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# University degrees and the workplace: A tracer survey of a cohort of twenty-six bachelor of primary education graduates of the University of Botswana

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# CHAPTER TWO

# UNIVERSITY DEGREES AND THE WORKPLACE: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

## Introduction

Major debates on education and employment view the development of the human potential of any country as fundamentally an investment that has the capacity to make positive contributions towards a country's development. This makes access to education not only a fundamental human right, but also a means through which economic prosperity and sustainability could be attained. It implies that education, higher education in particular, should equip students with the knowledge and skills required in the workplace (Carnoy, 1999). However, even if the course provides good knowledge and skills, the graduates and the labour market may make other demands. This chapter argues that there is no clear cut relationship between university degrees and the labour market, in terms of what degrees are advocating and what is happening in it. This literature review outlines current debates on university degrees and the labour market, focusing on the arguments around the relationship of the degree and career paths of graduates in the workplace. The following are the main issues explored in this chapter:

- conceptions of university degrees;
- the nature of university degree programmes and curriculum design issues;
- globalization and restructuring of the labour market;
- theories of education and the labour market, with emphasis on career paths.

## Conceptions of university degrees

Bear (1982:18) defines a degree as "a title conferred by a school to show that a certain course of study has successfully been completed". In some countries, those who enroll for degree programmes must have completed and passed very well secondary school "O" levels or "A" levels. This type of learning has clear guidelines and is defined and measured by the level of attainment. On successful completion of the degree programme, each graduate is given a certificate, normally referred to as a diploma

(Bear, 1982:18), as proof of attainment. Those who favour certification approaches to learning argue that it is useful to have a qualification because it takes learning to recognisable levels (Barth, 2001). To be awarded a degree qualification, however, is not automatic, but requires spending a considerable amount of time studying and obtaining a certain credit (Bear, 1982:17).

Buchman and Schwille (1983:42) assert that "book learning at its best advances the mobility of our conceptions and it expands the scope of our thoughts and actions as can be envisioned". With the help of relevant people and the appropriate material, students are allowed to let their imaginations run wild, as well making sense of the difficult concepts they may be expected to conceptualise. A university degree awards more status than a mere academic qualification (Bear, 1982:17), ensuring that those who underwent training and have certificates as proof of their degrees get prestigious jobs, coupled with higher salaries than those who do not (Blaug, 1987:78; Carnoy, 1999:2; Brennan & McGeevor, 1988:45 in Pitcher and Purcell, 1998:180). The implication is that, since a university degree is generally perceived as a sign of having obtained a good education, some people may be willing to pay for it. It is assumed that the contribution (productivity) of people with degrees is greater as a result of their knowledge and skills.

In counteracting this claim that attaches status to university degrees, Bear (1982:17) sees it as a narrow view of what a good education signifies. The basis of his argument is that the view does not take into account the fact that there are people who have been acquiring certain traits all their lives and are good at what they do (Bear, 1982:17), in some cases even better than those with university degrees. Behind this alternative view is that there are things one can learn without taking a formal course, encapsulated in the term 'everyday learning'. Vygotsky (1962) contends that this type of learning is tied to concrete reality and is associated with activity rather than theory. As a result, after gaining or being exposed to this kind of learning one is said to have gained 'experience'. The problem arises, however, when the experiences are to be interpreted, notably by those who are better placed to do so. For Vygotsky (1962) the concepts learnt through everyday experience are absorbed readymade, making it easy for one simply to observe the actions of others without actually learning them.

In university learning, a system of whatever students are learning takes shape in their minds. Systematic learning can only be understood within a system of concepts that help make sense to learners (Vygotsky, 1962). There are some things one has to learn before doing the work, and a need to understand how to perform certain tasks without actually having to watch and infer what their meanings may be. This raises two very important questions: "can one do some things without a course?" and "can one do some things better with a course?" The answer to the first is 'yes it is possible' and to the second, 'most probably, because having a course at least provides individuals with a chance of properly being taught how to do it and to understand the nature of the task'. University learning takes place in classrooms on campus. Such learning is dependent on the guidance and authority of the presenters, with the help of prescribed courses (Bear, 1982:17). With university learning, students are given the chance, through supervision, to grasp the necessary concepts.

**The nature of university degree programmes and curriculum design issues**

Traditionally, university degree programmes fall into particular disciplines, which students pursue. These fields of study "discipline" students' minds, and pursuing a university programme is believed to be important because it does so in a particular way. Bear (1982: 19) outlines six types of university degrees: the Associate degree, the Bachelor degree; the Master's degree; the Doctorate degree; Professional degrees and the Honorary degree.

