. The findings in the South African context will be compared and contrasted with general theories such that a link with theoretical concepts can be discovered. Some of the key journal and literature sources proposed for inclusion are the following:

- Emerald
- Springer
- African Higher Education Research Online
- African eJournals Project
- South African Journal of Higher Education
- South African Journal of Education
- South African Journal of HRM

Some of the most relevant keywords proposed for literature search are:

- Graduate workplace skills
- Work-integrated learning
- Soft skills

- Hard Skills
- Talent acquisition
- Graduate employability
- Unemployment
- Higher Education

1.7.2.2 Research participants

The research participants in this study included final year students and postgraduate students who is currently and was enrolled for a qualification in commerce. Academics who lectured in the field of Commerce were also included in the sample. A purposive convenience sampling technique was used to obtain the final participants (Saunders et al., 2011: 234).

1.7.2.3 Measuring instrument

Three questionnaires were used in the research. The questionnaires were developed by Barkhuizen (2010) to assess soft skills and technical skills training as presented by the Higher Education Institution. The questionnaires are similar in content in order to get a comprehensive view of all respondents and a true reflection of the skills offering of the university. The first questionnaire focused on the final year students, the second on postgraduate students and the third on academics.

All three questionnaires have four sections including respondents (biographical information), higher education training (soft skill and technical skills) and the need for work integrated learning. A brief overview of each questionnaire is presented below.

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The soft skills questionnaire was developed based on an extensive literature review. A total of 20 soft skills were included in the questionnaire. Firstly respondents are asked to what extent the higher education institution contributed to their competence in the specific soft skills ranging on a five point Likert scale from "To no Extent" (1) to a "Very large Extent" (5). Secondly the respondents are asked to indicate the importance of the soft skill in a five point Likert scale from 'Not' (1) to 'Critical' (5). After completion of this questionnaire the respondents were asked to identify any other important skills that were not addressed as part of their studies at the Higher Education Institution. Finally the respondent was asked to rank the five most important graduate soft skills.

The purpose of the Technical (hard skills) questionnaire was to ascertain whether the technical skills training contributed to the student's competence in technical skills. The respondent was asked to rate the extent to which the technical skills training contributed to the graduate's competence in technical skills on a five point Likert Scale ranging from 'To no Extent' (1) to 'To a very large extent' (5).

In the final part of the questionnaire respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which there is a need for work integrated learning as part of their qualifications. This question is measured on a five-point scale ranking from 'To No Extent' (1) to 'To a Very Large Extent' (5).

Open ended questions were included in each section to allow for additional comments.

1.7.2.4 Research procedure

The research was conducted by using the following steps:

- A preliminary literature review to make the problem, aims, objectives and research questions clearer.

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- A detailed literature review to establish a sound theoretical foundation.
- Designing the instrument as per the literature review findings.
- Conducting sampling by approaching the potential respondents through contacts and direct requests.
- Conducting the surveys among the four samples through meeting in person (where feasible).
- Sorting and tabulating the responses.
- Calculating descriptive statistical values and plotting the cross-tabbed charts.
- Comparing the means and observing the differences in various indicators.
- Drawing the recommendations and conclusion.

1.7.2.5 Data Analyses

Statistical analysis was carried out using the SPSS Program (SPSS, 2012). As this study is descriptive in nature the results are mainly reported in terms of means, frequencies, and standard deviations. The results are presented in Tables and Graphs.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.8.1 Employability

According to Yorke and Knight (2006), employability is “a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy

1.8.2 Employability skills

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA) represent employability skills as 'skills required not only to gain employment, but also to progress within an enterprise so as to achieve one's potential and contribute successfully to the enterprise's strategic directions' (ACCI & BCA, 2002).

1.8.3 Soft skills

Yorke and Knight (2006) refer to soft skills as personal qualities (self-confidence, independence, adaptability, initiative, willingness to learn), core skills (information retrieval, self-management, creativity) and process skills (problem-solving). Soft skills complement hard skills which are the technical requirements of the job.

1.8.4 Technical skills

Technical skills are skills that enable a person to use specialized knowledge to solve problems, human/people skills as the ability to effectively function and contribute to a team, and the conceptual skills as the integration of activities toward a common goal (Northouse, 2010).

1.8.5 Work integrated learning

WIL is described as an approach to career-focussed education that includes classroom-based and workplace-based forms of learning that are appropriate for the professional qualification (Council on Higher Education, 2011).

1.9 CHAPTER DIVISIONS

The following section gives a summary of chapters for the whole study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the topic “perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates”. It outlines the introduction and background, the rationale for the research, problem statement, research objectives, benefits of the research, research design and methodology as well as the limitations made of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The literature review chapter begins with an overview of concepts relating to the research. It entails a detailed review of available literature. Each concept is separately discussed in detail and models and tables are presented where necessary. It gives a comparison of, and the relationship between the various concepts linked to graduate workplace skills. Chapter 2 concludes with a brief summary of what the chapter is about.

Chapter 3: Research method

Chapter 3 entails a detailed discussion of the research design and methods which were selected as the framework through which the research questions of the study were answered. The chapter starts with an overview of the research paradigm of the study followed by the research design. A discussion of the sampling strategies and techniques used in the study and the data collection methodology are also presented. Issues that affect the reliability and validity of the research are considered followed by ethical concerns related to the study.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter the results obtained from the statistical analysis are presented in three different phases; phase one presents the results of the research format including the demographic breakdowns of the participants; phase 2 focuses on the testing of the

hypothesis and phase 3 of this chapter provides a comparison of responses from all three sample groups chosen for the study through the hypotheses developed in the literature review.

Chapter 5: Discussion of results

The analysis and interpretation of the results obtained and presented in chapter 4 is given in this chapter. Each of the seven hypotheses of the research study are presented and are either accepted or rejected based on the evidence collected from the study.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and conclusion

This is the final chapter of the study where everything is brought together to present the conclusions drawn from the study, its benefits, limitations as well as recommendations for further study.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter started with a brief discussion of the background of the study. The problem statement, research objectives, research design and methodology as well as the importance of the study were also discussed. The chapter ended with a summary of the chapters of the entire study. The following chapter concentrates on the review of literature with regard to graduate employability skills.

Chapter 2:LITERATURE REVIEW

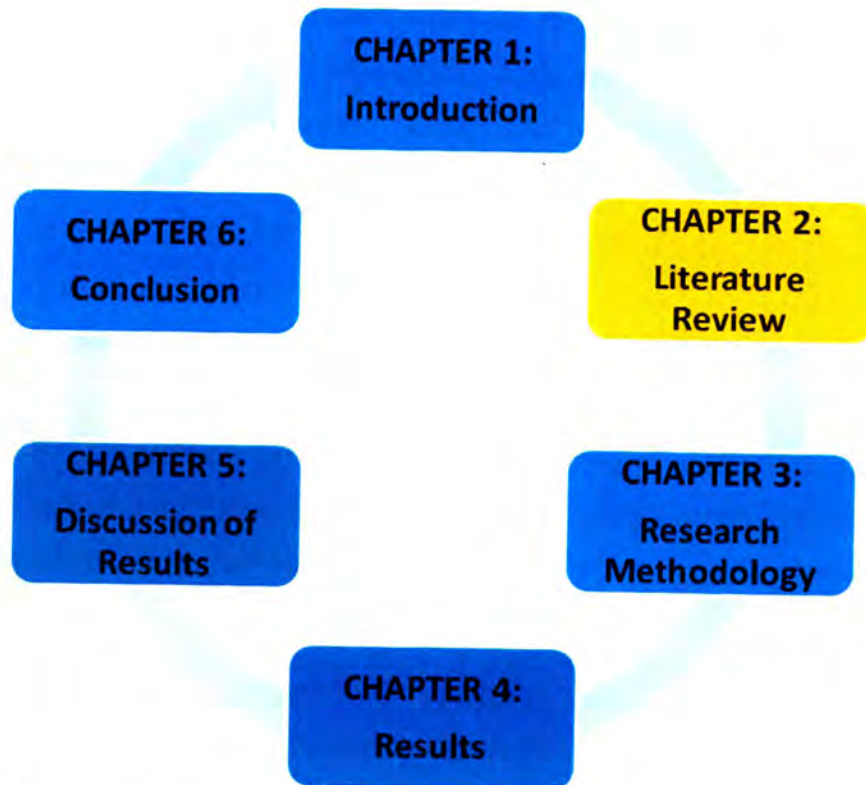


Figure 2.1: Chapter 2 in Context

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of literature regarding the employability skills of graduates. A further exploration of concepts such as graduate employability, unemployment, talent acquisition, workplace integrated learning, soft skills, hard or technical skills will be discussed in detail.

2.2 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

A study by the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) confirms that South African employers are not satisfied with the relevance and range of skills graduates bring to the workplace (JIPSA, 2006). The National Skills Authority (NSA) was formed in

1999 to advise the minister of Labour on policies and strategies related to skills development and to report to him on progress made in their implementation (Barker, 2007). Through the NSA, initiatives such as SAQA, NQF and learnerships were developed. This considerable legislative and policy developments encouraged transdisciplinary linkages between work and education. These included the collaboration between the Departments of Education and Labour, which led to the implementation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). SAQA is a body responsible for establishing a single unified system of education and training qualifications in the country by overseeing and implementing the NQF, generating unit standards and qualifications for registration on the NQF and creating and accrediting the institutions necessary to ensure that these qualifications are of a high quality (SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995). SAQA administers the NQF which is based on the principle of access.

The NQF is a national register of education and training unit standards and qualifications. It is a means by which qualifications can be recognised nationally (SAQA Act of 1995). A learnership is training agreement entered into by a learner, an employer and a training provider to train a learner to a set of agreed standards for a specified period (Barker, 2007). Learnerships assist unemployed youth to get employment and also help existing workers to improve their skills. There are also a number of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) established in different sectors of the SA economy to implement the skills development strategy. These SETA's are concerned with education and training and to increase the skills of workers in their sector. SETA'S serve to develop and implement a Sector skills plan, develop and administer learnerships, undertake quality assurance and disburse levies collected from employers in their sector. The design of the Skills Development Act enables the accreditation, at Higher Education levels, of work-based educational interventions and is funded through the skills development levy (Skills Development Act no 97 of 1998). The Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) aims to promote the implementation of policies

outlined in the Green Paper (1997) and reaffirms the need to incorporate structured learning with practical work experience (SDA No. 97 of 1998).

2.3 GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Being a country with an upper-middle income, South Africa is one of the countries that face major challenges when it comes to graduate employability. A labour analyst, Sharp wrote in the Sowetan (2012), "there are currently nearly 600000 unemployed university graduates in South Africa, mostly in the arts, humanities and social sciences, whereas the private sector has more than 800000 vacancies in management, engineering, law, finance, accounting and medicine". Sharp is of the view that universities in South Africa are producing the wrong kinds of graduates and that some professional bodies restrict entry into their fields through the high standards they set.

Skills discrepancy among graduates in South Africa is one of the causes of the high unemployment rate among youth. Unemployment is undoubtedly a huge problem in South Africa and is the cause of high levels of poverty, crime and violence. Youth unemployment has become a current issue in many countries around the world as the statistics keep on ascending. Barker (2007) defines an unemployed person as the one without work, the one currently available for work, and one who is seeking work or wanting to work

The unemployment problem in South Africa can be described as structural in nature, given that there appears to be a continuous, almost intractable, mismatch between the types of workers demanded by firms and those supplied in the labour market (Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU), 2007). This calls for an urgent need for broader and more intensive discussion between employers and the teaching and learning institutions (DPRU, 2007). According to a 2007 report by the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), graduate unemployment is aggravated by factors

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such as race, field of study, the institution from which the person graduated, employer perceptions of the graduate's quality and employability, lack of skills among graduates and lack of access to employers and networks, their attitude and lack of work experience. In South Africa, the high rate of unemployment is one of the pressing socio-economic challenges facing government.

According to van Aardt (2012:54), youth unemployment challenges in South Africa are closely related to the inability of young people to obtain employment owing to their lack of experience, which is all too often compounded by a lack of skills. The result is increasing group of young people with limited access to formal sector employment, and limited means to do anything about it.

Based on a report by the National Treasury (2011), some of the reasons why young people are unemployed include:

- Employers look for skills and experience and they regard unskilled and inexperienced jobseekers as a risky investment.
- Education is not a substitute for skills. Schooling is not a reliable signal of capabilities, and low school quality feeds into poor workplace learning capacity.
- Given the uncertainty about the potential of school leavers, employers consider entry-level wages to be too high relative to the risk of hiring these inexperienced workers.

Barker (2007) identified the following four types of unemployment:

- **Frictional unemployment** arises as a result of normal labour turnover, where people are moving between jobs, and the processing of new entrants to the labour market, where there are both unemployed persons and vacancies which can be filled by them. Frictional unemployment results from the time lags involved in the re-

employment of labour as well as the time it takes for those seeking work to find and fill vacancies. It is usually of brief duration.

- **Cyclical unemployment** arises during recessionary periods, when demand for labour is usually low. During recessionary periods few or no jobs are created for new entrants to the labour market and even existing workers may lose their jobs as a result of retrenchment.
- **Structural unemployment** generally refers to the overall inability of the economy, owing to structural imbalances, to provide employment even at the peak of the business cycle. Structural unemployment may be related to a mismatch in skills or geographical location.
- **Seasonal unemployment** due to normal and expected changes in economic activity in a single year, such as the ones occurring in the agricultural sector.

According to the National Treasury report of 2011, an important reason why unemployment is so high among the youth is that young people find it difficult to gain work experience, which is an important indicator of ability to potential employers. (National Treasury 2011:16). Apart from the fact that young people do not have the education and skills that they need to obtain a job, experience is usually one of the requirements for appointment especially in the formal employment sector. This certainly contributes to the high unemployment rate among the youth.

2.4 EMPLOYABILITY

The term “employability” has a number of definitions which narrows it to accentuate skills and other dispositions that make a person attractive to prospective employers. Yorke and Knight (2006), define employability as a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves,

the workforce, the community and the economy. Marock (2008:8) is of the belief that for the individual, employability depends on their assets in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use and deploy those assets, the way they present themselves to employers and the context in which they seek employment.

Pool and Sewell (2007:279) define employability as having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful. The definition of employability has been used as a starting point from which to develop a new theoretical and practical framework for employment called "the key to employability model" (Pool & Sewell, 2007:280). They further state that it could be argued that in addition to drawing together the essential concept issues that underpin an understanding of the concept of employability, the model also provides clear visual answers to what employability is.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI, 2002) describes employability as the skills required to gain employment or establish an enterprise, but also to progress within an enterprise or expand employment capability so as to achieve ones potential and contribute successfully to enterprise strategic directions. This definition is broad and summarizes self-employment as well as the need for on-going skills development of an individual.

2.5 EMPLOYABILITY MODELS

2.5.1 The career edge model of employability

The model by Pool and Sewell (2007:280) figure 2.2 reflects an assertion that each component is absolutely essential and one missing element will considerably reduce a graduate's employability. The model also suggests the direction of interaction between various elements. According to Pool and Sewell (2007:280), the six components in the

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model forms employability. The component of degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills has to be central concept in the model. It is more concerned with studying a specific discipline, to get a degree and a higher qualification so as to get a better job. It still remains the case that the people who are better qualified have greater opportunities of being employed (Pool and Sewell, 2007:280). The second component is of generic skills which are also referred to as transferable or core skills. Examples of these skills are creativity, numeracy, communication, etc. Emotional intelligence is the third component in the model and is more about personal qualities such as recognising one's feelings and those of others for motivating ourselves and for managing emotions well.

The fourth component is of career development and is more focused on developing and managing one's career. Pool and Sewell (2007:280) believes that in order for graduates to have the best chance in securing employment, it is important that they receive training career development learning. Experience (work and life) is the final component in the model. In this component a lot of research reveals that prospective employers value graduates with work experience and that graduates with more work experience are likely to secure employment than others. The essential of the employability model suggests that providing students with opportunities for them to access and develop everything on the lower tier and for reflecting on and evaluating these experiences will results in development of high levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem (Pool & Sewell 2007: 281). The following diagram represents the essential components of the employability model:

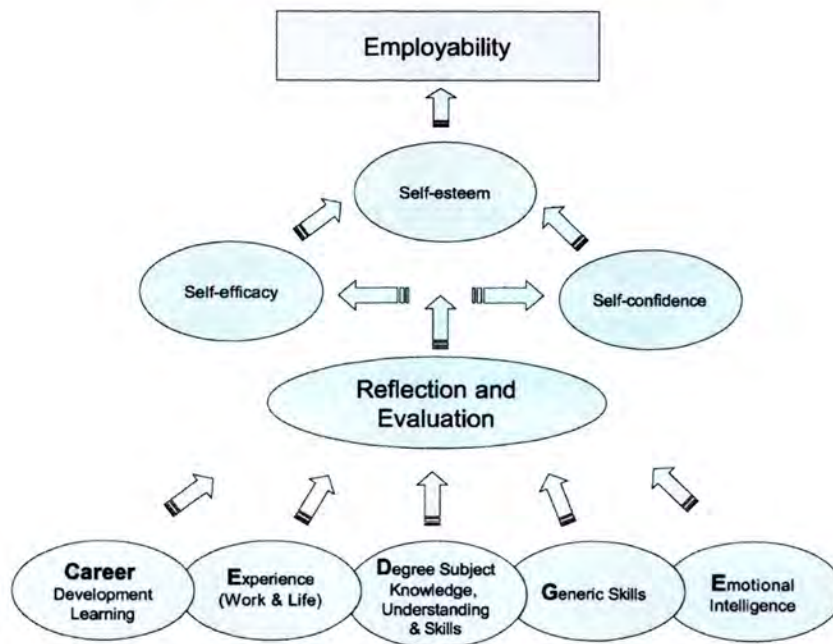


Figure 2.2 The essential components of employability model: Pool & Sewell (2007:280)

2.5.2 Fugate dispositional model of employability

Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth's (2004: 19) dispositional model to employability perceives employability as a disposition that captures relevant individual characteristics which promote adaptive cognition, behaviour and assist an individual to recognise and leverage career opportunities. Fugate et.al (2004:19-25) suggest three dimensions of employability, these being career identification, personal adaptability and social and human capital. The three dimensions are discussed below:

- **The career identification dimension**

It represents concepts such as role, occupational and organisational identity which describe how individual views themselves in a specific work environment. career identity bring together past, current, and future career experiences and aspirations into an understandable whole, and it also acts as the cognitive glue that integrates the other dimensions of employability. Career identity dimension gives employability particular relevance for career development.

- **The personal adaptability dimension**

This dimension refers to the adaptability and willingness to alter knowledge, skills, abilities, disposition, behaviours and other factors to meet environmental demands. Fugate and Kinicki (2008:507) believe that individuals with high levels of dispositional employability often proactively acquire information about the environment. Proactive coping means individuals make efforts in identifying possible stressors and acquire the skills and resources necessary to deal with those stressors.

- **Social and human capital dimension**

Social capital consists of the resources available in social networks that can advance a person's interests. Social and human capital dimension is regarded as an important element of employability. Individual's ability to identify and realize career opportunities is greatly influenced by such capital. Human capital includes traditional factors that influence a person's career advancement, such as age and education, work experience and training, skills knowledge, job performance and organisation tenure.

2.5.3 Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden competency based model of employability

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006:4) designed a competency based employability model built on the resource based view of the organisation. According to them, employability at the employee level is advantageous for both present performances on the job and career outcomes. The resource based view is of the notion that competencies are possible resources that enable the organisation to realize competitive advantage. This competence-based model is made up of five competencies namely; occupational expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance.

about personal identity and self-worth, and metacognition (self-awareness and the capability to reflect on for action) (Yorke & Knight, 2006:5).

2.5.5 Gazier's (1999) seven different operational versions of employability

The following is a table summarising Gazier's (1999:11) seven different operational versions of employability in three waves since the 1940s:

Table 2.1: Seven Operational Versions of employability (Gazier, 1999)

1940's	Dichotomous employability	Concerned with identifying whether an individual is or is not able to work depending on age, ability and family burdens. Associated with WW2 and identifying among the population those able to contribute to the total war effort.
1960's	Socio-medical employability	A quantitative scale of employability to assess the 'distance' between an individual's medical characteristics and the requirements of the labour market. This scale then used as a measure of required rehabilitation for disabled members of society to improve their chances of employment.
	Manpower policy employability	As above, a quantitative scale of employability, but with a focus on both skills and medical condition, applied to all employees and used as a measure of the individual's distance from regular employment. Used as a tool in policy interventions to help the disadvantaged.
	Flow employability	Concerned with the collective speed at which particular social groups leave unemployment and which, rather than considering individual attributes and behaviours, focuses on the demand side of the labour market and the absorption capacity of the economy. Individual 'relative employability' considered secondary to the 'mean employability' of social groups determined by overall economic conditions and the 'place' occupied by this group in society
1980's-90's	Employability as 'expected labour market performance'	A neutral statistical definition which seeks to measure individual productivity, in its dynamic context, through an assessment of both individual and collective characteristics for the purposes of assessing the effects of labour market or training interventions

	Initiative employability	Employability as the marketability of cumulative individual human, social and cultural capital, with an explicit focus on individual responsibility for one's own employability. Associated with a policy focus on promoting lifelong learning, labour market flexibility and the provision of labour market information.
	Interactive employability	The relative capacity of an individual to achieve meaningful employment given interaction between personal characteristics and the labour market, and connected to observed or predicted labour market performance. Policy emphasis on worker adaptation, alongside activation and preventive programmes.

