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Reviewing labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand

by

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(752642)

A research report

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Management

in

Public Policy

in the Faculty of Commerce, Law & Management, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Supervisor: Rekgotsofetse Chikane

December 2022

DEDICATION

In memory of my Mother

Ms F. Madubye

1962 – 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my supervisor, Rekgotsofetse Chikane, for his enthusiasm for my research and consistent guidance throughout the research project. This endeavour would not have been the same without his knowledge, encouragement and constructive feedback.

I also thank the graduates who took the time to participate in the research report's survey and interviews.

DECLARATION

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Governance

I, Mokgethwa Madubye (752642), am a student registered for the Degree of Master of Management in the year 2022. I hereby declare the following:

- **i.** I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- **ii.** I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work, except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- **iii.** I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- **iv.** I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

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ABSTRACT

Unemployment among social sciences graduates is often discussed as an issue of graduates lacking the required skills to enter the labour market. This research report sought to review labour market signals and unemployment experiences described and interpreted by social sciences graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand. This research aimed to analyse their perceptions of unemployment and their views on employability and signalling. It adopted the qualitative approach to collect data and analysed it using thematic analysis. The survey yielded twelve responses, and four of the twelve respondents returned for individual interviews.

The research report aimed to understand whether there is a mismatch between what the labour market expects and requires versus what graduates perceive, and found that there is not. It was discovered, however, that while graduates of social sciences understand the requirements of signals, their unemployment experiences are rooted in various socioeconomic and political issues. This research report concluded that positively responding to labour market signals plays a significant yet minimal role in securing employment because an array of supply and demand factors determine unemployment and employment prospects among graduates. Higher learning institutions, employers, and government must collaborate to reform the social sciences curricula to align with the labour market's demands and improve unemployment.

Keywords: Unemployment; social sciences; graduates; employability; signalling; perceptions

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This research report examined the relationship between perceptions of unemployment and interpretations of labour market signals through the experiences of graduates from the School of Social Sciences within the Humanities faculty at the University of the Witwatersrand. It studied how they perceived their preparedness to enter the labour market with their degrees amid the high levels of unemployment among social sciences graduates in the country (Dunga, 2016; Mncayi, 2016). It explored their perceptions about unemployment and the contribution they think they can make in the workplace. Finally, it also explored their experiences with employers and recruiters as they search for jobs in different labour market sectors.

The acquisition of education is generally vital for any society because it illuminates thinking, which develops essential skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking (Bhardwaj, 2016; Mncayi, 2016). It also trains and develops specialised skills for fields that require training, such as medicine and accounting, which significantly contribute to society's various needs and operations (Bhardwaj, 2016; Mncayi, 2016). The acquisition of education further benefits individuals and society collectively because it allows for self-dependence and financial security for the individual and promotes equality while helping to improve a country's economy (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Mncayi, 2016; Mncwango, 2016). It is also considered a panacea for the problem of unemployment and a way to escape the shackles of poverty because it paves the way for a better career and improved social status (Baldry, 2016; Mncayi, 2016). However, despite this, many of the youth and graduates in South Africa, especially in the social sciences and humanities fields, find themselves in a predicament due to the staggering levels of unemployment in a slow-growing economy that cannot create new jobs to absorb them into the labour market (Baldry, 2016; Mncayi, 2016). This poses questions and sparks dialogue on the relevance of acquiring post-high school education in the social sciences and humanities fields. It is also relevant because it provides a platform to explore the possibility of reforming the education currently offered to scholars and discern whether there is a need to employ measures to align it with the labour market.

Research demonstrates that employment can provide and improve social mobility and security, so without it, it is challenging for people to attain social mobility and do things for themselves

(Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Mncayi, 2016). The results of various surveys and studies carried out by, for example (Afrobarometer Survey, 2021; Statistics South Africa, 2021, 2022) in a bid to understand the extent of some of the critical socioeconomic issues that need to be tackled in South Africa, consistently indicate that unemployment is the highest ranking and, therefore, the most pressing. This consistent occurrence of unemployment in various studies and surveys across different platforms and disciplines demonstrates its magnitude and impact on citizens across the country (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Zizzamia, Schotte & Leibbrandt, 2019). It also shows that due to its pervasiveness, interventions and drastic actions by various stakeholders must be made to solve it together (Bhorat, 2012; Mncwango, 2016).

Social science is typically a large study area within a more significant humanities discipline. Humanities graduates at large are among the graduates who are most affected by high levels of unemployment, and this is often attributed to, among other reasons, their lack of practical job training from their respective qualifications to enable them to take up the available jobs (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). They struggle to gain employment because employers believe their education and abilities are insufficient to assist them in entering the labour market (Botha & Botha, 2022; Moleke, 2003).

Employers in the labour market use signals to convey their hiring requirements or demands to potential employees and graduates. Prospective employees identify signals during their job search and career decision-making processes to choose the appropriate subjects that may lead them into relevant careers (Di Pietro, 2017). To work in a particular sector, one might need to pursue a specific qualification, such as becoming an accountant by pursuing an accounting qualification. The graduates then react to the signals by aligning themselves according to those criteria by obtaining the necessary training or education in the form of certifications in various areas, putting them in a position to be considered for open positions (Di Pietro, 2017; Spence, 1973). The spread of signals also helps to include or exclude applicants based on factors like education or job-specific skills in some sectors (Di Pietro, 2017; Spence, 1973).

It is crucial to consider graduate unemployment since it relates to the debate of education and skills requirements in the modern labour market and economy. Graduate unemployment stood at 12.6%, lower than the national unemployment rate by 21.9 points in the first quarter of 2022 (Maluleke, 2022a). In the second quarter of 2022, it stands at 10.2%, 23,7 percentage points lower than the official national unemployment rate (Maluleke, 2022b).

Graduate unemployment is particularly concerning because it erodes significant human capital as people cannot use the education and skills acquired at higher learning institutions (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017). They graduate with their respective qualifications, hoping to be absorbed into the labour market but find themselves in a situation where they cannot take up the available jobs or are unavailable, and there are several reasons for this (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Mncayi, 2016).

In South Africa, unemployment increases the already existing socioeconomic inequality because it is mainly concentrated among African people, who are already at a disadvantage due to the history of policies that ostracised and dispossessed them (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). In post-apartheid South Africa, the government has implemented various policies geared towards accelerating the employment and development of young people, but despite those efforts, unemployment remains a significant challenge facing the country. Unemployment among the youth and graduates is rife, and it continues to shape the lives of many young people in the country (Ajufo, 2013; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011). Because unemployment can result in other social issues and negative behaviours like crime, violence, and depression, the implications are catastrophic for them and the larger society (Longe, 2017; Mncayi, 2016). Additionally, it is damaging since a lack of robust, human-based economic activity lowers the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) (Mncayi, 2016; Mncwango, 2016). Youth unemployment is a global issue, and it is also rampant in countries like Greece, Spain, Malaysia, Kenya, and Nigeria (Barroso, López & Ramiro, 2020; Moyi, Wambugu, Vuluku, 2013; Akofa, 2013; Ismail, 2011). The 2008/2009 financial crisis is also attributable to the globally high youth and graduate unemployment rates (Barroso et al., 2020).

1.2 Background

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) releases a biennially reviewed technical report with an Occupations in High Demand (OIHD) list. This list comprises occupations and sectors highly sought after by the economy and where many employment opportunities exist for youth (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). It was compiled in line with the National Development Plan (NDP) and National Growth Plan (NGP), as well as the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) policy document goals (Chabane, Mncwango, Rogan & Reddy, 2018). These government-established policies and frameworks aimed to address socioeconomic challenges collectively, each focusing on a different set of goals to

achieve at a specified time or within a specific period (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). They range from poverty eradication and reducing inequality and unemployment to fostering entrepreneurship through various initiatives and developing industrial sectors such as manufacturing (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020).

At the launch of the recent list, which was published in November 2020, The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, in his speech, explained that: "this list marks an important step towards helping us understand better the needs of the labour market and signals opportunities where our students and graduates are likely to stand a better chance of finding employment" (Eyewitness News, 2020). He further explained that "too many students rush into courses or programmes that we are not short of in South Africa and are oversubscribed, which is breeding unemployment" (Eyewitness News, 2020). He mentioned sectors like "the digital economy, travel and tourism and agriculture" as critical to the economy and areas where youth are likely to find employment (Eyewitness News, 2020).

The OIHD technical report aims to shed light on careers that are most required by the labour market as determined by studying past, current and future trends of the most employable sectors, skills or occupations (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). Studying the rate of growth experienced and predicted in those industries led to this decision (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). According to the report, the list is released to help manage enrolment, resource allocation, career counselling, and qualification development in the department and various institutions of higher learning (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). It is also released to benefit school leavers by helping them make an informed choice about their future careers based on the careers and skills that are needed most in the labour market (Chabane et al., 2018).

The 2018 OIHD list, published before the current one, includes skills and occupations in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, such as an ICT project manager, a software developer, and an application development manager, among others (Chabane et al., 2018). It also included some blue-collar occupations, such as plumbers, welders and carpenters, as critically required skills that the labour market needs (Chabane et al., 2018). In the current list of 2020, critical occupations and skills such as digital technology skills such as web developers and software engineers in the ICT sector were identified. It is in addition to some of the occupations identified in the former (DNA Economics, 2020). In the medical sector,

pharmaceutical and nursing skills were also in high demand (DNA Economics, 2020). Some of the identified careers and skills are not degree-specific, such as social media jobs (DNA Economics, 2020). These are examples of jobs that can be viewed as new and emerging careers that respond to the direction in which the labour market is moving.

Based on the data from the two reports examined in this paper, the labour market is undergoing substantial change, with specific industries shedding jobs as they become less necessary while others continue to grow and become more in demand. The consistent trend in the current and preceding reports demonstrates that the labour market is headed towards being more digitalised and technology-driven, even though there is also a need for critical skills in non-ICT fields such as nursing and agriculture (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). This is because information technology ranks as the most favourable sector in the labour market from both the demand and supply standpoint, followed by business and management (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). It means that the many available jobs in the ICT sector must be matched by the relevant skills to take up those jobs (DNA Economics, 2020). The demand for these skills is set to continue due to the demands of the current labour market to meet the digital transformation and the virtual and remote working modes that are slowly being integrated into how we work (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020).

For decades, people have debated the relevance of social science and humanities studies to the present and future of the labour market and their impending demise (Botha & Botha, 2022). This compels us to consider the role and future of humanities in work and the economy. It also poses questions about whether the humanities are in a crisis or merely a concern due to the response and perception in society and workplaces (Botha & Botha, 2022; Thomas et al., 2017). Due to their low economic contribution to the labour market compared to other fields of study, the social sciences' viability is questioned across various platforms (Thomas et al., 2017).

The skills taught in the social sciences are not exclusive to them because they can be learned elsewhere, according to some employers and recruiters in the labour market, and aside from those skills, nothing distinguishes social sciences graduates from those from other fields (Botha & Botha, 2022; Thomas et al., 2017). Many academics and society stakeholders have argued that the humanities are no longer relevant since they do not equip graduates with the practical and technological skills needed to compete in the present and ever-evolving job market (Thomas et al., 2017). Although some contend that they can bridge gaps that technology cannot

always address, graduates of humanities and social sciences explain that employers and other stakeholders in society undervalue their various skills because of the diversified and broad nature of their degrees, which is widely despised (Botha & Botha, 2022; Dunga, 2016). As a result, they may get a job unrelated to the courses they studied or even be significantly underpaid after spending years studying for their degrees (Botha & Botha, 2022; Mncayi, 2016). This causes a conundrum these graduates frequently encounter in their job-searching process.

However, there are some advantages to studying social sciences because these courses offer a broad array of skills that enable these graduates to deal better with everyday social issues they may encounter in the workplace or life (Davidovitch, Buhadana & Hengel, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). They train people in essential skills such as writing and the ability to formulate and justify one's ideas and arguments (Thomas et al., 2017). They also train individuals to be able to research and engage with information and social issues in a critical manner (Thomas et al., 2017). However, the social sciences are often criticised for their generic and subjective nature as they are not always scientific and are sometimes inadequate for solving current and emerging technical problems (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2017).

From a policy perspective, the South African government is responsible for reducing the barriers to employment people encounter, and they have done some work to achieve that (Statistics South Africa, 2022). While it is nowhere near adequate, it demonstrates strides that have been made and continue to be made by the government. On completing their studies, graduates continue to be lured into short-term internship opportunities in the public and private sectors, with no guarantee of permanent employment, which would provide better security (Dunga, 2016; Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). In addition, the government has also altered the requirements for entry-level jobs, which no longer have experience as a requirement.

1.3 Problem statement

The problem identified in this study was that, according to evidence from various studies (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Dunga, 2016; van Broekhuizen, 2016), despite earning a post-high school qualification, social sciences graduates face the highest unemployment rates among university graduates. Compared to graduates from other professions, such as those in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) or fields like medicine and agriculture, those with social science degrees have poor employment prospects (Bhorat, Mayet

& Visser, 2012; Moleke, 2003). Based on the critical skills and occupations that DHET identified in the two most recent OIHD lists, it might be claimed that few of the critical jobs were directly related to the social sciences. They were primarily composed of fields that value specialised training over broad and generalised education. This list is critical because it gives an idea of the current state of the labour market and the direction in which it is headed (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). It is essential because it gives an idea of the sectors or occupations where people are likely to get employment after completing their studies (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). Even though it is not the sole indicator of employable sectors, signals like this provide a platform for dialogue on careers and the future of work.

Despite efforts from the government to shed light on the occupations vital to the economy through the OIHD list, numerous graduates from various academic fields still leave institutions of higher learning to become unemployable and jobless, and youth unemployment rates are still remarkably high (Chabane et al., 2018; Statistics South Africa, 2022). Some academics say this results from a skills gap between job searchers and the economy's demands (Mncayi, 2016; Mncwango, 2016). It is crucial to gain an understanding of perceptions held by graduates through research to hear from them regarding their decisions to pursue higher education in fields that may not necessarily offer a slew of job opportunities as they are not critical to the needs of the current economy. It will enlighten people about post-high school education and employment through the experiences of social sciences graduates. It is to help us understand the circumstances that led to the choice to pursue their qualifications and their perceptions about the labour market and signals thereof.

Despite evidence from research suggesting that holders of degrees such as a general Bachelor of Science (BSc) or a general Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) have difficulty finding employment, they still fare much better than their counterparts in the social sciences who also hold general degrees (Dunga, 2016; Moleke, 2003). It demonstrates that people with general degrees across courses have difficulty when it comes to securing employment (Bhorat et al., 2012). After completing their studies, graduates find themselves without employment for extended periods, sometimes forcing them to take up any employment that might not necessarily be in their studied field (Botha & Botha, 2022). The problem with this is that it seems as if the social sciences produce graduates faced with low employment prospects in the labour market. A lack of the job-specific skills needed by the labour market in the modern economy is one explanation for this unemployment, among others (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat &

Kimani, 2017; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). As a result, this then raises the question of the role of social sciences graduates in the labour market. It also adds to the ongoing debate around the relevance of the humanities and social sciences in the current high-tech-driven and volatile economy.

Literature is replete on the issue of unemployment among humanities and social sciences graduates at large and how they are generally considered unemployable. Significant emphasis is often placed on the fact that the skills taught in the humanities and social sciences have become inadequate over the years, and they cannot equip graduates with the necessary skills to make them employable for the labour market (Davidovitch et al., 2017). Nevertheless, not much literature seeks to understand the relationship between what employers require and what graduates perceive as required by the employer or labour market. Most of the focus of the research on this topic is quantitative and not specific to the context in which this research takes place. The available literature does not seem to investigate how graduates understand signals from the labour market by examining their perspectives. Research further indicates that they are among those who are the most affected by unemployment, and in order to explore this, a contextual understanding of unemployment employed in this research among social sciences graduates was required. The extent to which the interpretation or misinterpretation of the signals affects graduates and its nuances can only be unpacked and understood by undertaking qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding, as this research did.

This research was conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University) because it only focused on respondents from the said institution. It is a historically white institution (HWI), urban-based in Johannesburg, the most industrious city in the country. It was undertaken among respondents who are social sciences graduates who form part of the second-largest faculty in the university in terms of throughput and graduation at the university (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022). Therefore, the possibility that they may be leaving with little prospect of finding employment is concerning and merits investigation to better understand the reasons behind their decisions.

This research had to be undertaken because the levels of unemployment in South Africa and globally are escalating. It was done to understand what needs to be done to break a loop of producing graduates who might be unemployed at the end of their studies. Even though people do not need to work in the fields they studied, it is also worthwhile to consider that there might

be some barriers to consider in some fields. This is particularly relevant for people who might not be trained in critical fields such as ICT when the labour market is already not optimal (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020). This research provided an avenue to explore what can be done to reduce the barriers that make it challenging to enter the labour market because of discrimination by employers and recruiters. It might also provide some insights regarding what interventions are needed to better equip social sciences graduates with the skills required to be employable on completing their studies.

The context of Wits University

The research was conducted among Wits University's social sciences graduates. Wits is a public higher learning institution based in Johannesburg, with campuses in Braamfontein and Parktown. It is rooted in Johannesburg's mining industry and is named for its location on the Witwatersrand mineral basin (Statistics South Africa, 2022; Wits Facts and Figures, 2022). The university comprises 34 schools with five primary faculties (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022).

The university recorded a total student headcount enrolment in the 2021 academic year of 42 175. From that enrolment figure, 39.40% were postgraduates, 58.5% were undergraduates, and 2.1% were occasional student enrolments (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022). A total of 61.89% of the student enrolment population was African (Black South African), and 56.43% of it was female, while international student enrolment accounted for 8.74% of the student enrolment in the 2021 academic year (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022).

According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the Shanghai Ranking, Wits University ranked second in Africa (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022). It is the same across numerous world university rankings, such as the Center for World University Rankings (CWUR) (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022).

The Humanities Faculty at Wits

The humanities faculty at Wits University served as the primary source of the study's data because it houses the School of Social Sciences. Data was collected to gain insights into the graduates' experiences, perceptions, and signal interpretations around unemployment.

The humanities faculty comprises five schools, which are: the Wits School of Arts, the School of Education, the School of Human and Community Development, the School of Literature,

Language and Media, the School of Social Sciences and WitsPlus (BA for the World of Work) (Humanities Rules and Syllabuses, 2022; Wits Facts and Figures, 2022). In the academic year 2021, the humanities faculty enrolled 10 269 students, accounting for 24.3% of the student enrolment, the second highest in the university following the Commerce Law and Management (CLM) faculty. In the same academic year, 27.11% of the graduates were from the humanities faculty (Wits Facts and Figures, 2022).

Social sciences at Wits

For this research, the focus was on unemployment among social sciences graduates. The humanities and social sciences studies are often talked about interchangeably, but there is a distinction. They are both concerned with studying and understanding human beings and society (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). Humanities is older than the social sciences and has a more analytical approach; social sciences, on the other hand, tend to be more 'scientific' as they are more focused on conducting observations and testing hypotheses (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Goldman, 2014; Thomas et al., 2017). Social science is a branch of the humanities concerned with studying how people relate to society or different cultures (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Goldman, 2014; Thomas et al., 2017). Some courses that can be studied through the social sciences include anthropology, archaeology and economics, while studies in the humanities include art, history and philosophy.

In this research report, a graduate is someone who has completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Through its Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, the School of Social Sciences at Wits University offers six courses: Demography & Population Studies, Anthropology, Political Studies, Development Studies, History, International Relations, Philosophy and Sociology. It takes a minimum of three years to complete a BA degree at Wits (Humanities Rules and Syllabuses, 2022). For a BA degree to be completed at Wits, one needs at least any two of the major courses listed above, which they started with from their first year right through to the third year (Humanities Rules and Syllabuses, 2022; *Humanities - Wits University*, 2022).

1.4 Purpose statement

The research aimed to investigate how recent graduates in social sciences perceive their unemployment experiences and how they interpret labour market signals.

Unemployment is a widespread problem that is escalating; it affects especially young people, including recent graduates, and is among the leading causes of despair and anxiety (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; de Witte, Rothmann & Jackson, 2012; Mncayi, 2016). The study broadly focused on the issue of graduate unemployment in South Africa. It was primarily interested in unemployment among those with educational credentials from the social sciences. It also studied the interpretation of labour market signals which, according to Spence (1973), capture the relationship between education and the labour market. This research project applied a qualitative approach to realise its objectives. It used a survey and interviews as research instruments to collect data.

The analytical framework of social capital, which supports the theoretical parts of the research paper, was used to address the purpose of this study. The theory of social capital is premised on the idea that human beings can form social connections and networks they can use to pursue shared objectives toward a better life and future (Kaasa & Parts, 2007, 2008; Smith & Kulynych, 2002). Social networks, such as education and sharing of information, which are the focus of this research, can improve individuals' lives if used effectively (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Smith & Kulynych, 2002). These social networks that one forms can act as a source of meaningful influence and benefit their well-being in different spheres of life (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Smith & Kulynych, 2002).

This research was interested in how education and employment work together to enhance well-being (Smith & Kulynych, 2002). Social capital theory impacts this research when it comes to examining the relationship between specific educational credentials and unemployment. This is because education is an essential component of social capital because it offers the potential for individuals to be self-sufficient and independent, which is considered a significant value in social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Smith & Kulynych, 2002).

1.5 Research question

i. How do social sciences graduates understand labour market signals?

Sub-questions

ii. How did social sciences graduates interpret labour market signals when choosing a degree to pursue post-matric?

iii. To what extent do social sciences graduates believe their degree has prepared them for the labour market?

1.6 Research objectives

- The study sought to understand whether there is a mismatch between what employers expect and what graduates perceive.
- Explore their unemployment experiences through their search for employment processes.
- Explore through their experiences how the labour market perceives them.
- Explore how they identify labour market signals and what they think of them.
- This research aimed to analyse how graduates interpret labour market signals through their journeys as graduates to employees.

1.7 Significance of the study

This research is particularly relevant because it may assist with career guidance. It was also essential to study and research the relationship between higher education and labour because it is an essential issue of public policy (Di Pietro, 2017). The growing levels of unemployment confronting South Africa are also of great concern, and research can help to delve into the issues that have to do with unemployment and perhaps also proffer solutions to the problem (Statistics South Africa, 2022). It allows people to track and make sense of the strides, if any, that have been and continue to be made by governments to curb the issue of unemployment and prepare students not only for post-matric education but beyond graduating from institutions of higher learning (Di Pietro, 2017). The research also contributes to the extensive body of available literature on unemployment.

1.8 Study outline

This research paper comprises six chapters that address different components of the research undertaken. The first chapter introduces the research and presents the research problem, questions, and objectives that guide the paper in seeking answers. It elucidates what the research aims to explore and why it was significant that this research must be undertaken at this time and in this context.

Chapter two presents the literature this research report reviewed to gain theoretical insights into the topic. It reviewed the literature on unemployment in different regions globally. It explored literature on labour market signalling and factors determining employment and unemployment in different people. It concludes by justifying the use of the two conceptual frameworks developed to unpack the themes from the emerging data, the social capital and signalling theories.

Chapter three presents the methodologies this research paper espoused to collect the empirical data evidence it sought to examine. It explains the ethical considerations that informed how this research was conducted and how research techniques were operationalised. It also justifies the reasons behind selecting the qualitative approach as the most appropriate approach to appreciate and understand this research.