The associate degree is awarded to students who complete either two years of residential study or full time study at any college of education, and was developed as a halfway to a bachelor's degree (Bear, 1982:19).

Normally referred to as a first degree in most countries, the Bachelor's degree takes either three or four years of full time studying (Bear, 1982:19), by which time it is assumed that students would have mastered certain required information in a specific field, together with some form of general knowledge. To successfully complete it, students have to have done course work, practical exercises and, in some instances, even mini research. The Bachelor's degree has different titles, for examples B.S (Bachelor of Science), B.A (Bachelor of Arts) and BEd (Bachelor of Education) (Bear, 1982:19).

After the Bachelor's degree is the Master's, normally referred to as the second degree. Duration is one year of fulltime studying, or in some countries two years after successfully completing the Bachelor's degree (Bear, 1982:19). Requirements for the Master's include either partial fulfillment of course work and partial fulfillment of a research study, or fulfillment of a dissertation. Titles include M.A (Master of Arts), M.S (Master of Science), M.B.A (Master of Business Administration) and M.Ed (Master of Education).

The Doctorate degree, as portrayed by Bear (1982:20), is given to people who have produced original pieces of research, normally referred to as 'doctoral dissertations'. The degree is obtained after spending time on campus, which may vary from institution to institution, as well as spending the needed time on research, whose timeframe is normally dependent on the study. Although it is important in some systems, there is no emphasis on course work since it is believed students have done that during both their first and second degrees (Bear, 1982:19). Students are considered mature enough to carry out their own studies under supervision, at the end of which they are expected to display considerable mastery of academic writing. Graduates are normally referred to as 'doctors' and doctoral titles include PhD or D.Phil (Doctor of Philosophy), D.Ed (Doctor of Education), D.B.A. (Doctor of Business Administration) and D.P.A (Doctor of Public Administration).

According to Bear (1982:20), professional degrees are normally earned for professional purposes. He maintains that, in most cases, people who undergo professional training are in-service students, already in possession of some form of qualification, an associate degree or a diploma in some field of education. In other countries however, professional degrees are earned after getting a Bachelor's degree, or may just be equivalent to the Bachelor's (Bear, 1982:20). Such degrees include Law degrees, Medical degrees, Teaching degrees and Business degrees, with titles including Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Library Studies and Bachelor of Nursing Education.

Lastly, Honorary degrees are awarded by universities as some form of respect, acknowledgement or gratitude to certain individuals who have made significant, meaningful contributions in society (Bear, 1982:21). These degrees are reserved for

Honorary Doctorates only, and titles include Doctor of Humanities, Doctor of Science and Doctor of laws. Those awarded the Doctorates do not have to produce an original dissertation or thesis.

In some universities, course design is the responsibility of the lecturers who would be offering the courses (Miller, 1987:1; Squires, 1990:7), whilst in others the lecturers are assisted by some divisions within the university to structure the courses (the senate or members of the same department). In other universities it is the professional bodies with a stake in the institution or the central government that has a say as to what the course should include (Miller, 1987:1; Squires, 1990:7; Toohey, 1999:1).

According to Miller (1987:7), it does not necessarily matter who has a slice of the cake, because it is ultimately those who present the course who have an overbearing effect on its nature, shape and on those who would be sitting for the course. With regards to the curriculum, even though presentation of the lessons solely rests with the lecturers, the content to be taught is reflective of other people, such as government or those in higher authority (faculty), since they determine what is legitimate and what should go into the courses (Miller, 1987:7). This limits the lectures' autonomy to the classroom, and they have to operate within a framework in line with what is expected of the degree by those who have a stake in it. Even though autonomy creates constraints in some variables, it does not mean that there is no latitude insofar as some variables are concerned. The lecturers determine how the content is to be organised, ways of transmitting it and the mode of assessment (Miller, 1987:67). The lecturers' input into the courses is not really compromised here. Amongst all the people with a vested interest in university learning, those entrusted with delivering the courses (the lecturers) are supposedly the best suited custodians of knowledge in a particular discipline. They have the means to plan and identify the appropriate material for their courses. With their research capacity and their wide-ranging ability on a variety of issues, they have the capacity to effectively deliver their material to students.

**Academic knowledge**

There is a commonly held belief that university degrees should focus on academic growth of students. Those who advocate the provision of academic knowledge in degree programmes hold the belief that this achieves depth in the disciplines for

which the students are studying, and therefore they call for a rigorous academic study (Toohey, 1999:7). According to these writers, students will need a deep understanding of a number of basic concepts and principles, which could only be attained through the strengthening of their academic knowledge.