2.6 GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Unemployed graduate numbers are rapidly increasing and it is becoming difficult for government to keep up with the high demand for jobs. Although there are interventions in place to address the problem of graduate skills development, there is still a backlog in existence. The existing skills deficit among graduates is evidenced by the apparent lack of soft skills, as many firms feel that graduates lack generic soft skills and are not workplace ready (DPRU, 2007). Lack of practical training opportunities and project management training are two key problem areas identified by JIPSA affecting graduate employability in South Africa. In an increasingly competitive globalized economy, there exists a growing demand for new labour market entrants to exercise a greater margin of flexibility and develop generic competencies such as soft skills, personality development, problem-solving skills, and information-technology skills. The general consensus amongst firms is that South African graduates often do not possess the necessary skills and experience to be considered even for entry-level positions (DPRU, 2007). The phenomenon of rising graduate unemployment has to be analysed within the context of skills shortages and the corresponding job opportunities in the labour market. Graduate unemployment relates either to an oversupply of graduates in general or, more likely, an oversupply of inappropriately qualified or poor quality graduates (DPRU, 2007). According to the DPRU (2007) study, some firms clearly stated that the average new recruit's education is of a lower quality than in the past, while others suggested that

if they could find more good quality graduates they would increase the intake of graduates.

Employability skills are soft skills and competencies/generic skills that form a vital part of effective and successful participation in the workplace. Due to the increasing requirements for skills by employers, it is important for graduates to understand and demonstrate an ability of those skills. The importance of the skills required by employers differs based on the job function to be performed within an organisation. Employability skills for employees refer to certain personal abilities of an individual, which can be taken from one job function to another, used within any profession and at any stage of their career. Employers seek graduates with essential soft skills obtained during their years of study rather than specific knowledge gained from their degrees. A lot of research has been conducted internationally in various HEIs on the employability skills of graduates. Most employers identified skills that are common to all of them.

2.6.1 Soft skills versus technical skills

Raftopoulos, Coetzee and Visser (2009) cited Smith and Kruger (2008) proposing that apart from being skilled, from having the required knowledge in a specific discipline and from having the up-to-date technical skills required in a profession, graduates also need generic skills. They adopted a definition from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research which states that generic skills are skills that apply across a variety of job and life contexts.

Knight and Yorke (2004) refer to soft skills as personal qualities (self-confidence, independence, adaptability, initiative, willingness to learn), core skills (information retrieval, self-management, creativity) and process skills (problem-solving). Soft skills complement hard skills which are the technical requirements of the job. Soft skills are

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also known as “people skills” and are typically hard to observe, quantify and measure. They have to do with how people relate to each other.

Soft skills are important to any work situation and for an employee to function effectively in the ever changing trends and the increasingly competitive environment of the workplace. For employees to be successful in this tough environment, they have to bring along competitive edge that distinguishes them from other candidates with similar qualifications and comparable evaluation results (Schulz, 2008:150). Schulz (2008:152) identified two methods by which soft skills can be acquired. The first one is learning through enrolling for formal training classes such as presentation skills or conflict management and the second way is through self-training usually based on books.

Coll and Zegwaard (2006) conducted an investigation on views of four stakeholders (student, recent graduates, employers and faculty) with the intention of finding out which competencies are ranked as the top five. The stakeholder's views provided different preferences regarding the top five competencies. The findings of the study revealed that the top five ranked competencies based on science and technology student's views are the ability and willingness to learn, initiative, achievement orientation, personal planning and organisational skills and analytical thinking (Coll & Zegwaard 2006:39). The business students on the other hand listed computer literacy, customer service orientation, teamwork and cooperation, self-confidence, and ability and willingness to learn as the top five competencies. Recent graduates and faculty in both science and technology and business sectors ranked the competency of ability and willingness to learn as the most important competency (Coll & Zegwaard 2006: 39).

In a study conducted by Archer and Davison (2008), employers were asked to indicate the skills and capabilities considered important when recruiting graduates and they mentioned communication, team working, integrity, intellectual ability, confidence, character or personality, planning and organisational, literacy, numeracy, and analysis

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and decision making (Archer & Davison, 2008:7). A study by Pop and Barkhuizen (2010) indicated that all soft skills are very important. A combination of results of both groups involved in their study showed that graduate interns view attentiveness as one of the five most important soft skills while mentors ranked business etiquette as the most important.

Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin (2011) also conducted a research on the employer's perception of the employability skills of graduates. Their study revealed that employers and HEIs found that there are characteristics, skills, knowledge and intellectual capability elements required for specific roles (Lowden et al., 2011:12). A combination of transferable skills was deemed particularly relevant. This included team working, problem solving, self-management, business knowledge, literacy and numeracy, ICT knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, initiative, and leadership skills. Their study also revealed that in addition to the skills mentioned, employers also highlighted particular attitudes and outlooks including motivation, tenacity, and commitment. The ACCI/BCI report of 2002 identified eight employability skills, being communication, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, learning and technology. The study of the ACCI/BCI (2002) revealed that employers realised that the skills emphasised by key competencies were no longer adequate and they were too generic in their approach and no longer reflected the needs of the contemporary workplace. After its research through consultation with employers across Australia, a framework that explains how employability skills can be contextualised and specified for the needs of industries and occupations was developed. The following table illustrates the ACCI/BCA employability skills framework:

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Table: 2.2: ACCI/BCA employability skills framework (2002)

Communication	Team work	Problem solving	Initiative and enterprise	Planning and organising	Self-management	Learning
Listening and understanding	Working as an individual and a team member	Developing practical situations	Adapting to new situations	Managing time and priorities	Evaluating and monitoring own performance	Using a range of mediums to learn
Speaking clearly and directly	Applying team work to a range of situation	Solving problems in teams	Identifying opportunities not obvious to others	Collecting, analysing and organising information	Taking responsibility	Applying learning to technical issues and operations
Reading and interpreting documentation	Working with people of different ages, genders, races, religions or political persuasions	Solving independence and initiative identifying problems and solving them	Being creative	Identifying contingency situations	Having knowledge and confidence in own vision and goals	Being open to new ideas and change
Using numeracy effectively	Coaching, mentoring and giving feedback	Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex project issues	Generating a range of options	Implementing contingency plans	Articulating own ideas and vision	Contributing to the learning community at the workplace
Sharing information	Knowing how to define a role as part of a team	Using mathematics, including budgeting and financial management to solve problems	Translating ideas into action	Being resourceful		
Being assertive	Identifying strengths of team members	Testing assumptions, taking the context of data and circumstances into account		Allocating people and other resources to tasks		

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Writing to the needs of the audience				Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies		
Empathising				Participating in continuous improvement and planning processes		
Negotiating responsibly			Planning the use of resources including time management			
Persuading effectively			Developing a vision and a proactive plan for the company			
Establishing and using networks						

Hard skills are referred to as the technical or administrative procedures related to an organisation's core business. These skills are typically easy to observe, quantify and measure. Technical skills include the ability to use specialized knowledge to solve problems, human/people skills as the ability to effectively function and contribute to a team, and the conceptual skills as the integration of activities toward a common goal (Northouse, 2010). The results of the study conducted by Pop and Barkhuizen (2010) showed that the majority of graduate interns and their mentors believe that technical skills training contributed to a large extent in the employability of graduate interns.

A study by Raftopoulos, Coetzee and Visser (2009) resulted in both groups rating the skills categories importance as follows:

- Academic/technical skills
- Basic/generic/transferable skills
- Work experience

The employers of graduates in the Fasset Sector and the graduates themselves therefore regarded their academic and technical skills as the most important category of skills required of graduates in the world of work. Both groups viewed generic skills to be more important than work experience (Raftopoulos, 2006).

2.7 THE ROLE OF HEI'S IN GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Since employers look for graduates with a variety of knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes, it is important for employers and academics to collaborate in finding a solution to address the lack of employability skills amongst graduates. The reviews of previous literature illustrated the need for collaboration not only between employer and university, but collaboration between all stakeholders (Rateau & Kaufman, 2009:32). The role of higher education has been the subject of many articles and focuses on the need for change in various areas including curriculum, teaching methods, expected educational outcomes to keep abreast with the changing world, and the need to collaborate with potential employers (Rateau & Kaufman, 2009:99).

Based on the NSDS (III), a partnership and collective responsibility between government, businesses, trade unions, constituency bodies, SETA's, employers, and other professional bodies and NGO's, is crucial in achieving high economic growth, high productivity and a highly skilled and capable workforce in South Africa. This kind of partnership calls for an improvement in relationships between universities, colleges, SETA's and employers both locally and nationally, and should also be extended to building international connections. As Griesel and Parker (2009: 1) point out that HEIs and the workplace have a common misunderstanding of each other's role, employers believe that universities produce poor quality graduates. By contrast, HEIs feel that employers do not appreciate the skills and knowledge graduates possess. It is strongly expected of HEIs to proactively and simultaneously engage with the skills needs of the economy through research, knowledge generation and innovation (Griesel & Parker

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2009:2). To enhance graduate employability skills and integrate employability into the curriculum successfully, it is imperative that HEIs give full support to the programmes through adequate staff resources, corporate policies and cultural support.

In South Africa there is a National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 (NQF) that offers the required support with the objectives to create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements, facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths, enhance the quality of education and training and accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities (NQF Act 67 of 2008). There are also SETA's mandated to promote and facilitate the delivery of education, training and development in order to enhance the skills profile of the Education, Training and Development (ETD) sector and contribute to the creation of employment opportunities especially for those previously disadvantaged. These SETA's assist in achieving the goals of the NSDS III by addressing employer demands through developing sector skills plans (SSPs) (NSDS III).

Having some educational background or formal qualification is a requirement for most employers but it is not sufficient to make one employable. As a result, HEIs are expected to redesign degree programmes and foster extra-curricular activities to foster undergraduate employability skills (Yorke & Knight, 2004). In a study conducted by Lowden et al (2011: 8), employers indicated that HEIs could do more to deal with employability across their courses through integrating work-based learning into the curriculum. The study highlighted that employers in general believe that universities were less responsive to the needs of employers and the economy at large. This brings about a huge gap between employer's needs and what skills graduates possess. It also explains why there are increasing numbers of unemployed graduates.

Marock (2008:10) points out that previous research suggested that in order for employability skills to be developed, HEIs need to:

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- Include employability skills among instructional goals and ensure that these skills are explicitly taught.
- Ensure that students understand the skills and talents they have and how they can contribute to their and the country's well-being.
- Ensure students know how to present themselves to employers
- Provide students with a reflective process that will be used both currently and in the future.
- Develop students who are ready and prepared for their next step.
- Provide students with experiences that simulate the world of work.
- Provide students with actual experiences of the world of work.
- Employ instructors holding and communicating high expectations for the learning and behaviour of their students.
- The overall culture of the institution holds high expectations for the learners

Researchers identified a number of different models for understanding the parties and their roles in implementing employability skills in HEIs. All stakeholders need to be involved in the process of developing employability skills in order to know the required skills, the way to improve those skills and find solutions to any skills gap identified. Harvey (2002) came up with two models called the “magic bullet model” and the “graduate employability development model”. The magic bullet model assumes that students are somehow provided with employability as a result of them being students which will lead them to being employed (Harvey, 2002: 4). The second model of graduate employability development was developed by Harvey which pointed out the importance of linking all factors and parties (student/graduates, HEIs and employers) involved in the process of developing graduate attributes. The model is presented below with three core processes that have an impact on employability. The processes are “the pedagogic process that encourages development, self-reflection by the student and the articulation of experiences and abilities”.

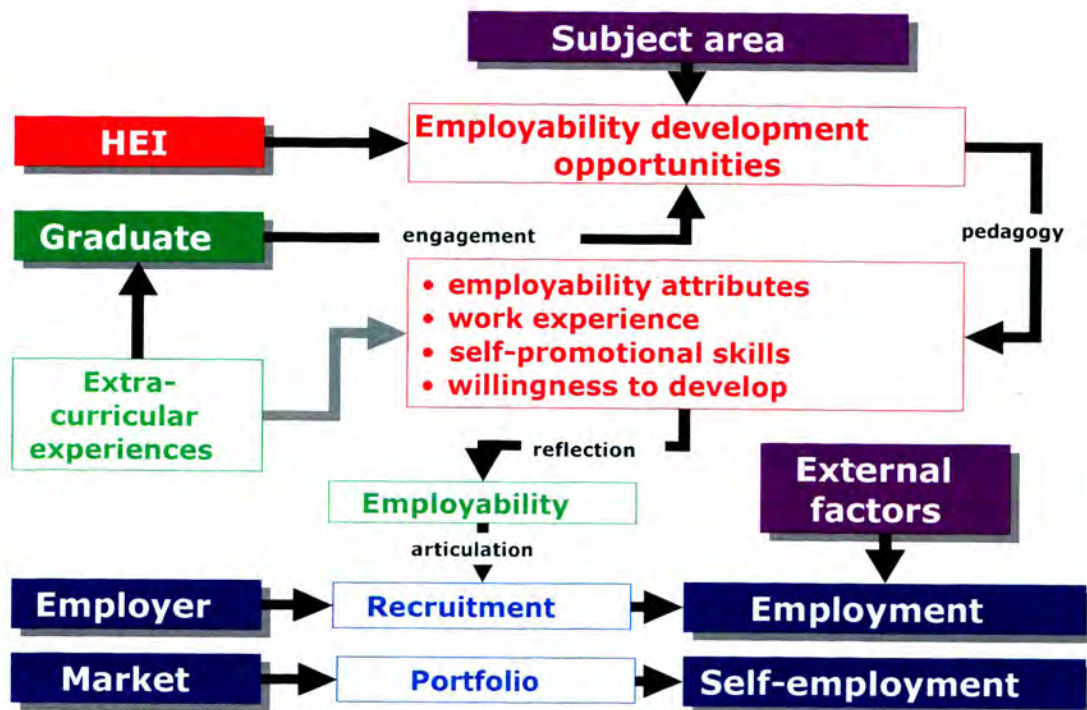


Figure 2.3 A model of graduate employability development: Harvey (2002:4)

Based on the CBI report “preparing graduates for the world of work” 2009, universities involved in its study used a range of approaches to embed employability into the curriculum. These approaches include:

- An institution-wide employability policy or strategy
- Building employability skills into the curriculum through work-related learning
- Adapting the way the curriculum is taught and assessed
- Offering compulsory modules
- Offering optional modules designed to help students acquire employability skills
- Offering foundation degree courses which directly address the development of employability skills
- Using a student's personal development plan to encourage analysis of and reflection on the employability skills
- Making paid work placements a key part of the university experience
- Encouraging students to take work placements during holidays

- Encouraging entrepreneurship by helping students run their own businesses
- Extra-curricular activities offered through careers service

2.8 WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Work integrated learning (WIL) is a term used to incorporate experiential learning or strategies for facilitating learning such as internships, work-based learning and professional practice (Holtzhauzen & du Toit, 2009:159). WIL has several names internationally, in the USA and South Africa it is commonly known as cooperative education and internships (Groenewald, 2004). WIL has a number of various definitions by different authors. According to Nica and Popescu (2010:1) WIL or cooperative education is a form of learning whereby periods of study are exchanged with periods of related work within business, industry or a governmental agency. By this means, students are given the opportunity to effectively integrate theory of the classroom with the practice and the responsibility of the workplace (Nica & Popescu, 2010:1).

Kramer and Usher (2011: 2) define WIL as “types of student employment experiences that are usually organised by the institution, related to their field of study and geared towards making connection between classroom learning and on the job experiences”. On the other hand Van der Westhuiizen and Kesa (2010) cite a definition of WIL by Feinstein, Mann and Corsun (2002) as a participatory method that involves a variety of a person’s mental capabilities and exists when a student processes information in an active and immersive learning environment (Van der Westhuizen & Kesa, 2010:3).

The World Association for Co-operative Education defines work-integrated learning as a combination of professional work experiences with classroom studies, in variable formats that can include research, internships, study abroad, service learning, student teaching, clinical rotations, community service, industry attachments, cooperative education and professional work placements.

2.8.1 Types of WIL that HEIs can use to enhance employability of graduates

According to Sattler, (2011), there are various types of WIL that HEIs can use each with its own benefits. These include apprenticeships, mandatory professional practice, field experience, co-op, internships, applied research projects, and service learning. A detailed discussion of the different types of WIL is provided below:

- **Apprenticeships-** are programmes that combine in-school training for employment in a skilled trade or skilled occupation with on-the-job workplace training over a specific length of program. Apprenticeships started many years ago in other countries when young people worked under a master craftsman to learn a trade. This was a form of low-cost work in exchange for learning. The young men often lived in the craftsmen's houses and taught work like embroidery and silk weaving for women (South African Department of Labour). Apprenticeship in South Africa is one of the programmes introduced based on the new acts for developing skills of the citizens of our country. They are still offered in terms of the Manpower Training Act, 1981. Trades such as welders, plumbers, fitters, plasterers, mechanics and instrument technicians were identified as scarce skills by the Department of Labour. The apprenticeship learning programme was seen as one way of assisting Government to train the unemployed and employed to obtain a qualification in order to work as an artisan.
- **Mandatory professional practice** includes any professional practice-based arrangements for professional licensing and workers may be paid or unpaid. Examples of this are clinical placements intended to give students practical experience in a health care environment and characterized by activities that are core to the program curriculum and necessary for the successful completion of the program, in which students are closely supervised by institutional staff or individuals working on behalf of the institution. In South Africa we have institutions like the Professional Board of Psychology (HPCSA), South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA), and the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP).

- **Field experience** incorporates placements and other work-related experiences that prepare students for professional or occupational fields but are not required for professional licensing. It include field placements/work placements that are scheduled hours of activities intended to give a student practical experience in the workplace and for which the student does not receive a regular salary or wage from the employer and that are central to the program curriculum and necessary for the completion of the program. These programs do not involve direct supervision of students by institutional staff, but may involve periodic site visits, and student performance is evaluated by the institution.
- **Co-operative (Co-op) education** are programs that enable students to gain appropriate work experience while applying and refining the knowledge and skills gained in the classroom. Groenewald (2004) defines co-op as a structured educational strategy that progressively integrates academic study with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals. Co-op programmes take longer to complete than non co-op ones and may cost students accommodation and transport. Groenewald (2009) concludes that co-operative education can be reduced to four core dimensions being; developing an integrated curriculum specific to the occupational field, designing work components to support experiential learning, cultivating supportive employers to offer placements and provide advisory input; and creating a structure to administer, monitor, and evaluate the learning experience.
- **Internships** are work experience programmes planned to occur at or near the end of a program of study and they last for duration of a year or more. They are offered in professional fields with supervisors to provide mentoring support as well as supervision. Internships are mostly shorter than co-operative education programmes and offer remuneration. Groenewald (2004) views internships as experiences of a fixed duration that occur toward the end of the programme of study.

- **Applied research projects** are used mostly in humanities, social sciences and sciences and are based on the research perception that real world research projects can assist pedagogically in improving student's work experience. They use different methods of paid assistance to professors involved in research projects or structured work with a strong research application. Helle, Tynjälä and Olkinuora (2006), identified the two key features of project-based learning as the presence of a problem that drives activities and the inclusion of the results in a final product. The four main motivations underlying project based work are professional (related to practice orientation and work-based learning), democratic or humanitarian (related to service learning), the desire to foster critical thinking (related to science orientation), and pedagogic motives (to deepen subject matter understanding) (Helle et al, 2006).
- **Service learning** is defined by the CHE as a pedagogy that integrated service with learning. It aims to provide equal benefits to both the provider and the recipient of service. Butin (2006) believes that there are five dimensions by which the institutionalization of service-learning can be measured. These include; philosophy and mission, faculty support and involvement, student support and involvement, community participation and partnerships and institutional support.
- **Work-based learning** is defined as a component of a learning programme that focuses on the applications of theory in an authentic, work-based context (Higher Council for Higher Education, 2006). WBL addresses specific competencies identified for the acquisition of a qualification which relate to the development of skills that will make the learner employable and assist in developing their skills. WBL is executed extensively in HEI's in both undergraduate and postgraduate student learning experiences (Groenewald, 2009).

2.8.2 Benefits of WIL for students

Van der Westhuizen and Kesa (2010:5) highlight a number of benefits that WIL education offers to students. These include:

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Enhanced student self confidence, self concept and improved skills
- Enhancement of practical knowledge and skills
- Enhanced employment opportunities
- Attainment of necessary skills to supplement theoretical training and
- Enhancement of the induction process when the student joins the labour market

From a study conducted by Pop and Barkhuizen (2011), it was reported that all interns involved in the study supported the need for an internship programme as it provides the bridge between the academic world and the work environment (Pop & Barkhuizen, 2011). Comments by graduate interns on this study also indicated that the programme provides practical exposure and experience for graduates and hence develops the talent pipeline and addresses the graduate unemployment rate. Mentors also recognised the need for an internship programme of this nature as they believe that it contributes to developing a pipeline for future junior consultant skills; providing opportunities for career and succession planning of entire departments; assisting with retention of good quality young professionals; exposing the organisation to new IT talent and thinking; contributing to the development of young business professionals; giving young people the opportunity for work exposure and delivering on the role as a responsible corporate citizen (Pop & Barkhuizen, 2011). Both mentors and graduate interns used in this study indicated that their expectations regarding the internship programme were met.

2.8.3 Benefits of WIL for employers

Braunstein and Stull (cited by Cullen, 2007:37) indicated that the benefits for the host organization includes the hiring of people with special skills, bringing new knowledge into the organization, fulfilling social responsibilities and providing supervisory experience. The benefits for the host organizations of co-op programs include screening and hiring of potential employees, interactions with the universities, cost savings, and the hiring of students for special projects.

2.8.4 Benefits of WIL for HEIs

Weisz and Chapman cited by (Coll & Eames, 2007:134), indicate the main benefits of WIL for HEIs being:

- Student recruitment and enrolment,
- Enhancements of student qualities in relation to the institution,
- Curriculum development,
- Internationalisation of the institution,
- Staff development, and
- Financial benefits

HEIs in South Africa need to include WIL in their teaching and learning programmes. The Council for Higher Education(CHE) in the WIL Good Practice Guide (2011) view WIL as a means of addressing concerns around student development and graduate attributes thus fostering learning that is less didactic and more situated and real world oriented.