Chapter four presents the analysis of the data that emerged from the data collection process using the thematic analysis approach. This chapter arrived at seven main themes and eight sub-themes used to narrate and make sense of the data.

Chapter five presents and discusses the findings that can be derived from the data that emerged in chapter four by linking it to the literature and the conceptual frameworks adopted in the research. It also explains how the findings help us answer the research questions.

Finally, chapter six presents the conclusion of the entire research paper. It summarises the main findings this paper arrived at and further explains how they help us answer the main research question. It states the insights that can be drawn from this research report and gives recommendations.

1.9 Conclusion

This study set out to answer the question of how social sciences graduates understand labour market signals to investigate how they perceive unemployment and their preparedness to enter the market. This chapter demonstrated how this research report addresses the research gap in the literature regarding this research topic and why it is significant to investigate further. It stated the research questions used to help deconstruct the research problem. It also stated the research objectives, which were informed by the research question and purpose. Finally, this chapter presented an outline of the report that illustrates its structure. The next chapter presents the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature reviewed to gain theoretical insights into graduate unemployment, labour market signalling and perceptions. This chapter also presents the two conceptual frameworks, social capital and signalling theories, applied to analyse critical concepts emerging from the data.

The literature review begins by presenting a general overview of unemployment by drawing on different contexts and examples globally, regionally, and in South Africa. It studies the concepts of employability and underemployment and what they mean for graduates, the labour market and this research report. Moreover, this literature review explores and synthesises the literature on graduate unemployment in South Africa and the factors that determine it. The literature review gives an overview of the humanities studies over the years and explores the role of social sciences graduates in the current economy. Finally, it explores the literature on labour market perceptions and explores how employment signalling in the labour market occurs.

2.2 Overview of unemployment

Unemployment is a pervasive global socioeconomic challenge that occurs when someone is in a position to work but cannot find suitable work (Baah-Boateng, 2013; International Labour Organisation, 2018; Bhorat, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004). Several factors are attributable to the growing levels of unemployment globally, such as an ineffective education system and the issue of overpopulation (Bhorat et al., 2012; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw, Oosthuizen & van der Westhuizen, 2008). When education systems are not up to acceptable standards and fail to prepare scholars for post-school education, that can inadvertently lead to unemployment because learners are not adequately trained academically or technically, and this can limit their chances to participate in the labour market (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008).

Unemployment can be explained as “when individuals are without a job but have been actively seeking employment within the last four weeks and are currently available to take up a job” (International Labour Organisation, 2018, p. 15). Due to the different cases of unemployment

found in economic literature, it is defined and measured in two ways, i.e. narrow and broad measurements. The narrow measurement refers to "people who are unemployed and actively seeking work", and the broad definition, on the other hand, considers all of those who are "without a job but are available for work even if they have not attempted to look for work" (International Labour Organisation, 2018, p. 15). This division helps to understand and distinguish which people are actively seeking work and those who may be in a position where they are discouraged from looking for work yet still want to work and would take an opportunity to work if it were available (Benes & Walsh, 2018; International Labour Organisation, 2015). Both definitions depict a different view of unemployment, depending on the context under which it is studied (Bhorat, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004, 2006). The unemployment rate is used as an indicator to assess the economic growth of a country, which is essential because it shows the rate at which the economy is growing (International Labour Organisation, 2018; Bhorat, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004, 2006). It is essential to assess economic growth because it can indicate if the economy can create jobs (Benes & Walsh, 2018; International Labour Organisation, 2015).

Unemployment occurs for varying reasons, and for that reason, different classifications of unemployment provide a practical way of understanding unemployment; this also helps to eliminate overlaps found without these classifications (Benes & Walsh, 2018; Kingdon & Knight, 2004). They are structural, frictional, cyclical and seasonal types of unemployment (International Labour Organisation, 2015; Kingdon & Knight, 2004, 2006). While there may be different classifications and definitions of the notion of unemployment, there is a consensus across literature that it is a challenge that affects multiple spheres of people's lives, both at an individual level and collectively, because it reduces the quality of life and undermines a sense of social security that employment provides (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat et al., 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004, 2006).

Unemployment is often associated with social vices, such as crime and violence, because it renders people dependent as they cannot provide for themselves what they need and want (du Toit, de Witte, Rothmann & van den Broeck, 2018; Kingdon & Knight, 2004). It indicates that when people find themselves idle and without the security that comes with employment, they may resort to destructive behaviours that oppose society's acceptable moral values (de Witte et al., 2012; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017). It can also lead to psychological distress and feelings of inadequacy and anxiety that can be differently expressed by different people (de

Witte et al., 2012; du Toit, 2018; Ibikunle et al., 2019). Research conducted by du Toit (2018) in two townships in Gauteng, aimed at understanding and analysing unemployment experiences in those locations, found that unemployment rendered youth vulnerable and psychologically distressed. According to du Toit (2018, p. 75), the word "pain" emerged in eight of the 12 responses that described unemployment experiences. Likening unemployment to pain demonstrates the magnitude and intensity of the problem for the youth and resonates with most people (du Toit, 2018). They also attribute being based in the township and being removed from opportunities as factors that put them at a disadvantage regarding employment opportunities (du Toit, 2018).

The most frequent type of unemployment that affects countries across the globe and in South Africa is structural unemployment, which occurs when there is a mismatch in the skills required in the labour market versus the available ones from the jobseekers, and so for that reason, unemployed people are unable to take up those jobs (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat, 2012; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Pauw et al., 2008). Structural unemployment is attributable to, among other factors, improvements in technology, a lack of education and training valued by the labour market, and issues relating to relocation to where employment opportunities are available (Baah-Boateng, 2013; Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; International Labour Organisation, 2020). It also endures across different economic cycles, unlike other forms of unemployment (Baah-Boateng, 2013; Bhorat et al., 2012; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003; Pauw et al., 2008). What is particularly exasperating about structural unemployment is that there are jobs, but the people seeking jobs do not possess the skills needed.

From conducting this literature review, this research report has identified traces of structural unemployment as the most descriptive of the unemployment social sciences graduates experience. 'Structural' because in South Africa, due to the history of apartheid compounded by an economy experiencing tepid growth, there are several structural factors, such as education and demographic factors, that influence employment prospects (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat, 2012; Ibikunle, Orefuwa & Mafo, 2019; Pauw et al., 2008). On the other hand, this research was conducted during and following the aftermath of the Covid-19 lockdown that presented new unemployment and employment challenges and exacerbated pre-existing ones. People lost jobs due to the lockdown that was enforced due to the pandemic, as there were changes in the economic cycle brought by shock, and employers could not afford to keep them in employment (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Structural unemployment is also particularly

significant for this research report because it is often attributed to why social sciences graduates and the youth are the most affected by unemployment for several reasons addressed throughout this literature review.

This issue of structural unemployment can also be observed, for example, by looking at the case of Spain, which is one of the countries in the European Union with high unemployment rates that continue to rise, particularly among the youth between 15 and 24 years old (Barroso et al., 2020). The high unemployment levels in Spain are partly attributable to an economic crisis, mainly between 2008 and 2014, due to the housing bubble (Araújo-Vila, Fraiz-Brea & de Araújo, 2020). The crisis further exacerbated the pre-existing challenges of already high levels of unemployment in Spain, and more jobs were shed (Araújo-Vila et al., 2020; Barroso et al., 2020). In 2007, the year before the economic crisis was declared, the unemployment rate in Spain was estimated to be 8.23% (Araújo-Vila et al., 2020; Barroso et al., 2020). In 2008 it soared to 11.25%, showing the effects of the economic crisis on employment. The effects of this crisis continue to shape unemployment in Spain, further demonstrating how chronic structural unemployment is. Barroso et al. (2020, p. 68) explain that youth are vulnerable to "macroeconomic evolution", which the economic crisis brought about. It illustrates how that crisis exacerbated young people's difficulty in breaking into the labour market because of the now-ailing economy that is unable to create new jobs for those who want to enter the labour market (Albert, 2000; Araújo-Vila et al., 2020; Barroso et al., 2020).

The upward trend of global youth unemployment levels is attributable to economic changes (Barroso et al., 2020). The effects of structural economic changes can be adverse and lead to severe, long-term unemployment with no solution or end in sight (Baah-Boateng, 2013; Longe, 2017; Oosthuizen, 2006). They can create a barrier for those who want to enter the labour market for the first time, particularly the youth and graduates (Barroso et al., 2020). The adverse effects of these challenges continue to shape the structure of the labour market, and this trajectory can also be observed in South Africa (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Kingdon & Knight, 2006). Part of the reason for high youth unemployment in South Africa is their lack of experience and the low quality of education; these factors make young people less employable (Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2021). Youth unemployment in South Africa continues to be a challenge and currently stands at 61.4% (15-24 years) and 41.2% (25-34 years) (Statistics South Africa, 2022). For a country and continent characterised and defined by a young population, the odds facing graduate youth, such as those the report studies and

youth at large, are a cause for concern because it creates uncertainty and insecurity (Morsy & Mukasa, 2019).

To further expand on this, Barroso et al. (2020), in their paper, reviewed the perceptions held by youth from a Spanish city about their individual experiences regarding the uncertainty that unemployment brought about in their lives. The paper was conducted through a cross-sectional study to determine what the informants regarded as significant issues regarding unemployment (Barroso et al., 2020). The study found that young people have challenges and feel discontent regarding the education and training they receive from their respective schools (Barroso et al., 2020). In addition, they reported that the education they acquired was ill-equipped to help them transition from school to higher education and the labour market (Barroso et al., 2020). The paper by Barroso et al. (2020) concluded that problems arising from unemployment create uncertainty about the future of the youth.

This example of self-perceived problems arising from unemployment among Spanish youth from this city affirms the literature on structural unemployment and the effects of the economic crises that Spain and other countries had to grapple with even after it occurred (Barroso et al., 2020). Youth unemployment in Spain is higher than overall unemployment, estimated at 16.1% compared to 7.8% (Barroso et al., 2020). This is the case in many countries, such as South Africa, where youth unemployment is also high. It is particularly relevant for this research report because it indicates a global pattern of unemployment among youth where a dwindling sense of hope about the future is apparent, permeating youth globally. This case is relevant to this research because, as much as it was interested in the experience of graduates, there is overlap as some graduates fall within the age group of youth. It helps us have a broader view of unemployment as a graduate and youth problem globally.

Youth and graduate unemployment are also high in Colombia, a developing country in northern South America that faces high inequality and unemployment levels in the Latin America region (Vallejo Zamudio, 2020). Youth unemployment is attributable to factors such as a lack of working experience, which is often required for most jobs. It is a paradox shared by many countries that youth and graduates are expected to possess prior work experience (Vallejo Zamudio, 2020). On the other hand, graduates with post-high school education are faced with the harsh reality of finishing their studies with no employment prospects after that (Apascariteli et al., 2015; Vallejo Zamudio, 2020). They also have to contend with the reality of taking up

jobs for which they are overqualified, or joining informal labour due to job insecurity (Apascariteli et al., 2015; Vallejo Zamudio, 2020). Due to the scarcity of jobs, most Colombians have resorted to working in the informal economy (Apascariteli et al., 2015). According to Vallejo Zamudio (2021), the economy's shift from manufacturing towards the services sector is attributable to the high levels of unemployment which have been rising since 2015. Structural factors such as informal labour and underemployment characterise unemployment in Colombia (Apascariteli et al., 2015; Vallejo Zamudio, 2021).

When drawing contrasts between youth unemployment in Spain and Colombia, Apascariteli et al. (2015) find that in Colombia, unlike in Spain, unemployment is due to discouragement and the choice not to participate in higher education. In Colombia, it is determined by factors such as "social exclusion, ethnic origin, social and socioeconomic status and even education access" (Apascaritei et al., 2015, p. 8). It demonstrates that even though a young Colombian may want to pursue education, factors entrenched in the system prevent them from doing so because of their demographic factors and background (Apascaritei et al., 2015).

In Africa, the case of unemployment in Botswana is similar to that of South Africa because the graduate unemployment rates are significantly lower than the national rates (Tabengwa, Okatch & Modisaatsone, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2022). Skills mismatch, lack of experience, and an ailing economy that cannot create new jobs are attributable factors to graduate unemployment in Botswana (Tabengwa et al., 2017). Graduates in the applied humanities and social sciences are the most affected by unemployment (Yilma, 2016). The lack of a practical approach to the job market and collaboration between institutions of higher learning, the government and employers is identified among contributing factors in Botswana (Tabengwa et al., 2017; Yilma, 2016). In response, Botswana has attempted to deal with graduate unemployment by establishing entrepreneurship initiatives such as the Local Enterprise Authority (Yilma, 2016). Internship programmes such as the National Internship Program and funds such as the Young Farmers Fund in the agricultural sector were also established (Yilma, 2016). These initiatives encourage economic participation through entrepreneurship and assist graduates in gaining much-needed work experience (Yilma, 2016). In Africa, youth unemployment is also high in Namibia, Angola and Swaziland, among other countries (Morsy & Mukasa, 2019).

2.2.1 Underemployment

The literature indicates that underemployment is a significant concept to consider when studying unemployment because high levels of unemployment can also result in underemployment, as witnessed in some countries (Apascariteli et al., 2015; Baldry, 2016). Underemployment measures how well the labour force uses people's skills to benefit different areas of the economy (Baldry, 2016; Green & Henseke, 2016). It is for that reason that it was relevant for this research report. According to Botha & Botha (2022), social sciences graduates often find themselves in positions where they have to accept any available job that offers them an income because the barriers are high for them to enter the labour market as they are perceived to be unemployable.

For instance, underemployment can be seen through an individual not being employed on a full-time basis, even though they are in a position and willing to take a full-time position (Baldry, 2016; Green & Henseke, 2016). It can also be seen through people relying on what would be regarded as menial work to earn their primary income. In other words, people may be employed but not necessarily be working in an area they studied for or even be overqualified to work those jobs they are in as they do not utilise the skills they learnt (Baldry, 2016; Green & Henseke, 2016; Moyi et al., 2013). These instances demonstrate two ways in which underemployment can occur because, theoretically, these individuals can add to the economy through their skills, but they do not for various reasons that have placed them in a position where they are underemployed (Baldry, 2016; Green & Henseke, 2016).

A recession is also among the factors that can lead to a situation where graduates cannot get jobs because the economy cannot generate jobs for them (Green & Henseke, 2016). As a result of the dismal state of the economy, where people are in desperate need of jobs, people have no choice and might have to take up any available work to improve their lives and have security (Baldry, 2016; Green & Henseke, 2016). Economists concur that there will always be some degree of underemployment in the labour market (Green & Henseke, 2016). However, it becomes destructive and concerning when the labour market structure is primarily shaped by underemployment, which can be observed in several countries due to various economic crises that negatively affect the economy and, as a result, employment (Green & Henseke, 2016).

2.2.2 Employability

Employability is also relevant, and it emerged numerous times in searching for relevant literature. This is because it is one of the most enduring components of any recruitment process across employers and employees despite one's academic qualifications (Knight & Yorke, 2002; Yorke, 2004). According to various literature (Ajufo, 2013; Bennett, 2018; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Tymon, 2013; Yorke, 2004), the notion of employability is often difficult to explain, but there is a consensus across literature that it refers to the varying skills and personal or individual attributes that make a person employable. The notion of employability refers to one's tendency to be employed (Ajufo, 2013; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Yorke, 2004). It considers one's ability to be able to get some employment, be able to maintain it, and ultimately be able to move to new employment if so desired (Ajufo, 2013; Yorke, 2004). It does not consider that a graduate is employable because they have attained academic qualifications in isolation. Even though that is important, it also considers the attributes that allow a graduate to retain the job that they have secured and also be able to move from one employment to the other regardless of whether it is a job in the same field as the previous one or not (Bennett, 2018; Curtis, 2007; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Yorke, 2004).

Employability is a critical component of labour markets because it contributes to the labour policies implemented in many countries (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Yorke, 2004). An example is research conducted by Ismail (2011) on Malaysian graduates, which aimed to determine what effect the varying characteristics of the graduates had on their employment. Ismail (2011) finds that those graduates with leadership skills and good command of the English language fared better than their counterparts who lacked those skills and abilities. Similar observations have been recorded by Longe (2017) among Nigerian graduates, where graduates with critical thinking and analytical skills were considered more employable. It is particularly significant for the social science graduate because it demonstrates that the probability or possibility of being employed also depends on several factors, not just academic qualifications (Bennet, 2018).

2.3 Graduate unemployment in South Africa

The context of graduate unemployment in South Africa is shaped by the highly fragmented landscape of higher education due to the historical legacy of the apartheid system, based on ostracism, that ruled the country for some 40 years (Mncayi, 2016; Pauw et al., 2008; van der

Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012). The deeply entrenched system, though formally abolished, continues to shape the landscape of higher education and, as a result, a large part of the labour market (Pauw et al., 2008; van Broekhuizen, 2016).

To help us gain insights into the structure of the post-apartheid South African labour market, Oosthuizen (2006) studied the labour market between the years 1995 and 2004. The study aimed to assess the changes the labour market underwent during that period, considering the new dispensation that had now taken power. Oosthuizen (2006) reports on the labour market by following a trajectory of unemployment and employment, which was characterised as a period of jobless growth. Jobless growth is "a state of the economy that is characterised by high levels of unemployment, although there is significant economic growth" (Oosthuizen, 2006, p. 2). While the paper by Oosthuizen (2006) rejects this concept, it acknowledges that the South African labour market during that period was undergoing several changes, and it was experiencing a high influx of jobseekers seeking entrance into the labour market.

These were jobseekers from different racial groupings as the apartheid system had been formally abolished, and the people denied access to some employment opportunities were suddenly eligible to access them (Mncayi, 2016; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008). It demonstrates that even though the country was in a democratic dispensation, opportunities were open to everyone regardless of race, the new government inherited a system that was already experiencing challenges regarding economic growth and creating jobs (Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008). To further elaborate on this, Pauw et al. (2008) explain that the employment trend in South Africa's labour market has declined since 1995, and it has not improved over the years. Many graduates and other jobseekers sought employment for extended periods, without being able to secure any (Botha & Botha, 2022; Dunga, 2016; Pauw et al., 2008).

Even though many South Africans continue to be confronted by staggering levels of unemployment, the levels of graduate unemployment in South Africa are significantly lower than those of other groups and the official unemployment rate (Oluwajodu, Greyling, Blaauw & Kleynhans, 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2021, 2022). Graduate unemployment is estimated at 10.2%, and the official unemployment rate is 33.9% (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Earning a qualification is still significant despite the high levels of unemployment because those with qualifications seem to fare much better in gaining employment (Graham, Williams & Chisoro,

2019; Moleke, 2003). It also confirms the literature that suggests that post-school qualifications still stand a better chance of helping people secure employment, even though different qualifications offer different benefits and challenges (Graham et al., 2019; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

While the unemployment rate is an important figure to consider when trying to understand graduate unemployment, Graham et al. (2019) remind us that it still does not clearly indicate the context of graduate unemployment. It does not account for nuances in the labour market, so studying and understanding it within its context is crucial. South African graduates are not homogeneous; they possess different characteristics and skills, which determine their employment, and go through different processes and experiences in their search for employment (Graham et al., 2019; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

2.3.1 Determinants of graduate unemployment

A myriad factors determines graduate unemployability and employability, affecting graduates differently. Factors such as one's socioeconomic status and background, a poor education system, the choice of a higher education institution and a mismatch of skills are some of the factors that influence unemployment among graduates in South Africa (Bhorat et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2019; Oosthuizen, 2006; van der Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012). These factors are primarily systematic and play an essential role in accessibility to higher education institutions, and further employment opportunities on graduating (Mncayi, 2016; Oosthuizen, 2006). It also explains that, due to this history, the South African trend of unemployment might be different compared to that of other countries, in addition to other challenges posed by the dynamics of the labour market that every labour market goes through (Baldry, 2016; Kingdon & Knight, 2004, 2006).

In South Africa, it is nearly impossible to study the link between education and employment without looking into the history of the education system that shapes the labour market. The Bantu Education school curriculum has left a lasting legacy among black Africans, resulting in a lack of skills to compete in the workplace (Graham et al., 2019; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). Bantu Education, which refers to the system of education previously used in South Africa under the apartheid regime, forced black African learners at the time to be taught in the Afrikaans language (Bhorat et al., 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Pauw et al., 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). It played a role in the outcomes of the education for black Africans because of the quality

of education they received and the resources to which they had access. In addition to the challenge posed by Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, the education they received was substandard compared to that of their white counterparts, and as a result, it was not adequate to prepare them to further their studies or compete in the formal labour market (Bhorat, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Pauw et al., 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016).

This history and legacy continue to shape the education system and are evident in the different types of schools available in the country today (Mlatsheni, 2014; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). It demonstrates that the type of school determines the kind of education one will receive and the resources one will access (Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). Learners from disadvantaged communities and schools face many challenges before gaining entry into institutions of higher learning (Mlatsheni, 2014; Pauw et al., 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). Even on gaining entry, their challenges are significantly magnified in contrast to those of their counterparts who went to private schools or former Model-C schools and had access to a wide range of resources that equipped them to compete in higher education (Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mlatsheni, 2014; Oosthuizen, 2006).

2.3.2 Demographic factors

Against the backdrop of the rising levels of unemployment and widening inequality in South Africa, there are socioeconomic challenges attributable to the high graduate unemployment levels (du Toit et al., 2018; Mncayi, 2016; Oosthuizen, 2006). South Africa's history of ostracism and disenfranchisement also resulted in social stratification, determining that unemployment is shaped and determined by three factors: race, class and gender (du Toit et al., 2018; Statistics South Africa, 2021, 2022).

The South African socioeconomic environment can be broadly divided into three classes to make sense of the conditions of each class and illustrate the extent of purchasing power in each. The rich own a significant portion of the economy, the middle class is perpetually trapped in debt, and the poor remain poverty-stricken (du Toit et al., 2018; Statistics South Africa, 2022). To provide a better understanding and context, they can be further narrowed down and classified as chronically poor, transient poor, vulnerable middle-class, stable middle-class, and elite (SALDRU, 2018; Zizzamia, Schotte & Leibbrandt, 2019). To further expand on this, the National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) studied poverty and socioeconomic class to understand the dynamics between 2008 and 2017 (Zizzamia et al., 2019). According to the

study, roughly 80% of South Africans were poor at least once during that period (Zizzamia et al., 2019). It demonstrates that a large part of the population is struggling to break from the poverty line as they find themselves in a situation where they are a pay-cheque or two away from poverty. The study reveals that the middle class also experiences poverty at some point in their lives, and it is normal for South Africans to experience bouts of poverty from time to time due to the vulnerabilities brought about by various socioeconomic conditions (Zizzamia et al., 2019).

The study discovered that 48.8% of South Africans were chronically poor at the time (Zizzamia et al., 2019). This finding implies that nearly half of the population is poor and will most likely remain poor throughout their lives (Zizzamia et al., 2019). White-headed families were 26.6% less likely to be impoverished than their African counterparts with the same education level; and less likely to continue to be impoverished for prolonged periods (Zizzamia et al., 2019). This highlights how racial inequality due to apartheid's legacy defines the dynamics of poverty and class in South Africa (Zizzamia et al., 2019).