Academic courses are, by nature, seen by Squires (1990:83) as highly internal, in that their pattern and content reflects the demands of the discipline. Hence they do not have strong relationships with the labour market. Furthermore, Squires (1990:83) maintains that these kinds of courses are normally associated with students whose desires are to continue with further studies, as well as engage in extensive research. In support of Squires (1990), Hiep (2001) argues that the labour market demands that students be adequately prepared to tackle challenges they may be presented with at the workplace, by being thoroughly equipped with both the theoretical and practical knowledge that may enable them to do so.

**Professional knowledge**

Concerns about the quality of services offered in the workplace led advocates to push for professional emphasis on courses offered in universities. A growing body of literature suggests that universities need to offer courses that could lead to the improvement of the professional practices needed in the world of work, so that students could fit well with employer demands (Delaney, 1997; Heath, 1998; Pring, 1999). This is in line with what is said about course design in universities by Miller (1987:7), that: “a course may be designed to help prepare students for a profession or trade or to cater for specific needs or interests of students.” This assertion does not sit without tension. The statement makes curriculum in such courses defendable, since what should and what should not go into such courses becomes highly selective. Relevance in professional courses to this end becomes critical. Miller (1987:7) points out that such prescriptive courses are common in professional degrees programmes, as those of Engineering, Law, Medicine and Teaching.

Among those advocating professional emphasis on university courses are those sharing the belief that to ensure that students are adequately prepared for practice, universities have a responsibility to develop in individual students the knowledge and information needed for them to act as professionals, as well as the skills and attributes

that would ensure that graduates are better placed to handle chores in the workplace (Delaney, 1997; Heath, 1998; Pring, 1999). Professional work demands that workers play particular roles, which requires certain skills, and knowledge that can only be gained through a formal structured course. Key elements of this professionalisation, as identified by Pring (1999:298), include theoretical knowledge, practical competence and commitment to one's work.

In real working situations, employees are faced with challenging experiences (Delaney, 1997), which nevertheless they have to face and also strive to overcome in order to survive. These challenging experiences include having to relate to clients, supervisors and co-workers, displaying a sense of order and efficiency; handling work demands as well as out of work demands (Delaney, 1997). This suggests that students should be prepared in such a way that enables them to address these demands. Students need not only learn the skills but also be able to master them. Mastery of the skills can only be demonstrated through practical means. The skills learnt through university training should be those that graduates could easily transfer to the workplace (Heath, 1998; Roizen and Jepson, 1985), and be able to use effectively. In the past, theoretical knowledge was to influence practice. Traditional courses emphasised theory at the expense of personal attributes. Students, it is claimed, had their heads filled with jargon that did not help prepare them for the 'real world' (Squires, 1990), with the result that graduates would find themselves in possession of valuable and at times relevant information, but lacking the necessary skills to use it effectively. This impacted negatively on institutions, as they could be considered to be failing adequately to prepare students for work. Traditional courses were, as a result, criticised for failing to acknowledge the connection between education and the labour market (Hiep, 2001; Reizon & Jepson, 1985). However, the gap between theory and practice did not mean that theory had to be discarded, rather there was need to find a way of benefiting from theory by balancing theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge.

Critics of this narrow conception of university education hold that courses should not only respond to the challenges of the job itself, but also to the problems experienced in the wider society, be they social, economic or political (Pring, 1999). This is because, in addition to offering professional courses, university degrees also aim at

many goals. They aim to equip students with high level reasoning skills needed to handle work, including communication skills, problem solving, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, creativity and management (Roizen and Jepson, 1985). University courses should therefore be designed for teaching and learning that supports the total development of students. In this way, Toohey (1999) advocates courses take on board the total growth of the individual. For education to make a difference would require that curriculum be used broadly to develop the full potential of students in order to capture all their needs. Furthermore, Toohey (1999) calls for an integrated curriculum, to encourage the idea of commonality in all that is taught.

**General Knowledge**

According to Miller (1987), university programmes should strive to develop students by providing them with general knowledge. This makes connections between all forms of knowledge and, as a result, its programmes are planned on deliberation and balance. Its curriculum is not based on any form of subject discipline or with any particular occupation in mind. The implication of this view is that, if students are taught a little bit of everything, they will be in position to handle any specific situation.