2.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a detailed review of the literature available in relation to graduate workplace skills has been explored. Models of graduate employability and the types of WIL have been discussed. A variety of skills needed to enhance graduate employability were also considered. Based on the literature discovered, it is evident that organisations expect graduates to be in possession of certain skills that make them employable and prepared to cope in the labour market. This means HEIs need to play an enormous part in embedding skills into their curriculum and introduce WIL programmes to prepare graduates for the world of work and to meet the expectations of the labour market. The subsequent chapter discusses the research methodology employed for this study.

Chapter 3:RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 INTRODUCTION

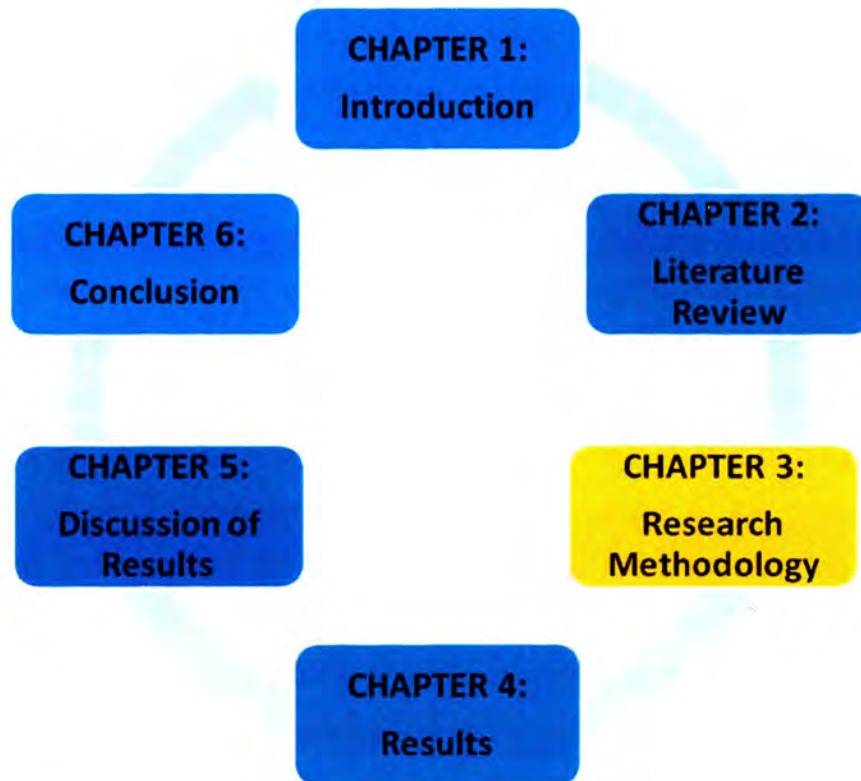


Figure 3.1: Chapter 3 in context

This chapter presents the research methodology employed in this study. The chapter provides a detailed discussion of terms such as research design, population and sampling method, sample size, data collection instrument, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:2) research is a systematic process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information in order to increase the researcher's

understanding of the phenomenon of interest. The research paradigm is a significant consideration when undertaking a research study. Creswell (2009) defines a research paradigm as a worldview, which is a basic set of beliefs that guides and directs the action of the researcher. Creswell (2009) further states that the choice of a paradigm is influenced by four main factors: the problem, the researcher, the methodology and the expected outcome. The beliefs of a researcher influence the approach to be taken in the research which can either be a qualitative, quantitative or a mixed methods approach. This study follows a quantitative research approach.

According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2004:481), paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiry along three dimensions which are ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied and what can be known about it. Epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known. Methodology specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known (Terre Blanche, 2004:480). This study uses a positivist paradigm due to the quantitative approach the research is taking. Positivism is described as an epistemological stance that maintains that all phenomena including social, can be analysed using a scientific method (Walliman, 2011:175). He further elaborates that everything can be measured and if only one knew enough, the causes and effects of all phenomena can be uncovered. The ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology of the positivist paradigm are presented in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.2 Characteristics of the positivist research paradigm

Characteristic	Positivist Characteristics
Ontology: the researcher's view of the nature of reality or being	• One true reality is apprehendable, identifiable and measurable; • Reality consists of stable pre-existing patterns or order that can be discovered; • Reality is not time or context-bound; and • Reality can be generalised
Epistemology: the researcher's view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge	• The researcher and the research participant are assumed to be independent and by following rigorous and standardised procedures, the participant and the topic can be studied by the researcher without bias (objectivism); • The researcher can study the research participants without influencing them in any way; • Replicated findings are considered true and provide evidence for theory verification; and • Knowledge consists of verified hypotheses that can be considered as fact.
Axiology: the researcher's view of the role of values in research	• Values of researcher have no place in research • Values of researcher must be carefully controlled.
Researcher Role in the research	• Objective, impartial observer, passive, value-neutral
Most Common Data Collection Techniques	• Highly structured • Large Samples • Measurement quantitative but can use qualitative

Table 3.2 adapted from Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009).

The positivist paradigm is suitable for this study as the main objective is to obtain reliable and valid knowledge with reference to the employability skills of graduates. In addition this paradigm is also suitable because the study uses a survey design. The broad research design of the study is presented in the next section.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF INQUIRY STRATEGY AND BROAD RESEARCH DESIGN

The following section presented the description of the study's strategy of inquiry and the basic characteristics of quantitative research.

3.3.1 Description of inquiry strategy

The research approach of this study is quantitative in nature since the intention of the research is to find out the perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates. To achieve this, the researcher uses a non-experimental research design which will provide numerical data required for statistical analysis gathered by means of a questionnaire (Creswell, 2009). The research approach influences the way the researcher conducts the search for information. According to Cooper and Schindler (2011:726), quantitative research is the precise count of some behaviour, knowledge, opinion or attitude. .

3.3.1.1 Characteristics of quantitative research

Quantitative research is used as a means for testing objective theories by the method of statistically analysing relationships amongst variables (Creswell, 2009). It is concerned with consistent measurement of a phenomenon by different researchers over time and usually by means of a measurement device (Creswell, 2009). The consistent measurement forms the foundation needed for the thorough statistical analysis of the data which is required to investigate the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments in question (Bryman & Bell, 2007:154). Quantitative measurement also allows the researcher to statistically analyse the extent of relationships or differences between constructs (Bryman & Bell, 2007:154). This aligns with the need for establishing empirical, exploratory and descriptive data on the desirable graduate workplace skills in the South African context.

3.3.2 A classification of the proposed study's overall research design

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) define research design as planning. They maintain that as a researcher, you will be more efficient and effective if you identify your resources, procedures and your data always with a central goal of solving your research problem in mind at the beginning of your project. Maholtra (2004) defines research design as a framework or blue print for conducting the research project. It entails procedures necessary for obtaining information needed to structure or solve research problems. With regard to the quantitative approach used in this study, a questionnaire is identified as the suitable instrument for collecting data. The data collected from respondents will be analysed using a statistical technique called SPSS.

The following are appropriate descriptors that best describe the broader research design of the proposed study:

- **Cross-sectional:** Creswell (2009) describes a cross sectional survey as one where the data is collected at one point in time only. The study can be considered cross-sectional as each respondent completed the survey once, and the data collected by the survey represents desirable graduate workplace skills in a South African context at a single point in time. The survey drew responses regarding the topic from a broad cross-section of respondents, making the approach practical and reasonable for pursuing the exploratory and descriptive aims of the study. The disadvantage of cross-sectional research is that the design is not suitable for researching change over time.
- **Non-experimental:** Non-experimental research provides a numerical (quantitative) description of attitudes, opinions or trends of a population by studying a sample of the population. Data can be collected through questionnaires or structured interviews while conducting a cross-sectional or longitudinal study (Creswell, 2009).

- **Primary data:** Saunders et al. (2009) define primary data, as data which is collected for a specific proposed research project. In this study data has been collected specifically for the intended purpose. Primary data refers to data that is collected specifically for a research project being undertaken (Saunders et al. 2009). In this study the researcher collected empirical data to achieve the research objectives.
- **Empirical Research:** The study is classified as an empirical study as the researcher collected and analysed primary data. Mouton (2001:53) classified survey research as empirical as it is usually quantitative in nature. As this study has gathered first-hand information and made use of statistical analysis it can be concluded that it is empirical in nature.
- **Descriptive Research:** Saunders et al. (2009) mentions that the main goal of descriptive research is to portray an accurate profile of people, events or situations. The main aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive description of graduate workplace skills.
- **Quantitative Data (Numeric Data):** Quantitative data refers to numerical data that can be statistically analysed to determine the results of the research project. The data collection technique used for this study is a questionnaire which generated numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009). This type of data was used to perform statistical analysis using SPSS and draw conclusions thereof.

3.4 SURVEY RESEARCH

According to Leedy and Ormrod, (2010:108) a survey research is a study to determine the incidence, frequency, and distribution of certain characteristics in a population. It involves acquiring information about one or more groups of people, perhaps their characteristics, opinions, attitudes or previous experiences, by asking them questions and tabulating their answers (Leedy & Ormrod, (2010:108). Survey research has the

power to contribute to the advance of scientific knowledge. Survey research enables the researcher to draw inferences and extrapolate about a certain state of relationships over longer periods of time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:108). Furthermore data collected by means of survey research can be used to suggest reasons and explore possible relationships that might exist between variables (Saunders et al, 2009).

The main advantages of survey research are as follows (Saunders et al., 2009):

- The researcher is not forever dependant on the participants in the study and the research can continue long after departure of the sample group. This could lead to better turnaround time.
- Potential to generalise to a large population, given that appropriate sampling techniques are utilised.
- High measurement reliability if the research makes use of proper instruments.
- Increase trust with the sample group; anonymity will be assured by no supervision during completion of the questionnaire.

3.5 SAMPLING

Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008: 501) define sampling as a process of selecting some elements from a population to represent a population as a whole. When collecting data for quantitative studies, it is impractical or impossible to assess all individuals or the population in a particular category signified by the research project; therefore a sample for the population needs to be selected (Saunders et al., 2011). For the purpose of addressing the research objectives, the researcher selected a non-experimental strategy of inquiry. This study could not be conducted using an experimental research design as the researcher was trying to determine the graduate workplace skills and compare responses of the three sample groups.

3.5.1 Units of analysis

The units of analysis of a study refer to the organisation or persons which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions from. As previously indicated, to include the entire population will not be possible therefore the researcher has decided to include only the final year students, postgraduates and academics in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration for this study.

3.5.2 Target population

According to Maholtra (2004) the target population is a collection of elements or subjects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made Maree (2010) states that a sample depends on the availability of a good sampling frame, money, time and the inherent characteristics of the population. For this research, three population groups are targeted; final year students, postgraduate students and academics in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration. This is motivated by ease of access to the sample groups and other logistics such as time and costs.

3.5.3 Sampling method

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:205) maintain that a researcher should pick their applicable sample depending on the intended research questions asked and the objectives of the study. In the research design, an instrument was carefully designed to provide answers to the research questions and the findings of literature review will help in answering the research questions. The responses from the three samples will help in creating a mapping that is expected to reflect the findings. In order to create the most accurate generalisation of the results of the three groups, the researcher tried to obtain the biggest sample group possible. To accomplish this, the researcher made arrangements with academics in the faculty to set up appointments for distributing and collecting questionnaires to students.

This research used a purposive convenience sampling method whereby the researcher selects the sample on the basis of the researcher's judgement and knowledge of the sample group was used for this study. As there was a possibility that not all the participants would answer the questionnaire and not all the respondents would complete the whole questionnaire, it was essential that this method be used (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

The next section will discuss the specific attributes and characteristics of the units of analysis and challenges encountered in gaining access to the required data. In continuation, the specific approach, method and instruments used in the collection of data will be discussed. Next, there will be a discussion on the specific forms of data collection and a discussion of who was involved in the data collection and the length of data collection period.

3.6.1 Specific attributes and characteristics of the units of analysis

Final year students, postgraduates and academics in the field of Commerce were identified as the units of analysis for this study. The characteristics and attributes of the units of analysis were collected through primary data collection method. To understand the results gained from this study, it was first important to have a better understanding of the sample population, so that generalisations made on the population could be more accurate.

The first attribute the respondents were asked to identify was their gender. The second one was their age which assisted the researcher to determine the age ranges of the population groups. The other attributes and characteristics collected from the sample included ethnicity, level of study, programme of study and qualifications. These attributes were used to determine differences between the sample groups and also for the

researcher to have a better understanding of the respondents so that better generalisations can be made about the population. The last attribute and characteristic that was important to the study was the occupation which final year students wish to follow in future and the current occupation of postgraduates who are employed. The academic respondents were asked to select their positions classified as lecturer, associate professor and professor.

3.6.2 Challenges encountered in gaining access to the required data

Every research study has challenges that hinder obtaining access to necessary data sources on time. The most common challenge is access and completing the questionnaire. In order for the researcher to gain access to the data needed it was vital to have access to the participants because the data is collected from them. This process is known as gaining physical access or entry (Saunders et al., 2009). The researcher needed to obtain permission from the institution's Faculty Higher Degrees Committee to conduct the study. The researcher had a challenge in gaining full participation from the participants as not all of them attended classes on a regular basis and some were not cooperative or willing to answer questionnaires.

3.6.3 Specific approach, method and instruments used in the collection of data

The following section provides a discussion of the specific approach used to collect the required data. The next part of the section will discuss the specific measurement instruments used in the collection of the required data.

3.6.3.1 Specific research method

The main methods for collecting data in survey research are interview or questionnaires (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:187). For this study, a questionnaire was chosen as a suitable method of collecting the data required data. The questionnaires used in this study were all self-administered questionnaires which required the researchers to personally

distribute and collect them. For postgraduate students on courses such as MBA and PGDM, it was necessary to distribute the questionnaire to them through e-mail as most were staying far from campus.

3.6.3.2 Measurement instruments

The instrument used for data collection in this study is a questionnaire. A questionnaire is a research tool through which people are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order (Gray, 2009:337). The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it could address the objectives of the study.

The types of questions in the questionnaire were both closed and open ended. Closed ended questionnaires are ones in which the respondent is offered a set of pre-designed replies such as yes or no, true or false, multiple choices responses, or is given an opportunity to choose from a selection of numbers representing strength of feeling or attitude (Gray, 2009: 338).

Three self-administered questionnaires measuring desirable graduate skills were used for this research study (Barkhuizen, 2010). The questionnaires were developed in such a way as to reflect the soft skills and technical skills training as presented by the HEIs. All questionnaires are similar in content in order to get a comprehensive view of all respondents and a true reflection of the skills offering of the higher education institution. The first questionnaire focused on the final year students, the second on postgraduate students and the third on academics. The original questionnaire was piloted and submitted to subject matter experts to enhance its face validity, content validity and reliability.

All three questionnaires have four sections including respondents (biographical information), higher education training (soft skill and technical skills) and the need for work integrated learning. A brief overview of each questionnaire is presented below.

The soft skills questionnaire was developed based on an extensive literature review. A total of 20 soft skills were included in the questionnaire. Firstly, respondents are asked to what extent the higher education institution contributed to their competence in the specific soft skills ranging on a five point Likert scale from “To no Extent” (1) to a “Very large Extent” (5). Secondly the respondents are asked to indicate the importance of the soft skill in a five point Likert scale from “Not” (1) to “Critical” (5). After completion of this questionnaire the respondents were asked to identify any other important skills that were not addressed as part of their studies at the Higher Education Institution. Finally the respondent was asked to rank the five most important graduate soft skills.

The purpose of the Technical (hard skills) questionnaire was to ascertain whether the technical skills training contributed to the student’s competence in technical skills. The respondent was asked to rate the extent to which the technical skills training contributed to the graduate’s competence in technical skills on a five point Likert Scale ranging from “To no Extent” (1) to “To a very large extent”(5).

In the final part of the questionnaire respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which there is a need for work integrated learning as part of their qualifications. This question is measured on a five-point scale ranking from To No Extent (1) to To a Very Large Extent (5).

Open ended questions were included in each section to allow for additional comments.

3.6.3.3 Who was involved in the data collection and the length of data collection?

The questionnaire did not need the use of any equipment to be completed. The sample pool was based on campus which made it easy and fast to distribute and collect questionnaires. The data collection period lasted for a month due to the university recess period in which students had to go home for a week. The data collection was intended to last no more than two weeks. During the data collection period follow-ups

were made with academics and postgraduate students to complete and return the questionnaire.

3.6.4 Research Procedure

Prior to the data collection process, the researcher needed to first gain permission from the institution concerned. As soon as permission was granted, the sampling process began. The participants were identified through the purposive convenience method. The identified sample groups were presented with a cover letter attached to the questionnaire which explained the purpose of the study. The researcher also made brief verbal introduction of the study to final year students. The rights of the participants in the study were explained and they were also informed of the anonymity as well as their rights to withdraw from the study anytime. By completing and submitting the questionnaire, participants gave their informed consent and this ensured voluntary participation. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured as the survey was conducted in complete anonymity, since the researcher did not request or record the respondent's identity. To ensure that enough participants answered the questionnaire the participants were given some time by lecturers during their classes to complete the questionnaire. This was very helpful in getting a quick response from participants.

3.7 DATA ANALYSES

Statistical analysis was carried out using the SPSS Program (SPSS, 2012). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and standard deviations were used to analyse the data.

3.8 ASSESSING AND DEMONSTRATING THE QUALITY AND RIGOUR OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN

This section provides a description of the sampling, data collection and data analysis methods used in the study. Furthermore the quality and rigour of the study is discussed

as well as the applicable ethics in the study. Issues which affect the reliability and validity of the research must be considered.

3.8.1 Reliability

Blumberg et al, (2011:500) define reliability as a characteristic of measurement concerned with accuracy, precision and consistency. It is the extent to which the questionnaires used in the study will produce consistent and dependable results (Saunders, et al., 2009). The reliability of the instruments used in this study was determined after all data of the survey have been collected and statistically analysed by means of a statistics programme named SPSS. The reliability of the measuring instruments is assessed with the use of Cronbach alpha coefficients and factor analyses (Field, 2005). Descriptive statistics are used to analyse the data. Reliability is the degree to which measures are free from random error and therefore, provide consistent data (McDaniel & Gates, 2002).

3.8.2 Validity

Validity refers to a characteristic of measurement concerned that a test measures what the researcher actually wishes to measure and that differences found with a measurement reflect true differences among respondents drawn from a population (Blumberg et al., 2011:505). This means a measuring device is valid only if differences in scores reflect true differences on the characteristics being measured rather than systematic and random error (McDaniel & Gates, 2002:299). Validity encompasses two very important areas; firstly, validity questions the controls enforced to ensure conclusions drawn are truly reflected by the data and secondly, it questions if we can make a generalisable conclusion about the population from the initial sample group drawn (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:28).

3.8.3 Rigour

The rigour was tested using the correct sampling strategy when selecting the sample. By using a purposive convenient sampling method, a better sample was selected as the greatest part of the target population had the chance of being in the study (Creswell, 2009). Another way of demonstrating rigour in this study was to use the correct application of statistical analysis. Any type of statistical analysis could have been used to get the desired results from the data. However, by using the correct statistical analysis the results could be used to make a correct generalisability to the target population.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are various ethical considerations to take into account when conducting research in an internationally and culturally diverse environment. In this regard Isaacs (2007) states that “the cultural diversity of the participants should be acknowledged and actively addressed so that cultural differences can be caught up in an upward spiral of constructive engagement”. Working across cultures enables one to recognize commonalities and differences in a much clearer way. The following has been considered to ensure ethical standards in conducting this research study:

- **Protection from harm:** Participants should not be exposed to unnecessary physical or psychological harm irrespective of them volunteering to participate. This study posed no harm to participants especially that it was non-experimental in nature. Participants had direct contact with the researcher to assist them should they need clarification or any kind of assistance in completing the questionnaire.
- **Informed consent:** This entails that the participants in a study should be aware of the specific nature and purpose of the study in which they are participating. Their participation is voluntary and they were at liberty to withdraw from the study should they wish to.

- **Rights to privacy:** This is about confidentiality and anonymity. Participants are not asked for any information that can identify them directly. The biographical information asked is of such a nature that one will not be able to link it to the individual participants.
- **Honesty:** This entails reporting findings in an honest manner and not allowing any misinterpretations to occur or mislead the readers in any way.

The researcher complied with the ethical standards set out in the university regulations and applied for ethical clearance in the Faculty.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed in detail the research design and methods applied in this study. It commenced with an overview of the research paradigm of the study then followed by a description of the strategy of inquiry and broad research design. A detailed discussion of the sampling strategies and techniques used in the study was also provided and followed by a discussion of the data collection methodology. After that there was a brief discussion on the data analysis. Issues which might have an impact on the reliability and validity of the research were considered before ethical concerns related to the study were addressed.