Data from Statistics South Africa (2022) demonstrates that social class, even though it fluctuates, is a significant factor in unemployment. Those who rank higher on the social class hierarchy have a better chance of accessing the best available opportunities. They also have proximity and material access to quality education as they can afford to send their children to private schools, avoiding the congestion of state schools. This puts them in a better position for employment opportunities and, ultimately, a better and more successful life (Graham et al., 2019; van Broekhuizen, 2016).

Black Africans are the most affected by unemployment, partly due to inequalities in the education system, where most of them only have low-quality education, which potentially limits their employment opportunities and renders them in a position of low purchasing power in the lower classes (du Toit et al., 2018; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2022). Between 1994 and 2014, the unemployment levels of Africans with tertiary education rose from 8% to 19% (Statistics South Africa, 2015). It demonstrates that these levels have doubled during those 20 years, meaning more people had access to university than before 1994. It also demonstrates that African people's socioeconomic conditions have worsened. They are also mainly located in removed and disadvantaged areas, where opportunities are limited. White people, who form a minority of the population, own a large portion of the wealth in the

country and, as a result, have far better opportunities (Statistics South Africa, 2021, 2022). They are the least affected group by unemployment at 8.6% (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

Unemployment among black Africans stands at 37.8%, the highest in the population groups and higher than the national rate (Statistics South Africa, 2022). According to data from the World Bank (2022), South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient globally, making it the most unequal society globally (Facundo, 2022). It reflects South Africa's socioeconomic fabric, where resources are unevenly distributed, and the levels of inequality continue to widen (Facundo, 2022; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008). It demonstrates how the existing socioeconomic challenges that black Africans face have a likelihood of making it difficult for them to break out of the cycle of unemployment because they also follow career paths that have minimal prospects of employment (Graham et al., 2019; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008). In addition to these existing conditions, evidence from the research also suggests that Africans are more likely to choose a career path that offers a low potential for employment. Part of the reason for this is that they do not have access to someone who can give them proper career guidance (Graham et al., 2019; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008).

Location is also a determining factor in graduate unemployment in South Africa. Location primarily affects black Africans when they need to access employment opportunities, even years after the apartheid system was abolished (du Toit et al., 2018; Oosthuizen, 2006). The spatial laws implemented under the apartheid regime ensured that black Africans were located far away from economic opportunities (Mncayi, 2016; Soudien, 2010). Due to these laws and a history of dispossession, unemployment is more concentrated in rural areas than urban areas (Bhorat et al., 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Kingdon & Knight, 2004). People who live in townships and rural areas need to consider logistics such as transportation and accommodation when deciding on a job because opportunities are often far away from them, which can be a barrier to them (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat et al., 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004).

According to data from Statistics South Africa (2022), the labour market is advantageous to males, which is demonstrated by the male participation rate, which is higher than that of females. This means that males play a more significant role in the labour market than females. Statistics South Africa (2022) indicates that the females' official unemployment rate is estimated at 35.5 %, compared to 32.6% for males. It is the case among women from different

racial groups (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Oluwajodu et al. (2015) say males are more likely to be employed than females. This is partly attributable to the existing socioeconomic and structural factors, which make females more susceptible to unemployment (du Toit et al., 2018; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

In South Africa, black African women are disproportionately affected by unemployment. Unemployment figures for black African women stand at 39.3 % compared to white women at 8.8 %, followed by Indian/Asian females at 20.2%, and then coloured females at 27.3% (Statistics South Africa, 2022). This trend persists in South Africa despite the efforts that have been and continue to be made through the government's transformational policies in an attempt to economically empower women and foster gender equality in the labour market and the country at large (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2022).

To help us gain further insights into the role of intersectional determinants of race, gender and age in higher education and the labour market outcomes- applying a three-step estimation procedure of quantitative methods, Bhorat et al. (2012) investigated the destinations of graduates and non-completers on leaving institutions of higher learning (HWIs and HBIs). The research by Bhorat et al. (2012) was interested in tracking down the destinations of those who graduated and those who did not complete their respective qualifications from seven public universities and technikons (now Universities of Technology) between the years 2002 and 2003 (Bhorat et al., 2012). The research aimed to find out the relevance of covariates such as age, gender and race when it comes to one's career trajectory from the time they are still at an institution of higher learning to the time they are graduating, working, and finally earning an income (Bhorat et al., 2012). It sought to estimate the extent to which these covariates play a role in determining the outcomes of one's subsequent employment or unemployment (Bhorat et al., 2012). They also considered the role of socioeconomic status, household income and earnings (Bhorat et al., 2012).

The results from the research revealed that race and gender are central to the process studied because they play an important determining role (Bhorat et al., 2012). It also revealed that African females were more disadvantaged than other groups, although women are generally disproportionately affected by unemployment more than males, among other races as well (Bhorat et al., 2012). These results corroborate those of recent years, as demonstrated by data from Statistics South Africa (2021; 2022), years after this study was conducted (Bhorat et al.,

2012; Statistics South Africa, 2021, 2022). The research, however, concludes that race is significant, although it is not a crucial factor (Bhorat et al., 2012). It means that even though it is essential, it is not the sole determinant of unemployment; varying covariates all come into play, and they all determine unemployment (Bhorat et al., 2012).

The analysis of this cohort indicates that completion rates also rank lower in HBIs compared to HWIs, which is a demonstration or confirmation of the preferential allocation of resources experienced during the apartheid system (Bhorat et al., 2012). From the seven institutions studied, one can deduce that the validity of the literature is confirmed by the experiences (Bhorat et al., 2012). Many factors and covariates come into play, and they all play a role in determining the outcome of one's employment (Bhorat et al., 2012). Based on these varying determinants, it is evident that employability is not definite (Bennett, 2018; Yorke, 2004). The common thread that runs through all these factors and covariates is that they are structural and deeply entrenched in the systems and structures.

2.3.3 Post-high school education and training

In addition to the challenges posed to people by the poor education system from as early as basic education, the institution from which their qualification is earned is vital to consider when studying unemployment (Bhorat et al., 2012; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

In South Africa, there is a distinction between the public institutions of higher learning, namely, historically black institutions and historically white institutions (Oluwajodu et al., 2015). Many employers prefer graduates from the latter as they perceive them to be better educated or equipped for the labour market (Graham et al., 2019; Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). This demonstrates that even after these candidates have completed their formal high school education, their opportunities will still be determined or limited by their institution (Graham et al., 2019; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). Historically, HBIs faced many challenges as there was a lack of the essential resources needed to help the students excel in specific technical or scientific courses (Bhorat, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Moleke, 2003). Most HWIs had access to resources that helped them excel academically (Bhorat et al., 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004). It demonstrates that the role of infrastructure in institutions is significant and can make the difference between success and failure in higher education (Bhorat, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Oluwajodu, 2015).

A mismatch of skills is also attributable to the high levels of unemployment among graduates in South Africa (Mncayi, 2016; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008). Research suggests that one's employment is strongly linked to the qualifications one obtained post-school (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat et al., 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Pauw et al., 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). This is significant because it indicates that the chosen field of study is one of the factors that influence unemployment. Moleke (2003) highlights that attaining some education is still not an assurance of employability, and as a result, the type of qualification acquired further makes a difference when it comes to who qualifies for specific jobs and what the labour market or employer's needs are (Pauw et al., 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016).

Kruss (2004) describes the relationship between the education acquired and employability as complex. It is not necessarily linear or causal because getting an education, regardless of the course studied, might not necessarily lead to employment or even employment in the field the person studied or wants to work. It demonstrates that the acquisition of education and graduation is still not an assurance for getting employment, which further complicates the nature of unemployment in South Africa because there are many nuances to it (Artess, Mellors-Bourne & Hooley, 2017; Bennett, 2018; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Yorke, 2004).

Graduate unemployment encompasses demand and supply factors (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Moleke, 2003). Even though the problem is often attributed to a mismatch of skills, some blame the ailing economy for the high and persistent unemployment levels of graduate unemployment as it fails to create jobs for jobseekers (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2022). It demonstrates that graduates struggle to find employment due to supply factors (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Moleke, 2003). Looking at the case of unemployment in South Africa, for example, industries such as construction and mining are not the high employers they used to be, and as a result, they cannot create jobs and absorb new people into the industry (Statistics South Africa, 2022). In some cases, they are also unable to sustain the existing jobs. The economy is becoming more productive in the tertiary sector, so people must be trained in the skills that align with this movement so they can take up these jobs (Statistics South Africa, 2022). These are industries such as banking and tech, among others. Again, this indicates that changes in the economy's structure can lead to unemployment and perhaps create employment for others, leaving many jobless who were trained in other skills that are no longer required (Chabane et al., 2018; International Labour Organisation, 2020).

The inability of the government and other sectors of the economy to create employment brings us to the role that can be played by entrepreneurship and vocational learning programmes in response to possible solutions to the problem of unemployment (Kraak, 2019; Naong, 2011). In 2002, the government established Technical and Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) colleges under the Further Education and Training Act [No. 98 of 1998] to bridge the identified skills training gap. The establishment of the TVET colleges was born out of the realisation that there was inadequate vocational and technical training in the various higher learning institutions that were already available (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 1998; Kraak, 2019).

For that reason, it was necessary to establish institutions that could train essential skills, such as hospitality, plumbing and boiler-making, that are critical to the labour market (Kraak, 2019). It was also an alternative to accommodate those who might not be fit for traditional universities (Kraak, 2019). According to the DHET website, 50 TVET public colleges are registered and accredited in South Africa, located in various urban and rural areas. They allow grades 9 and 12 entrants. Each college is mandated to provide occupational and vocational training to forge employability and labour market-aligned skills training (Kraak, 2019; Naong, 2011).

2.4 Humanities and social sciences studies

Humanities broadly refers to a branch of studies that is interested in the study of humanity and what it means to exist in a world with people from different cultures and societies (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Piper, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017). It can be broken down into disciplines that study different areas of humanity, history and experiences, such as art, history, music, psychology and linguistics (Piper, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017). Over the years, humanities studies have gone through different epochs that have seen them move from a time dating back to the 1900s, when the humanities held a degree of prestige, to recent times when their value is often questioned or undermined (Davidovitch et al., 2017). The concern is that they are not as marketable and valuable as the hard sciences, such as medicine and science and technology professions, particularly for training scholars to be employable in the labour market (Botha & Botha, 2022; Davidovitch et al., 2017; Goldman, 2014; Moleke, 2003). It has seen funding to social science studies and research receiving less funding from governments and various other organisations, which is another demonstration of how that has led to the so-called crisis of the humanities (Botha & Botha, 2022; Davidovitch et al., 2017).

Despite this, there are some valuable lessons that one can learn from the humanities and social sciences courses, such as knowledge about different cultures and societies that exist in the world (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Goldman, 2014; Piper, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017). Through a deep understanding of culture, one is trained to interact with people from different walks of life, and this can help develop and promote cultural and citizenship awareness, empathy and emotional intelligence (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Goldman, 2014; Piper, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017). This empathy and understanding of others can define and set the tone for critical working relationships and how scholars or graduates interpret their environment and society (Thomas et al., 2017). Through this understanding, one can interpret how structure and order make the world function through various policies, political affiliations and other government interventions (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Goldman, 2014; Piper, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017).

Even though the assumption is often that their skills are not exclusive to them, their ability to interpret the often-hidden meaning behind oversimplified social situations, such as overt behaviour in different social environments, is what sets them apart (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Piper, 2011). This is due to their training in interpreting various conflicting ideas and forming logical arguments toward better solutions while remaining neutral on beliefs and opposing values (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Piper, 2011). The skills trained in the humanities are also transferrable because a graduate can contribute to various work environments through their ability to do research and evaluation (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). It indicates how they can leverage their skills to work in areas where research and communication skills are required (Thomas et al., 2017).

The humanities may not be as marketable as the other areas of study, but they are still valuable to society because of the critical skills they train, as mentioned above. Research reveals a move to rethinking the humanities to make the studies more valuable to the labour market (Glisic, 2019; Goldman, 2014; O'Leary, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). Humanities is currently going through a revival because it has been devalued over the past years, and the research aims to find ways that they can adapt and make a meaningful contribution to an economy that has become driven by technology and artificial intelligence (Glisic, 2019; Goldman, 2014; Piper, 2011). This revival places value on graduates whose skills may have been undermined compared to their counterparts in the hard sciences (O'Leary, 2017). This revival indicates that the world needs diversification of skills through graduates from different disciplines because

they will bring in different perspectives due to their different training and experiences (O'Leary, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017).

Conversely, critics of the humanities and social sciences studies argue that they are lacking when it comes to preparing graduates to apply what they studied to the requirements of the current labour market, and this is due to their traditional and outdated approaches, which are not necessarily relevant or aligned with the current labour market (Botha & Botha, 2022; Moleke, 2003). A vast body of literature explains that higher learning institutions and governments have not done much to reform humanities and social sciences curricula to align with the modern labour market (Botha & Botha, 2022; Davidovitch et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). Researchers argue that they fail to prepare scholars for a specific job, and as a result, they find themselves in a predicament on graduating as their disciplines are generic, making it difficult for them to fill specific posts (Botha & Botha, 2022). It can be incredibly frustrating for entry-level jobseekers because they do not always know where to place their skills (Botha & Botha, 2022; Moleke, 2003).

This notion is not unique to South Africa; in a study that traces the causes of unemployment among Nigerian graduates, Longe (2017) found that Nigeria experiences a proliferation of graduates exiting institutions of higher learning but without any prospects of employment awaiting them in the labour market due to unavailability of jobs they can fill with their skills (Longe, 2017). Similar findings are also documented among Malaysian graduates with social science degrees who, in the early stages of their careers, find it difficult to enter the labour market due to their lack of technical and specialised skills for professional jobs (Ismail, 2011; Kadir, Naghavi & Subramaniam, 2020).

This paper accepts both perspectives as plausible because it contends that there is value in the humanities and social sciences. It is also clear that not enough has been done to respond to the evolving labour market requirements and to establish or forge the applicability of what is learnt in the classroom to the work market because there is value in the humanities and social sciences. To further expand on this, research indicates that medicine and hard sciences research stand a better chance of success if the methods applied in the research are carried out by working with individuals from the humanities (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Piper, 2011). It is because humanities graduates, due to their skills, often speak to people in a manner and language that is accessible to them, and therefore the impact can be more significant when

people do not feel alienated from the research that is implemented (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Piper, 2011).

There is more that could and should be done to prepare and develop humanities scholars and graduates for the labour market. The humanities remain traditional and epistemic in their approach (Davidovitch et al., 2017). It is not easy to enter the labour market with a humanities degree, even though it does become easier once one gains more experience in the labour market (Moleke, 2003; Botha & Botha, 2022). Institutions of higher learning and organisations must work together to revive the humanities and help prepare scholars to compete in the labour market. The labour market, particularly in South Africa, must be open to graduates working across careers that may differ from what graduates initially studied. For example, someone trained in law or social science should be able to work in a field such as agriculture or media, and if training is required for that person, then it should be made available. However, for this to happen, the labour markets need to provide that access and lower the barriers to entry.

2.5 Labour market perceptions

The literature on labour market perceptions is significant because this research report was interested in understanding and analysing social sciences graduates' perceptions of labour market signals in relation to their unemployment experiences. Perceptions about the labour market are determined and influenced by various factors unique to every labour market (Curtis, 2007; Mncwango, 2016). In South Africa, factors such as beliefs, job market expectations, access to job-related information and tools, and labour-related policy influence jobseekers' decisions to participate in the labour market (Mncwango, 2016). According to Mncwango (2016, p. ix), perceptions can help us to better understand the "attitudes to the labour market and can thus inform the government's intervention methods". It explains that it is essential to look into labour market perceptions because understanding them can assist policymakers and other decision-makers in governments in understanding the job search processes followed by jobseekers so that they can make better choices as informed by the needs and requirements of jobseekers (Mncwango, 2016).

Studying labour market perceptions is beneficial for skills planning for scholars and graduates seeking jobs (Mncwango, 2016). It can help both with a realistic picture of the labour market structure so that they can prepare accordingly to participate and manage their expectations before they enter (Bennett, 2018; Curtis, 2007; Di Pietro, 2017; Mncwango, 2016). It also helps

them track any changes in the labour market trajectory so they can prepare to align with or adapt to those changes and be in a better position to be employed or employable (Bennett, 2018; Curtis, 2007; Mncwango, 2016).

To expand more on perceptions about the South African labour market, a report by Mcwango (2016) surveyed labour market perceptions and attitudes among people who are unemployed, employed and those who are not active in the labour market. The report aimed to understand better their experiences, job preferences, and job-seeking manners (Mncwango, 2016). Mncwango found that "there is a close link between race, education and class" (2016, p. ix). This finding corroborates a vast body of literature that the existing and often unalterable structural factors, such as race and socioeconomic conditions, are determinants of employment that cannot be escaped, and they affect people as they search for jobs (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Kruss, 2004; Mncayi, 2016; Mncwango, 2016). It can only be through transformative policy implementation that they are addressed (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Mncwango, 2016).

The report indicates that there is consensus among those who took part in the research that education was an essential determinant of getting employed in the labour market (Bennett, 2018; Curtis, 2007; Di Pietro, 2017; Mncwango, 2016). Education and training are among the factors that influence the labour market perception, and those who possess tertiary education report valuing their jobs as they provide them with a sense of security (Mncwango, 2016). This confirms that even though education and training may not necessarily guarantee employment, it puts one in a better position to be considered for possible employment (Bennett, 2018; Curtis, 2007; Di Pietro, 2017; Mncwango, 2016). Mncwango (2016) also found that in addition to formal education and training, jobseekers need to recognise the value in transferable skills such as leadership, time management and people skills to help them thrive in the labour market.

The report concludes that education is critical for entering and thriving in the labour market (Mncwango, 2016). It also recommends that policymakers and decision-makers assist vulnerable jobseekers by providing lower skills and education through vocational training programmes (Mncwango, 2016).

2.6 Labour market signalling

The Oxford Dictionary defines a signal as "a gesture or action used to convey information or instructions, typically by prearrangement between the parties concerned". In the labour market,

a signal refers to a particular ability that an individual may possess that might be required or valuable to the demands of the labour market (Albert, 2000; Di Pietro, 2017). Labour market signalling refers to employers disseminating information about their requirements to jobseekers or potential employees (Bonoli & Leichti, 2014). Requirements can be academic skills, changes and developments in the specific sector or labour market that may affect jobseekers (Albert, 2000; Di Pietro, 2017). Potential employees can acquire skills or credentials to align with those requirements (Spence, 1973).

According to Spence (1973), labour market signals capture the relationship between education and the labour market. This explains why academic credentials are mainly used as signals that employers use to convey messages about the labour market to alert jobseekers to job requirements for available jobs or future jobs. This information explains the education or training required to fill those jobs and how long it may take to attain them (Bardhan, Hicks & Jaffee, 2013; Di Pietro, 2017). For example, in South Africa, a qualification such as a matric certificate – earned on exiting high school – is vital because it is considered an essential requirement for entering most institutions of higher learning and most jobs. It is a signal to which many people positively respond because it is basic and opens one up to many other opportunities in higher education and the labour market. There are not enough jobs in the labour market that allow one to enter without a matric certificate.

Information about market-related remuneration is also a signal used to convey various jobs in the labour market because it affects how people perceive jobs and their decisions to take them up (Bardhan et al., 2013; Di Pietro, 2017; Mncwango, 2016). Through formal and information dissemination, some jobs and sectors are known to be better paid than others. Potential employees identify labour market signals in informal and formal modes such as social networks (Mncwango, 2016). Research conducted by Mncwango (2016) found that jobseekers rely on informal modes of receiving information about possible job openings, such as social networks and other ways through the internet. This indicates that traditional methods of recruiting potential employees are no longer sufficient, and it is beneficial to use newer methods to send and receive signals. This is supported by evidence from a study by the Stellenbosch Business School on using social media in recruitment. Koch, Gerber & de Klerk (2018) found that social media is an essential and positive element of recruitment in South Africa because it provides access to people who would otherwise not have it or might have it in limited form.

Even though signalling is a critical component, it comes with a degree of uncertainty, and having the required qualifications does not always mean that people and organisations align (Spence, 1973). Employers do not know if an employee will be beneficial to the organisation through an interview because it is a process to get to know an individual's productivity levels. Spence further explains that "based on previous experience in the market, the employer will have conditional probability assessments over productive capacity given various combinations of signals and indices" (1973, p. 357). To elaborate, Spence (1973) says that signals should come at a cost, financially or materially, so people work hard to align with the signals disseminated. It allows the employer to assess the level of commitment based on the effort invested over time to achieve those goals in response to the signals (Spence, 1973). For this reason, the acquisition of some higher education training is considered a significant signal in the labour market because it indicates one's ability to do a task from beginning to its completion; this serves as an indication that the candidate can achieve results, which is essential for the employer (Bardhan et al., 2013; Spence, 1973).

A paper by Bardhan et al. (2013), which analysed how American higher education institutions respond to labour market demands, found that the institutions studied in the report were moderately responsive. The paper found computer science courses more responsive to the labour market's signals and requirements because they experienced a significant increase in the number of enrolments compared to previous years. It indicates that information about the economy becoming technology-driven is seemingly well interpreted by students because they are enrolling in courses that will allow them to work in ICT fields. This example also shows how higher learning institutions respond positively to labour market requirements. It is an example of positive signalling to the job market because those seeking employment respond to the employer's requirements (Bardhan et al., 2013).

2.7 Conceptual framework

This research identified two conceptual frameworks that helped to achieve its purpose: to learn if there is a mismatch between what employers want and what the graduates perceive. It was mainly interested in unpacking two key themes: unemployment experiences and labour market signals. For that reason, the social capital and the signalling theories were the most appropriate conceptual frameworks to help us better identify and understand emerging concepts and themes.

The widely applied social capital theory was significant because it helped us understand and analyse the interconnectedness of different variables that exist in society, such as the attainment of education for employment purposes. It was vital because it helped us dissect the subtle nuances around how trust and shared values and relations can benefit people's well-being (Kaasa & Parts, 2008; Smith & Kulynych, 2002). On the other hand, signalling theory was relevant because it demonstrated how messages in the labour market are transmitted and the signs or signals one can identify to stand a better chance of getting employed (Spence, 1973).

2.7.1 Social capital theory

The social capital theory is the first conceptual framework emanating from the literature review and overall research. The theory is premised on the idea that social relationships benefit the accumulation of crucial human capital that can have meaning in people's lives (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). It is interested in how individuals relate to society and is applied to different contexts to make sense of political and socioeconomic outcomes (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009).

The most cited contemporary authors on the social capital theory are Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988), and Robert D Putman (1993), who started using the theory on various academic platforms (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Claridge, 2020). Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". This definition explains that attaining social capital gives significant power to an individual, which they can use to influence a larger group to effect change so long as they have mutual interests (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986).

Though related to Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1990, p. 302) is of the view that "social capital is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure". In other words, groups and individuals can positively benefit from the associations and social relationships they are part of (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Coleman, 1988). The difference between Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) is that Bourdieu (1986) saw social capital as a tool or structure that aids the reproduction of inequality in various spheres, whereas Coleman (1990) saw it as a mechanism to benefit everyone involved in that social environment (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986; Claridge,

2020; Coleman, 1988). Putman (1993), on the other hand, deviates from Bourdieu's (1986) view but has similarities with Coleman's (1988) theory (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Smith & Kulynych, 2002). Putman (1993, p. 35) is of the view that social capital refers to "features of social organisations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit". It explains that for social capital to be maintained, the stated features must be in place as they are co-dependent on each other and crucial to its maintenance (Putnam, 1993).