In counteracting the above view, Squires (1990:84) maintains that general knowledge is highly problematic, as it raises questions about the capacity of graduates to get absorbed into the labour market. General education does not relate to the labour market but graduates in possession of only general knowledge may find it difficult to satisfy employer demands because of lack of the disciplined knowledge and skills needed in the workplace. Squires (1990:86) maintains that general knowledge should, if it is to make significant impact on student learning, be integrated into both professional and academic learning so that they complement rather than compete with each other. This would be done to make students' learning rich in depth, and more coherent, as well as improving the status of graduates and making them ready to be absorbed into the labour market.

**Curriculum design issues in universities**

Curriculum debates continue to advocate the training of students in ways of teaching and learning that facilitate active rather than passive student learning (Miller, 1987:33). University learning should be responsive to such ways of teaching and learning and have them integrated into its curriculum (Miller, 1987; Toohey, 1999). In addition, the curriculum should be made relevant to the economic and social needs of the community (Pring, 1999) and these elements should be included in university education so that graduates can meet these needs once they start work.

Toohey (1999:2) asserts that "the need to broaden higher education curriculum requires design of courses which foster engagement with subject matter and reward deep learning," Since all learning is regarded as the outcome of a consequence of experience, it is only befitting that this experience improves with practice. What is of great importance in university learning should be that students profit from this so-called "learned experience", with the hope that their ability to profit from it would in the end be of benefit to them. The key challenge for universities lies in the structure and design of the courses. As Miller (1987:6) noted, "there is need to consider the context in which the course will be offered, effective methods for developing the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes in students, resources required, means of student learning and a plan for evaluating the course at regular intervals." The model the courses follow as a result should unpack the different ways with which students come to understand the content of the courses. This would expose students to different types of knowledge so that they could apply their understanding to their development of these.

Miller (1987:7) maintains that it is equally important for academic staff to communicate students' expectations. The belief here is that addressing such issues by making them transparent would impact positively on students. Communicating these expectations may or may not increase the likelihood that a response to them may occur in the future. The conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that if university education is not to fall short of demands made by the labour market, it has to align all the three types of knowledge, professional, academic and general, so that what graduates fall shot of in dealing with challenges in the workplace they can complement with others types of knowledge. Without this, the status of university

education may deteriorate dramatically. Arguably, the decline may have more impact on the quality of education provided by universities and its failure to provide graduates who can help to expand the growth of economies and sustain them.

**Globalization and restructuring of the labour market**

There is a large issue for debate revolving around study as the basis of qualification. A level of global consensus has formed around the need for knowledge and skills on which work centers. New global developments have such a pervasive impact on people's lives, increasingly operating against people who lack the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the development of the economy (Blaug, 1987; Carnoy, 1999; Carnoy & Castells, 2001; Pitcher & Purcell, 1998). These new global developments called for the labour market to be structured in a way to embrace these changes. (Carnoy, 1999)

Carnoy (1999:6) claims that the main ingredient in these new services is the knowledge that increases productivity, providing a closer fit between a client's specific needs and the services delivered, and creating possibilities for developing new products and new services. The restructuring of knowledge in this way has profound implications for learning, meaning that there is no time that one would actually say "I have completed my studies". There is a need for continued or lifelong learning, so as to be always abreast with the changing times. To a greater extent, this restructuring of knowledge has implications for university programmes. There is now a need, more than ever, to work across faculties, disciplines and across subjects, so that students would not necessarily have to specialise in one discipline but could also become knowledgeable in others. This may actually shape one's perception of life in a radically different way, because then one might start seeing the commonality of things in a way not possible through a single disciplinary approach.

Globalization, as articulated by Oman (1996), is seen as a catalyst to the increased movement of goods and services, including that of people, in the form of migration. This Oman (1996) further goes on to say makes the distance between countries, regions, villages, towns and, indeed, workplaces themselves, an increasingly affordable one that can easily be attained. It is for this reason that Carnoy (1999:8) maintains that in response to globalization, organizational restructuring will by and

large affect the traditionally held assumptions about career opportunities of graduates. A job may not necessarily mean the same thing it did before. This is linked to the notion of preferences and choices, as envisaged in the new global era. Unlike the past, when it was not easy to change jobs, those lucky enough to obtain higher education qualifications are now at an advantage in being able to do so (Blaug, 1987, Carnoy, 1999).