Chapter 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

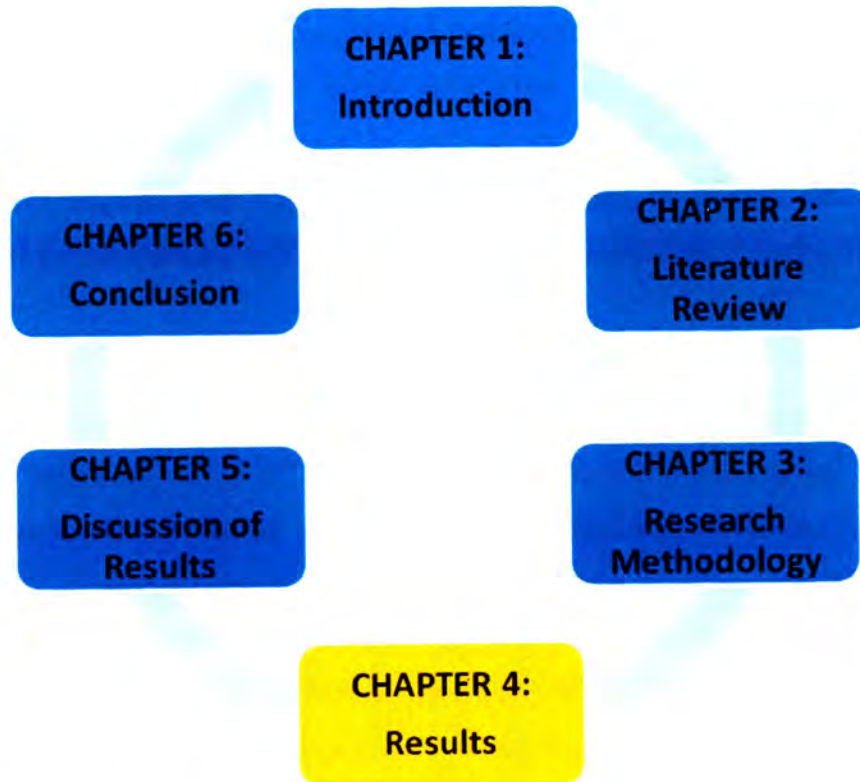


Figure 4.1: Chapter 4 in Context

The previous Chapter presented the research design of the study and included the methods, measuring instruments, research procedures and data analysis methods. This Chapter delineates the results and findings of the various analyses methods applied.

The results and findings are reported in two phases. Phase one presents the results of the demographic breakdowns of the participants. Phase two focuses on the results pertaining to the measurements. The Demographic breakdowns of the respondents are reported next.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The next section shows the demographics of the sample group used in this study with regard to the biographical information provided by the respondents. The sample for this study includes final year undergraduate students, postgraduate students and academics of a Faculty Specialising in Commerce and Administration. The final year undergraduate students include those students doing their third and final year of study. They are referred to as Final year students in this study. Postgraduates included Honours, Masters and Postgraduate Diploma in Management students. Academics are all teaching staff in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration ranging from lecturers to full professors.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:261), a questionnaire response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis, while 60% and 70% are good and very good. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to final year undergraduate students, of which only 244 were returned. This represents an 81% response rate which is a very good response rate. From the 150 questionnaires that were sent to postgraduates, 94 responded. This represents a 63% response rate which is above 50% of the distributed questionnaires and is adequate for analysis. Out of the 45 questionnaires distributed to academics only 21 responded. This represents a 47% response rate which is slightly below 50%. The following information reflects the demographics of the respondents which include gender, age, ethnicity, level of study, programme of study, qualification and current or future occupation.

The gender distribution of the final year students, postgraduate students and academics respondents are as follows:

Table 4.1: Gender distribution

	Final Year Students		Postgraduates		Academics	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	87	35.7	49	52.1	19	76.2
Female	157	64.3	45	47.9	5	23.8
Total	244	100	94	100	21	100

According to Table 4.1 the majority of the final year students who completed the questionnaire were females with 64.3% whereas males represented 35.7%. From the postgraduates who completed the questionnaire, 52.1% were male while 47.9% were female. From the academics that completed the questionnaire, 76.2% of them represented males while 23.8% were females.

The ethnicity of undergraduate final year students, postgraduate students and academics respondents are presented below:

Table 4.2: Ethnic distribution

	Final Year Students		Postgraduates		Academics	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Black	224	91.8	91	97.	13	61.9
White	11	4.5	0	0	6	28.6
coloured	9	3.7	3	3	2	9.5
Total	244	100	94	100	21	100

Table 4.2 shows that 91.8% of respondents are black, 4.5% are whites and 3.7% are coloured. From the postgraduates 97% of them are black and 3% are coloured while 61.9% of the academics are black while 28.6% are white and 9.5% are coloured.

The age of undergraduate final year students, postgraduate students and academics who participated in this study are reported below in Table 4.3

Table 4.3: Age distribution

	Final Year Students		Postgraduates		Academics	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	182	74.6	40	42.6		
30-39	52	21.3	27	28.7	8	38.1
40-49	5	2.0	20	21.3	5	23.8
50-59	1	0.4	5	5.3	3	14.3
60+					4	19
Total	240	98.4	2	2.1		

The above table 4.3 represents the age categories of all three respondent groups. The age ranges from 20 to 60+. From the undergraduate final year students, 74.6% of respondents are between the ages 20 and 29, 21.3% are between 30 and 39, 2% are between 40 and 49 and 0.4% represents 1 person aged between 50 and 59. For postgraduate students, results show that 42.6% are aged between 20 and 29, 28.7% are between 30 and 39, 21.3% are 40 to 49 while 5.3% are between 50 and 59. There are no respondents above the age of 60 from this sample group. On the academics side, there are no respondents aged between 20 and 29. Academics age groups are 38.1% for those who are between 30 and 39, 23.8% between 40 and 49, and 14.3% are between 50 and 59 and 19% are above 60.

All 244 undergraduate final year students who responded to the questionnaire are currently doing their third year of study.

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The Programme of study for postgraduate students who participated in this study are reported below in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Programme of study for postgraduates

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
MBA	53	56.4	56.4	56.4
PGDM	15	16.0	16.0	72.3
HONOURS	26	27.7	27.7	100.0
Total	94	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.4 shows that out of the 94 postgraduate students who participated in this study, 56.4% are currently doing MBA, 16% PGDM and 27.7% honours.

The occupations of Postgraduate students who participated in this study are reported below in Table 4.5

Table 4.5: Occupations of postgraduates

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	2	2.1	2.1	2.1
Education	12	12.8	12.8	14.9
Management	25	26.6	26.6	41.5
Operational	17	18.1	18.1	59.6
Other	22	23.4	23.4	83.0
Professional	16	17.0	17.0	100.0
Total	94	100.0	100.0	

The above table 4.5 illustrates that 26.6% of the postgraduate students who participated in this study are in management positions, 12.8% are in the education industry while 18.1% are in operational occupations. Other occupations comprise 23.4% of the

population while professional comprise of 17%. The occupations of academics who participated in this study are reported below in Table 4.6

Table 4.6: Occupations of academics

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Lecturer	14	66.7	66.7	66.7
Associate Professor	4	19.0	19.0	85.7
Professor	3	14.3	14.3	100.0
Total	21	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.6 shows that 66.7% of academics who participated in this study are lecturers, 19% are associate professors and 14.3% are professors.

4.3 PHASE 2: RESULTS OF THE GRADUATE SKILLS QUESTIONNAIRE

The first section of the Graduate Skills Questionnaire consisted of 20 of the most important graduate skills that were identified from literature. All three groups of respondents were first asked to indicate the extent to which the institution contributed to the listed skills. Secondly the respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each skill for the employability of graduates. The results are presented in the ensuing section.

4.3.1 Results of Soft Skills: Final year students

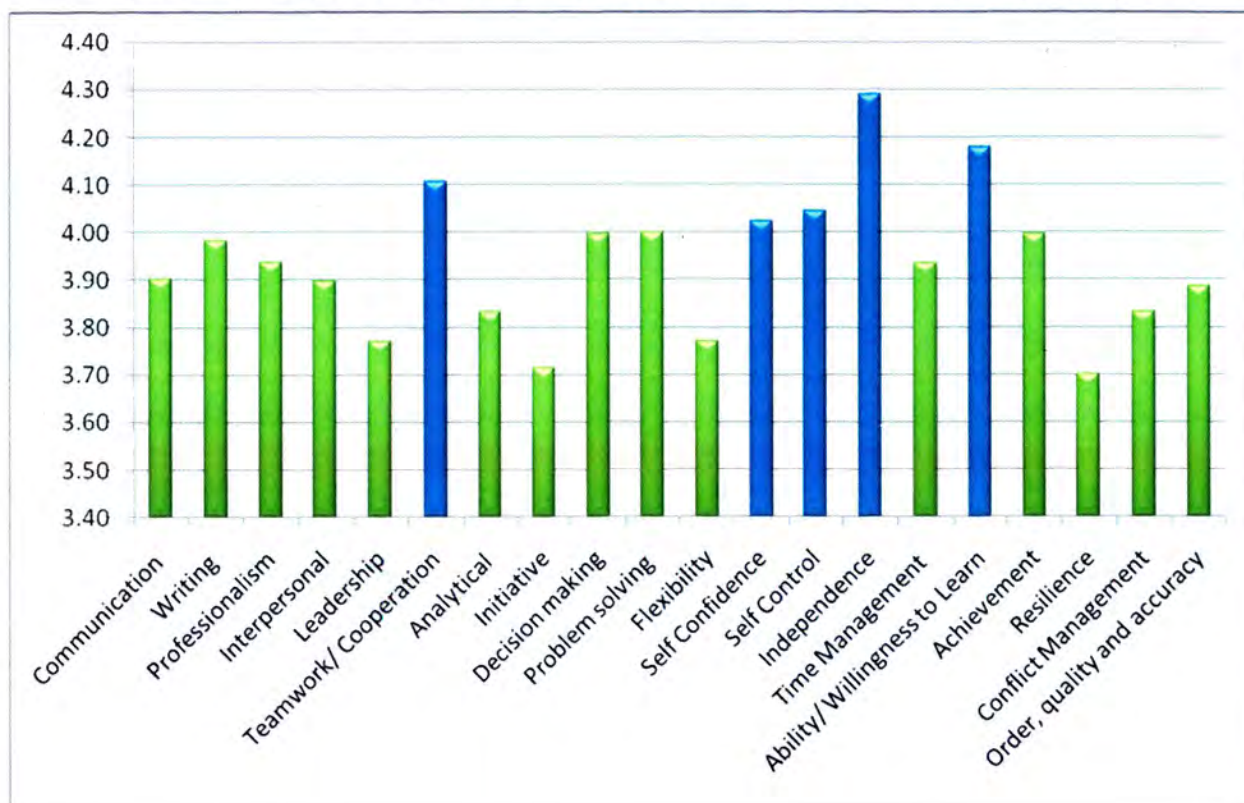
4.3.1.1 Perceptions of Graduate Soft Skills

The results of the extent to which the Final Year Undergraduate students perceived that the university currently equips them to demonstrate the listed skills in the workplace are reported in table 4.7 and Graph 4.1 below.

Table 4.7
Perceptions of Current Graduate Soft Skills Final Year Students

Graduate Skills	Mean	SD
Communication skills	3.90	.747
Writing skills	3.98	.764
Professionalism	3.94	.907
Interpersonal skills	3.90	.776
Leadership skills	3.77	.932
Teamwork and Cooperation	4.11	.873
Analytical skills	3.83	.842
Initiative	3.71	.785
Decision making skills	4.00	.860
Problem solving skills	4.00	.846
Flexibility	3.77	.887
Self Confidence	4.02	.870
Self-Control	4.05	.857
Ability to work independently	4.29	.771
Time Management Skills	3.93	.927
Ability and Willingness to Learn	4.18	.796
Achievement Orientation	4.00	.778
Resilience	3.70	.844
Conflict Management	3.83	3.374
Concern for order, quality and accuracy	3.89	.945

Graph 4.1 Perceptions of Current Graduate Soft Skills Final Year Students



From Table 4.7 and Graph 4.1 the results in general showed that the final year graduate students perceived that the institution enabled them to demonstrate the listed skills to a large extent. On average, the final year graduates indicated that their studies contributed mostly to programme training contributed most to ability to work independently, ability and willingness to learn, teamwork and cooperation, self-control and self-confidence.

4.3.1.2 Results of the importance of the graduate skills

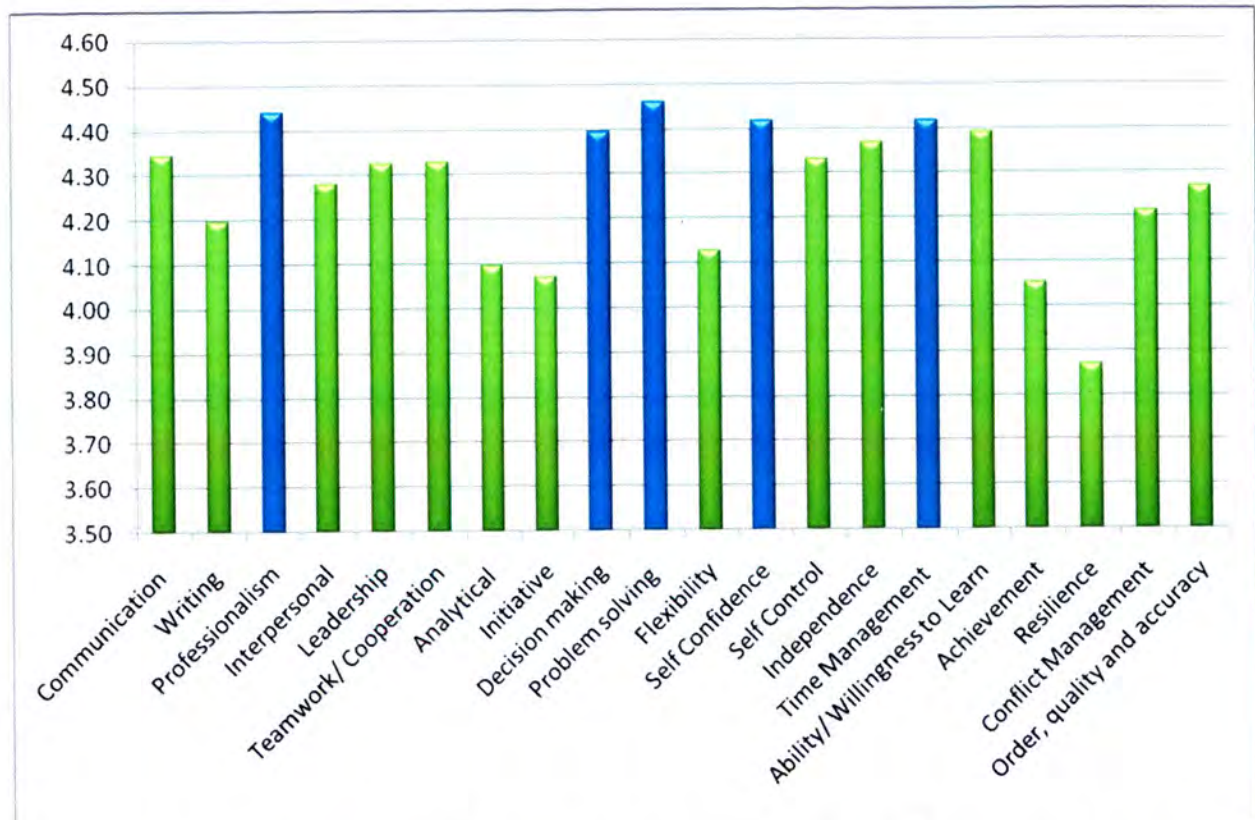
The graduates were next asked to indicate the importance of the graduate skills for enhancing their employment. The results are reported in Table 4.8 and Graph 4.2.

Table 4.8

Importance of Graduate Soft skills for Final Year Graduates

GRADUATE SKILLS	Mean	SD
Communication skills	4.34	.814
Writing skills	4.20	.782
Professionalism	4.44	.775
Interpersonal skills	4.28	.756
Leadership skills	4.32	.774
Teamwork and Cooperation	4.33	.841
Analytical skills	4.09	.834
Initiative	4.07	.846
Decision making skills	4.39	.765
Problem solving skills	4.46	.727
Flexibility	4.13	.814
Self Confidence	4.42	.701
Self Control	4.33	.786
Ability to work independently	4.37	.728
Time Management Skills	4.42	.757
Ability and Willingness to Learn	4.39	.710
Achievement Orientation	4.05	.827
Resilience	3.87	.860
Conflict Management	4.21	.829
Concern for order, quality and accuracy	4.27	.811

Graph 4.2: Importance of Graduate Skills for Final Year Graduates



The results in Table 4.8 and Graph 4.2 indicate that the final year undergraduate students perceive all the soft skills which they received training as very important. On average soft skills such as problem solving, professionalism, self-confidence, time management and decision making were perceived as the most important skills.

4.3.1.3 Ranking the Five Most Important Soft Skills

The final year undergraduate students were next asked to rank the five most important soft skills. The results are reported in Table 4.9 and Graph 4.3 below.

Table 4.9: Ranking Five Most Important Skills

GRADUATE SKILLS	%
Communication	27.9
Leadership	16.8
Professionalism	20.4
Team work	16.4
Time management	18.6

Graph 4.3: Ranking the five most important skills



From table 4.9 and Graph 4.3 it is evident that the most important soft skills for the undergraduates are communication (27.9%), followed by professionalism (20.4%), time management (18.6%), leadership (16.8%) and team work and cooperation (16.4%).

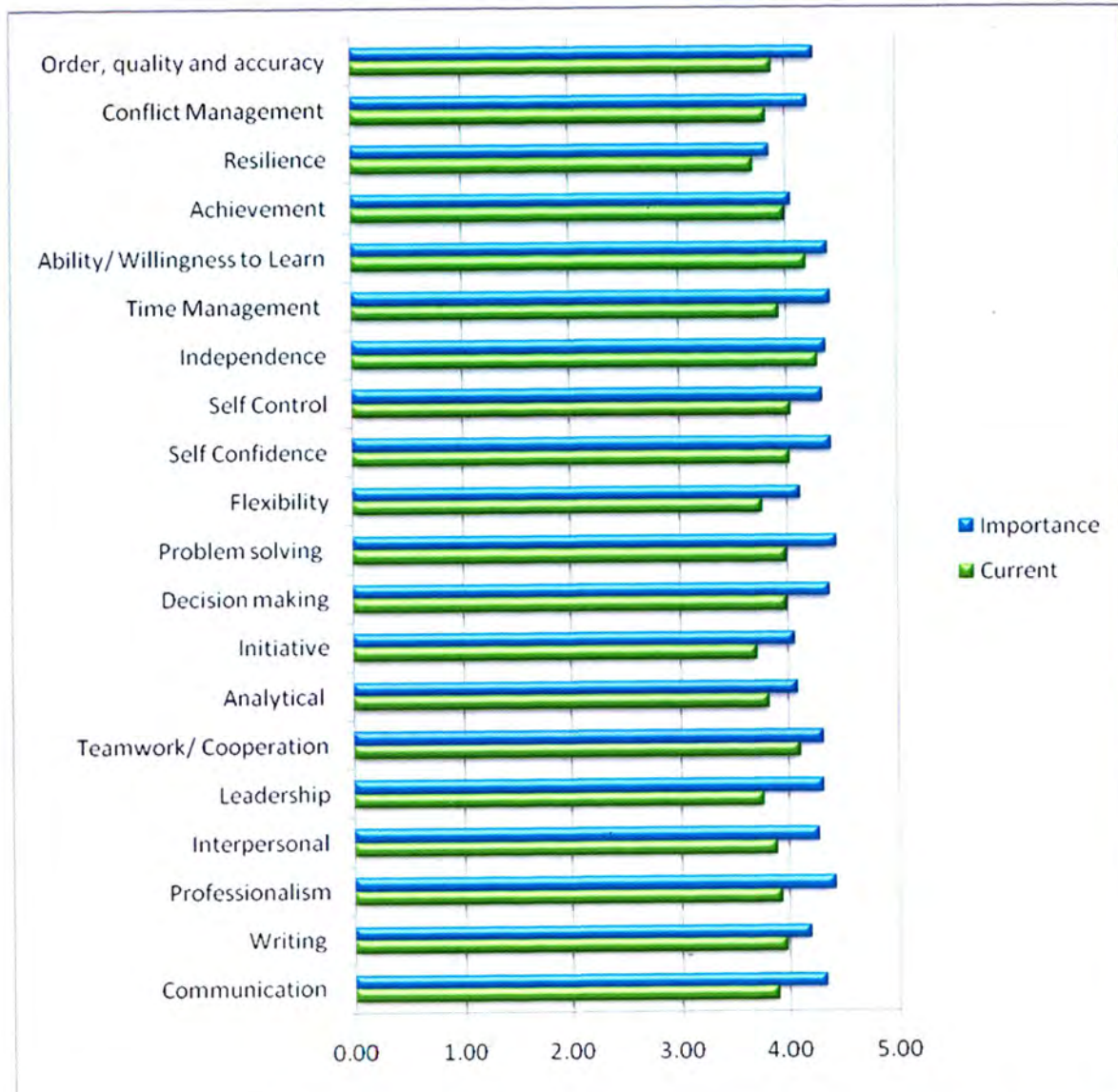
4.3.1.4 Comparison of current versus most important skills for final year students

A comparison was done between the extent to which the undergraduates perceive that the institution enabled them to display the graduate skills as well as the importance of the skills for their employability. A gap analysis was done to determine the difference between current perceptions of skills versus the importance thereof. The Results are reported in Table 4.10 and Graph 4.4 below.

Table 4.10
Comparison of Current versus most important skills

Graduate Skills	Current	Importance	Gap
Communication	3.90	4.34	-0.44
Writing	3.98	4.20	-0.21
Professionalism	3.94	4.44	-0.50
Interpersonal	3.90	4.28	-0.38
Leadership	3.77	4.32	-0.55
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.11	4.33	-0.22
Analytical	3.83	4.09	-0.26
Initiative	3.71	4.07	-0.36
Decision making	4.00	4.39	-0.40
Problem solving	4.00	4.46	-0.46
Flexibility	3.77	4.13	-0.36
Self Confidence	4.02	4.42	-0.39
Self-Control	4.05	4.33	-0.29
Independence	4.29	4.37	-0.08
Time Management	3.93	4.42	-0.48
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.18	4.39	-0.21
Achievement	4.00	4.05	-0.06
Resilience	3.70	3.87	-0.17
Conflict Management	3.83	4.21	-0.38
Order, quality and accuracy	3.89	4.27	-0.38

Graph 4.4. Comparison of current versus most important skills



The results in Table 4.10 and Graph 4.4 shows that there is a gap between what the final year undergraduates perceive as their current skills and the importance thereof. The largest gaps were perceived between leadership (-0.55), professionalism (-0.50), time management (-0.48), problem solving (-0.46) communication (-0.44).