The general and consistent idea across different proponents of social capital from various epochs is that, like any other form of capital, it can help people and institutions attain things they would otherwise not be able to do without it (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988, 1990). The theory gained traction through its application by public policy specialists and other social scientists from various disciplines to make sense of societal issues in different contexts (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Claridge, 2020).

This paper adopted the former because Bourdieu (1986) demonstrates the subtle ways social order and power are maintained in different parts of society. Bourdieu (1986) helped us better understand how being employed or unemployed can affect other areas of one's life, whether negatively or positively. One of the critical differences between Bourdieu's (1986) theory and the two others is the treatment and approach to power (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Smith & Kulynych, 2002). Unlike the other two theorists, Bourdieu (1986) emphasises that social capital refers to having power over something rather than the power to do something with it. Bourdieu (1986) emphasises how social capital reproduces inequality, an idea that comes out frequently in the literature review, looking at the context of South African society, which is characterised by high inequality levels. Bourdieu (1986) further emphasises the role of structure and how it determines unemployment and employment. The literature reveals that structural factors significantly determine the context of unemployment and employment in South Africa, which justifies why it was an appropriate framework for navigating this research.

The social capital theory is dense, with different ideas that can be applied to various contexts. As a result, some dimensions were identified by various authors, for example (Liu & Besser, 2003), to unpack better and understand the different aspects of the theory. Most of the dimensions commonly identified by authors are centred around making sense of how concepts of 'trust', 'resources', 'networking', and 'rules and 'norms governing social action' work

together to ensure the function and maintenance of social capital in various organisations and society at large (Andrews, 2010; Kaasa & Parts, 2007; Liu & Besser, 2003). These dimensions assist with accessible analyses of emerging concepts and data.

The following social capital dimensions were constructed by Liu & Besser (2003) and were applied to make sense of the data that emerged from the research: informal social ties, formal social ties, trust, and norms of collective action. These dimensions provided a framework for explaining and understanding the role of social capital in graduate unemployment among social sciences graduates. They were applied to the data analysis chapter to help us understand and decipher the embedded meaning that emerges from the data. The role of institutions in facilitating and maintaining social capital was also explored through the dimensions of the social capital theory.

The figure below illustrates the dimensions of how social capital functions in society:

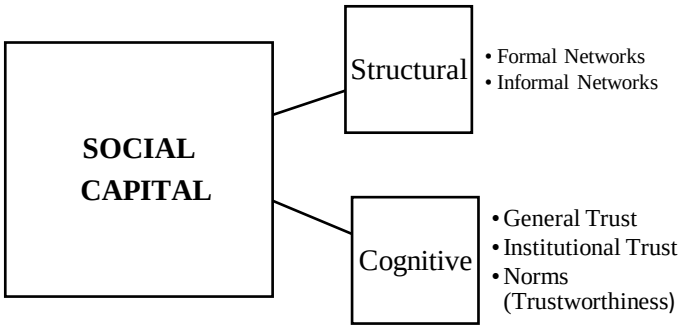


Figure 1 Social capital dimensions

Source: (Kaasa & Parts, 2007)

Kaasa & Parts (2007), in Figure 1, illustrate how social capital can be divided into two forms of capital: structural and cognitive, to understand better how it manifests in the social environment. The structural form of capital considers the role played by the existing social order and access to resources in society (Andrews, 2010; Kaasa & Parts, 2007). It consists of "formal and informal networks", which expand on the relevance of social capital (Kaasa & Parts, 2007, p. 7). Through both networks, one can observe that social capital is maintained

through social order, connections and social ties that benefit the actors involved (Kaasa & Parts, 2008; Liu & Besser, 2003).

On the other hand, cognitive capital considers the collective understandings, shared values and goals among various groups of people (Andrews, 2010; Kaasa & Parts, 2008; Liu & Besser, 2003). It comprises "general trust, institutional trust and norms", which significantly determine and maintain social capital in society (Kaasa & Parts, 2007, p. 7). This demonstrates that through trust, people can create and nurture meaningful relationships that can benefit them in several ways (Andrews, 2010).

Figure 1 demonstrates that social capital plays a role in how society and social interactions are governed by social capital from the two levels and further helped this research report analyse how it is determined in issues of graduate unemployment (Kaasa & Parts, 2007).

2.7.2 Signalling theory

Labour market signalling is the second key and a frequently recurring theme in the literature review process. Michael Spence initially developed the signalling theory in 1973, and it continues to be applied to different fields to understand how signals are sent and interpreted by those who send and receive them. In this instance, the theory was applied to understanding signals sent by the labour market and what the receivers perceive of these signals sent to them (Spence, 1973).

Job market signalling (1973) was an appropriate theory and model applied to explore the reasons behind the choices made regarding the choice to pursue a career in the social sciences because it helped the research to unpack the role of demand and supply in terms of education and how scholars interpret those signals. Part of Spence's (1973) signalling theory, which was used in this paper, was the overarching assumption and argument of the theory, which is that: "Hiring is an investment in uncertainty" (Spence, 1973, p. 356).

Spence (1973) compares this investment in hiring to buying a lottery ticket. The ticket signifies an individual's attributes because it is difficult for an employer to know at the onset whether a person will contribute positively to the job. Spence (1973) also found that even though education might not immediately provide direct benefits to the employer, the employee and employer can benefit from it. To illustrate his argument, Spence (1973) makes an example: if more education leads to a higher wage, more people will be educated to the highest level to

earn a high salary and be considered good employees. In this example, Spence (1973) demonstrates that signalling is a powerful tool to ensure that employees align with the job requirements they want to the best of their abilities.

The job signalling theory was appropriate because it helped the research critically engage with education as a signal. It helped us understand how years of schooling determine employment outcomes, with specific reference to those in the social sciences. It helped us understand how their schooling in the social sciences predetermined their employment prospects long before they completed their studies. It was also applied to understanding the role of two parties in disseminating and interpreting signals; in this instance, it is the employers and the graduates. It also assisted with unpacking the logic behind how social sciences students decide their career choices through interpreting signals. Transitioning from education into a career is also not always a seamless process, and the signalling theory gave us tools to reflect critically on this, particularly in South Africa.

In conclusion, this literature review has provided a general overview of unemployment, with information and example from different regions. The factors that influence unemployment and employment are addressed across the literature, and in addition, the literature review has explored literature on labour market perceptions and signalling.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the literature review, summarising and synthesising information on graduate unemployment and labour market signals. The literature review started by broadly presenting an overview of unemployment across different countries. It also involved analysing and interpreting the meaning behind essential concepts that emerged in the research at a theoretical level. Through this, it identified significant findings, debates, and themes on the research topic that helped gain a deeper yet structured view of the literature on unemployment from which thematic literature was developed. The literature review was narrowed down to focus on graduate unemployment in South Africa and explored the factors determining graduate unemployment in the country.

The literature review then proceeded to present information from research on the humanities and social sciences studies and explored their relevance for the labour market. Finally, the

literature review in this chapter also presented a summary of findings made on signalling in the labour market and the role it plays in one's employment journey.

This chapter also presented and justified the two frameworks that helped the research with analysis and to develop a coherent understanding of the key concepts in the research. The next chapter presents the research methodologies adopted and elucidates how they were operationalised.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodologies adopted and why they were appropriate to help us understand and carry out the research project's purpose. It explains how validation and reliability were operationalised to ensure rigour was maintained throughout the research process and the ethical considerations for conducting the research.

3.2 Research paradigm

This research project explored unemployment experiences and decision-making around choosing a career path through the lived experiences of various social sciences graduates from Wits University. The problem identified in this research report was that, despite earning a post-high school qualification, social sciences graduates face the highest unemployment rates among university graduates and face considerable challenges as they seek employment (Dunga, 2016; Letseka & Cosser, 2010).

Nieuwenhuis & Smit (2012, p. 125) explain that "the qualitative approach is interested in the socio-cultural processes that play a role in shaping an individual and their behaviour". This research adopted the qualitative paradigm because it was interested in understanding the processes of making a career choice from a social and cultural perspective. The qualitative paradigm is appropriate because it is interested in analysing, understanding, and exploring from the perspective of the participant, and so was able to guide the area of this project's inquiry, which was to explore through individuals' perspectives rather than getting the generic or universal truths or understandings about it (Bengtsson, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012; Merriam, 2002). The qualitative paradigm provides insights into the different subjective experiences of the participants because the experiences and responses may differ from one person to another (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative paradigm is also appropriate because it appreciates the fact that what applies to one person or situation may not apply to another or may apply differently, and it provides ways to analyse and explore a phenomenon within a particular context because of its rather interpretive approach, as opposed to a controlled one (Bengtsson, 2016; Merriam, 2002).

The qualitative paradigm accepts reality as multiple, allowing for the analysis and exploration of multiple realities (Bengtsson, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). The advantage of

applying the qualitative paradigm to research is that it allows one to delve into an issue observed within a particular context and gain an in-depth yet contextual understanding of that issue (Bengtsson, 2016; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). This research was interested in graduates' experiences within the confines of a particular context, Wits University. Through the qualitative paradigm, this research was able to appreciate the graduates' varying perspectives by granting them authority over narrating their own stories and experiences while gaining invaluable contributions to the research project.

However, the disadvantage of the qualitative paradigm is its use of intangible constructs to conduct research (Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). It is not based on empirical evidence, which can be tested or verified by any researcher and still arrive at the same or a similar conclusion (Bengtsson, 2016; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). Another drawback that comes with the qualitative paradigm is that one researcher might include a particular issue that they deem as necessary for the research while another may think it is not, and this may pose questions about the quality of qualitative research due to this subjectivity (Bengtsson, 2016; Merriam, 2002). The paradigm provided an avenue to explain and understand that the experiences of graduates from Wits University would not necessarily apply to those of graduates with similar characteristics from other institutions. So, it would not be possible to make generalisability across research with similar questions or inquiries.

A qualitative study can be conducted through focus group discussions, interviews, and participant observations as instruments to collect data (Bengtsson, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). This research project was carried out through a questionnaire disseminated through email and some in-depth follow-up interviews, which are discussed in greater detail in the section on data collection below in this chapter.

3.3 Research approach

Chilisa & Kawulich (2012) explain that the interpretivist social science approach under the qualitative paradigm accepts that reality is a social construction as several factors influence it. It therefore allows for the interpretation and analysis of multiple realities, and for research to interpret the complexity of human experiences as experienced by different social actors (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). This approach helped the research unpack how social sciences graduates attribute meaning to their choices and perceptions about the labour market through individual and unique human experiences.

The interpretivist social science approach was the best approach to provide the research with insight into subjective phenomena such as perception and interpretation. (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). The advantage of this approach in any research is that it allows one to gain an in-depth understanding of an issue because an experience may be experienced and interpreted in different ways by the social actors (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). Since this approach does not only rely on empirical and objective data, it allowed this research to delve into themes that an objective approach would not pick up because they are not quantitative yet are still relevant to consider because they contribute to understanding graduate unemployment and labour market signalling (Creswell, 2014).

Compared to the transformative approach, which is history-bound and concerned with doing research that transforms through group action, the interpretivist is more appropriate for this research report (Creswell, 2014; Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). The rationale is that while both approaches can be applied to qualitative studies, they have different values and assumptions about reality (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). The axiom in the transformative paradigm is that researchers research because it is a "moral and political activity that requires them to choose and commit themselves to a value position" (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012, p. 57). The transformative approach is guided by the desire to transform or emancipate, whereas interpretivism seeks to comprehend reality as narrated by social actors; thus, no point of view is incorrect (Creswell, 2014; Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). It is for this reason that this research was carried out through the interpretivist social science approach because it derives meaning from the multiple perspectives of the participants, who are graduates in this instance, without passing judgement (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012).

The main research question of this research report was about social sciences graduates' understanding of labour market signals. The exploratory tool was used to guide this research because it helped explore the questions of 'how' and 'why'. The most crucial questions and purpose of this research were to find out the reasons behind why and how a particular decision is made and interpreted by an agent, which is a graduate in this instance, so the exploratory tool was the best tool to guide the research in asking the necessary questions.

3.4 Research design

This research report adopted the phenomenological research design as a framework to conduct this research. The phenomenological framework is a design within the qualitative research

paradigm that is interested in studying a phenomenon through the lived experiences of people belonging to a specific group or social environment in which the study is interested (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). The phenomena that this research project sought to understand through lived human experiences were graduate unemployment and signal interpretation.

The phenomenological framework takes two forms: hermeneutic phenomenology, which is focused on describing and interpreting, and psychological phenomenology, which is more focused on describing life experiences and less on interpreting them (Creswell, 2014; Norlyk & Harder, 2010). This research adopted the former because it was interested in describing and interpreting unemployment experiences among social sciences graduates (Creswell, 2014).

Norlyk & Harder (2010) postulate that the ontology of phenomenology is rooted in understanding and interpreting the physical world through human consciousness and understanding. It explains that the phenomenological framework is also not science-based, allowing and giving authority to the participants being studied to narrate their own stories and experiences, which was advantageous for this report (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). The framework uses interviews and observations, among other instruments, to acquire data. The unemployment experiences among social sciences graduates across institutions are not the same, which also justifies why it was carried out through a hermeneutic phenomenological research design, as it allows for multiple realities, descriptions and interpretations (Norlyk & Harder, 2010). This research report collected data from respondents through interviews and a survey, per the requirements of a phenomenological framework.

3.5 Data collection

The data was collected using primary and secondary modes of data collection. The primary data comprises data that the researcher collected through a survey and in-depth interviews. The secondary data comprises data that other people or organisations previously collected in the form of documents and data to support the primary data collected.

Primary Data

Multiple methods were used for the research to capture varying perspectives on the same issue (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). The primary data was collected in two ways: through a questionnaire in a survey disseminated through the university's distribution systems, and individual in-depth interviews done by the researcher. According to Mentz (2012, p. 101),

using a "questionnaire is convenient because it is easy to administer and can be sent to many people". This research report benefited from this convenience as the questionnaire was administered to many people. The survey was interested in social sciences graduates' general opinions about pursuing degrees in the social sciences and unemployment. The survey helped the research recruit and access people who later participated in the individual interviews. The aim of proceeding from the survey to the interviews was to move beyond the general opinions and to gain further in-depth information from the subjects of interest about the perceptions that could not be accessed through the survey only (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002).

Online Survey

The reason for using online surveys is that they have proven to be effective because they allow more significant volumes of data to be processed cheaply and timeously (Mentz, 2012; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). For this reason, it was decided that the survey would be appropriate for carrying out this research because it was convenient for the time allocated to collect data (Mentz, 2012).

An online survey with ten questions was disseminated: four demographic and six open-ended questions that helped realise research questions and objectives. The Wits Registrar's assistant disseminated the survey to their extensive email database. In this context, the survey was disseminated via email to a total of 1 854 postgraduate students registered for this academic year in the humanities faculty. It consisted of students enrolled for the Bachelor of Arts Honours BA (Hons), Master of Arts (MA) and PhD degrees within the faculty who are currently registered for different courses, not only from the School of Social Sciences but from other schools within the humanities faculty. The reason for disseminating the survey to this group of people was to recruit people who are still within the system of higher education in the faculty. The research also gained access to people who have left the institution and ventured into other fields outside the humanities and social sciences. A total of five responses were recorded before the research resorted to other ways of recruiting respondents, which are discussed in the sampling section below.

The research report used SurveyMonkey, an online tool used to create and conduct the surveys (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). The SurveyMonkey online tool provides software tools to analyse and store data safely (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012). This research used these tools to safely store information in soft copy and access it at any time throughout the research process

without compromising its quality. It was beneficial because it saved the researcher time and resources (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012).

The Wits School of Social Sciences Students' council was then approached. It is one of the societies within the university. The objective of societies in a university is to take care of the needs of students. It also bridges the communication gap as a voice for social sciences students in the university. The reason behind approaching it was that students might be more responsive when receiving the survey through a body considered to be for the students.

The Wits School of Social Sciences was also approached to disseminate the survey to distribute to postgraduate students within the school through their email system. The reason for this was that the school has a much more extensive database and access to social sciences graduates than the council, so it was an attempt to maximise the likelihood that the postgraduate students and graduates would respond to the survey that was sent. In the end, 12 survey responses were recorded. Even though the research would have appreciated getting more responses, the survey was distributed online over time and responses were required within the set time. Participation was voluntary, and the research had to carry on without the desired number of respondents, targeted at 15. The questionnaire from the survey is appended (see Appendix A).

Individual in-depth interviews

The research then moved to conduct individual interviews with what the research refers to as subjects of interest that emerged while completing the survey. It refers to participants whose information was essential to be further discussed, so this necessitated a more in-depth conversation or probing through an interview beyond just the online survey that was initially disseminated. The follow-up interviews investigated the role and interpretation of signals and the factors influencing the graduates' perceptions. The interview aimed to understand the graduates' meanings attributed to their varying experiences.

Merriam (2002) and Creswell (2014) explain that qualitative research allows for the use of interviews because it helps the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of behaviour and perceptions, making it appropriate for this research. Merriam (2002) further states that the benefit of interviews is that they are flexible and led by the respondent, which helps the researcher get valuable information. This also benefited the research project when there was a discussion about unemployment among a few social science graduates to get an idea of the

challenges they face, and it allowed the researcher to explore further the issues discussed and anything that may have been omitted or overlooked in the surveys.

A semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions was used to conduct the interviews. An open-ended questionnaire is not answered with either yes or no, but rather with a statement or response that is not static (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012; Merriam, 2002). The reason for using this type of questionnaire was because the interviews aimed to get in-depth information from the participants, so this type of questionnaire did not pose too many restrictions on what a participant could answer (Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012; Merriam, 2002). It also allowed the interviewer to learn about new experiences and ideas that emerged during the interview and thus be able to probe even further into them. The interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The interview guide is appended (see Appendix B).

Five of the 12 responses recorded from the survey were considered subjects of interest, but in the end, four in-depth interviews were conducted because of the availability of respondents. They demonstrated some of the themes that emerged during the literature review and research process, and the researchers decided that this necessitated a much deeper conversation.

Secondary data

This research used secondary data and information from books, journal articles, and other scholarly articles from various databases. These were relevant because they provided the theory underpinning the concepts that emerged from the literature review and the data collection through the surveys and interviews conducted during the research process. They also helped situate the research within a logical approach and its findings within an academic and theoretical framework.

The research relied on government policy documents and reports, such as DHET's Post-School Education and Training Monitor Report to understand the government's role in tackling unemployment, and used document analysis as part of its secondary data. It also used information from databases on employment and unemployment, such as the Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) database. The rationale was to get information about graduate unemployment that the research could not access first-hand. The Wits University and DHET websites helped us understand the throughput. The two provided information about Wits graduates and graduates nationally.

3.6 Sampling

This research adopted non-probability sampling and utilised the snowball technique to recruit eligible participants. Laher & Botha (2012) explain that non-probability sampling is a sampling selection technique that employs non-random methods to select people who will participate in research, which means that the people who participate in the research possess characteristics that the study requires. In that instance, a study deliberately contacts only those identified to fit the research requirements (Laher & Botha, 2012). So, it was an appropriate technique to employ in this instance because the researcher used participants who possess the required characteristics and are willingly available to be used as participants for this research.

The snowballing technique was employed to get people who are graduates of the social sciences who are no longer members of the university but are graduates of the university and might provide valuable insights into the perceptions that social sciences graduates hold. Upon graduates answering and completing the survey, they were requested to forward it to other participants that align with the requirements of this research product. The research also had a purposive element because the researcher relied on their knowledge and experience to find other participants who fall within the population required by the research (Laher & Botha, 2012). Laher & Botha (2012) explain that the snowball technique, on the other hand, is used when it might be a challenge to find people of a specific population who are eligible to participate in the research, and once one manages to recruit those people, they then ask them to refer them to other people they know who might fall within the same population (Laher & Botha, 2012). This technique allowed for the time and resources available for data collection.

The respondents

The target population in this research was unemployed and employed graduates who had graduated with a minimum BA degree, majoring in any of the courses offered within the school of social sciences within the past ten years. The respondents consisted of currently registered postgraduate students and non-registered graduates because the researcher wanted the experiences and perceptions of those pursuing studies and those who were not. The literature also revealed that people choose to go into the humanities and social sciences for various reasons, and some pursue unrelated careers after graduating. For this reason, this research surveyed and interviewed employed graduates from the social sciences to learn how their

degree may have helped them transition or even be adaptable to the changes they faced in their careers. It was beneficial because it assisted with getting varying perspectives.

The study consisted of twelve graduates who majored in any of the six courses offered through the BA degree. For the individual interviews section, four subjects of interest were later interviewed for the in-depth interview. The sample size was adequate to help us access participants and information quickly and easily without compromising the quality of the data that emerged. The justification for using a relatively small sample size is that the participants were largely unavailable and how it was distributed and answered was voluntary. The resources in terms of time allocated were limited and the data collection aspect needed to be completed within the specified time. When data was collected, the university was also beginning to open up for blended learning due to the global pandemic that made contact classes impossible. Access to the university and students continued to be limited, and where available, it was often restricted. So as a result, all the interviews were conducted virtually through Microsoft Teams, and the others were done telephonically.

3.7 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of analysing data that is commonly used in qualitative research studies (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). It is conducted by identifying and analysing common or recurring codes, themes and patterns that emerge from the data collection process and by reviewing the literature in the research (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). The phenomenological framework under qualitative research also allows for data analysis to take a systematic analysis procedure from broad to narrow units of analysis, such as thematic analysis, which this research report adopted (Kawulich & Holland, 2012).

The thematic analysis takes the forms of two approaches: the inductive approach, which means that the themes used in the end emerged out of the data, they were not predetermined based on theory or the researcher's expectations or the deductive approach, which means that the themes that emerged were influenced by theory and the researcher's expectations of what would emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). This research report adopted the former because the themes that were arrived at and used in the analysis are the ones that emerged out of the data; it was not predetermined based on theory or the researcher's expectations and prior or preconceived knowledge about the research area (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). The

literature and theories only served to back the data and locate it within a logical and theoretical framework of academia.

The thematic analysis method applies a coding process whereby the researcher examines different codes from the research. These codes embed meanings attributable to behaviour and perceptions, which were analysed (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). So this demonstrates that codes and themes that emerge through the process are an integral part of this process (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Coding in thematic analysis can be done in either latent or semantic coding (Byrne, 2022). Latent coding involves studying and analysing underlying meanings in the data, not just what is said (Kawulich & Holland, 2012).

On the other hand, semantic coding explicitly analyses the data that emerges without reading into any underlying meaning in the subtext (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022; Kawulich & Holland, 2012). This research report applied the semantic, which means that the researcher focused on and analysed explicitly the data that emerged from the respondents, not on following underlying patterns that the respondents may have not explicitly mentioned but the researcher identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Braun & Clarke (2006) and Byrne (2022) emphasise that thematic data analysis is an iterative and adaptable process, which is why it was the most suitable approach for research that sought to understand perceptions people hold about a subject because the research was able to analyse common codes that emerged in the data.