4.3.1.5 Additional skills

The following additional soft skills requirements are identified by the respondents:

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- Listening
- Accountability
- Creativity
- Patience
- Respect

The above listed skills are identified by undergraduate final year respondents as important in addition to the skills provided.

4.3.2 Results: Postgraduate students

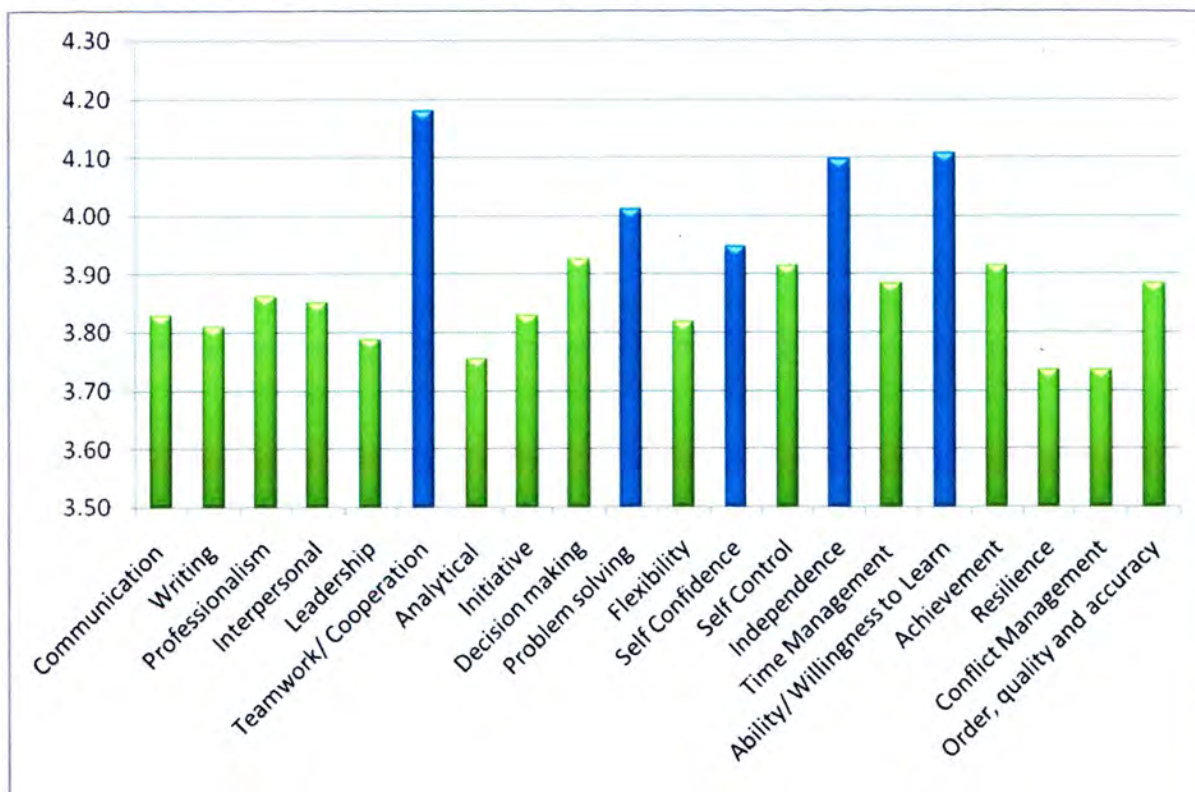
4.3.2.1 Perceptions of demonstration of graduate skills

The results of the extent to which the Postgraduate students perceived that the university enables them to demonstrate the listed skills are reported in Table 4.11 and Graph 4.5 below.

Table 4.11:
Postgraduates Perceptions of Demonstration of Graduate Soft Skills

Graduate Skills	Mean	SD
Communication	3.83	.757
Writing	3.81	.737
Professionalism	3.86	.824
Interpersonal	3.85	.829
Leadership	3.79	.902
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.18	.761
Analytical	3.76	.799
Initiative	3.83	.825
Decision making	3.93	.806
Problem solving	4.01	.836
Flexibility	3.82	.820
Self Confidence	3.95	.847
Self-Control	3.91	.799
Independence	4.10	.763
Time Management	3.88	.853
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.11	.769
Achievement	3.91	.838
Resilience	3.73	.806
Conflict Management*	3.73	.918
Order, quality and accuracy	3.88	.828

Graph 4.5: Postgraduate Perceptions of Demonstration of Graduate Soft Skills



From Table 4.11 and Graph 4.5 the results in general showed that the postgraduate students perceived that the institution enabled them to demonstrate the listed skills to a large extent. On average, the final year graduates indicated that their studies contributed mostly to programme training in team work and cooperation, ability and willingness to learn, Independence, problem solving and self-confidence.

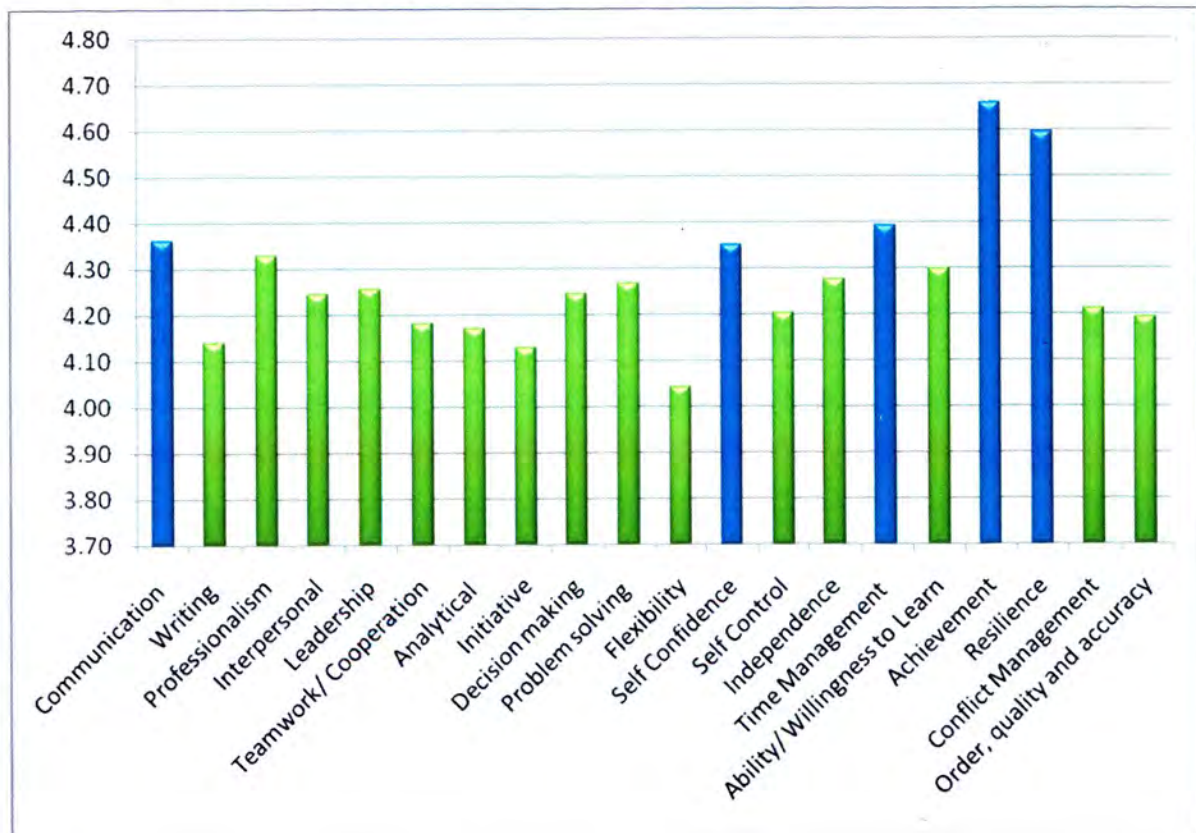
4.3.2.2 Results of the importance of graduate skills

The postgraduates were next asked to indicate the importance of the graduate skills for enhancing their employment. The results are reported in Table 4.12 and Graph 4.6.

Table 4.12
Importance of Graduate Soft Skills for Postgraduates

Graduate Skills	Mean	SD
Communication	4.36	.746
Writing	4.14	.837
Professionalism	4.33	.835
Interpersonal	4.24	.758
Leadership	4.26	.816
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.18	.761
Analytical	4.17	.812
Initiative	4.13	.737
Decision making	4.24	.812
Problem solving	4.27	.792
Flexibility	4.04	.761
Self Confidence	4.35	.714
Self-Control	4.20	.742
Independence	4.28	.754
Time Management	4.39	.736
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.30	.774
Achievement	4.66	.774
Resilience	4.60	.774
Conflict Management	4.21	.774
Order, quality and accuracy	4.19	.833

Graph 4.6: Importance of Graduate Soft Skills for Postgraduates



The overall results indicate that postgraduate students perceive all the soft skills in which they received training, very important. On average soft skills such as achievement orientation, resilience, time management, communication and self-confidence were perceived as the most important skills.

4.3.2.3 Ranking the five most important skills

The postgraduate students were next asked to rank the five most important soft skills. The results are reported in table 4.13 and graph 4.7 below.

Table 4.13: Ranking the five most important skills

Graduate Skill	%
Communication	28.5
Leadership	20.6
Team work/cooperation	18.2
Problem solving	16.4
Time management	16.4

Graph 4.7: Five most important skills

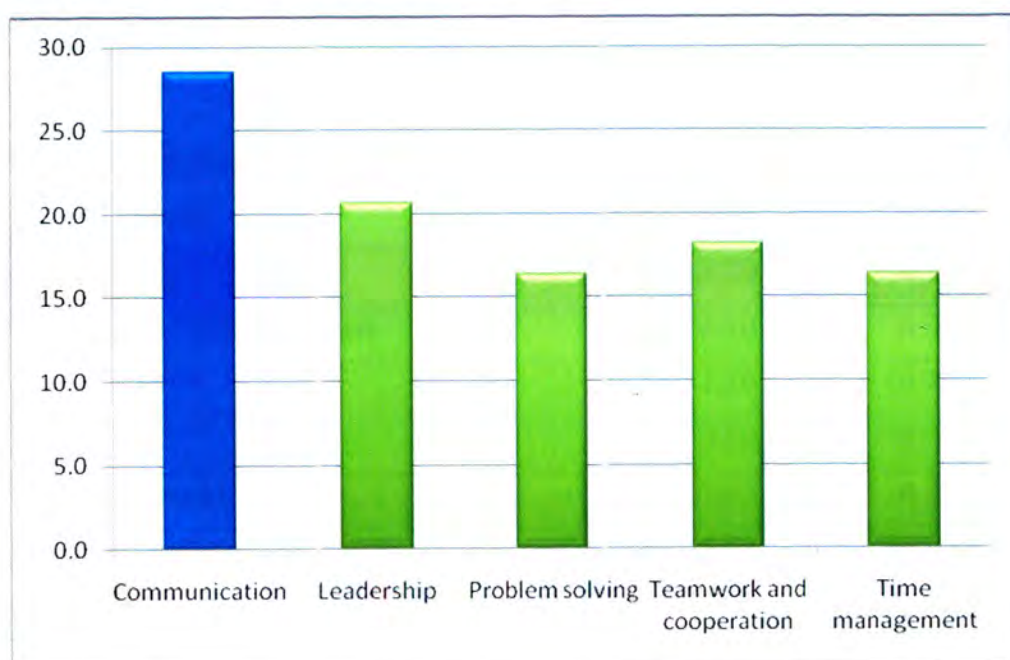


Table 4.13 and Graph 4.7 represents the five most important soft skills that postgraduate students ranked. Communication skills (28.5%) are the most important according to the respondents. Leadership (20.6%) is the second important then followed by team work/cooperation (18.2%) and lastly problem solving (16.4%) and time management (16.4%) with equal importance.

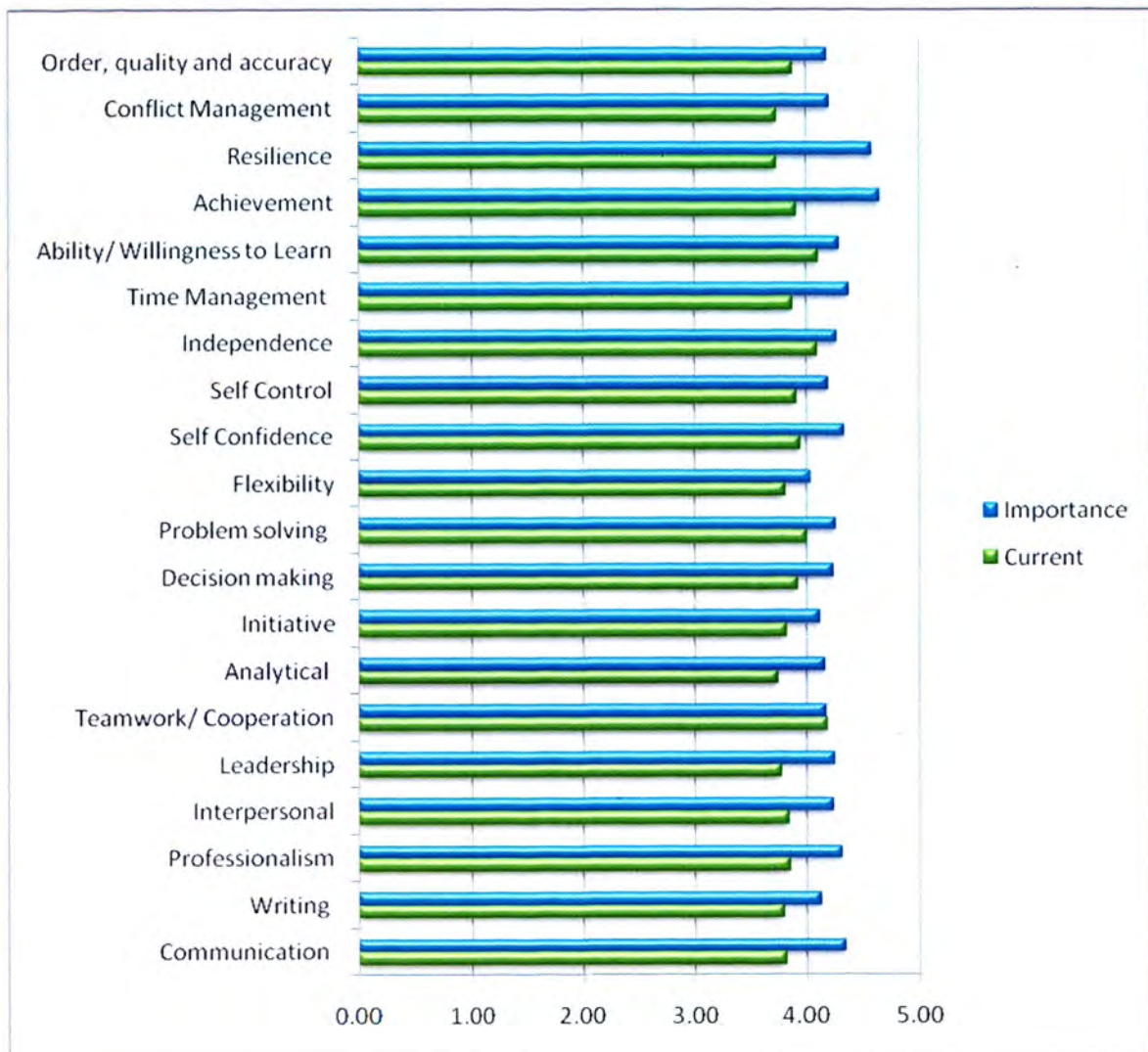
4.3.2.4 Comparison of Current versus most important skills for Postgraduate Students

A comparison was done between the extent to which the postgraduates perceive that the institution enabled them to display the graduate skills as well as the importance of the skills for their employability. A gap analysis was done to determine the difference between current perceptions of skills versus the importance thereof. The Results are reported in Table 4.14 and Graph 4.8 below.

Table 4.14:
Comparison of current versus most important skills

Graduate Skills	Current	Importance	Gap
Communication	3.83	4.36	-0.53
Writing	3.81	4.14	-0.33
Professionalism	3.86	4.33	-0.47
Interpersonal	3.85	4.24	-0.39
Leadership	3.79	4.26	-0.47
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.18	4.18	0.00
Analytical	3.76	4.17	-0.41
Initiative	3.83	4.13	-0.30
Decision making	3.93	4.24	-0.32
Problem solving	4.01	4.27	-0.26
Flexibility	3.82	4.04	-0.23
Self Confidence	3.95	4.35	-0.40
Self-Control	3.91	4.20	-0.29
Independence	4.10	4.28	-0.18
Time Management	3.88	4.39	-0.51
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.11	4.30	-0.19
Achievement	3.91	4.66	-0.74
Resilience	3.73	4.60	-0.86
Conflict Management	3.73	4.21	-0.48
Order, quality and accuracy	3.88	4.19	-0.31

Graph 4.8: Comparison of Current versus most Important Soft skills for Postgraduates



The results in Table 4.14 and Graph 4.8 show that there is a gap between what the postgraduates perceive as their current skills and the importance thereof. The largest gaps were perceived between resilience (-0.86), achievement orientation (-0.74), communication (-0.53) and conflict management (-0.48).

4.3.2.5 Additional skills

The following additional soft skills requirements were identified by the postgraduates:

- Creativity
- Criticism handling
- Emotional intelligence
- Negotiation
- People management

4.3.3 Results: Academics

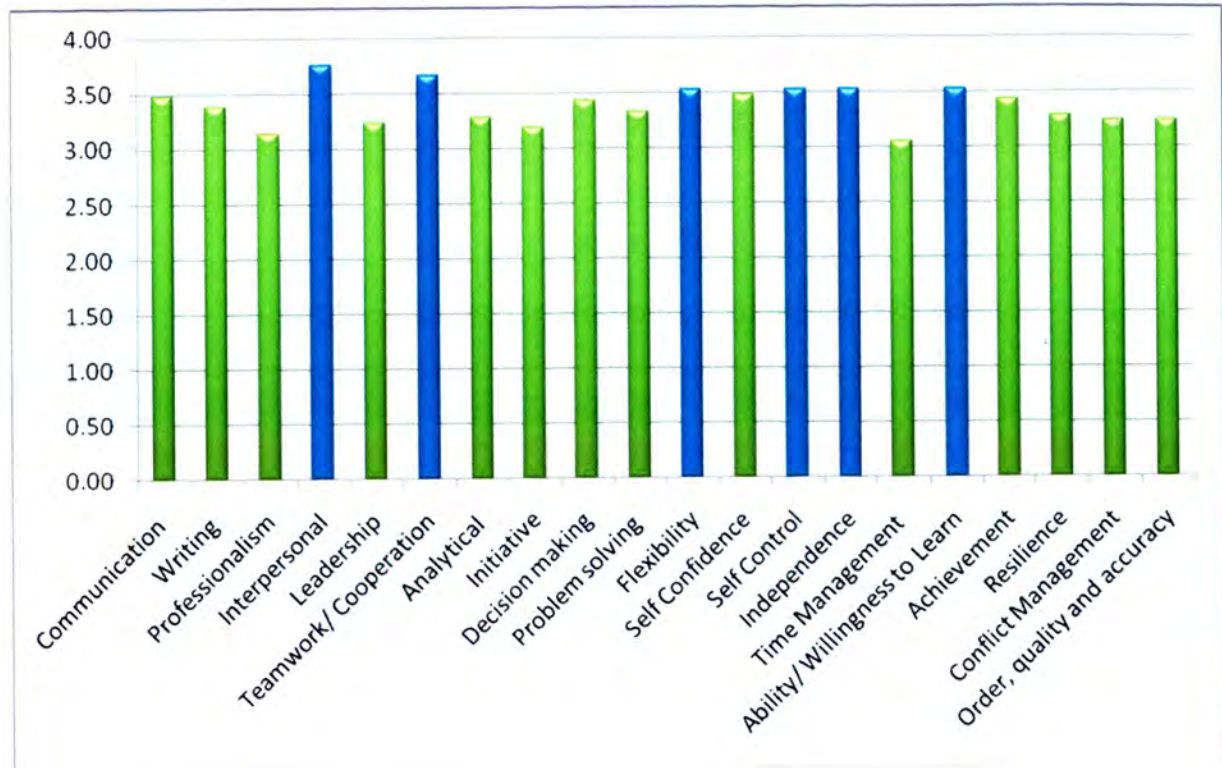
4.3.3.1 Perceptions of demonstration of graduate skills

The results of the extent to which the Academics perceived that the university equips graduates with Soft skills are reported in Table 4.15 and Graph 4.9 below.

Table 4.15:
Academics' Perceptions of Graduate Soft Skills

Graduate Skills	Mean	SD
Communication	3.48	.928
Writing	3.38	.973
Professionalism	3.14	.964
Interpersonal	3.76	.944
Leadership	3.24	1.044
Teamwork/ Cooperation	3.67	.966
Analytical	3.29	.845
Initiative	3.19	1.030
Decision making	3.43	.811
Problem solving	3.33	1.017
Flexibility	3.52	.928
Self Confidence	3.48	.873
Self-Control	3.52	.873
Independence	3.52	.928
Time Management	3.05	.921
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	3.52	.873
Achievement	3.43	1.028
Resilience	3.29	.902
Conflict Management	3.24	.889
Order, quality and accuracy	3.24	.944

Graph 4.9: Academics' Perceptions of Graduate Soft Skills



From Table 4.15 and Graph 4.9 the results in general showed that the Academics perceived that the institution enabled them to demonstrate the listed skills to a large extent. On average, academics indicated that the studies on programme training contributed most to ability to interpersonal skills, teamwork and cooperation, flexibility, self-control and independence.