The research questions guided this analysis process because most codes used to make sense of the data came from the research question (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). Thematic analysis assisted with the extensive data from the interviews and surveys, allowing the researcher to group it into different categories and make sense of it from that perspective without compromising the data quality. The thematic analysis also allows for the analysis of subjective findings, and the findings of this research were subjective because they were based on analysing perceptions held by graduates (Kawulich & Holland, 2012). To help researchers towards realising the goals of their research, Braun & Clarke (2006) identified and developed six steps towards achieving those goals.

The first step of the six-phase approach focused on familiarising oneself with the data, whereby the researcher took time to immerse herself in the data from the surveys and individual interviews by reading and rereading to gain intimate familiarity with the data sets (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). This process included transcribing the data from the survey and individual interviews and reading to get a general sense of the responses after conducting the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allowed the researcher to pick up the extracts from the interviews and survey that would be turned into initial codes.

The second phase was about generating the initial codes, where the researcher crudely generated codes from the survey responses and interview extracts. These initial codes were meant to break down large amounts of data and information into codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was done by reading and rereading the extracts to derive common and recurring codes from the transcribed long texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the third phase, the researcher applied a funnel approach to condensing data from larger units called codes into smaller units called themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach assisted with ordering and categorising the data by level of frequency and relevance. Some of the codes generated in the second phase were discarded because it was decided they would not be relevant going forward as they did not appear frequently enough to be considered in the next phase, and some were combined to make one theme.

The themes were reviewed in the fourth phase, whereby potential themes arrived at in the previous phase were studied and analysed for their relevance (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes were also reviewed based on the extent to which they responded to the research question. As mentioned above, thematic analysis is an iterative process, so in this phase, it was important for the research to check and establish whether the themes arrived at were representative of the data and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involved reading again, which ultimately helped the researcher decipher whether those potential themes arrived at should be used as themes or merely codes.

In the fifth phase, the names of the themes were created and defined after the potential themes were reviewed and defined based on whether they were representative of the data that emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the last phase in the thematic analysis approach was producing the report using the final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.8 Validity and reliability

It was essential to take various measures to ensure validity and reliability in a research process because they are critical to the overall research presentation (Mentz & Botha, 2012). The fact

that the qualitative methodology relies on people's opinions and perceptions and is narrated from their experiences can create uncertainty among readers on whether the research is trustworthy and credible (Bengtsson, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012; Merriam, 2002). The two ensured that the methods and tools employed were consistent with what the research aimed to measure and assessed the quality of the research conducted (Bengtsson, 2016; Mentz & Botha, 2012).

Validity refers to the measures undertaken to measure the research or studies it claims to measure or study (Bengtsson, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012; Merriam, 2002). The validity of this research was established by employing a few mechanisms. Firstly, the researcher used responses from employed and unemployed people to reduce bias. Secondly, the survey was disseminated on a system that the researcher had no control over, and this opened up a diversity of responses from people from different walks of life, who brought various experiences to the research. This is integral because it demonstrates how the research established a base for validity. This accuracy was enhanced by ensuring that both instruments' questions were consistent with what the researcher wanted to find out at the end of the research process (Crewell, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012). This issue was constantly reflected upon throughout the data collection process by reassessing the research questions concerning the tools and validation methods employed (Creswell, 2014; Mentz & Botha, 2012; Merriam, 2002). In order to promote validity, the research again employed the triangulation strategy by using two methods: surveys and interviews. The research sought to find consistency in the two instruments' responses, using respondent validation to assess validity by validating two responses from the same person in the surveys and the follow-up interview.

Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the measures taken to ensure consistency in the measurements employed (Bengtsson, 2016; Mentz & Botha, 2012). Reliability in this research was enhanced and consistently assessed by using two instruments, a survey and individual interviews, to observe if the results from the two instruments deviated from each other and, if they did, the extent to which they did (Bengtsson, 2016; Mentz & Botha, 2012). Reliability in this research was established by using recordings and taking notes of the interviews on a notepad. The researcher also acknowledged biases by stating her position in the research and acknowledging any biases she may bring. The research also established reliability by presenting the information in tables and diagrams while collecting the data. It helped the researcher keep track of the responses and the research progress.

Triangulation enhanced and assessed the reliability of the research by comparing the results from the participants in the surveys and individual interviews. The researcher sought permission to record the conversations in all interviews. In addition, participants were quoted verbatim where necessary, and transcriptions of the interviews were made.

Limitations

This research suffers certain drawbacks; firstly, it was conducted through qualitative methods and is context-based, which poses challenges because one cannot generalise the findings from this research. The other drawbacks this research suffers are sample selection and bias because it only managed to reach twelve participants, so it captures reality from a limited perspective. The research also had a purposive element, which limited selection bias because the researcher influenced it. This was because of the researcher's experiences and knowledge of whom to contact for information.

Time frames were also a limitation in the research because data was only conducted over two months, and this was limiting because it meant the difference between access and lack of access to valuable information due to time constraints. Some respondents fell off because time frames did not align with the researcher.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The research obtained ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Governance) at Wits University to proceed with the research. Protocol Number: *WSG-2021-53*. It obtained further permission to conduct research within the university's premises with its people through the University Registrar. Both permission letters are appended (see Appendix E). Once that permission was obtained from the relevant authorities, the researcher ensured and maintained the following throughout the research:

The guarantee of confidentiality: For this research, the respondents who returned for the interviews specifically did not have the privilege of anonymity, but the researcher assured them that their information would be treated with confidentiality. Pseudonyms and not real names were used to protect the respondents' identity and privacy (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012).

The principle of informed consent: Permission to audio record the interviews was sought from the respondents. It was vital to request the respondents' permission and explain to them how the research would be conducted and how it may be used so that they could make an informed

decision (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). Respondents were constantly reminded that their participation was voluntary, that they were free to withdraw from the research at any point, and that there would not be any penalty or prejudice should such a decision be taken by them (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012).

Positionality

It is necessary for a researcher to continuously reflect on the power dynamic between the respondents and the researcher (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). The researcher, in this instance, is also a social sciences and humanities graduate. The researcher's experiences and observation influenced their decision to conduct this research.

The follow-up interviews of the research were also not conducted with vulnerable people (Ogletree & Kawulich, 2012). Everyone interviewed was eligible and in an appropriate position to answer the questions posed by the researcher.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented and justified the various methodological techniques that this research employed in seeking answers to the research question and the objectives it sought to achieve. It explained the reasons and logic behind selecting the qualitative paradigm and other approaches within it that were the most appropriate to help answer the research questions and realise the research objectives to achieve its purpose. It further explained how data was analysed using thematic analysis and demonstrated why it was the most appropriate method to analyse the data.

This chapter illustrated how evaluation techniques such as validity and reliability were operationalised to establish and maintain accuracy and consistency throughout the data collection in the research report. It was done by demonstrating and explaining the different techniques and how they serve as checks for each other. Finally, it explained the ethical considerations and measures taken to protect the respondents who participated in this research report. The next chapter presents the data that emerged from the data collection and uses thematic analysis to analyse it.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of the survey and individual interview results. The results from both study instruments are juxtaposed because similarities were detected in the data. This chapter begins by explaining the strategy applied to reach and analyse the final themes and sub-themes used in the final report to help make sense of what transpired post the data collection. It is followed by the tabulated final themes, sub-themes, and the respondents' attributes. The analysis section presents a theme or sub-theme and then explains what it represents in the data or literature and how the research report arrived at it. Lastly, it is followed by texts from the data set that exemplify the theme or sub-theme, indented in italics and edited for grammar and correctness purposes.

Final themes and sub-themes selection strategy

Thematic analysis, which the research report discussed in detail in the previous chapter, assisted with transcribing the data, creating codes, and emerging themes that help make sense of the data through its six-phase analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is conducted by identifying and analysing common or recurring codes, themes and patterns that emerge from the data collection process and by reviewing literature in the research report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

Following a data collection process discussed in the previous chapter, this research report recorded and noted many similar experiences which were converted to codes from the interview extracts and survey results from different respondents. This process considered the underlying theoretical assumptions of thematic analysis as a grounding force. Thematic analysis is an iterative process, so in this phase, it was essential for the research to check and establish whether the themes arrived at were representative of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). High repetition frequency in the data influenced the choice of the codes and themes that were ultimately used in the final report.

These codes were narrowed down to themes reviewed several times, and in the end, it concluded that seven themes were to be used in the report as they were more representative of the data that emerged. Four were further narrowed down from those seven themes to arrive at eight sub-themes that assist with making sense of the data. The reason behind coming up with

sub-themes was that those narrowed-down themes still had broad ideas that could not necessarily be new themes but could be understood within a particular theme.

The discussion of each theme and sub-theme below was informed by and structured around four voices. The first was the voice of the data, which refers to the emerging data from the respondents. It was arrived at by sifting through the data to find and select the most frequent ideas communicated. The second voice was that of the literature, whereby the discussion connects the emerging data and the literature reviewed in the second chapter. It explains how the emerging data links, corroborates or even departs from the literature. The third was the voice of the conceptual frameworks emanating from the literature review: social capital and signalling theories. The report made links between the data and conceptual frameworks to decipher the data's broader relevance and resonance for society. The fourth and final area was the author's voice, which refers to the researcher's explanations and analyses of the data and how it connects to the three voices discussed.

Table 1 Themes

Themes	**Sub-themes**
1. Beginning of job search	➢ Nepotism
2. Social sciences graduates' challenges	
3. Labour market perceptions	➢ Structure and order ➢ Labour market preparedness ➢ Underemployment
4. Role of education	
5. Career choice and guidance	➢ Regret
6. Unemployment effects	➢ Changing career paths ➢ Social pressure and hopelessness ➢ Financial independence
7. Recruitment processes	

Table 1 illustrates the seven themes and the eight sub-themes.

Four of the seven themes were narrowed down into sub-themes to assist with making sense of the often overlapping but distinct features of the emerging data.

Table 2 Respondents' attributes

Respondent Code	Gender	Race	Employment Status	Level of Education
Respondent 1	Male	Black African	Employed	Honours
Respondent 2	Female	White	Employed	PhD
Respondent 3	Female	Black African	Employed	Master's
Respondent 4	Female	Indian/Asian	Unemployed	PhD
Respondent 5	Female	Black African	Employed	Master's
Respondent 6*****	Female	Black African	Unemployed	Honours
Respondent 7*****	Female	Black African	Unemployed	Master's
Respondent 8	Female	Black African	Self-employed	Honours
Respondent 9 *****	Male	Black African	Employed	Honours
Respondent 10	Female	Black African	Unemployed	Honours
Respondent 11	Female	Black African	Employed	Honours
Respondent 12*****	Female	Indian/Asian	Employed	PhD

Survey Respondents *Survey and Individual Interviews

Table 2 above illustrates the essential characteristics of the respondents.

Four of the twelve respondents returned for the in-depth individual interview. Out of the twelve respondents that participated in the research, ten were female, with half of them reporting to be in employment.

Most of the respondents identified as black African, with six employed. Only one person with an Honours degree selected self-employed as the category that describes their employment status.

4.2 Theme one: Beginning of job search

The first theme in the data analysis chapter begins by closely examining the reality of unemployment for the respondents as recent graduates through them narrating their experiences and observations. It provides a picture of what graduates undergo after graduating as they seek employment for the first time regarding their expectations versus their experienced reality. The beginning of a job search is often filled with excitement from completing their qualifications, as well as trepidation, and hope for future job opportunities.

Most respondents report having expected that they would secure employment soon after graduating but to their surprise, that was not the case. Most of the respondents spent months,

some years, and some are still searching for jobs after graduating. They send applications from one employer to the next in both the public and private sectors, with no sign of their unemployment status changing imminently. It is through this process that it then becomes clear to the respondents that their challenges with securing employment are rooted in a wide variety of factors, such as their socioeconomic status and the political and economic state of the country (Dunga, 2016; Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Pauw et al., 2008; van der Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012).

The following quotes from the survey and interview extracts capture what the respondents make of their initial experiences with unemployment.

> *"I did not know that getting a job was difficult despite attending varsity and getting a degree" (Respondent 5, Employed)*
>
> *"I wish I was more aware of what skills were in more demand" (Respondent 3, Employed)*
>
> *"I wish I knew more about entry-level salaries and employability in each field" (Respondent 1, Employed)*
>
> *"Getting a job is a lot harder than I expected because I have been sending applications, but I have not received anything" (Respondent 4, Unemployed)*

Through the above sentiments, this report learns that the reality of unemployment and the requirements of the labour market become even more apparent post-graduation because graduates get to see the skills that are more favourable to employers based on watching other graduates who do not seem to struggle to enter the labour market after graduating. This reality makes the graduates aware that education alone is not enough to enter into and thrive in the labour market (Knight & Yorke, 2002; Tymon, 2013; Yorke, 2004). It suddenly dawns on them that they might have studied fields or careers already oversaturated; therefore, it might take longer to enter the labour market. In essence, some of the career-related issues they may have overlooked or been unaware of suddenly become clear, and they must confront them in their search for employment.

The above sentiments highlight the notion of employability which, according to literature, refers to the various educational and personal attributes that enable one to attain employment and a sustainable employment journey throughout their respective career (Bennett, 2018; Yorke, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2007). To further expand on this notion, Yorke (2004) and

Yorke & Knight (2007) explain that employability is not a linear process but one that is affected by various factors and characteristics that the applicants or graduates possess. This notion can be witnessed from the lived experiences of graduates as soon as they complete their studies and begin looking for employment.

Some respondents attribute their inability to secure employment to a lack of skills required in the current labour market on their part. Respondent 5 says they wish they knew of the difficulty of getting a job despite getting the required qualification. It illustrates that their inability to secure employment can be partly attributed to not satisfying other aspects of employability because they have already acquired the education. It also highlights that several factors influence employability (Bennett, 2018; Yorke, 2004).

Respondent 3 above indicates that they wish they knew more about the required skills. This highlights the issue of oversupplying specific skills that are no longer valuable to deal with the demands of a high-tech economy and labour market raised in the literature review (Bhorat, 2012; Graham et al., 2019; Liu, Salvanes & Sørensen, 2016). This respondent's experiences further reveal how the issue of a mismatch of skills in the economy leads to structural unemployment (Bhorat, 2012; Graham et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2016). It also indicates a gap in informing scholars about the critical career paths where they are most likely to find employment, as some respondents report not knowing much about them (Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2006). Spence (1973) explains that the labour market communicates signals in various post advertisements by stating the minimum requirements the potential employee needs to fulfil before securing an invitation to an interview. According to Spence (1973), potential employees can respond to the signals by acquiring the necessary education to put themselves in a favourable position to get employment. This theme demonstrates that the respondents respond to the requirements of the labour market by attaining some form of education; however, as Spence (1973) posits, there is no guarantee that the potential employee will be able to fulfil the requirements and demands of the job or that everyone who has attained some education will be a suitable match for the job. To further explain this, Spence (1973, p. 356) says that "hiring is an investment in uncertainty". This idea links back to the complex notion of employability: hiring and employability are not definite. They are influenced by race, sex and other personal attributes (Bennett, 2018; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Spence, 1973).

4.2.1 Sub-theme: Nepotism

Through the respondents' experiences, this research report reveals how nepotism can limit job opportunities, or increase them. The notion of nepotism mainly came from the respondents' observations and experiences as they interacted with various people and organisations in search of employment. The first sub-theme under the first theme explores the role of luck and connections in getting a job.

In addition to the challenges posed by what it takes to be employable and the mismatch of skills issues that were addressed above, respondents also had to contend with the reality that having connections to the right people in the labour market or specific industry and employer can help fast-track one's job search and employment journey.

The respondents do not seem to have the right people to advance them, making their journeys to employment longer and more unpredictable. According to some respondents, people with contacts or connections can get roles quicker as they do not have to spend time sending applications to various employers. They can cut in front of those who are in the employment queue, unlike their counterparts without them. Their experiences are expressed in the following quotes below:

> *"I wish I knew that you need contacts to get a proper job, how getting a job is so difficult despite academic qualifications, merit and skill" (Respondent 4, Unemployed)*
>
> *"Getting a job is all about luck and connections" (Respondent 5, Employed)*
>
> *"Getting a job depends on connections and contacts, especially for government jobs. I always wonder who gets those internships because I have never met anyone who got it. I think that they keep them for people they know or their families" (Respondent 1, Employed)*
>
> *"The government jobs are the worst, I apply, but I do not get anything, not even a response" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*

The respondents speak of the role played by luck. The concept of luck that the respondents consistently talk about helps us understand that getting a job can also be unexplained and improbable (Spence, 1973). This process usually involves applying for jobs through various platforms, waiting for an interview if one is shortlisted, and finally getting the job if successful. The experiences indicate that the journey of employability and the reality of unemployment

can sometimes defy logic or what would be regarded as standard processes or traditions around how one can gain employment.

Not having the right connections is also frustrating for the respondents because they have to rely on the traditional application and recruitment processes, whose outcomes they have no control over. It is yet another confirmation of how employability is not a linear process and is experienced differently by people with different characteristics determined by several factors revealed and discussed in the literature review (Tymon, 2013; Yorke & Knight, 2007). Respondent 4 says that a combination of connections and education can lead to better and quicker chances of employment and success. It illustrates that even though education may be necessary to get employment, it does not guarantee that one will get employment (Tymon, 2013; Yorke & Knight, 2007).

The respondents explain that they have given up on internships in government and its organisations because even though they apply, they never know the outcome of their applications. The responses also indicate a loss of confidence in the systems and procedures that are followed by human resources and recruitment departments, particularly for jobs in the public sector. This behaviour may be widespread in the public sector but is not unique to government jobs, even in the private sector (Scanlan, 2018). To further expand on this, Scanlan (2018) explains that the public sector is known for malicious compliance, where the hiring process is superficially followed but not to the full extent. This process lures hopeful respondents and other applicants into believing they have secured the potential of being employed, only to learn that specific people have already been designated for those roles (Scanlan, 2018). It is incredibly discouraging for hopeful graduates, and explains why they have especially given up on applying for roles in the government sector.

Spence (1973) explains that the labour market communicates signals by stating the minimum requirements the potential employee needs to have before securing an invitation to an interview, and by acquiring the required education, the employees respond to the signals. In this case, the respondents have tried to respond to the signal by acquiring knowledge and applying for roles but cannot get jobs by responding to the signals. It then brings us to the notion of social capital by Bourdieu (1986), which is critical to getting and sustaining a job. According to Bourdieu (1986), due to structural constraints in factors such as class and race, there is unequal access to institutional resources and their distribution across different areas of

society. As reported by the respondents, knowing someone in one's social circles or family can help one secure a job more quickly. It indicates that those with networks and connections have a better chance of employment as they possess some social capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

This theme highlighted the role luck and connections play in getting a job. It shows there are other ways people can enter labour, whilst some still fail to do so even if they are a better fit than people with networks. It also further confirms the respondents' experiences and what literature revealed that education alone is insufficient to get one through the system. These two ideas further complicate the notion of employability discussed in various parts of the literature. It is because the idea that having access to people's resources makes it easier to gain entry into certain positions and workplaces is introduced. Inequality continues to be reproduced as those who already have material or social accessibility to resources maintain it throughout generations in their own families or professional networks (Baldry, 2016; Bourdieu, 1986; Moyi et al., 2013).

4.3 Theme two: Social sciences graduates' challenges

The data analysis's second theme addresses the challenges of graduates with social sciences qualifications as they submit their applications to various organisations. It explores the labour markets' perceptions about social sciences graduates' qualifications and, as a result, their contribution to the work through the respondents' experiences. The literature informed this theme on social sciences studies and labour market perceptions. It was also informed by the data that emerged through the respondents as it confirmed and challenged the various perceptions about them in the workplace.

It emerged during the data collection and analysis that the respondents face challenges as graduates, but additionally, some challenges come with being a social sciences graduate, which is unique to them. The literature revealed that the economy is dismal and cannot create jobs (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). Graduates exiting various institutions of higher learning enter an already oversaturated labour market and economy with high levels of youth unemployment, where there is no guarantee of absorption into the labour market as soon as one completes their qualification (Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Pauw et al., 2008).

According to the respondents, they face the same challenges brought about by unemployment as other graduates, but there is an additional barrier that comes in the form of pushback from potential employers because they are social sciences graduates. According to them, this is created by the notion that humanities and sciences graduates are not valuable to the labour market, and it often goes without being questioned or challenged.

The respondents relayed their experiences with potential employers and recruiters as humanities and social sciences graduates at large in the following quotations:

> *"Employers say that we are not qualified" (Respondent 3, Employed)*
>
> *"As a social science graduate, you receive much flak from employers even when you apply for jobs. One recruiter said to me that they do not like to deal with social science graduates because they do not know where to place them, and they will not even get much of a commission from placing them in the job" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*
>
> *"The problem is that no workplace wants to hire us. It is tough to get a job as a social sciences graduate; the moment you say you have a BA, then there are already a lot of negative perceptions about you" (Respondent 8, Self-employed)*
>
> *"Well, I guess number one is that the labour market or employers regard those who graduated from social sciences as underqualified. Well, they do not believe that universities prepare you for the place for the world of work in any way because of a lack of practicality [in the degree]. I mean, they believe that it is more theoretical. Most of the graduates lack certain skills and so basically the course does not prepare you for work" (Respondent 12, Employed)*

The sentiments above are a demonstration of how the apparent devaluing of the humanities disciplines has an impact on how various stakeholders perceive the humanities and social sciences studies in society and how that, in turn, affects graduates who pursued courses from these disciplines (Botha & Botha, 2022; Davidovitch et al., 2017; Glisic, 2019). As witnessed through the sentiments that the respondents shared on their interactions with various employers, it is evident that the devaluing continues to result in a lack of trust in the studies, negatively affecting the respondents in turn because the studies are not the sole determinant of employment. However, to a certain extent, they play a role in that decision.

The literature revealed that one of the drawbacks of the humanities and social sciences courses is that they are dense with theory and do not always respond to or offer practical solutions to the requirements of the high-tech economy that continues to evolve, needing new or developed skills (Thomas et al., 2017). Davidovitch et al. (2017) and Glisic (2019) further explain that most institutions and donor organisations have reduced funding to the humanities and social sciences faculties in various institutions of higher learning across the world, which is yet another demonstration and confirmation of this devaluing as it has seen organisations divest from these areas of study.

Another challenge the respondents reveal is that the lack of specialisation or focus area in the social sciences degrees makes it difficult and frustrating for the respondents when they search for employment because they cannot figure out where and how they can contribute with their skills. The respondents lament the difficulties posed by the lack of specialisation due to how the social sciences degrees are structured. There is no end goal in terms of a specific profession that can make it easier for both the respondent and the employer because it would be easier to place someone to fulfil a particular function.