4.3.3.2 Importance of the Graduate Soft Skills for Academics

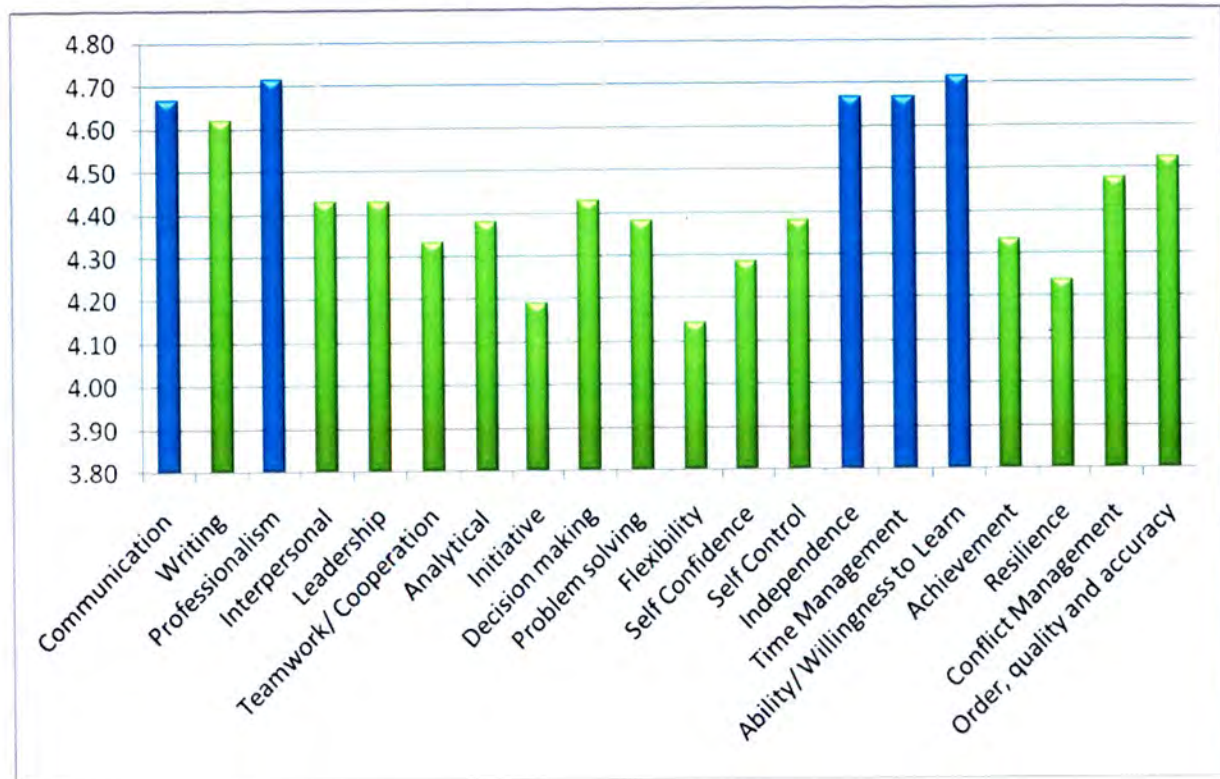
The Academics were next asked to indicate the importance of the graduate skills for enhancing their employment. The results are reported in Table 4.16 and Graph 4.10.

Table 4.16

Importance of the Graduate Soft Skills for Academics

Graduate Skills	Mean	SD
Communication	4.67	.658
Writing	4.62	.740
Professionalism	4.71	.561
Interpersonal	4.43	.676
Leadership	4.43	.870
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.33	.966
Analytical	4.38	.973
Initiative	4.19	1.030
Decision making	4.43	.870
Problem solving	4.38	.865
Flexibility	4.14	.854
Self Confidence	4.29	.956
Self-Control	4.38	.973
Independence	4.67	.577
Time Management	4.67	.730
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.71	.717
Achievement	4.33	.730
Resilience	4.24	.700
Conflict Management	4.48	.750
Order, quality and accuracy	4.52	.928

Graph 4.10: Importance of the graduate skills



The overall results indicate that the academics perceive all the soft skills in which students received training, very important. On average soft skills such as professionalism, Ability/willingness to learn, communication, independence and time management were perceived as the most important skills.

4.3.3.3 Five most important soft skills

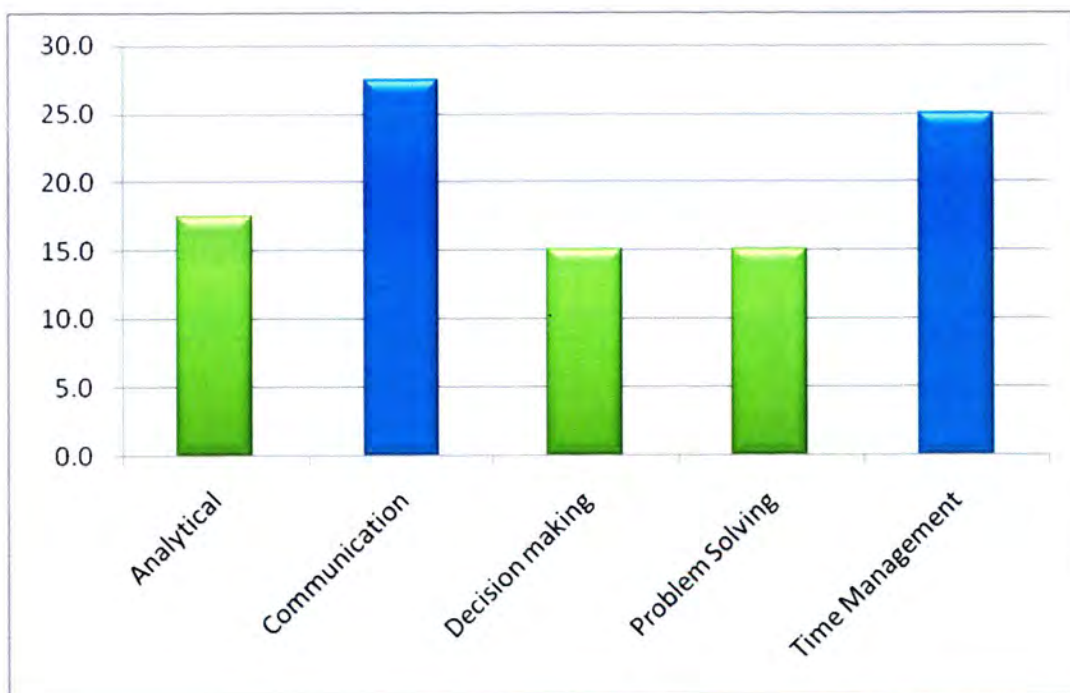
The academics were next asked to rank the five most important soft skills. The results are reported in Table 4.17 Graph 4.11 below:

Table 4.17

Ranking the five most important soft skills

Graduate Skills	%
Communication	27.5
Time Management	25.0
Analytical	17.5
Decision making	15.0
Problem Solving	15.0

Graph 4.11: Five most important Graduate Soft skills for Academics



The above table 4.17 and graph 4.11 shows that academics believe that the most important soft skills that can enhance graduate employability are communication (27.5%), time management (25.0%), analytical (17.5%), decision making (15.0%) and problem solving (15.0%).

4.3.3.4 Comparison of current versus most important by academics

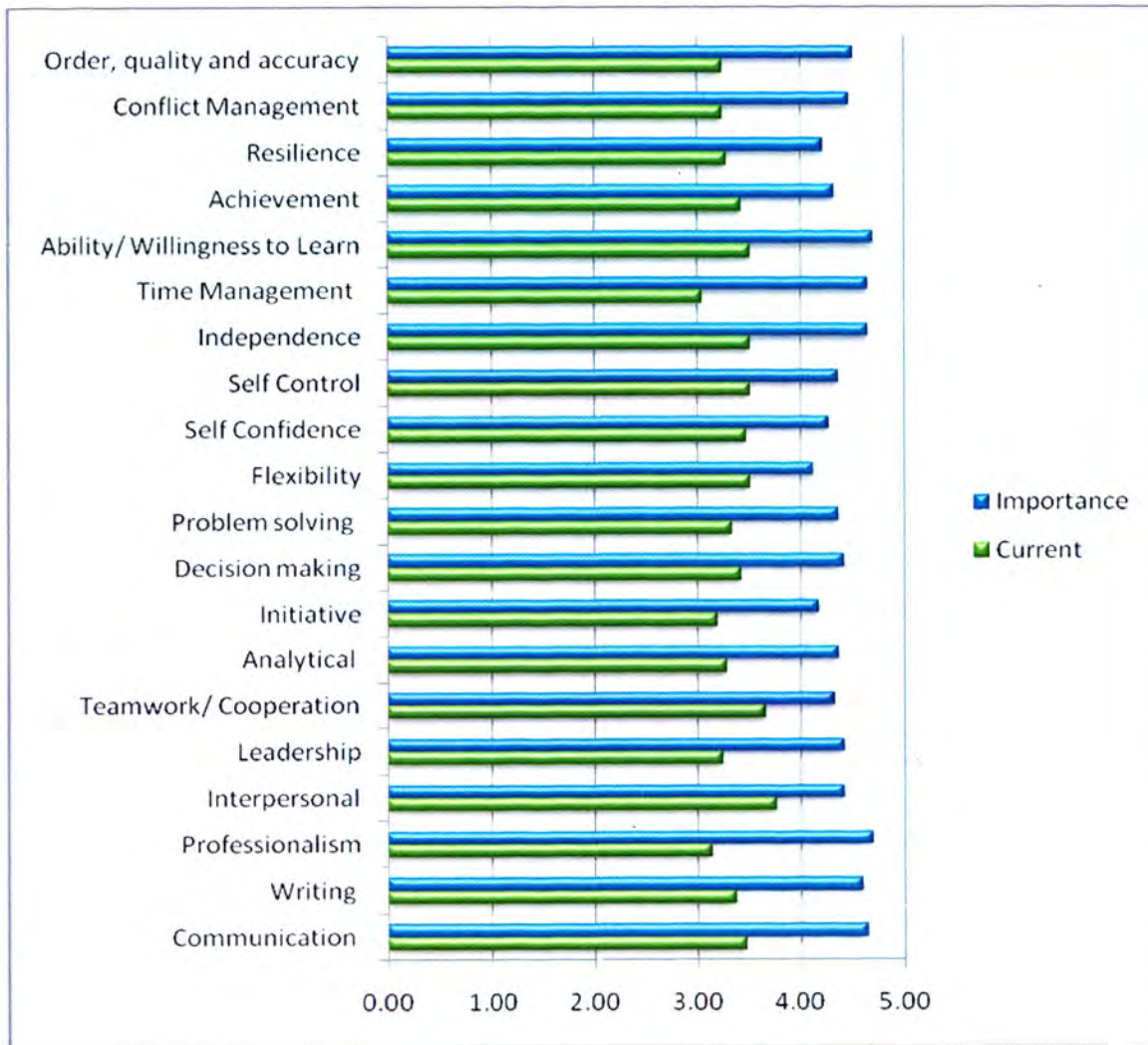
A comparison was done between the extent to which the academics perceive that the institution enabled graduates to display the graduate skills as well as the importance of the skills for their employability. A gap analysis was done to determine the difference between current perceptions of skills versus the importance thereof. The Results are reported in Table 4.18 and Graph 4.12 below.

Table 4.18:

Comparison of Current versus Importance of Soft Skills by Academics

Graduate Skills	Current	Importance	Gap
Communication	3.48	4.67	-1.19
Writing	3.38	4.62	-1.24
Professionalism	3.14	4.71	-1.57
Interpersonal	3.76	4.43	-0.67
Leadership	3.24	4.43	-1.19
Teamwork/ Cooperation	3.67	4.33	-0.67
Analytical	3.29	4.38	-1.10
Initiative	3.19	4.19	-1.00
Decision making	3.43	4.43	-1.00
Problem solving	3.33	4.38	-1.05
Flexibility	3.52	4.14	-0.62
Self Confidence	3.48	4.29	-0.81
Self-Control	3.52	4.38	-0.86
Independence	3.52	4.67	-1.14
Time Management	3.05	4.67	-1.62
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	3.52	4.71	-1.19
Achievement	3.43	4.33	-0.90
Resilience	3.29	4.24	-0.95
Conflict Management	3.24	4.48	-1.24
Order, quality and accuracy	3.24	4.52	-1.29

**Graph 4.12 Comparison of Current versus Importance of Soft Skills
by Academics**



The results in Table 4.18 and Graph 4.12 show that there is a gap between what the academics perceive as current skills and the importance thereof. The largest gaps were perceived between time management (-1.62), professionalism (-1.57), Order, quality and accuracy (-1.29), problem solving (-0.46) conflict management (-1.24).

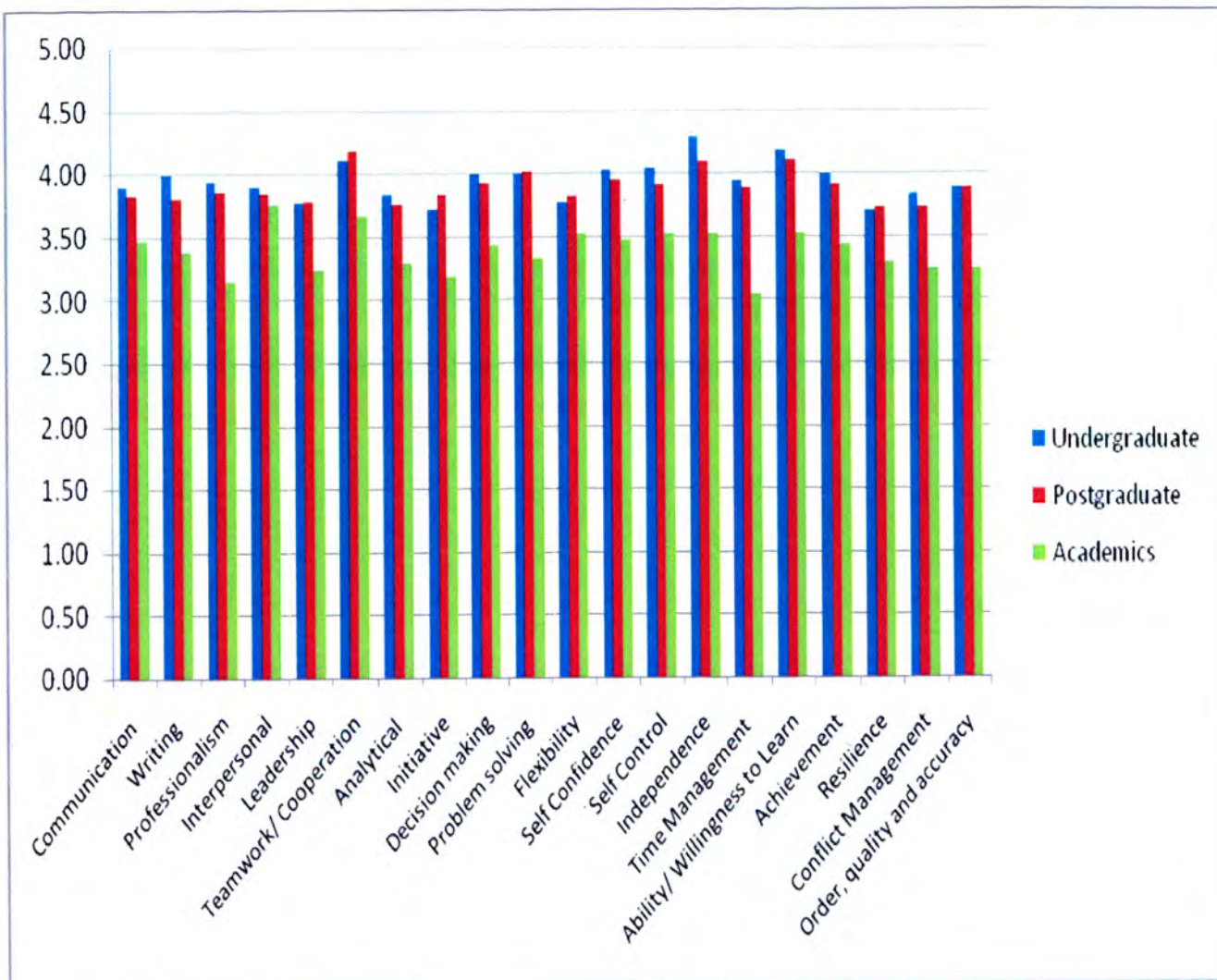
4.3.3.5 Comparison of Graduate Soft Skills

A comparison was done between the extents to which the three sample groups perceived that the higher education institution enables graduates to demonstrate Soft Skills. The Results are reported in Table 4.19 and Graph 4.13 below.

Table 4.19:
Comparison of Graduate Soft Skills

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Academics
Communication	3.90	3.83	3.48
Writing	3.98	3.81	3.38
Professionalism	3.94	3.86	3.14
Interpersonal	3.90	3.85	3.76
Leadership	3.77	3.79	3.24
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.11	4.18	3.67
Analytical	3.83	3.76	3.29
Initiative	3.71	3.83	3.19
Decision making	4.00	3.93	3.43
Problem solving	4.00	4.01	3.33
Flexibility	3.77	3.82	3.52
Self Confidence	4.02	3.95	3.48
Self-Control	4.05	3.91	3.52
Independence	4.29	4.10	3.52
Time Management	3.93	3.88	3.05
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.18	4.11	3.52
Achievement	4.00	3.91	3.43
Resilience	3.70	3.73	3.29
Conflict Management	3.83	3.73	3.24
Order, quality and accuracy	3.89	3.88	3.24

Graph 4.13 Comparison of Graduate Soft Skills between the Respondents



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The above table 4.19 and graph 4.13 demonstrate a comparison of the graduate skills between the three groups. The results indicate that undergraduates perceive the skills for independence (4.29), ability/ willingness to learn (4.18), team work/cooperation ((4.18), self-control (4.05) and self-confidence (4.02) are gained through their studies. Postgraduates perceive team work/cooperation (4.18), ability/willingness to learn (4.11), independence (4.10), problem solving (4.01) and self-confidence are gained through their studies at NWU. On the other hand, academics perceive that the skills for interpersonal (3.76), team work/cooperation (3.67), flexibility (3.52), self-control (3.52) and independence (3.52) are gained by students through their studies at the higher education institution.

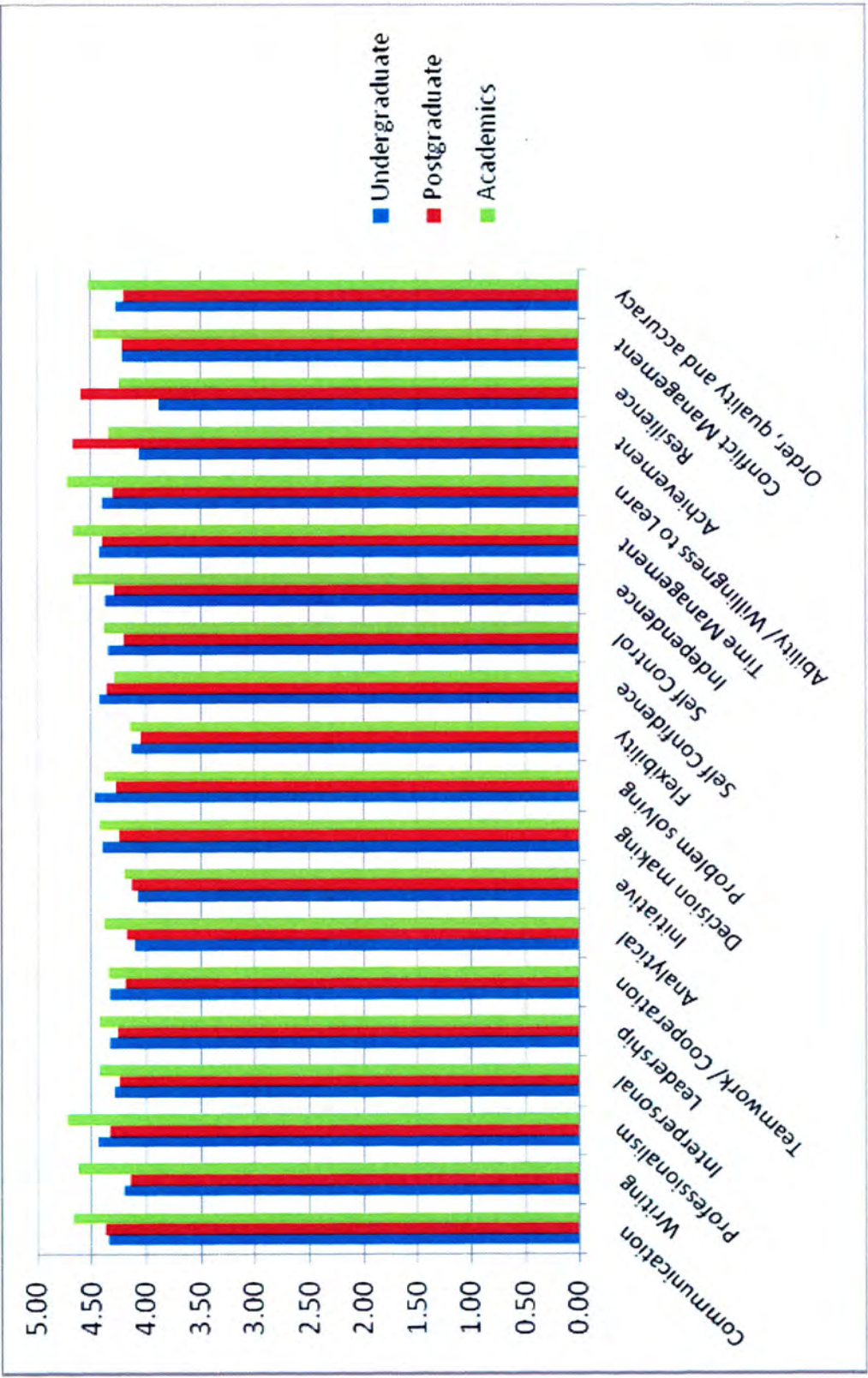
4.3.3.6 Comparison of the Importance of Soft Skills

A comparison was done between the extent to which the three sample groups perceived that the listed soft skills as important. The Results are reported in Table 4.20 and Graph 4.14 below.