> *"The challenge I had to face was the uncertainty regarding which career path to follow now that I have gained all this knowledge and qualifications as a social sciences graduate. This is because the faculty is broad and complex, and most if not all departments and sectors have already become oversaturated, and my skills as a social science graduate seem to have no place in many industries" (Respondent 6, Employed)*

> *"It is open markets… I do not know how to say it, but it is difficult to get a job in general because you do not have the classic law degree or engineering or science degree, so it is challenging because there are not very many opportunities" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*

The responses above indicate a degree of uncertainty around not knowing where one can work because it is not explicitly clear due to the general nature of the courses (Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). To exemplify this, the phrase "open markets" is used by Respondent 7. This confirms the difficulty that comes with no clear direction as to what a social science graduate can do. The respondent makes a comparison, for example, with what a lawyer does in a law firm or what an engineer does on-site. This comparison highlights the issue that was raised in the literature that people who pursue professional degrees stand a better chance

of employment than those with general ones (Bhorat, 2012; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

Because of the challenges stated above, some respondents found ways to re-evaluate their studies, in response to the challenges posed by the lack of specialisation. In the following quotes, some of the respondents share how they responded to the challenges brought about by lack of specialisation:

> *"I currently work as a teaching assistant in a foreign country through a program; after obtaining my BA in International Relations and Anthropology, I did an honours degree in Interpreting and Translating Studies, but I was still struggling to find a job. That is when I decided to pursue a PGCE for more [teaching] opportunities in South Africa and abroad" (Respondent 6, Employed)*

> *"When I enrolled for a social sciences degree, I knew I would need a Master's degree. I only have to consider where [which area or course] in the social science… you know. Not just anything easy to get into or something that I am interested in, but something that I know I can find a job after studying. The degrees are broad, so doing a Master's degree is almost narrowing it down" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*

> *"I had to pursue an additional PDM [Postgraduate Diploma in Management] to add on to my qualifications and increase my chances of getting work" (Respondent 3, Employed)*

Wits University has opportunities for further studies in the form of short courses such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) offered at the School of Education or the Postgraduate Diploma in Management (PDM) at Business School or the School of Governance. These courses offer much-required practical exposure and lessons and can help bridge the gap between their initial studies in social sciences and getting a job. It is a demonstration and confirmation that the respondents feel that the degrees are inadequate to get into the labour market, so they further their studies by venturing into areas like education or business. It is also an opportunity to gain skills as specialists in specific fields. Some respondents take a different turn regarding their studies; some choose to further their studies within the social sciences in the form of senior degrees such as a master's or PhD. For example, Respondent 7 above explains that they always knew that due to the challenges that social sciences graduates and students face, they would need to do a master's degree, which would grant them an opportunity to attain some degree of specialisation. The respondent explains that this is because, at master's

level, one can choose a particular topic or field of expertise to study and gain expertise and an edge over others.

Adding to the challenges they face as they seek jobs for the first time is the requirement of work experience, which poses a significant barrier to entry for most graduates. They already find themselves in an economy with high levels of youth unemployment that is struggling to create new jobs, and so the work experience requirement is discouraging as it makes the possibility of getting employed more unattainable and challenging.

Through the quotes below, the respondents express their thoughts on the requirement of experience for entry-level jobs:

> *"I wish the structure of employment did not require so much work experience from young hopefuls who have just made it out of school" (Respondent 6, Employed)*

> *"Uh, they are looking for experience, even for entry-level jobs. I am saying even for those who are just leaving the university. Most employers are looking for experience. Suppose you are lucky enough to get an interview; it will be an issue of what they pick up in an interview. Some people feel that you do not have enough experience or exposure in the field you have studied [social sciences], so they would end up going for somebody with experience and more years of experience. You know that somehow disadvantages somebody that comes from that comes directly from university because they will not be picked for that job" (Respondent 9, Employed)*

> *"Most of the applications need experience- two years of experience at least. So without that experience, you are at a disadvantage" (Respondent 3, Employed)*

The responses above indicate that the challenge for a social science graduate is that, firstly, there are not enough jobs available in the economy that one can apply for now; when one adds on the requirement of work experience, it renders the respondents helpless. As of April 2019, the South African government, through policy, scrapped the requirement of work experience in entry-level jobs to eliminate unnecessary barriers to entry into the public service (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2019). It was a measure to make the public sector fertile ground for graduates to gain valuable experience that they can use in their careers going forward and a move from the government to reduce the high levels of unemployment among the youth (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2019).

Despite this seemingly transformative move from the government, respondents lament the requirement of experience in many jobs, even for those jobs that are not in the public sector. The previous requirement had been in effect for a long time and had unfavourable effects on those trying to enter the labour market. For example, Respondent 9 above states that in their employment experience, when it comes to social sciences graduates, employers prefer a small amount of experience because it is easier to place them in an area or function they previously occupied. They do not seem to know where to place the recent social sciences graduates. After all, they do not know which area or function they can contribute towards in terms of their skillset, making it difficult for those seeking entrance into the labour market for the first time. It also confirms the point raised above that in addition to having no jobs to apply for, the requirement of experience compounds the difficulty of gaining employment (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Graham et al., 2019; Moleke, 2003).

In his work on signalling, Spence (1973, p. 357) identifies the role played by factors such as "experience, education, race and sex" and further states that some of these factors are changeable and some are not. According to Spence (1973), education is not a constant because people are always free to change direction entirely or alter their existing education by studying further. It is witnessed by respondents either taking a new direction or adding to their existing qualifications with senior degrees in the same field. It can be seen as a response to the signal because, in realising that there may be gaps in their educational qualification, they want to make themselves more employable and align with the employer's requirements by making changes to their qualifications (Spence, 1973).

The challenges and issues addressed in this theme speak to the mismatch of skills discussed in the literature review. It is a recurring challenge that continues to affect graduates because of their inability to contribute to the labour market due to their skills not aligning with what is required (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). This theme has also demonstrated the issue of negotiating with social orders in the various employment areas one has to confront.

4.4 Theme three: Labour market perceptions

The third theme of the data analysis unpacks the respondents' perceptions about the labour market and is divided into three sub-themes. This theme came out through analysing the experiences of the respondents. It was through the codes and stories that emerged in the data

collection and analysis that it became clear to the researcher that the issues that inform or affect the respondents' perceptions are beyond their control as they are informed by and speak to a wide variety of socioeconomic and political issues in the country.

It was revealed through the data collection that some respondents had perceptions about the labour market retrospectively when they were matriculants applying for entrance into certain degrees. They also had varying perceptions as graduates and jobseekers seeking employment. For this reason, this theme of perception addresses both periods of the respondents' experiences. It also delves into what they think about how the market communicates signals to applicants and potential applicants. Finally, it briefly discusses how the employment structure has resulted in underemployment, which some respondents find themselves confronting.

4.4.1 Sub-theme: Structure and social order

The first sub-theme, under labour market perceptions, investigates the role played by existing structures in the labour market. It explores the role of social order and how it plays out in the labour market. This sub-theme was informed by the data that emerged and how it was reflective of the literature covered in the research report's second chapter.

The literature reveals that due to apartheid's lasting legacy, South Africa's higher education is shaped by a fragmented landscape (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Pauw et al., 2008; van Broekhuizen, 2016). Apartheid's skewed laws, though abolished, continue to inform and shape various aspects of life in South Africa, including access and lack thereof to job opportunities (Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008; van der Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012). The perception that the labour market is unpredictable and unjust is prevalent among the respondents; this implies that even though one may possess the requirements, there is still no guarantee that they will have a straightforward journey from being a graduate to being employed (Pauw et al., 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016; Tymon, 2013). It means that in their search for employment, respondents have to confront structural challenges that they do not have much control over, yet they play a role in determining their unemployment status (Mncayi, 2016; van Broekhuizen, 2016; Oluwajodu, 2015; Pauw et al., 2008).

In the following quotes, the respondents express how systematic challenges affect them in their search for employment:

> *"Other races do not have problems when it comes to getting a job because they have businesses, and they can be easily given employment in the home businesses after finishing matric or varsity. And even if they do not have the necessary qualifications, it does not matter because it is in the family business" (Respondent 6, Employed)*

> *"It is always black people who always have to strive for academic qualifications. We have heard stories where a white person only has a matric but has a high position and is earning a high salary. For a black person, it is challenging to get work without education because you do not even have the connection to get you inside" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*

Through the expressions above, there is an indication that in their quest for better opportunities through getting employment, they find themselves being affected by systemic challenges that they cannot escape or even control because of their chronic and persistent nature (du Toit et al., 2018; Mncayi, 2016; van der Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012). The responses above touch on the contentious issue of race, mainly how black Africans are always at the back of the queue regarding employment opportunities. Respondent 6 laments that despite getting the necessary academic qualifications, they are still lagging and attribute this to not having adequate access to or ownership of resources in the economy compared to white counterparts who have ownership and access to the resources and, therefore, have control over decisions such as who gets employment. According to data from Statistics South Africa from various periods, unemployment in South Africa is consistently concentrated among black Africans. Even though unemployment is concentrated among African people, people from other races are also affected by unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2022). These experiences demonstrate how the racial organisation of apartheid based on race still negatively affects black Africans and their access or lack thereof to opportunities (Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008).

Another factor revealed by the responses above is how graduates, youth and unemployed black Africans particularly feel the repercussions of the dismal state of the South African economy. Oosthuizen (2006) and Pauw et al. (2008) explain that the labour market has declined since 1995. The economy cannot create jobs even though many people have more access to institutions of higher learning (Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008). It explains why the respondents may be in a precarious position even though the dispensation is now democratic in South Africa (Oosthuizen, 2006 & Pauw et al., 2008). Unemployment in the country is mainly structural, and due to its chronic nature, there is an enduring uncertainty about the future

of one's unemployment status that is frustrating among the respondents (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007).

Spence (1973, p. 357) on signalling power explained that "factors such as race and sex are unalterable and play a significant role in the labour market". It is a concern for South African applicants and jobseekers due to the country's history because these unalterable factors, unlike education, still determine their employment status (Graham et al., 2019; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Spence, 1973). It demonstrates that the characteristics that people cannot change about themselves can render them unemployable. To elaborate, evidence from Statistics South Africa (2021, 2022) also reminds us that the labour market remains more favourable to men than women, which helps to understand another angle to the perpetual state of the structural overhaul of unemployment in South Africa (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Graham et al., 2019).

4.4.2 Sub-theme: Labour market preparedness

The second sub-theme, under labour market perceptions, looks at what graduates wish they knew before exiting higher learning institutions. It also deals with what they wish their degree had prepared them for in line with the labour market's requirements. This sub-theme addressed graduates' views on preparedness for the labour market.

> *"I wish I learned the ability to think critically, research, write well, solve problems, work independently, and good have time management" (Respondent 2, Employed)*
>
> *"To be more analytic, have a great presentation of information" (Respondent 10, Unemployed)*
>
> *"Marketing strategies… Training during the last year of study would have sufficed. It should have emphasised group work for sharing of ideas" (Respondent 11, Employed)*

Ismail (2011), in research among graduates entering the labour market, finds that employers value employees who demonstrate soft skills and a good command of the English language. The responses above indicate a longing for the degrees to train or emphasise soft skills such as time management, adaptability, communication, problem-solving, creativity, and the ability to present information to audiences. The respondents have also identified soft skills as essential to thriving in the workplace.

The respondents highlight how they wished the university cultivated entrepreneurship skills through the curricula, and how important this is. Entrepreneurship is one of the ways that has been identified to help eradicate the high levels of unemployment in the country (Kraak, 2019; Naong, 2011). Those skills are essential to groom job creators to play a role in the economy's growth while creating job opportunities for others (Kraak, 2019; Naong, 2011). It is also the government's call, and they have introduced various initiatives to enhance entrepreneurship in multiple communities. Though entrepreneurship is encouraged to solve unemployment, it is also argued that the business environment is not conducive to many who want to start a business; due to red tape, it is not easy for anyone in South Africa to start a business. In addition to the need for entrepreneurial skills, Respondent 11 also expresses a need for degrees to teach or train marketing strategies, especially in the final year of study. It is a response to the challenging economic times we find ourselves in, where it has become critical to be skilled in more than one area. Marketing skills can help enhance one's ability to network and compete in the workplace.

Some respondents report not knowing much about the labour market and what to expect before graduating. They attribute this to not having access to information or resources that can help them familiarise themselves with the labour market requirements. What they wish they knew and learnt in terms of skills and what they knew or learnt about the labour market comes out in this theme.

> *"I knew little about the job market because at the time there was limited access to information as opposed to now with technology, it has made it easier for people to access information at the tip of their fingers efficiently" (Respondent 6, Employed)*
>
> *"The labour market seems to favour people with your science or commerce degrees, so it is easy to get a job for those who have those degrees" (Respondent 4, Unemployed)*
>
> *"I wish I had learnt about the importance of side hustles and multiple streams of income" (Respondent 5, Employed)*

The idea of multiple income streams is popular among the respondents, which speaks to the precarity of the current labour market, which is characterised by unpredictability and insecurity (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Oosthuizen, 2006). It explains why they yearn to be trained in more than one area of specialisation and to have multiple income streams so they

are in a better position to respond to the challenges that might be posed by sudden or unexpected unemployment. It also indicates that, contrary to widespread misperception, graduates experience challenges from the supply factors of the economy in the labour market, which means that the economy is unable to create jobs for them. This divergent view indicates that graduates also face challenges from the labour market as the discussion is often skewed on the one side that graduates do not possess the required skills (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

4.4.3 Sub-theme: Underemployment

The third and last sub-theme, under labour market perceptions, explores the notion of underemployment through the respondents' experiences. Underemployment came out in the literature, and some respondents reported their own experiences with it, so this sub-theme exemplifies and expands on it with corroborating evidence from the data that emerged.

With the current state of the economy and the structure of the labour market, some of the respondents find themselves working in jobs that do not allow them to use their skills fully. It brings us to the issue of underemployment, which refers to being employed in a position that underutilises a person's skills in the career studied towards or is qualified to work in (Baldry, 2016; Green & Henseke, 2016). It may also result in not having full-time employment (Baldry, 2016; Bennett, 2018). Underemployment erodes skills as they are not utilised or are underutilised in the economy (Baldry, 2016; Longe, 2017; Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). The respondents below express their experiences with being underemployed:

> *"We need security as graduates because, at the moment, we are accepting jobs such as data capturers even with the degrees that we have so that we can get by. I had a temporary job in filing as well" (Respondent 6, Employed)*
>
> *"I worked in a school as a teaching assistant temporarily" (Respondent 7, Employed)*
>
> *"Before my current job, I worked at school, but it was a temporary job" (Respondent 1, Employed)*

The responses demonstrate how the respondents have resorted to accepting any available job that will help them earn an income. Respondent 6 above explains that they work as a data capturer despite having a degree that could allow them to get a better job and earn better remuneration, improving their security and stability. Respondent 7 also reports that their work is intermittent because it is challenging for them to find a permanent job opportunity due to the

state of unemployment in the country. The experiences above can be attributed to the changing and continuously evolving economy not making it any better to get a decent job (Baldry, 2016; Moyi et al., 2013). They also speak to structural changes brought about by changes in technology, which change the structure of the labour market in terms of the skills that are now required (Goldman, 2014; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Oosthuizen, 2006).

The respondents expressed not knowing much about the labour market and some skills they wish they had learnt, and soft skills were among them. Spence (1973) reminds us that hiring refers to an investment whose outcome cannot be determined in a single encounter at an interview, but over time. In this instance, it means one will not know whether an individual will be able to carry out the job requirements immediately (Spence, 1973). It makes all the other soft skills significant, particularly in the early stages of their employment, because the employer relies on them to decide whether to hire (Spence, 1973). This theme illustrated that respondents interpret and respond to signals by gaining an education; however, the labour market's structure and the state of the economy also determine who will be employed.

4.5 Theme four: Role of education

This fourth theme seeks to understand the role of education and what value the respondents place on attaining some level of it based on their shared sentiments in the data collection process. The literature, the conceptual framework of social capital and the emerging data from the respondents primarily informed this theme.

Respondents express their disappointment regarding the acquisition of post-matric education because, throughout their lives, they were constantly encouraged to go through school and earn qualifications. There is a sense that some of the respondents place little to no value on education for "employment" purposes. According to Bhardwaj (2016), education is a process considered vital for human development and is supposed to pave the way for better employment opportunities, but the respondents' experiences may propel us to interrogate its value and role today.

> *"I think a greater majority of people come from disadvantaged backgrounds or not even disadvantaged backgrounds, just like the middle class. The best option is always to go to school because it provides opportunities that you would otherwise not have without the education, of course" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*

> *"There should be a cap on the enrolment of students in the social sciences to reduce people exiting [to be] unemployed. We need to move away from the theoretical aspect [of teaching]and try to bring specific skills that would be favourable to the labour market. We should explore options such as including practical courses such as communications or public relations in the curriculum. There should be a requirement that you cannot graduate unless you have completed a practical exposure project or internship at the employer of your choice so that you know what goes on in the place of work" (Respondent 9, Employed)*

> *"Education is important, but it is not enough. You need to put yourself out there" (Respondent 12, Employed)*

> *"I learnt how to research and work independently. To me, education is not only about doing well in life. I guess the bigger picture [of getting educated] is getting employment, and we study to get employment to pay off debts. But there is more to education than just getting employment. It helps you in terms of how you think. It helps you in how you generally do and view things. Education helps me because I can work independently and make decisions for myself. I also have a few soft skills that I learned over the years, which I also believe should be incorporated in our educational system, especially for young graduates" (Respondent 9, Employed)*

The quotes above show that the respondents generally view education as vital for human development, which means it is a way that they can change their socioeconomic status (Bhardwaj, 2016; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). The responses above indicate that there is frustration that comes from following traditional methods of getting some education yet not being able to secure employment after that. It speaks to, among several factors, the changing dynamics of the labour market and the influences of technology and development (Bhorat, 2012; Goldman, 2014; Pauw et al., 2008). Respondent 9 says that even though education is essential, the requirements of the labour market also need to be incorporated into the curriculum to better prepare graduates for the labour market. Respondent 9 also touches on the importance of social sciences education for the labour market and society in general, stating that graduates from disciplines such as psychology can help unpack and understand difficult social situations that affect different areas of people's lives due to their training. Respondent 9 further cites the importance of research skills trained in the social sciences that can contribute immensely to the work environment. Davidovitch et al. (2017) and Thomas et al. (2017) explain that courses in the social sciences train and hone the ability to research, analyse and interpret underlying socioeconomic issues and report.

According to the social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), the role played by education remains significant because, through acquiring education, people can form lifelong networks and relationships that can be beneficial for both parties because they can serve as gateways for opportunities for each other materially and socially. Education carries symbolic power and can make a positive and meaningful change and improve people's lives by creating better conditions (Bhardwaj, 2016; Bourdieu, 1986).

This theme demonstrated through the respondents' experiences that education is critical for human development. It has also been revealed through literature and the respondents that the labour market needs more than academic success and that the way education is transmitted can be altered to align with the requirements of the labour market so that graduates can be in a better position to be employed.

4.6 Theme five: Career guidance and choice

The fifth theme explores the role played by career guidance when it comes to career choice, which helps the researcher understand how and why the respondents pursued social sciences qualifications. It was confirmed by the literature and complemented by the evidence from the respondents' data. This theme is divided into two parts: those who received career guidance and those who did not, and it broadly analyses the differences and what it means.

Literature reveals that the state of basic education in South Africa remains one of the most regrettable inheritances of the apartheid legacy, yet it is vital to changing people's lives for the better (Baldry, 2016; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016; van Broekhuizen, 2016). The research uncovers that most of the respondents chose social sciences because it was the only option available to them as determined by their high school education and marks, even though some followed their passions or careers that they had always desired in the social sciences. It is a revelation of the state of education in South Africa and how it determines careers and employment opportunities post the completion of one's higher education studies.

There were mixed responses to the questions about receiving career guidance from their respective high schools, social circles, or family. Some respondents report receiving guidance from various people and platforms, whereas others report having limited access to information and resources to help them decide.

The respondents who did not get much guidance express their experiences in the quotes below:

> *"We had no career guidance in high school, except for Life Orientation classes when it came to university application processes for admission purposes" (Respondent 5, Employed)*

> *"None of my immediate family members had formal education. In essence, I had to make choices that would benefit me and help me get to where I wanted to be. All high school subjects should equip scholars with the necessary education to prepare them for higher learning and post-university. Otherwise, it does not seem like Life Orientation as a high school subject does enough in preparing the high school learners with the necessary education for preparation when it comes to their future careers" (Respondent 6, Employed)*

Respondent 6 above indicates that not having a family member with formal education and higher education experience may put one at a disadvantage. It was a disadvantage because they were limited in their options when it came to consulting for career advice. They needed to decide without much assistance from family members because they did not have anyone close to them who had been through the education system.

The literature revealed that the poor socioeconomic status of the potential graduates and their parents determined, to a great extent, the outcomes in their pursuit of various opportunities in higher education (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Ingle & Mlatsheni, 2017; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2006). The cracks in the South African education system find expression at the end of matric, when it is time to apply for entrance into institutions of higher learning, with the applicants sometimes having success and gaining entry (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Ingle & Mlatsheni, 2017; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2006). It reveals the state of South Africa's basic education in terms of preparing learners for higher education and, eventually, the labour market because they feed into each other. Oosthuizen (2006) also finds that an African student is more likely not to have received career advice from a family member.

The respondents who received some guidance express their thoughts below:

> *"We had career guidance from the school. I remember we travelled to different universities in our matric year, and I had the opportunity to learn about different degrees and make an informed choice. We even had a*

roadshow at school that exposed us to different universities and colleges from the public and private sectors" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)

I did receive some career guidance, but I have always known that I would follow a career path in the law or the humanities because I am not good with numbers, so I had to do something that I enjoyed and was good at" (Respondent 12, Employed)

The respondents above indicate that while they received career guidance, their abilities determined their choice of study. They mentioned that they identified that numerical subjects were not their strength and that awareness helped them decide where or what they would study post-matric. It indicates another view on career choice and employment, that even though eradication of unemployment is the goal, in the end, one needs to consider their strengths because they determine the programmes in which one can get accepted.

Oosthuizen (2006) finds that those who received good career guidance fare better than those who did not. Because they have opportunities in different fields, they make an informed choice based on the information they have received. Even though the respondent chose a career that did not offer many chances of employment, they were well-informed about the other courses and careers. During the data collection and literature review, this research found that marks and subjects in matric and high school determine the choice of study and available options for most social sciences students, which is another indication that one's abilities also determine employment.

4.6.1 Sub-theme: Regret

The only sub-theme under this theme explores feelings of regret expressed by some graduates. It explores how this feeling or state affected them and how they responded. Regret mainly came out through the data from some respondents, even though some did not express regret but rather how they found ways to put their social sciences degrees to use through further academic and professional development. This sub-theme presents both sides.

Through the data collection, a sense of regret and nostalgia over career choice was common among most of the respondents, who said they wished they had pursued different courses and careers. Respondents resorted to various ways to deal with feelings of regret; some found ways to channel their regret into lessons and opportunities to learn further and branch into other areas of study. Pursuing new studies all over again remains a financial hurdle for some, which is why

they cannot do so. Fees are high for them, and they can only study once they can pay for themselves (Mlatsheni, 2014).

The respondents express having feelings of regret regarding their choice of study:

> *"I wish I knew more about other careers; maybe I would not have pursued the degree I did… I do not know" (Respondent 4, Unemployed)*
>
> *"There are many job opportunities in health sciences" (Respondent 3, Employed)*
>
> *"If I had a choice, I would choose a different career path because that would allow me an opportunity to be more employable and skilled in one particular industry"(Respondent 6, Employed)*

Respondent 3 explains that there are many job opportunities within the field of health sciences. The utterances demonstrate regret for their chosen career path in the social sciences. It also indicates nostalgia in this respondent because they wish they knew of the opportunities in health sciences; perhaps they would have pursued those. This response about not being aware of the opportunities in health science speaks to the issue of career guidance discussed in the previous theme, where Oosthuizen (2006) reminded us that those with career guidance have an opportunity to make well-informed choices about their studies.

Those who do not have regrets and those who may have previously had regrets but no longer do, share their thoughts below:

> *"I did [regret] at some point, but because I found something that I love, and I have found the niche in the area that I want to pursue or research further. I want to study towards a PhD in the social sciences. Getting an internship would allow me to get to where I want to go. I no longer regret" (Respondent 7, Unemployed)*
>
> *"As much as the labour market is skewed, there is an opportunity to tweak the curriculum. It does not need to be scrapped but rather restructured because we need humanities graduates as they come with research abilities. I am employed in an insurance company, and I use the skills that I learnt in my studies, but I also learn at work" (Respondent 9, Employed)*

There are some people whose social sciences degrees work in their favour. Some of them work in fields that are not in the humanities, which indicates the transferability of graduates as they can also work in other fields that are not necessarily humanities or social sciences (Davidovitch

et al., 2017; Glisic, 2019; Thomas et al., 2017). Respondent 9 is working in a field that may be seen as unrelated to the social sciences, demonstrating that social science graduates can work in a field different from their studies and learn on the job due to the transferability of their skills. Social capital is relevant because it refers to the networks one has that make opportunities accessible; for example, the school that one went to plays a significant role in the opportunities that one will have in life, even post-school (Bourdieu, 1986; Koch et al., 2018; Mlatsheni, 2014; Oosthuizen, 2006).

The data and information on this theme made it apparent that those who received guidance made an informed choice. It explains that those with access to valuable information have a greater chance of succeeding. It indicates the significance of having platforms and people to rely on for valuable information because they can make a meaningful difference in one's career and life. It also revealed that even those who might not have been satisfied initially with their choices later found ways to change or move around within the same areas of study due to the exposure they had to information, experiences and other people. It also confirms that education illuminates and increases knowledge and, as a result, networks and net worth (Bhardwaj, 2016; Bourdieu, 1986).

4.7 Theme six: Unemployment effects

The sixth theme in the data analysis unpacks unemployment's effects on some of the respondents and how they are finding ways to overcome it if they are. The literature influenced this theme about the effects of unemployment on unemployment, the social capital conceptual framework and the data that emerged from the respondents. Unemployment effects are addressed across the research report and are divided into three sub-themes, each focusing on a different unit of analysis.

Being employed is beneficial. After all, it may potentially allow for independence, which is vital because it gives people a sense of security to care for their various needs (Baldry, 2016; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). An unemployed status means one has little to no sense of security, which can result in dire consequences for people if they are in a position where they are unable to provide for themselves (Graham et al., 2019; Ibikunle et al., 2019). Unemployment also reproduces inequality in a highly unequal society such as South Africa because those who experience unemployment are already economically disadvantaged (Baldry, 2016; Mncayi, 2016; World Bank, 2022).

4.7.1 Sub-theme: Changing career paths

The first sub-theme, under unemployment effects, deals with changing or rethinking one's initial career path. Because of the high levels of unemployment in the country, people must pursue career paths that are not always aligned with their aspirations or passions to stand a better chance of being employed or employable. This sub-theme explores the experiences of graduates who resorted to changing careers and investigates the outcome. This theme mainly came out through the data from the respondents.

> *"I work in the field of insurance in the financial sector, which is unrelated to what I studied in the social sciences" (Respondent 9, Employed)*

> *"I aspired to travel the world as a diplomat representing my country, South Africa, but given the shaky political climate of our country, I decided rather diversify my skills under the humanities department so that I can have more capabilities and opportunities" (Respondent 6, Employed)*

Respondent 6 explains that they aspired to become a diplomat, but they had to relinquish their dreams because of the political situation in the country, where jobs are not being created. It speaks to the ongoing issue of skills mismatch that the literature reveals that there is an oversupply of specific skills, or not enough jobs or roles to be filled by those who want to be diplomats (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; Graham et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2016).

4.7.2 Sub-theme: Social pressure and hopelessness

This sub-theme about social pressures and hopelessness among respondents explores negative feelings that come with extended unemployment and rejection after rejection from employers. Like the literature discussed in chapter two, about the effects of unemployment, this theme seems to positively reinforce what the literature says, as supported by anecdotal evidence through the respondents' experiences.

Social pressure is felt by most of the respondents because, as tradition would have it, one must graduate from a job and move into the labour market, and when that does not happen, it leaves the respondents feeling frustrated and helpless. The frustration and hopelessness manifest in the ways that are expressed below:

"When you do not have money or a job, you ask for everything, so employment boosts your self-esteem. If you are unemployed, you end up even doubting your abilities" (Respondent 8, Self-employed)

"After graduating, I had to go back to the township, which was not in my plans because I thought that after graduating, I would not struggle to get a job because I now have a degree" (Respondent 6, Employed)

Employment helps people sustain their physical and emotional needs (Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017; Mncayi, 2016). Without it, one's self-esteem can dip as it comes with anxiety and helplessness because one does not know when an employment opportunity will arise to change one's unemployment status (de Witte et al., 2012; du Toit, 2018; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Mncayi, 2016). The responses above indicate that unemployment has rendered the respondents dependent on others, such as their parents or other family members. They demonstrate that a prolonged experience of unemployment with no clear direction or sense of when one's unemployment status will change, can lead to feelings of hopelessness and doubt. Respondent 6 talks about the challenge of leaving university only to return home, and not enter the labour market or gain independence, as expected. Moving back home is challenging because they do not have the means to support themselves. They have no power or means to improve the circumstances they grew up in, so they continue to live in the same conditions despite having qualifications. It demonstrates how unemployment undermines social security and independence and how it continues to reproduce inequality (Baldry, 2016; Mncayi, 2016). It also leads to underemployment, as addressed in the previous theme (Bennett, 2018; Yorke, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2007).

4.7.3 Sub-theme: Financial independence

The financial independence sub-theme explores how being unemployed limits one's independence and what that means for them. The idea of having or not having financial independence came out through the data, which is a positive reinforcement to the literature by Longe (2017), who reminds us that the state of being employed is critical to attaining one financial needs, among other needs.

The respondents explain that they long for financial independence, which would mean they could afford a decent lifestyle and be in a position to meet their financial requirements and goals every month (Bhorat, 2012; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017). For some respondents, it takes longer to reach some level of financial independence than they had hoped they would

reach through acquiring education, which is frustrating. They share their thoughts and experiences in the quotes below:

> *"Depending on other people limits your voice because if you rely on others, you are more inclined to do what they want you to do because you rely on them for financial assistance. In other words, employment gives you a voice and independence" (Respondent 8, Self-employed)*

> *"Not being able to buy yourself the things that you want is very hard because you cannot exercise your freedom" (Respondent 9, Unemployed)*

Respondent 8 alluded that employment gives one a voice, meaning that with employment comes an income and a multitude of choices regarding life choices. Also, it brings up the idea that one can be easily controlled by those who fund or finance them.

In this instance, the currency of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is apparent because financial independence allows one to navigate various places and platforms because of the various statuses and classifications that financial independence grants one in society. It grants access to exclusive spaces where one would not be allowed without having the financial means (Bourdieu, 1986; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017). This theme demonstrates how unemployment undermines human dignity (Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017; Mncayi, 2016). It demonstrates how respondents must forgo their dreams and aspirations to be employable and how unemployment can lower one's self-esteem and lead to self-destructive behaviour.

4.8 Theme seven: Recruitment processes

The seventh and last theme of the data analysis chapter looked at some respondents' frustration with recruitment processes and procedures. It also explored the role of social order, which comes out again through the recruitment processes theme, indicating that different themes and sub-themes of the paper overlap, as they are interwoven.

The interactions with the respondents in the data collection revealed their frustrations with recruitment processes and procedures, which this theme will analyse. It delves into the challenges and shared experiences some respondents report having faced when they reached the point of securing an interview. They express their thoughts and experiences in the following quotes:

> *"I wish I knew how to tailor my CV for an application and how to talk about my experience and qualifications in an interview" (Respondent 2, Employed)*

"Recruiters tend to look at people with qualifications in other degrees, not the social sciences" (Respondent 1, Employed)

"Some jobs require motivational letters, and they do not even respond after you submit too many things that they want" (Respondent 5, Employed)

"Not getting any response is the worst; at least it would be better if you got a rejection letter. You would know where you stand" (Respondent 3, Employed)

Respondent 3 and others talk about constantly applying for jobs but not getting any feedback on the outcome of their applications, especially for government jobs, which adds to the feelings of despondence in the graduates. Not getting any response or feedback from prospective employers is frustrating for the respondents because it leaves them with questions about their applications that cannot be answered. Without feedback, they do not know why they did not succeed, whether their Curriculum Vitae (CV) was read, or if it did not even make it through the software systems.

The respondents explain that looking for a job requires money because, in some offline applications, one must make copies of supporting documents and travel to submit papers and go for interviews. The online ones require data. As a result, some graduates do not have the money to do all the work required to apply; at times, this can be the difference between getting a job and not getting one, and confirms the idea of exclusion from participating in various activities again. It demonstrates how one's socioeconomic status can determine employment status (du Toit et al., 2018; Mncayi, 2016; Oosthuizen, 2006; van Broekhuizen, 2016).

Respondent 2 talks about the lack of uniformity among recruiters regarding the structure of a CV required for a job application. A CV is essential because it is the first thing employers get to see before meeting the potential employee. So it can be the difference between getting a call back about a job and not getting it. According to Spence (1973), an employer cannot immediately determine the kind of value and input an employee will contribute with their skills; he likens it to the notion of "hiring as an investment in uncertainty to playing the lottery" (1973, p. 356-357). This comparison links back to employability, which was discussed in several parts of the paper, demonstrating through respondents' experiences and the literature that it is not guaranteed or linear and may happen by chance (Bennett, 2018; Yorke, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2007). It speaks to the improbable nature of both hiring and employability (Bennett, 2018; Spence, 1973; Yorke, 2004). Spence (1973), in his work on hiring, explains that in the absence

of a comprehensive understanding of a person's productivity levels immediately, an employer relies on soft skills to decide. The CV can be viewed as the first virtual interaction with a potential employee before a possible face-to-face meeting as it tells one how they write and present info, which can be regarded as a soft skill. Based on this, whether to offer an interview is decided, demonstrating that it is a critical part of the recruitment process and, therefore, it is vital that graduates understand it.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented and explained the themes that emerged through the data collected. It described the recurring ideas from the data and demonstrated how they link with the relevant literature and conceptual frameworks discussed in the previous chapter. The themes that emerged from the data confirmed that structural unemployment is prevalent and exasperating, and what graduates or respondents can do about it is minimal. Through the data that emerged in the themes in this chapter, it is apparent from the respondents' experiences and literature that South Africa's unemployment issue is a symptom of the country's more significant and deeper historical and socioeconomic conditions and can lead to even more severe challenges.

They further revealed that education alone is not enough for social sciences graduates because of the high levels of competition. Finally, the themes also reveal that traditional ways of getting employment continue to be disrupted in various ways, and the respondents continuously need to develop themselves by acquiring skills to participate. As espoused by this research report, social capital is a significant concept because symbolic power is a common thread that runs through different ideas and experiences in this chapter. The next chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings, mainly around four key components. The discussion is interested in interpreting the results and how they answer the research questions. It is interested in interrogating their implications and why they should be considered. This chapter explains how the data results answer the questions posed at the beginning of the research project. It further clarifies how the findings help us realise the research's objectives and purpose and how they deviate from the objectives in the form of unexpected results. This chapter concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the research, which is what the findings cannot tell us about the area of inquiry studied.

5.2 Key findings

The main question of the research sought to investigate how social sciences graduates understand and interpret the labour market signals. The data suggests that social sciences graduates understand the labour market's expectations and requirements, but several factors addressed throughout this chapter influence their entry into the labour market differently. It can be seen in how they respond to part of the signals by acquiring education post-matric. This research aimed to analyse how graduates interpret labour market signals, and the reason behind this was to understand whether there is a mismatch between what employers expect and what graduates perceive to be required and expected. It was done by qualitatively exploring unemployment, employment experiences, and perceptions of employability and signalling.

There are many studies that look at employment and unemployment among the youth, graduates and other groups. However, this study looked at it through the experiences of social sciences graduates at Wits University because it recognises that experiences are not homogeneous and wants to explore a specific group to understand the issue better. Most studies tend to focus on the quantitative aspect of understanding unemployment, which is essential but often does not give the researcher subjective views and experiences. That is how this study then extends to the available literature on graduate unemployment and labour market signalling.

5.2.1 Interpretation of the findings

The research results indicate that social sciences graduates from the university, who were respondents in the survey and interviews, understand and effectively respond to part of the signal regarding the required education and minimum experience required for a job. However, what seems not to be effectively communicated and interpreted is the process it takes to be employed in terms of personal attributes and characteristics, which is also a crucial element of the recruitment process. Their acquisition of education demonstrates this, but they later find themselves knocking on several doors without any luck trying to get employment and struggling to get through, and for those who do, it is often the result of several attempts with no clear direction. Others have had to endure bouts of underemployment before eventually securing permanent employment, whilst some must pursue further studies to increase their chances of employability.

This research sought to understand whether there is a mismatch between what the labour market expects and requires and what graduates perceive. The findings suggest that there is a structural problem because even though the element of education as a signal seems to be communicated and interpreted effectively, some respondents still battle with long periods of unemployment upon graduating, which confirms that the problem may be structural, as the literature revealed (Bhorat, 2012; Morsy & Mukasa, 2019; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008).

The context in which this research takes place is Wits University, located in Johannesburg. The city is the economic hub of South Africa and also home to the country's mining, manufacturing and finance industries, which are central to the economy's growth (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Location is a significant determinant of unemployment, and in South Africa, as revealed by literature, unemployment is primarily concentrated in rural areas rather than urban areas. This is due to rural underdevelopment and the spatial laws under the apartheid government, which are different from other countries on the African continent (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; du Toit et al., 2018; Ibikunle et al., 2019; van der Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012). Most economic activities take place in the province, possibly and ideally meaning more employment opportunities for residents, and it is also located in an urban area, but despite this, the respondents are still struggling to secure jobs, which contradicts a vast body of literature (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007; du Toit et al., 2018; Oosthuizen, 2006;

Pauw et al., 2008; van der Berg & van Broekhuizen, 2012). This further indicates that location is not the sole issue but one of many co-existing problems. There is also something of a skills mismatch in the number of graduates versus the economy's requirements is likely what hampers the respondent even when they understand what the signals require (du Toit et al., 2018; Mncayi, 2016; van Broekhuizen, 2016).

Another indication of a structural problem is that this research is conducted with Wits University's graduates, a HWI. The literature revealed that employers prefer graduates from these institutions because they are assumed and considered to be better equipped with quality education and, therefore, ready to enter the workplace and make a significant contribution (Oluwajodu et al., 2015). The graduates have also had, in most cases, and continue to have, various privileges and better access to resources than in other institutions that are not HWIs, which makes them fare better in the race for employment (Oluwajodu et al., 2015). The respondents' experiences contradict the findings of a body of literature (Graham et al., 2019; Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015) because the respondents in this research still struggle to get jobs despite having graduated from a HWI. It highlights that even though factors like graduating from a HWI in an urban area may converge to increase one's chances of employment, they still do not guarantee a seamless transition into the labour market (Mncayi, 2016; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Soudien, 2010).

To further illustrate this point, an article published on Wits University's website in 2018 titled '*Wits Produces 'Ready-for-Work' Graduates*' says that the university produces graduates ready to enter the labour market upon completing their respective qualifications. It was based on a survey conducted by the Global Employability Survey and Ranking in 2017, which was interested in the employability of university graduates and the labour market's satisfaction levels. The article reports that the survey found that employers are delighted with the Wits graduates who enter the workplace as first-time employees in the labour market out of university. It goes on to explain that the employability of their graduates is because the university equips them with a range of essential and practical skills that are valuable to employers and recruiters, which help them transition with ease from being graduates to employees. It is not the experience of all the respondents, even though few of them report getting their work shortly after graduating, and some work in other areas outside the social sciences, which contradicts the article's findings.

This research sought to examine the extent to which the graduates of the social sciences believe their degrees prepared them for the labour market and their perceptions of their preparedness to enter the market. The data from the survey and individual interviews, supported by literature, suggest that employability is essential to one's employment journey (Yorke, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2007). The results indicate that it is part of the process that is not well interpreted by the respondents when they are in matric and during their studies at higher learning institutions, and this is partly due to a lack of exposure to the labour market at that stage of their careers. They only become aware of it after graduating from higher learning institutions and trying to enter the workplace, but find the transition from graduate to employee unexpectedly challenging. The recurrence of the concept of employability in most of the responses throughout the research was startling and unexpected because it seems that it is not always explicitly clear or talked about like other labour market requirements such as education, experience, or training. It tends to take on an intangible and non-universal form, which is why this research may have initially overlooked it, but the results indicate that it is a critical component due to the frequency with which it came up.

Because of the way employability interlinks with several parts of the research, it is evident that it is a crucial component of the respondents' experiences as they try to make sense of the signals of the labour market requirements in their employment and unemployment journeys. This revelation helps us to answer the research question because it tells us that the respondents understand employability as central to interpreting labour market signals in retrospect as graduates. A vast body of literature supports the experiences above, including (Artess et al., 2017; Cai, 2013; Knight & Yorke, 2002; Kruss, 2004; Tymon, 2013), who explain that employability is a critical element to securing employment because the various attributes and characteristics demonstrate to the employer how a potential employee can deal with work pressures and demands that are universal in the workplace despite educational qualification and background.

The results further indicate that transitioning to the labour market from higher education is not smooth sailing for most respondents. Some attribute this to the social sciences curriculum, which they report is dense with theory that they are not always able to apply in jobs, which is why they face discrimination from employers and recruiters. While the university has made strides to foster accessibility across gender, race and class lines, minimal changes have been made to the curriculum to align it with the changing landscape and demands of the labour

market so that it can train and cultivate skills that can be applied in the labour market (Soudien, 2010). The curriculum has not been developed or altered over the years even though the labour market is ever-changing, which means that people constantly need to adapt in order to be able to take part in it from a qualification perspective (Soudien, 2010). It makes it challenging for some to transition to the work environment because of the often-initial inability to show how one can contribute to the workplace. Based on the findings, one can deduce that the curriculum also plays a significant role in their transition to the labour market and may hamper or enhance employability even though they may positively respond to signals by getting a degree or education (Pauw et al., 2008; Soudien, 2010).

The research report aimed to understand how the labour market perceives social sciences graduates through the experiences and observations of the graduates who participated in the research. The literature revealed that humanities and social sciences graduates are the most affected by the high unemployment levels compared to other university graduates (Bhorat et al., 2012; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). The respondents' experiences from the previous chapter confirm the evidence from the literature that degrees in social sciences and humanities majors tend to rank lower in terms of economic value, which is why they battle with securing employment compared to graduates from other fields (Bhorat et al., 2012; Dunga, 2016; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). The revelations above and the respondents' experiences can also be attributed to the role and evolution of social capital in the post-apartheid era in South African society as it expresses itself in higher education and the labour market. The degrees awarded in the social sciences are no longer as marketable as they used to be, so they do not align with the markets. They are lower in employment and market demand compared to degrees from other fields (Dunga, 2016; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). The careers that are highly employable and desirable are the ones that contribute to the various sectors of the economy, which are careers mostly in STEM-related fields (Bhorat et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2019; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). They are considered future careers as they can train people to participate in the current high-tech economy that continues to develop through their skills. This illustrates how markets influence or determine perceptions to a certain degree.

5.2.2 Broader implications of the findings

The results also matter because they have broad implications and a wider resonance in the South African context. In post-democratic South Africa, higher learning institutions continue to see massification in the form of students from different milieus being admitted into the

various institutions to pursue education (Moleke, 2003; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008; Soudien, 2010). While it is laudable that more people across racial lines are entering the institutions, they were previously denied access. Employment, on the other hand, has not been improving; instead, it has declined over the years, and the levels are unemployment continue to be calamitous despite them having access to higher learning institutions (Graham et al., 2019; Moleke, 2003; Oosthuizen, 2006; Pauw et al., 2008; Statistics South Africa, 2021). It is concerning and raises the question of where the graduates will go to work once they complete their studies because it is evident that the ailing economy cannot create jobs for the rising influx of students and graduates who continue to complete their respective studies in various fields (Bhorat, 2012; Dunga, 2016; Moleke, 2003; Oosthuizen, 2006).

The findings demonstrate that social sciences studies are valuable but sometimes inadequate to help the respondents gain initial employment (Botha & Botha, 2022). They further demonstrate that social sciences graduates understand what is required through labour market signals. It is evident in how some of the graduates need to upskill themselves by acquiring more qualifications that offer practical exposure or skills. While the decision to learn more is also a valuable option, it is also a financial decision that not everyone can take because not having finances can limit one's options. Mlatsheni (2014) adds that job searching efforts are also affected by one's finances because of the costs of postage, transport, data for online applications and other costs related to applying for job opportunities.

Several reports and studies have been released on the journeys and outcomes of graduates between various academic periods and years in higher learning institutions, indicating that the humanities faculties across higher learning institutions produce the most graduates and are the most affected by unemployment by, for example (Bhorat et al., 2012; Dunga, 2016; Letseka & Cosser, 2010; Post-School Education and Training Monitor Report, 2019). The Department of Higher Education and Training released the annual *Post-School Education and Training Monitor* report in 2019, which traces the progress that public higher learning institutions continue to make from various perspectives depending on their goal. Without confusing throughput and employability, the large humanities faculty and most graduates come from there, so it is relevant to consider the work opportunities that will be available to them upon exiting higher learning institutions (Dunga, 2016; *Humanities - Wits University*, 2022; Mncayi, 2016; Wits Facts and Figures, 2022). They also confirm the statements reported by the respondents that they found themselves in social sciences because that is what they were

qualified for. This further illustrates that while graduates positively respond to and interpret the labour and employment signals, their education and ability determine which degree they will learn (Mlatsheni, 2014; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011). It also speaks to the country's broader challenges of basic education and preparing scholars for university and the labour market (Letseka & Cosser, 2010; Mlatsheni, 2014; Oosthuizen, 2006).

The respondents explain that studying towards a senior degree such as a master's or PhD is often the solution to avoid long periods of unemployment for most social sciences graduates because, at that level, one has gained high-level expertise in the subject. For entrance into humanities and social sciences courses notably, one respondent suggested that there could be a cap on the number of students admitted into the faculty as a possible solution to solving unemployment. The respondents who chose academia as a career explained that they knew that for them to stand a better chance at beating the odds facing social sciences graduates, they had to pursue academic qualifications and careers.

The respondents' common sentiment about thriving in the labour market is that one requires more than education. The findings from the research results imply that even if the labour market signals are understood and responded to accordingly, the labour market keeps changing, and people need to develop by being willing to learn on the job constantly or by going to school to get more skills. Another revelation from conducting the research is that graduates are not able to market themselves for the labour market as they have not been trained to do so; even though it does not fall within the overall plans and objectives of the literature and project, it adds considerably to understanding the challenges of unemployment in South Africa. It demonstrates that a combination of educational qualifications, personal attributes, and sociocultural capital is essential in securing and maintaining employment.