Table 4.20
Comparison of the Importance of Soft Skills

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Academics
Communication	4.34	4.36	4.67
Writing	4.20	4.14	4.62
Professionalism	4.44	4.33	4.71
Interpersonal	4.28	4.24	4.43
Leadership	4.32	4.26	4.43
Teamwork/ Cooperation	4.33	4.18	4.33
Analytical	4.09	4.17	4.38
Initiative	4.07	4.13	4.19
Decision making	4.39	4.24	4.43
Problem solving	4.46	4.27	4.38
Flexibility	4.13	4.04	4.14
Self Confidence	4.42	4.35	4.29
Self-Control	4.33	4.20	4.38
Independence	4.37	4.28	4.67
Time Management	4.42	4.39	4.67
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	4.39	4.30	4.71
Achievement	4.05	4.66	4.33
Resilience	3.87	4.60	4.24
Conflict Management	4.21	4.21	4.48
Order, quality and accuracy	4.27	4.19	4.52

Graph 4.14 Comparison of the Importance of Soft Skills



CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 4.20 and Graph 4.14 illustrate the comparison of the three groups on the importance of each skill. Undergraduates perceive problem solving (4.46), professionalism (4.44), self-confidence (4.42), time management (4.42) and ability/willingness to learn (4.39) to be the five most important. Postgraduates view achievement orientation (4.66), resilience (4.60), time management (4.39), communication (4.36), and self-confidence (4.35) as the most important skills of them all. Academics perceive professionalism (4.71), ability/willingness to learn (4.71) communication (4.67), independence (4.67) and writing (4.62) to be the most important skills.

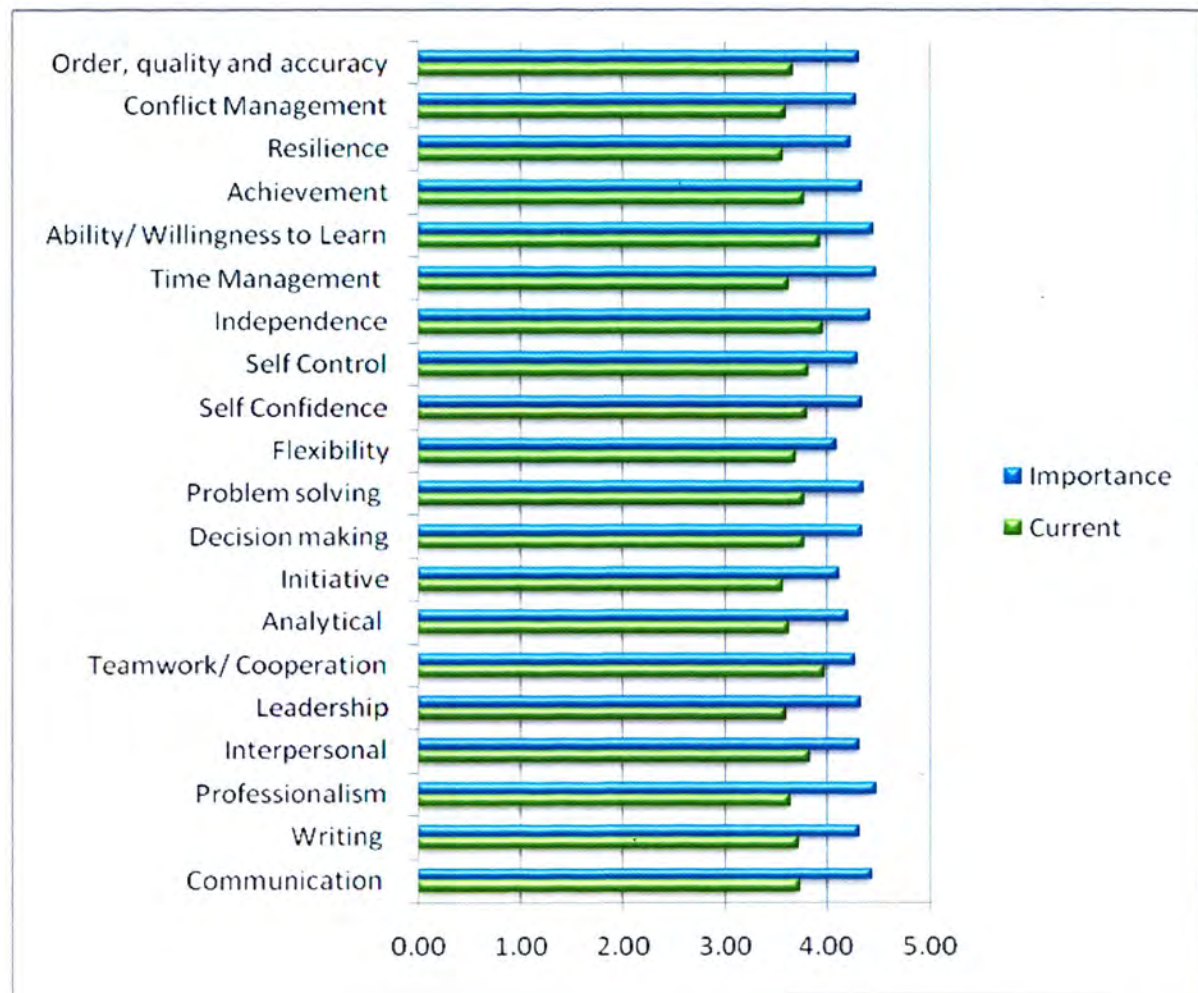
4.3.3.7 Combined averages of Current and Importance of Soft Skills

Table 4.21 indicates the combined averages of all three sample groups in terms of the Current and Importance of Graduate Soft Skills

Table 4.21
Combined averages of Current and Importance of Soft Skills

	Current	Importance
Communication	3.74	4.46
Writing	3.72	4.32
Professionalism	3.65	4.49
Interpersonal	3.84	4.32
Leadership	3.60	4.34
Teamwork/ Cooperation	3.98	4.28
Analytical	3.62	4.22
Initiative	3.58	4.13
Decision making	3.78	4.36
Problem solving	3.78	4.37
Flexibility	3.70	4.10
Self Confidence	3.82	4.35
Self-Control	3.83	4.31
Independence	3.97	4.44
Time Management	3.62	4.49
Ability/ Willingness to Learn	3.94	4.47
Achievement	3.78	4.35
Resilience	3.57	4.23
Conflict Management	3.60	4.30
Order, quality and accuracy	3.67	4.33

Graph 4.15 Combined averages of Current and Importance of Soft Skills



The above Table 4.21 and Graph 4.15 demonstrate the combination of both current and important skills. It shows that professionalism (4.49), time management (4.49), ability/willingness to learn (4.47), communication (4.46) and independence (4.44) are the most important. Independence (3.97), ability/willingness to learn (3.94), decision making (3.78), problem solving (3.78) and achievement orientation are the current skills they have gained from the studies at the higher education institution.

4.3.4 Results of technical skills

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with the respondents of the extent to which the higher education enable graduates to display technical skills in the workplace. The results are reported in Table 4.22 and Graph 4.16 below.

Table 4.22

Perceptions of Technical Skills

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Academic	Overall Average
Technical Skills	4.20	3.46	3.75	3.80

Graph 4.16 Perceptions of Technical Skills

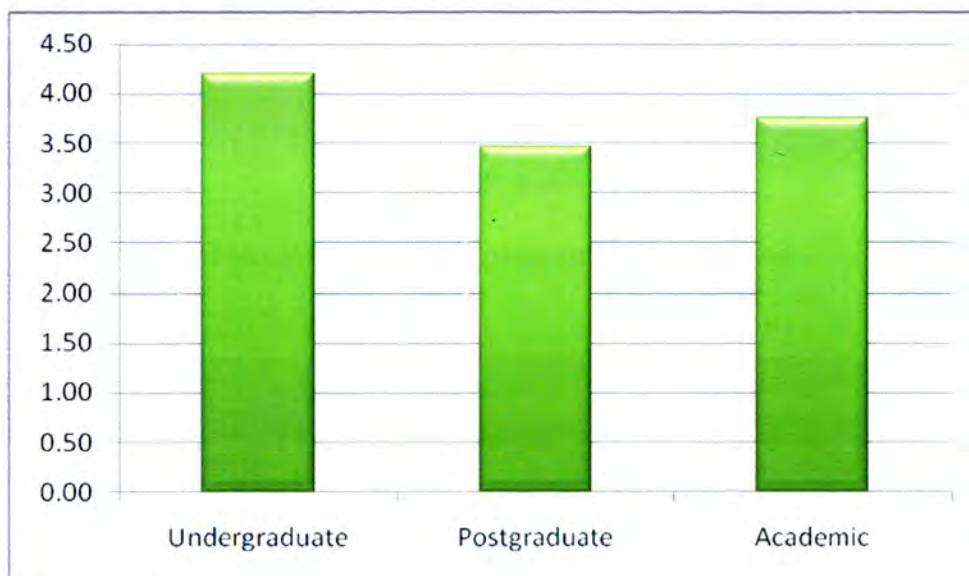


Table 4.22 and graph 4.16 shows that undergraduates (4.20), postgraduates (3.46) and academics (3.80) perceive that students have gained some technical skills during their studies which will prepare them to a large extent for employability. However, the three groups indicated that there is a need for additional technical skills training to enhance employability.

4.3.4.1 Comments by respondents regarding additional technical skills

Final year students identified a number of additional technical skills which they require to enhance their employability. These include presentation skills, report writing skills, interview preparation, project management and researching. Postgraduate identified presentation skills, policy formulation, analysing information and application skills as skills they need to make them employable. From the academics point of view, they indicated entrepreneurial skills, public speaking, conflict management, writing skills and practical business administration.

4.3.5 Results of Work Integrated Learning

The final section of the questionnaire dealt with the respondents' perceptions of the need for work integrated learning as part of undergraduate curricula. The results are reported in Table 4.23 and Graph 4.17 below.

Table 4.23

Results of Work Integrated Learning

	Final Year	Post-Graduate	Academic	Overall Average
Work Integrated Learning	4.53	3.66	4.29	4.16

Graph 4.17 Results of Work Integrated Learning

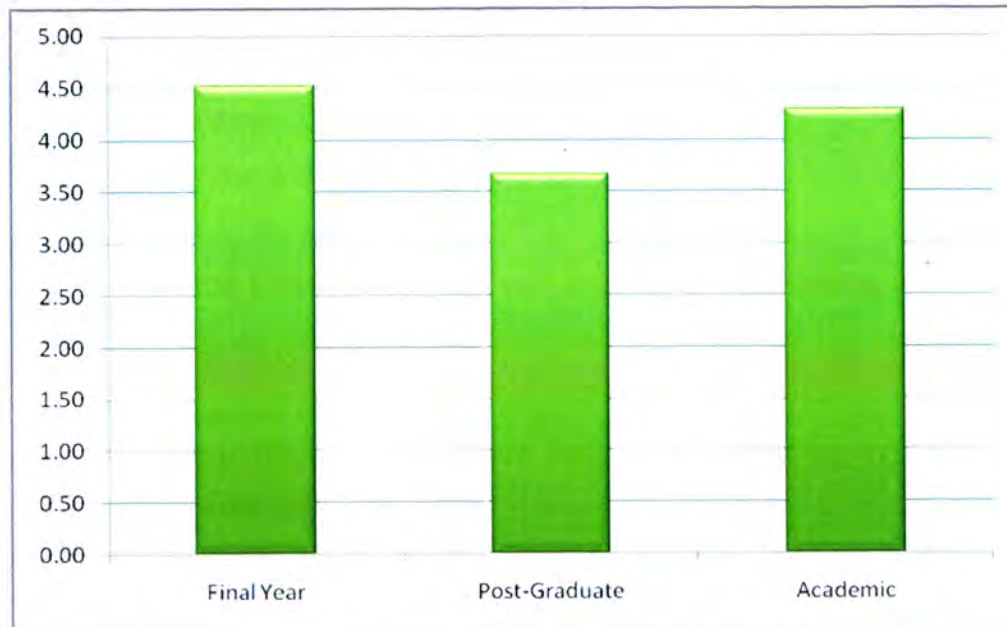


Table 4.23 and graph 4.17 illustrates the extent to which undergraduates, postgraduates and academics perceive the need for WIL component as part of the studies. Final year students with 4.53 highly feel the need for a WIL component in their studies. Postgraduates (3.66) and academics (4.29) feel there is a need for WIL component to a larger extent.

4.3.5.1 Comments by respondents on the benefits of work integrated learning.

Final year undergraduate students, postgraduates and academics were asked how making the WIL component part of the undergraduate studies will benefit graduates.

The final year students identified the benefits that programmes like WIL will offer them. Some of their responses are listed below:

- It will enable me to have experience that is required to enter the industry
- Enhance my skills and work knowledge

- It will give me chance to apply the knowledge I have gained into practical and have insight on things I learned
- It will improve the pass rates as it is easy to remember something that you do in practical than the ones you just read about
- Equip me with necessary skills needed for future job
- Get better acquainted with workplace procedures

Postgraduate students believe that WIL will them in the following ways:

- Offer opportunity to do practicals and improved my skills Get exposure to practical work situation
- Would make entry to the workplace more easier because of the experience gained through practical work experience
- Gain work experience and give me more understanding of theory and make my transition to the workplace easier
- Will be opportunity for self-development

Academics believe that WIL will help student to:

- Potential job placement as well as gaining experience
- Gives the hands on experience and an opportunity to put theory into practice and gain skills
- Open future employment opportunities
- It would help students find employment and gain job related skills

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the results of the statistical analysis followed by a presentation of the statistical findings.

The next chapter will discuss the implications of the statistical results presented in this chapter.

The following presents a discussion of the research questions which is followed by the implications of the statistical results.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that Higher Education Institutions equip graduates with the desirable soft skills needed for the workplace?

The results showed that in general all three groups of respondents perceived that the Higher Education Institutions equipped them to a large extent with the soft skills needed in the workplace. The final year graduate students indicated that their studies contributed mostly to training on the skills for ability to work independently, ability and willingness to learn, teamwork and cooperation, self-control and self-confidence. Postgraduates indicated that their studies contributed mostly to training on the skills for team work and cooperation, ability and willingness to learn, independence, problem solving and self-confidence. Academics on the other hand indicated that the studies contributed most to interpersonal skills, teamwork and cooperation, flexibility, self-control and independence and ability or willingness to learn.

There is a perceived overlap of skills between what the three groups perceive as skills acquired during their studies. The links are between the skills for ability and willingness to learn, team work and cooperation, self-control and self-confidence which were common skills identified by all three groups and the results confirms that indeed students did receive training on those skills.

The findings of this study are closely related to the findings of the study conducted by Dressler and Keeling (2004) cited by Haddara and Skanes (2007) that confirmed that compared to conventional graduates, student who participate in WIL programs gain

employment more easily, fit in better in the workplace and advance more rapidly in their careers. This study is also in line with the findings of Harvey, Moon, Geall and Bower (1997) which indicated that a range of skills such as communication and team work was +beneficial to graduate job placement. In a study conducted by Archer and Davison (2008), employers were asked to indicate the skills and capabilities considered important when recruiting graduates and they mentioned communication, team working, integrity, intellectual ability, confidence, character or personality, planning and organisational, literacy, numeracy, and analysis and decision making.

Coll and Zegwaard (2006) also made an investigation on views of four stakeholders (student, recent graduates, employers and faculty) with the intention to find out which competencies are ranked as top five. The stakeholder's views provided different preferences regarding the top five competencies. The findings of the study revealed that the top five ranked competencies based on science and technology student's views are the ability and willingness to learn, initiative, achievement orientation, personal planning and organisational skills and analytical thinking. This study indicates a skill like ability and willingness to learn which is also is similar to the findings of the study by Coll and Zegwaard (2006). Hughey and Mussnug (cited by Raftopoulos, 2006) stating that decision making and problem solving skills will help employees to remain employable.

The literature conducted on the graduate workplace skills, revealed differences in the stakeholder's opinion of the extent to which HE skills training provide sufficient workplace soft skills training. HEIs believe that they are producing skilled graduates whereas the labour market is of the opinion that HEIs produce the wrong kind of graduates. There is still a huge gap in terms of what the HEIs are producing and what the labour market requires hence there is a need for a stronger collaboration of the three stakeholders. As previously stated by Lowden et al. (2011) employers indicated

that Higher Education Institutions could do more to deal with employability across their courses through integrating work-based learning into the curriculum.

Yorke and Knight, (2006) indicated that employability is influenced by four broad and inter-related components these being; skilful practices (communication, time management, problem solving, and lifelong learning), deep understandings grounded in a disciplinary base (specialised knowledge in a field of knowledge), efficacious beliefs about personal identity and self-worth and metacognition (self-awareness and the capability to reflect on action). Griesel and Parker (2009) pointed out that HEIs and the workplace have a common misunderstanding of each other's role, employers believes that universities produce poor quality graduates. By contrast, HEIs feel that employers do not appreciate the skills and knowledge graduates possess. It is strongly expected of HEIs to proactively and simultaneously engage with the skills needs of the economy through research, knowledge generation and innovation (Griesel and Parker 2009).

5.1.2 Research question 2

What graduate soft skills do final year students, postgraduate students and academics view as most important in the workplace?

The results from chapter 4 indicated that the skills final year students perceive to be the most important are the least important to academics and postgraduates and vice versa. Academics believe that professionalism and ability/willingness to learn are critical among them all for enhancing employability. On contrary, undergraduates believe that problem solving is the most important whilst postgraduates view achievement orientation to be the most important. The results indicated significant differences. The overall results indicated that the all three stakeholders perceive all the soft skills listed in the questionnaire to be very important.

A study by Lowden *et al* (2011) revealed that employers and HEIs found that there are characteristics, skills, knowledge and intellectual capability elements required for

specific roles. A combination of transferable skills was deemed particularly relevant. This included team working, problem solving, self-management, business knowledge, literacy and numeracy, ICT knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, initiative, and leadership skills. In this study, the three sample groups were asked to name additional skills which they feel should be part of the undergraduate studies. Final year students listed the skills for listening, accountability, creativity, patience and respect. Postgraduates listed creativity, criticism handling, emotional intelligence, negotiation, and people management while academics indicated the skills for active listening, integrity, punctuality, honesty and innovation.

5.1.3 Research question 3

What is the perceived gap between the current graduate soft skills offering of the Higher Education Institutions and the desirable soft skills?

The results from chapter 4 reflected a significant gap between current soft skills training and the desirable soft skills. Final year students' results indicated that there is a gap between what they perceive as the current skills and the importance thereof. The largest gaps were perceived between the skills for leadership, professionalism, time management, problem solving and communication. A gap was also identified on what postgraduates perceive as their current skills and the importance thereof. The largest gaps were perceived between resilience, achievement orientation, communication and conflict management. A gap existed between what academics perceive as current and desirable skills. The largest gaps were perceived between time management, professionalism, order, quality and accuracy, problem solving and conflict management.

A study conducted by Coll and Zegwaard (2006) on science and technology and business students revealed that students made little difference in rating the importance of workplace competencies in ten years' time. The largest changes in ratings were for computer literacy, directiveness and customer service orientation. Only one competency

of self-confidence was deemed likely to be less important. The major differences between the two groups were for customer service orientation, relationship building, self-control and self-confidence. The increase in importance of computer literacy was seen as likely to impact upon other competencies such as written communication which it is believed, can deteriorate in the future because of the rising communication technology. All competencies, except written communication, were seen by graduates as likely to be more important in ten years' time. Other notable increases in the rating of competencies from today to ten years' time were for directiveness, customer service orientation, developing others and team leadership (Coll and Zegwaard, 2006).

5.1.4 Research question 4

To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that Higher Education Institutions equip graduates with the desirable technical skills needed for the workplace?

Based on the study findings, the three stakeholders mentioned one common technical skill (computer literacy) which they gained throughout their studies. Higher Education Institutions should thus introduce more technical skills to their programmes to enhance graduate employability. The other technical skill mentioned is presentation although it was only a few who got exposed to presentations during their studies. Being computer literate can enhance one's employability but this skill needs to be supplemented with others. There are no significant differences in existence between the three stakeholder's opinions of the extent to which higher education skills training provide sufficient workplace technical skill training.

Generally, results showed that undergraduates, postgraduates and academics perceive that students have gained some technical skills during their studies which will prepare them to a large extent for employability. They believe the technical skills training can

contribute to a large extent to their employability. However, the three groups indicated that there is a need for additional technical skills training to enhance employability.

Final year students identified a number of additional technical skills which they require to enhance their employability. These include presentation skills, report writing skills, interview preparation, project management and researching. Postgraduate identified presentation skills, policy formulation, analysing information and application skills as skills they need to make them employable. From the academics point of view, they indicated entrepreneurial skills, public speaking, conflict management, writing skills and practical business administration.

According to the literature review, technical skills include the ability to use specialized knowledge to solve problems. This is directly related to the soft skill of problem solving. The findings of this study showed that the common technical skill that they gained throughout their studies is computer literacy. A study by Pop (2009) citing Stanz & Mosoenyane, (2008) suggest that learning must include practical training, because learners take in knowledge and cannot apply the learning on the job. The results of the study conducted by Pop and Barkhuizen (2010) showed that a majority of graduate interns and their mentors believe that technical skills training contributed to a large extent in the employability of graduate interns.

5.1.5 Research question 5

To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive technical skills training as a way of enhancing their employability?