The results confirm that the degree choice pursued by a respondent is essential to securing a job in the labour market (Bhorat, 2012; Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2003). The literature revealed that the choice of study and qualification acquired is strongly linked to one's prospects of employment or unemployment, and those who hold qualifications in engineering and science are less affected by unemployment (Mlatsheni, 2014; Moleke, 2003; Pauw et al., 2008). They further help build on available literature that speaks to the preference for specialisation and professional versus general degrees (Dunga, 2016; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

In a report that studies and analyses the public's attitudes and perceptions about the labour market, Mncwango (2016) found that the public still values education even though most people continue to battle with the high levels of unemployment in the country. This finding is consistent with the evidence from (Graham et al., 2019; Mncayi, 2016; Mncwango, 2016; Moleke, 2003) and data from StatsSA (Statistics South Africa, 2020, 2021), which indicate that graduate unemployment is significantly lower than that of other groups. It demonstrates that education is still valuable because those who acquire it even beyond matric fare better than those who do not (Bhardwaj, 2016; Graham et al., 2019; Moleke, 2003). It explains why the respondents are still acquiring and pursuing it despite their grim employment prospects. However, based on the responses, it is also evident that the value they place on it has diminished over the years because it does not necessarily guarantee employment for them.

The literature revealed that poverty and unemployment are firmly linked, so attempts to solve the unemployment problem can have ripple effects and assist in efforts to eradicate poverty (International Labour Organisation, 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2013). The Millennium Development Goals Country Report published in 2013 suggests a positive relationship between poverty and unemployment exists because unemployment leads to poverty. These findings matter because unemployment affects an individual level and a more significant community at large, leading to poverty (International Labour Organisation, 2015). People with minimal income are likely to fall into poverty (International Labour Organisation, 2015).

The World Bank's evidence revealed that Southern Africa is a highly unequal region (Facundo, 2022). The respondents explain the challenge of going back home to live in the squalor they grew up in, despite earning qualifications that could ideally provide them with some level of social mobility and financial independence. The respondents' lamentations show how poverty and inequality continue to be reproduced by unemployment and poverty in South Africa. It further demonstrates how the vestiges of the apartheid government continue to find expression in the labour market even beyond graduates exiting higher learning institutions because unemployment and poverty are concentrated among black African people, most of whom were respondents in this research (Mlatsheni, 2014; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). The results that were arrived at support the existing literature, which explains that the unemployment challenge in South Africa is deeply structural, with frictional elements and is complex (Dunga, 2016; Mlatsheni, 2014; Moleke, 2003). The calamitous levels of youth unemployment worldwide and in the country also perpetually lead to other social problems,

such as poverty and social injustice (Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017; Statistics South Africa, 2013).

Since 1994, the democratic government has rolled out various plans through their various redistributive and affirmative action policies to resolve the unemployment problem (Bhorat, 2012; Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007). The policies had different objectives; some were geared toward cultivating youth's participation in entrepreneurship activities because it has been identified as a way to create employment and contribute to the economy (Naong, 2011; Statistics South Africa, 2021). However, despite this effort from the government, research indicates that youth are averse to entrepreneurial initiatives as most people report not being interested in starting their own businesses, and there are several reasons for this (Naong, 2011). For example, they express that there is much red tape and a scourge of corruption in most of the government's institutions, making it difficult for them to start and operate a business successfully. Some policies have been implemented to transform and advance women because the labour market continues to favour men (Statistics South Africa, 2021).

Various authors indicated that scholars are not studying for the degrees required for the future labour market, which is why a surplus of skills is not required in the economy (Liu et al., 2016; Mlatsheni, 2014; Moleke, 2003). Some respondents expressed that they only became aware of the careers most likely to earn them employment quickly while looking for job opportunities after graduating with their degrees. This realisation came from finding themselves in a position where they are not getting employment partly due to their degrees. An issue that can also be observed from this position and experience is that a lack of career guidance is a problem because most respondents report not expecting to struggle before getting their first job. This speaks to a lack of quality guidance when choosing a career and the careers available in the labour market (Ingle & Mlatsheni, 2017; Mlatsheni, 2014; Oosthuizen, 2006).

Some respondents expressed that their ability reflected through their marks determined the careers they went with, not their choice exclusively. It demonstrates that school subjects and marks also predetermine which careers are available to some post-matric. It further demonstrates the relevance of excellent and qualitative career advice for a better chance at satisfaction and success in one's chosen career path and how it stems from high school education (Mlatsheni, 2014; Oosthuizen, 2006).

Due to these experiences, youth and graduates who think their qualifications are not valuable have given up searching for employment because of the prolonged periods of unemployment they experience. It is also due to the signals from the labour market constantly indicating that they do not have the right qualifications to gain employment (Mlatsheni, 2014; Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011). It demonstrates a sense of hopelessness that the respondents expressed as they continued to apply for jobs with no luck. It is further supported and demonstrated by a report that the International Labour Organisation did on youth unemployment and experiences globally, and the experiences and challenges are similar (International Labour Organisation, 2015).

The findings demonstrate through the respondents' experiences that a social sciences graduate is often employed by chance rather than design. This indication links back to the issue raised around the challenges posed by the lack of specialisation in the general structure of the social sciences degrees (Dunga, 2016; Moleke, 2003; Oluwajodu et al., 2015). This seemingly improbable nature of their employability in the labour market poses several significant challenges (Baldry, 2016; Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017). It erodes the knowledge and skills acquired through their degrees and leaves them frustrated (Ibikunle et al., 2019; Longe, 2017). The respondents report that not having a clear sense of what is required is even more frustrating because one cannot even plan much for their career because they do not have a sense of what is required or expected. This experience renders them vulnerable, and they end up underemployed because they have to take up the available jobs for which they are overqualified in terms of qualifications and some instances, work experience (Baldry, 2016; du Toit, 2018; Ibikunle et al., 2019). The respondents further express that a more refined and deliberate approach is required to solve the existing unemployment problem among social sciences graduates. According to them, this might help curb the high levels of youth unemployment.

Research conducted by Statistics South Africa demonstrates that the workplace desires work experience (Statistics South Africa, 2020). The respondents express that adding to the challenge posed by employment by chance is the requirement of work experience by employers in the labour market. The results from the data corroborate evidence from data from Statistics South Africa consistently throughout various periods because the respondents also explain how the requirement of work experience by employers often renders them helpless because they cannot do much of it. Graduates often do not possess enough experience, which puts them at a disadvantage as, as a result, they cannot fulfil the roles that might be available.

Social capital refers to the social and cultural reproduction interrelationships of economic, cultural and social forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Mncwango, 2016; Smith & Kulynych, 2002). These forms of social capital are created and maintained through social networks and work to benefit people and institutions to thrive in various activities (Bourdieu, 1986; Mncwango, 2016). The results from the previous chapter revealed how different stakeholders reproduce social capital in higher learning institutions and how they use it to their advantage or disadvantage (Baldry, 2016). The results also demonstrated how social capital functions in education and the labour market through institutionalisation (Bourdieu, 1986; Mncwango, 2016). Some institutions carry more prestige, which can translate into opportunity. Being a member of such exclusivity can come with some social capital that can work for one in different contexts (Bourdieu, 1986).

It builds on the theory that social capital plays a vital role in acquiring employment and retaining it throughout one's career because the networks one builds in school right through to the workplace can work in their favour (Bourdieu, 1986; Mncwango, 2016; Yorke, 2004). The findings also demonstrate that it can be transferred from generation to generation. The role of signalling, according to theory (Spence, 1973), teaches us that signalling is a powerful tool to communicate the requirement of employers to potential employees. It is seen through how employers use it to include and exclude applicants by filtering so that employers can get the potential employees they want in their workplaces (Di Pietro, 2017; Spence, 1973).

5.3 Limitations

This research falls short in certain areas. Firstly, the respondents that participated in the surveys and interviews were aware of the researcher's intentions, which might have influenced the way they responded to the questions, and the researcher was unable to manipulate the behaviour in any way (Mentz, 2012). Secondly, this research adopted the convenience sampling method to recruit respondents. The graduates who left the institution and current postgraduate students were used as respondents due to availability. This decision was informed by the time allocated to complete the data collection, and it poses a limitation because respondents would have been available to provide valuable insights later but were excluded due to lack of time.

Lastly, conducting surveys was challenging due to the inability to probe or seek further clarification on responses that might be unclear (Mentz, 2012). Some of the respondents in the

survey were not interested in returning for an in-depth interview, so the short answers did not provide sufficient information to analyse and, in some instances, had to be excluded.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings deduced from the data that emerged in the data analysis chapter of the research report. The discussion focused on explicating and interpreting the results and discussing their broader implications for this research report and the social environment. The results revealed how the historical and systematic dispossession of black Africans in South Africa is the nucleus of most of the issues that came through the results.

This chapter has demonstrated that the themes may be different and address different challenges, but they link back to each other. The themes are interwoven, and there is often an overlap in some of the issues that come up. However, this chapter has further demonstrated distinct features of the themes that emerged in the previous chapter and how they interlink. It has explained and demonstrated that whilst some strengths can be drawn from this research, it also suffers some shortcomings. The next chapter presents the overall conclusion of this research report.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the research report and states the answer to the research questions posed at the introduction of the study. It does so by explaining how the findings assist in answering the research questions. It also states the key insights that can be drawn from the research process results and some unexpected yet valuable insights that arose. It concludes by explaining how this research added to existing literature and then states the recommendations for future studies in this area of inquiry.

This research report aimed to investigate how recent graduates in social sciences perceive unemployment and to analyse how they interpret labour market signals based on their career-searching journeys. It was done to understand whether there is a mismatch between what employers expect and what graduates perceive. The problem identified was that social sciences graduates are among those who face high unemployment rates among university graduates. They also have to contend with many negative perceptions from the labour market despite possessing a post-high school qualification. This problem was deconstructed using a research question and two sub-questions.

The main research question of the report was interested in how social sciences graduates understand and interpret labour market signals. Based on the research findings, it is evident that social sciences graduates understand the signals as they positively respond to the signals by acquiring education post-matric. However, a myriad factors addressed throughout this research report influence their entry into the labour market negatively or positively. Firstly, acquiring an education does not necessarily lead to automatic entry into the labour market. The type of qualification and skills one has are crucial to their entry into the labour market because this is the difference between getting a job and not getting one (Dunga, 2016; Letseka & Cosser, 2010; Oluwajodu et al., 2015; Pauw et al., 2008). This finding corroborates the literature that explains that education and employment are inextricably linked, so attempts to solve education can improve graduates' employability in different fields of study (Dunga, 2016; Pauw et al., 2008; Soudien, 2010).

Secondly, employability appears to be a salient and significant element of the recruitment process. Attributes such as one's ability to market their skills and communicate well in English

can determine who gets employed and who does not, but these are hardly mentioned in various settings (Bennett, 2018; Ismail, 2011; Yorke & Knight, 2007). It is mainly the part education plays that is spoken about in informal and formal settings, such as homes and schools. This finding suggests that unemployment is mainly structural because even though the element of education as a signal seems to be communicated and interpreted effectively, some respondents still battle with long unemployment periods upon graduation (Bhorat & Kimani, 2017; Kadir et al., 2020; Oluwajodu et al., 2015).

Finally, the trajectory in which the labour market is headed determines the type of skills and graduates favourable to the labour market and thus makes those who possess those more employable. There is high skills demand in the ICT, agricultural and financial sectors among the country's high employers (Chabane et al., 2018; DNA Economics, 2020; Statistics South Africa, 2022). This finding highlights a skills mismatch because some sectors are experiencing more growth and therefore attract graduates as they require a workforce, and perhaps the high unemployment of social science graduates indicates that even though there are jobs in those sectors, they still cannot fill them as they do not possess the requisite skills (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2007).

The first sub-question of the research report dealt with the question of how social science graduates interpreted employment and labour market signals when choosing a degree to pursue post-matric. The findings suggest that part of the question regarding interpreting signals plays a minimal role in their degree or career choice. Their capabilities and limitations, as spelt out by their matric results and subjects, determine what courses they can pursue and, ultimately, their careers. Some respondents begin to realise the shortcomings of their degree choice as far as entry into the labour market is concerned once they are in the institutions or searching for work. They then respond by studying further to gain practical work skills to make themselves more employable. This finding demonstrates that social science graduates respond to employment and labour market signals through further development in their studies or careers by studying further or exploring sectors unrelated to the social sciences for more or better opportunities.

The second sub-question of the research report dealt with unpacking the extent to which social sciences graduates believe their degree has prepared them for the labour market. The findings suggest that most of the respondents do not feel adequately prepared to work with their

undergraduate BA degree only, which is why they have resorted to upskilling or finding work in other areas unrelated to the social sciences. Similar to the answer to the first sub-question, this indicates that a degree in the social sciences alone may be inadequate to gain one entry into the labour market based on the difficulties the respondents encountered. Conversely, it also indicates that social sciences skills are transferrable, and one can work in different fields with their skills, as revealed by the literature, even though the existing notion that they are unemployable outweighs this transferability of their skills (Davidovitch et al., 2017; Lea, 2014; Piper, 2011). On the other hand, those who feel somewhat prepared sometimes find themselves in situations where they are underemployed due to misperceptions about them, making it difficult for them to enter the labour market (Botha & Botha, 2022). They then have to accept jobs for which they may be overqualified to earn an income and hopefully build their resumés to increase their chances for better job opportunities. This finding speaks to the literature on underemployment that explains that due to the inability of many economies to create jobs, people resort to accepting jobs that underutilise their skills (Green & Henseke, 2016; Moyi et al., 2013).

Applying a qualitative approach to conducting the research was helpful because it assisted with analysing, understanding, and exploring from the perspectives of the different respondents (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2002). It helped the research to gain insights from individual perspectives rather than generic or universal truths or understandings about unemployment in the social sciences. Merriam (2002) and Creswell (2014) explained that using multiple methods in research is beneficial to capture varying perspectives on the same issue. It is what the use of a survey and interviews assisted the research to achieve. In the survey, the answers were often brief, and in the interviews, much more depth into the issues was reached, but both instruments demonstrated similarity in the responses. The interviews, however, allowed for an opportunity to delve into issues that were unclear or required further probing for clarity or better understanding.

6.2 Key insights

The research findings revealed some insights that were both expected and unexpected. The findings of this research illustrate that an unemployment state is not only the result of negatively responding or interpreting labour market signals; a wide range of factors in the economy and education system influence it. Literature demonstrated that in the South African

economy, there are deliberate efforts from the universities and government through the department of higher education to do away with the vestiges left by the former regime (Soudien, 2010). Whilst there are efforts from the government to ameliorate the devastatingly high unemployment rates, there is still a lot that can be done to the curriculums at universities and basic school education to forge better alignment with the labour market demands towards improved employability across various graduates (Soudien, 2010). The findings suggest that interventions to produce employable graduates are required from both the university and the labour market (Soudien, 2010).

Initially, upon embarking on this research, the dominant mindset that informed the research was that social sciences graduates need to work in a field they studied. However, over time, through reviewing literature and collecting data, it was found that it does not need to be this way. This was a surprising yet illuminating insight from conducting the research that helped move away from the notion that people need to work in the fields from which they graduated. People can move across sectors and fields and contribute with their skillset. This research report's findings add another dimension to understanding education and labour studies' challenges and successes.

6.3 Recommendations

This research focused on analysing the labour market signals from the perspectives of social sciences graduates within one university. It provided insights into how graduates understand how labour market signals are disseminated to the labour market. It has attempted to explain if there is a mismatch between what employers and graduates understand. The research learnt that in most cases, the labour market signals are understood, but not much can be done to manipulate the academic and social circumstances of the graduates. The research also demonstrated that unemployment figures alone do not demonstrate the extent of unemployment which is why it was necessary to speak to the graduates to gain understanding from their perspectives. Greater detail in future research can be placed on looking at ways or strategies to make them more employable through their acquired degrees by looking into possible changes to the curriculum and the courses.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the overall conclusions on how the research results helped answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the research report. It also stated the key insights

that can be drawn from the research process results and some unexpected yet valuable insights that arose. It explained how it contributes to the available literature on education and labour studies to understand graduates' various barriers to employment. It has explained and demonstrated that whilst this research report contributes to available literature, there are areas and questions it cannot answer. For that reason, it provided recommendations for future research to focus on education and labour studies.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Questions

1. What is your gender?

Female	Male	Non-binary	Prefer not to say

2. Please specify your ethnicity:

White	Black African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	Prefer not to say	Other (please specify)

3. Which degree are you currently pursuing?

Honours	Master's	PhD

4. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Employed	Self-employed	Unemployed	Student

5. Which of the following were your major subjects in the final year of your degree?

Demography & Population Studies	Anthropology	Political Studies	History
International Relations	Philosophy	Sociology	Development Studies

Open-ended questions

6. What high school subjects do you think can better equip scholars to prepare for higher learning and post-university, regardless of whether they are currently offered or not?
7. What do you wish that your social science degree prepared you for as far as the labour market is concerned?
8. Is there anything you wish you knew about the structure of employment and the labour market when you were in matric?

9. What do you think are the most important skills and qualities that graduates should possess to be able to thrive in the workplace?

10. If you would like to take part in a focus group discussion (30 min- 1hr) about unemployment among humanities and social science graduates, Please provide us with your e-mail address.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Open-ended questions

1. What challenges do you currently face regarding employment or unemployment as a social sciences graduate?
2. If you had an opportunity to choose again, would you make the same decision about your career? Why?
3. Did you have any career guidance from anyone when you were in high school?
4. What did you know about the job market prior to enrolling at university?
5. Is a career in social sciences the career you want to follow? If not, what career path did you want to follow?
6. What do you wish that your social science degree prepared you for as far as the labour market is concerned?
7. Do you think anything can be done to better prepare students and graduates to align their degrees with the labour market? Please elaborate.
8. What do you think are the most critical skills and qualities that graduates should possess to be able to thrive in the workplace?
9. Do you believe that you possess these skills and qualities that you deem as important?
10. Did you have an idea of a profession you wanted to be in at the end of your studies?

APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Reviewing labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Mokgethwa Madubye. I am a Master's student in Public Policy at the Wits School of Governance. As part of my studies, I have undertaken a research project that reviews the labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am inviting you to participate in a research study by participating in an online survey questionnaire followed by an individual interview. Both will take up approximately 30 min to 1 hour of your time.

Participation is voluntary: Please understand that your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalised or negatively affected if you choose to withdraw from this study at any point.

Risks of being involved in the study: There are no risks associated with this research.

Benefits of being in the study: There are no direct benefits to participating in this research study.

Reimbursements for "out-of-pocket" expenses**:** You will not receive any payment for participating in this research project.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

All interviews will be virtual or telephonically, depending on the convenient platform. Because of the focus groups, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, but the information will be treated with confidence.

Whom to contact if you have any concerns about the research:

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, contact my supervisor: Rekgotsofetse Chikane, by e-mail: at rekgotsofetse.chikane@wits.ac.za or by telephone: 011 717 3809.

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you are interested in participating in the research, please read and sign the attached consent form.

E-mail shared with current students for the survey questionnaire

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Dear Respondent

My name is Mokgethwa Madubye. I am a Master's student in Public Policy at the Wits School of Governance. In partial fulfilment of my degree, I am required to conduct a research project and collect data through an online survey. The title of my research is: **Reviewing labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand.** The research aims to understand whether there is a mismatch between what social sciences graduates perceive as required by employers and what employers expect.

I am inviting you to take part in a research study by completing this questionnaire which can be accessed through the link below:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/35F8ZTK

The questionnaire should take about 10-15 minutes to complete and consists of approximately ten questions. Completion of the questionnaire is voluntary, and all responses shall remain confidential.

The research study has been approved by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical); you are welcome to contact +27(0) 11 717 1408, e-mail: hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za. Should you feel that you no longer want to participate in the questionnaire, you may exit the questionnaire at any stage, and you will not be penalised or negatively affected. Should you require further details regarding the study, please contact me at 752642@students.wits.ac.za. For your reference, my supervisor Rekgotsofetse Chikane may be contacted by e-mail: at rekgotsofetse.chikane@wits.ac.za or by telephone: 011 717 3809.

Yours sincerely
Mokgethwa Madubye

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM



RESPONDENT CONSENT SHEET

Title: Reviewing labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand

I hereby agree to participate in research on reviewing the labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates at Wits.

I am aware that the study will involve my participation in either a survey questionnaire, individual interview, or both, which will take roughly 30 min to 1 hour each on a virtual platform or telephonically.

The requirements of the research have been explained to me. I understand that I can withdraw from the research project at any point, and that decision will not negatively affect me.

Permission to record interviews

I hereby agree to participate in research on reviewing the labour market signals through the lenses of social sciences graduates from Wits.

I hereby agree to be recorded and understand that the recordings will be kept confidential and later deleted upon the end of the research.

_____	_____	_____
Name of respondent	**Signature**	**Date**

_____	_____	_____
Name of respondent	**Signature**	**Date**

APPENDIX E: ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTERS

Research Office:
Ayanda Molefe
Tel: 011 717 3968
Email: ayanda.molefe@wits.ac.za

Research Ethics Chair:
Rekgotsofetse Chikane
Tel: 0117173869
Email: rekgotsofetse.chikane@wits.ac.za

03 December 2021

Dear Mokgethwa Madubye,

Title: Reviewing labour market signals through the lenses of social science graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand
Student Number: 752642
Degree: Master in Management in the field of Governance
Ethics Clearance Number: *WSG-2021-53*

All candidates must satisfy the University's ethical standards for research. Your ethics application has been received and reviewed by the Wits School of Governance Human Research Ethics Committee.

Your ethical clearance has been approved subject to you getting permission to conduct research from all sites where research is conducted. The letter(s) of permission to undertake research must be submitted to the WSG Research Office and kept on file with your final proposal and other ethics documents.

You may commence your data collection under the guidance of your supervisor. In the event that the scope, methodology or nature of the research changes, you are required to submit another ethics application reflecting the changes.

The onus is on you as the candidate, with support from your supervisor, to ensure your research complies with university human research ethics policies and protocols at all stages of the research process.

It is recommended that you keep this letter in a safe place as you are responsible for ensuring you have proof of ethics clearance and have lodged the ethics clearance / protocol number with Faculty before final submission of your research report. If you do not have an ethics clearance number, you are not permitted to graduate.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Rekgotsofetse Chikane

Rekgotsofetse Chikane
Research Ethics Chair

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGISTRAR

09 February 2022

Mokgethwa Madubye
Student Number (752642)
Master of Management
Wits Business School

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

"Reviewing labour market signals through the lenses of social science graduates from the University of the Witwatersrand."

This letter serves to confirm that the above project has received permission to be conducted on University premises, and/or involving staff and/or students of the University as research participants. In undertaking this research, you agree to abide by all University regulations for conducting research on campus and to respect participants' rights to withdraw from participation at any time.

If you are conducting research on certain student cohorts, year groups or courses within specific Schools and within the teaching term, permission must be sought from Heads of School or individual academics.

Ethical clearance has been obtained. (Protocol number: WSG-2021-53)

Research Expiration: (Research submission date)

Nicoleen Potgieter
University Deputy Registrar