The respondent's results from chapter 4 indicated that there is a great need for HEIs to provide technical skills training relevant to one's career that will help graduates to be prepared for the workplace. Technical skills training should be incorporated into the

learning curriculum. All three stakeholders believe that technical skills training will help students gain practical knowledge and also integrate theory into practice. There are no significant differences that exist between the three stakeholder's views. Final year students identified a number of additional technical skills which they require to enhance their employability. These include presentation skills, report writing skills, interview preparation, project management and researching. Postgraduates identified presentation skills, policy formulation, analysing information and application skills as skills they need to make them employable. From the academics' point of view, they indicated entrepreneurial skills, public speaking, conflict management, writing skills and practical business administration. In general all three stakeholders perceive technical skills as a way of making students employable.

As previously mentioned in the literature review chapter, a study by Raftopoulos, Coetzee and Visser (2009) resulted in participants rating the importance of skills as being academic/technical skills, followed by basic/generic/transferable skills and lastly work experience. Their study revealed that employers of graduates in the Fasset Sector and the graduates themselves regarded their academic and technical skills as the most important category of skills required of graduates in the world of work. Both groups viewed generic skills to be more important than work experience. Lack of practical training opportunities and project management training are two key problem areas identified by JIPSA affecting graduate employability in South Africa.

5.1.6 Research question 6

To what extent do final year students, postgraduate students and academics view the need to have a work integrated learning component as part of undergraduate studies?

Based on the study findings from chapter 4, the results showed a high need for a WIL programme to be part of the undergraduate student's curriculum. This was indicated by

all three stakeholders involved in the study. They believe that WIL will introduce students to the corporate world thus enhancing their practical skills and gaining relevant work experience.

From the literature, Van der Westhuizen and Kesa (2010) highlighted a number of benefits of WIL education to students including that it will enhance self-confidence, self-concept and improved skills, enhance practical knowledge, enhance employment opportunities, attainment of necessary skills to supplement theoretical training and enhance the induction process when the student joins the labour market.

5.2 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a comprehensive discussion of the seven research hypotheses which were formulated based on available literature on graduate employability skills. To address the research objectives of the study, the seven research hypotheses were empirically tested using the statistical data analysis techniques presented in Chapter 4. Using this empirical information, the researcher embarked on a discussion of the empirical results obtained, and what the implications of these results were for the research hypotheses.

The next chapter will give a summary of the entire research study and discuss the conclusions, limitations and possible future research areas associated with the topic.

Chapter 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

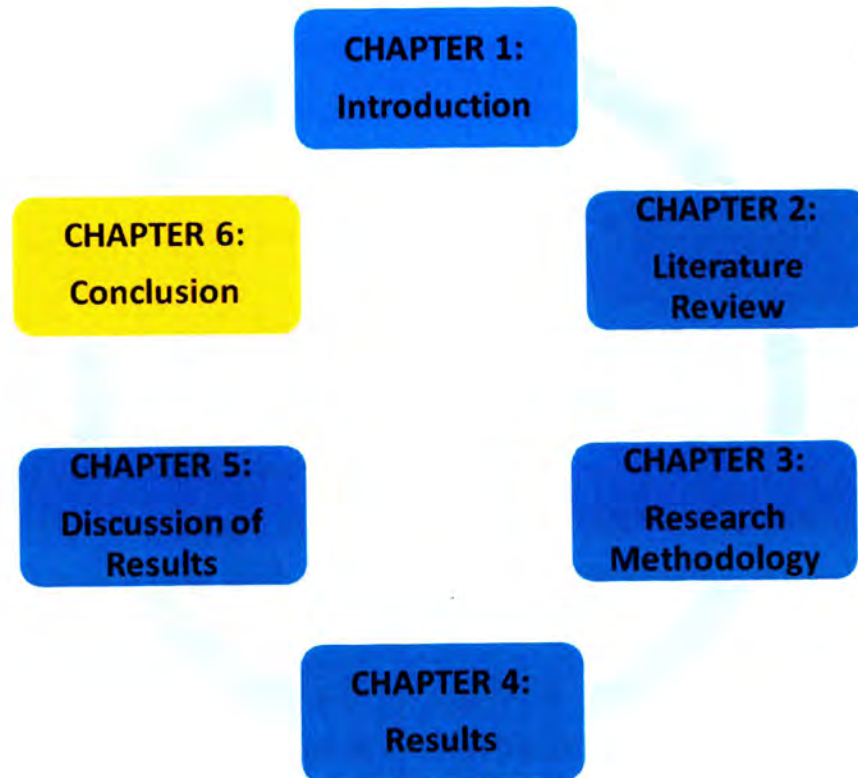


Figure 6.1: Chapter 6 in Context

This final chapter presents a summary of the entire study. The discussion of the significance of the study, findings gathered from the literature as well as empirical results is offered. The limitations of the study are also discussed and recommendations are made for further study on the topic.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The following section will discuss the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research design, expected contribution of the study, definition of key terms, and an overview of the contents of the study.

6.2.1 Purpose of the study

The main objective of this research is to determine the perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for Commerce graduates.

6.2.2 Research objectives

The objectives of this study were:

- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that HEIs equip graduates with the desirable soft skills needed for the workplace.
- To determine which graduate soft skills do final year students, postgraduate students and academics view as most important in the workplace.
- To determine the perceived gap between the current graduate soft skills offering of the HEIs and the desirable soft skills.
- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive that HEIs equip graduates with the desirable technical skills needed for the workplace.
- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics perceive technical skills training as a way of enhancing their employability.

- To determine the extent to which final year students, postgraduate students and academics view the need to have a work integrated learning component as part of undergraduate studies.

The following section summarises the contents of the study highlighting the chapters which are discussed in this document.

6.2.3 Content of the study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduced the theory on graduate employability skills. It also provided the drive for the research study by highlighting the problem statement and research objectives. This chapter guided the whole study through its research objectives.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This is the literature review chapter that gave an overview of all the concepts and aspects that were related to the study. The chapter commenced by focusing on each concept of the study individually. Under each concept, the different characteristics that made up the concepts in this study were discussed. This chapter ended with a summary of what the chapter was all about.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter entailed a comprehensive discussion of the research design and methods which were selected as the framework through which the research questions of the study were answered. The chapter began with an overview of the research paradigm of the study and the approach the study will follow. A discussion of the sampling techniques employed in the study was then given and the data collection methodology was presented. Reliability and validity of the research were considered and thereafter ethical considerations related to the study were contemplated.

Chapter 4: Results and findings

This is where the results and findings obtained from statistical analysis were presented. It started with a discussion on the demographical information that was gathered during the data collection period of the study. The next phase of the chapter involved discussing the statistical analysis of the different concepts involved in the study. The final section of the chapter (better known as phase 3) discussed the comparison of responses from the three groups.

Chapter 5: Discussion of results

Gives a discussion of the results presented in Chapter 4. All seven hypotheses of the research study were presented and were either accepted or rejected based on the evidence achieved from the research findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Chapter 6 provides an overview of the research findings of the study in relation to the literature reviewed and the statistical analysis undertaken. Everything is brought together in this chapter, the limitations of the study are addressed, and selected recommendations for further study are made.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY

The following section summarises the conclusions which can be drawn from this study with emphasis on conclusions drawn from the literature and conclusions drawn from the results.

6.3.1 Conclusions from the literature

From the literature review the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Youth unemployment challenges in South Africa are closely related to the inability of young people to obtain employment owing to their lack of experience, which is all too often compounded by a lack of skills. The result is an increasing group of young people with limited access to formal sector employment, and limited means to do anything about it (van Aardt: 2012).
- Some of the reasons why young people are unemployed are that employers look for skills and experience and they regard unskilled and inexperienced jobseekers as a risky investment as education is not a substitute for skills. Schooling is not a reliable signal of capabilities, and low school quality feeds into poor workplace learning capacity. Given the uncertainty about the potential of school leavers, employers consider entry-level wages to be too high relative to the risk of hiring these inexperienced workers (National Treasury: 2011).
- The existing skills deficit among graduates is evidenced by the apparent lack of soft skills, as many firms feel that graduates lack generic soft skills and are not workplace ready. The general consensus amongst firms is that South African graduates often do not possess the necessary skills and experience to be considered even for entry-level positions (DPRU, 2006).
- Griesel and Parker (2009) pointed out that HEIs and the workplace have a common misunderstanding of each other's role. Employers believe that universities produce poor quality graduates and by contrast, HEIs feel that employers do not appreciate the skills and knowledge graduate possess. It is strongly expected of HEIs to proactively and simultaneously engage with the skills needs of the economy through research, knowledge generation and innovation (Griesel and Parker 2009).
- Employers seek graduates with essential soft skills obtained during their years of study rather than specific knowledge gained from their degrees. Most employers identified skills that are common to one another. Harvey, Moon and Geall (1997)

stated that supplementing a graduate's education in a subject specific discipline with a range of skills such as communication and team work was beneficial to graduate job placement. The most prominent soft skills highlighted in the literature by Coll and Zegwaard (2006) are ability and willingness to learn, initiative, achievement orientation, personal planning and organisational skills and analytical thinking. Archer and Davison (2008) mentioned communication, team working, integrity, intellectual ability, confidence, character or personality, planning and organisational, literacy, numeracy, analysis and decision making as capabilities considered important when recruiting graduates.

- Syed Hussain (cited by Rasul and Puvanasvaran, 2009) found that technical graduates cannot fulfil the needs and requirements of employers because the technical curriculum used was designed to prepare the graduates with basic knowledge and theory of technical aspects but lacking in practical training. Technical skills are believed to be the most important skills in making one employable however, this was opposed by Ramlee (2002) cited in Rasul and Puvanasvaran (2009) who found out through his research that technical graduates in Malaysia have mastered their technical skills but employers feel dissatisfied with their employees because they lack motivational skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, problem-solving and entrepreneurship skills which also comprise a major part of the employability skills.
- The technical skills shown by the findings of this study that students gained through their studies are computer literacy and presentation. Students identified a number of additional technical skills which they require to enhance their employability including presentation skills, report writing skills, interview preparation, project management and researching.
- According to the International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences (2011), employers are increasingly demanding graduates with workplace-ready skills.

in collaboration with employers can have a real impact on graduate employability. HEIs should consider using WIL programs to provide relevant degrees and help students become employable. They should provide students with a range of experiences to help them grow and develop through activities that will help to guide their learning. Programs like WIL benefit universities, students and employers and the country's economy in general. Students can benefit through gaining practical experience and skills and thus enhance their employability. They have a role to play in developing the workforce of the future by being a part of the education experience. This will also save employers time and money in recruitment processes, boost the company image and increase productivity through the skilled employees (IJPSS, 2011)

6.3.2 Conclusions from the findings

From the statistical analysis conducted in the study the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The results of the analysis proved that the final year students, postgraduates and academics agree that the institution enabled them to demonstrate the listed skills to a large extent. Final year students indicated that their studies contributed mostly to training on the skills for ability to work independently, ability and willingness to learn, teamwork and cooperation, self-control and self-confidence. Postgraduates indicated that their studies contributed mostly to training on the skills for team work and cooperation, ability and willingness to learn, independence, problem solving and self-confidence. On average, academics indicated that the studies on skills training contributed most to interpersonal skills, teamwork and cooperation, flexibility, self-control and independence and ability and willingness to learn.

- The overall results indicate that the final year students, postgraduates and academics perceive all the soft skills in which they received training very important. Findings from chapter 4 revealed that professionalism, time management, ability/willingness to learn, communication and independence are the most important.
- Based on the analysis it has been determined that a gap between what the final year students, postgraduates and academics view as the current skills and the importance of them does exist. Independence, ability/willingness to learn, decision making, problem solving and achievement orientation are the current skills they have gained from the studies at the higher education institution.
- The analysis demonstrated that there are differences on what undergraduates, postgraduates and academics perceive as the most important skill. The comparison of the three groups on the importance of each skill showed that undergraduates perceive problem solving, professionalism, self-confidence, time management and ability/willingness to learn to be the five most important skills that the HEIs contributed to their studies. Postgraduates view achievement orientation, resilience, time management, communication, and self-confidence as the most important skills of them all. On the contrary academics perceive professionalism, ability/willingness to learn, communication, independence and writing skills to be the most important
- The results confirmed that there are significant differences on the type of skills the three groups believe students gain through their studies. A comparison of the graduate skills between the three groups resulted in undergraduates indicating that the skills for independence, ability/ willingness to learn, team work/cooperation, self-control and self-confidence are gained through their studies. Postgraduates perceive team work/cooperation, ability/willingness to learn, independence, problem solving and self-confidence are gained through their studies at NWU. On the other

hand, academics perceive that the skills for interpersonal team work/cooperation flexibility, self-control and independence are gained by students through their studies at NWU.

- The analyses findings determined that students have gained some technical skills during their studies which will prepare them to a large extent for employability hence there is a need for additional technical skills training. As showed in the findings from chapter 4, undergraduates, postgraduates and academics perceive that students have gained some technical skills during their studies which will prepare them to a large extent for employability. However, the three groups indicated that there is a need for additional technical skills training such as presentation skills, report writing skills, interview preparation, project management, research, policy formulation, information analysis, entrepreneurial, public speaking, conflict management and practical business administration to enhance employability.
- The analysis demonstrated that all three groups feel the need for a WIL component in their studies to a large extent. Findings indicate that all three groups strongly feel the need for WIL to be a component of their studies. The final year students listed a few reasons why they feel WIL will benefit them. They mentioned it will help them gain experience that is required to enter the industry, enhance skills and work knowledge, give them a chance to apply the knowledge gained into practical skills and have insight on things learned. Postgraduate students believe that WIL will have the benefits of offering an opportunity to do practical work and improve skills, get exposure to the practical work situation, make entry to the workplace easier, give more understanding of theory and provides an opportunity for self-development. Academics believe that WIL will help students with potential job placement, hands-on experience and open future employment opportunities

6.4 LIMITATIONS

The following section discusses the limitations of the study.

6.4.1 Limitations as a result of the research design

A quantitative research design was used for this study. It is a method in which the investigator primarily uses positivist claims for developing knowledge, employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments which yield statistical data (Creswell, 2003:18). Saunders et al. (2009), point out that in observing people over a period of time the researcher would be better able to exercise a measure of control over the variables in the study, provided that they do not affect the research process itself. A longitudinal study would have been good in the case of this study, as it may possibly have removed the factors that may well have hampered the relationship between the concepts.

6.4.2 Limitations as a result of the data collection method

The data collection tool used for this study was a questionnaire. The quality of the data it collects is often criticised (Leedy & Omrod, 2010). Therefore it is important that the questionnaires used are constructed and administered appropriately to ensure that high quality data is obtained (Saunders et al., 2009). This was achieved in the present study by following a thorough research design. The questionnaires used contained close-ended and open-ended questions.

6.4.3 Limitations as a result of the sampling method

When collecting data for quantitative studies, it is impractical or impossible to assess all individuals or the population in a particular category signified by the research project. A sample for the population therefore needs to be selected (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill,

2000:150).The use of such sampling techniques allowed the researcher to select relevant respondents to ensure an adequate sample size. Furthermore, participation in this study was voluntary. The combination of non-probability sampling techniques and the voluntary nature of participation in the study imply that the results of the study can only be generalised to similar groups, organisations or environments.

6.4.4 Limitations as a result of sample size and characteristics

As mentioned above, the sample size was an important consideration and collecting adequate sample was a bit of a concern. About 300 questionnaires were sent to final year undergraduate students, of which only 244 were returned. Out of the forty five questionnaires distributed to academics only 21 responded. From the 200 questionnaires that were sent to postgraduates, only 94 responded. It is therefore important to note that sampling was not controlled in terms of language and race groups but only in programme of study and occupation. Satisfactory results were achieved with regard to the characteristics of the sample. A large portion of respondents from undergraduates were female (64.3%) and from the postgraduates were males (52.1%). From the academics side, most respondents were males with (76.2%).

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the South African perspective, it is clear that more research is needed to determine the extent to which HEIs provide graduates with workplace skills. The data gathered, analysed and interpreted for the purpose of this study provides the following recommendations:

- HEIs and employers should collaborate in determining which skills are essential in preparing graduates for the workplace.

- For employability to be embedded in a curriculum, HEIs should focus on producing competencies that prepare students for meaningful and productive work lives. HEIs must undertake the provision of inclusive extra-curricular up-skilling programmes for students. Employability programmes must constitute a central aspect of higher education curriculum design.
- Soft skills training are imperative to the preparation for employability and must not be deemed optional or regarded as secondary to the technical skills training.
- HEIs should establish and continuously review opportunities for a more formal, planned approach to communicating with stakeholders on a regular basis to better ensure they are remaining abreast with the changing world
- HEIs should explore and promote additional experiential learning opportunities including practical projects and student involvement in organizations and internships.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was limited to one faculty within the NWU Mafikeng campus. The scope of this study can firstly be extended to include all five faculties within the Mafikeng Campus. Secondly it can be extended to include all three campuses of the NWU (Mafikeng campus, Potchefstroom campus and the Vaal campus). Thirdly it can be extended to include other HEIs in South Africa. Lastly, the sample consisted of only three groups (undergraduate final year students, postgraduates and academics); the sample can be extended to include employers.

6.7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates. Employability of graduates is still a major concern globally due to the lack of the required skills and the mismatch between what HEIs are producing and what employers need. The literature and findings presented in this study demonstrated the important skills for enhancing graduate employability. It was valuable to gather the views of undergraduate final year students, postgraduates and academics with regard to the importance of soft and technical skills. The study was successful in achieving the intended objectives. It indicated that although students and academics regard some of the skills important, they would still value programmes like the WIL which is currently not part of their undergraduate studies. This kind of research study should serve as an eye opener to HEIs by encouraging them to form collaborations with employers and other organisations that can provide students with workplace readiness programmes like the WIL.

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APPENDIX A **DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
MAFIKENG CAMPUS

19 September 2012

**Informed consent for participation in an academic
research study**

Dept. of Industrial Psychology

Perceptions of desirable graduate workplace skills for commerce graduates

Research conducted by:

Ms. L.P. Ntsizwane(16717708)

Cell: +27 83 402 3871

Dear Respondent

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Lungile Ntsizwane, a Masters student from the Department of Industrial Psychology at North-West University.

The purpose of the study is to explore the desirable graduate workplace skills in the South African context.

Please note the following:

- This study involves an anonymous survey. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire and the answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential. You cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- This research adheres to all ethical requirements. Permission for this study was granted by Prof Mark Petersen, Research Chair, Faculty of Commerce and Administration.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than 7-10min minutes of your time
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request.
- Please contact my supervisors, Prof. E.N Barkhuizen, nicolene.barkhuizen@nwu.ac.za of Prof Swanepoel if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

Respondent's signature

Date

Biographical details

1.1 Gender

Male

Female

1.2 Please state your age in years

--

1.3 Programme of study

--

1.4 Level of study

--

1.5 Race/ Ethnicity

--

1.6 What occupation do you want to follow one day?

--

North West University Graduate Skills

1. Please rate the extent to which your undergraduate studies at NWU will enable you to demonstrate the following skills on a scale from To no Extent (1) to a Very large Extent (5).

	Graduate skills	1 To no Extent	2 To a low Extent	3 To a moderate Extent	4 To a large Extent	5 To a very Large Extent
1	Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
2	Writing skills	1	2	3	4	5
3	Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5
4	Interpersonal skills	1	2	3	4	5
5	Leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5
6	Teamwork and Cooperation	1	2	3	4	5
7	Analytical skills	1	2	3	4	5
8	Initiative	1	2	3	4	5
9	Decision making skills	1	2	3	4	5
10	Problem solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
11	Flexibility	1	2	3	4	5
12	Self Confidence	1	2	3	4	5
13	Self-Control	1	2	3	4	5
14	Ability to work	1	2	3	4	5

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	independently					
15	Time Management Skills	1	2	3	4	5
16	Ability and Willingness to Learn	1	2	3	4	5
17	Achievement Orientation	1	2	3	4	5
18	Resilience	1	2	3	4	5
19	Conflict Management	1	2	3	4	5
20	Concern for order, quality and accuracy	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please rate the following in the table below:

The importance you (from your perspective as an undergraduate student) attach to each of the listed skills or attributes on a scale from Not Important (1) to Critical in the workplace (5).

	Graduate skills	1	2	3	4	5
		Not	Low	Medium	High	Critical
1	Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
2	Writing skills	1	2	3	4	5
3	Professionalism	1	2	3	4	5
4	Interpersonal skills	1	2	3	4	5
5	Leadership skills	1	2	3	4	5
6	Teamwork and Cooperation	1	2	3	4	5
7	Analytical skills	1	2	3	4	5

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8	Initiative	1	2	3	4	5
9	Decision making skills	1	2	3	4	5
10	Problem solving skills	1	2	3	4	5
11	Flexibility	1	2	3	4	5
12	Self Confidence	1	2	3	4	5
13	Self-Control	1	2	3	4	5
14	Ability to work independently	1	2	3	4	5
15	Time Management Skills	1	2	3	4	5
16	Ability and Willingness to Learn	1	2	3	4	5
17	Achievement Orientation	1	2	3	4	5
18	Resilience	1	2	3	4	5
19	Conflict Management	1	2	3	4	5
20	Concern for order, quality and accuracy	1	2	3	4	5

2.2 Please indicate any other skills not listed above that you need for employment purposes.

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2.3 From the items listed above, please list five (5) graduate skills that you regard as most important for your future career.

--

3. What technical skills training did you receive as part of your studies at NWU? (i.e. computer training)

--

3.1 To what extent do the technical skills training prepare you for your employability?

1	2	3	4	5
To no extent	To a low extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent

3.2 What additional technical skills training do you require from NWU to enhance your employability?

--

4. To what extent is there a need for you to have a work integrated learning component as part of your undergraduate studies? For example a six month internship at a company to gain practical experience?

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1	2	3	4	5
To no extent	To a low extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent

4.1. How would such a programme benefit you?

--

Thank you for your Participation