**Theories of education and the labour market**

Contrary to the traditional form of life that prevailed in the past, when the amount of income one earned was associated with one's material possession, in modern society material possession has consequently been replaced by earned income, on the basis of ones' educational attainment (Varghese, 1982). The analysis of this scenario reveals that individuals' share of income is unevenly distributed in society, due to different levels of educational attainment. The implication here is that those with higher levels of education are bound to earn more, while those with lower levels will earn lower salaries. This would explain why higher education is suddenly gaining popularity, and to a greater extent echoes concerns initially held by reformers of schooling that education perpetuates inequalities (Mckay, 1995). A study by Siphambe (2000:14) on "Education and the labour market in Botswana", confirms these assertions. Siphambe's study concluded that earnings in Botswana's labour market show differences in, among other things, the type of organization and educational attainment.

In support of Varghase's (1982) assertion, Blaug (1987) maintains that a major view of the human capital theory is that when comparing earnings of any two groups of individuals, the more educated will definitely earn higher salaries than the less educated. In particular, Blaug (1987) believes that investment in education is generally correlated with the growth and development of the economy at the individual as well as the national levels. The indication here is that the individual has an advantage over higher education as it may affect his/her income earning positively, while the economy will benefit in terms of increased production. Indeed Blaug (1987:96) tried to explain the correlation between earnings and levels of educational attainment:

> Employers pay educated people more, even when their education has taught them no specific skills, because they are more achievement-motivated, more self-reliant, act with greater initiative in problem solving situations, adapt themselves more easily to changing circumstances, assume supervisory responsibility more quickly, and benefit more from work experience and on-the-job training.

A study by Siphambe's (1999:414) on "Educational certification and earnings: evidence from Botswana" noted "that qualification plays an important role in determining wages". Since education is made a determinant of employment and earnings in particular, this means that the affluently educated are bound to secure jobs and earn much more than their less educated counterparts (Bhaduri, 1978). This creates a complicated set up between education and employment, which led scholars of education to try and establish what the cause of this complication may be. To this end, they developed a number of theories concerning education and employment, particularly in relation to one's earnings in the labour market. These theories are presented below.

**The cognitive skill development hypothesis**

This hypothesis was developed by those who support the human capital theory (Becker, 1964; Mencer, 1974; Schultz, 1961). The underlying assumption behind this theory is that the highly educated have the capacity to make a meaningful contribution in the workplace. Through education, according to Varghese (1982), individuals develop cognitive skills, which in turn may enhance job production. As a result, employers reward workers, based on this belief. In short, as Blaug (1987) puts it, employers expect the highly educated to be more productive than less educated people. This suggests that those who are more likely to benefit from higher education are those who are highly educated. All the highly educated need to do is to sell their skills to the labour market.

However, this assertion is problematic since it renders income distribution in society as a monopoly of a few, highly educated, individuals. As Varghese (1982) further argues, in such cases education becomes an employment barrier. Emphasis on highly educated people entering the labour market will increasingly ensure that those who do not have the required qualifications become marginalised, as only those who are highly certified will be considered for employment.

**The affective skill development model**

The affective skill development model, proposed by Bowles and Gintis (1975), assumes that the labour market is affected by the way the education system socialises students. The belief here is that from the process of schooling (education), students come to develop a variety of characteristics, which may ultimately influence their capacity to be productive in their job settings. In support of Bowles and Gintis, Varghese (1982:12) asserts that "education is used as an instrument of social reproduction and the role of education is to inculcate certain affective traits through the structural correspondence between education and the production sectors."

**The screening and signaling model**

The screening hypothesis was developed by Arrow (1973), while the signaling hypothesis was developed by Spencer (1973). The two writers maintain that being educated nearly equals being talented, and that with their talents, the educated can increase production in the workplace. A degree or any form of qualification is seen as a benchmark through which employers come to select potential employees. Employers believe that if candidates passed in any form of higher education, it would be easier for them to learn the needed skills in the labour market. In essence, during the process of employment; employers do not have any information regarding the capability of individuals to deliver services, hence their heavy reliance on education as a screening device through approved certificates.

In support of the above two writers, Varghese (1982) argues that education acts as an instrument for pushing to the fore the potentially productive, rather than relating it directly to production. Varghese's projection of the theory is actually one that does not support the idea of higher education equipping students with work-related skills. According to him, increased earnings in the labour market are due to skills that employees learned and mastered in the work place, rather than those that were developed through the courses. The implication here is that higher education just presents employers with potential candidates for employment from which to choose, thereby preparing them and rewarding them accordingly. Siphambe (1999) showed the prevalence of screening in Botswana, concluding that people educate themselves to earn more rather than to be productive in the workplace, albeit the latter may be the case in the process.

**The job-competition model**

The job-competition model, according to Thurow (1975), is dependent on the capacity of individuals to respond to training on the job. This model maintains that education awards students some form of certification, rather than equipping them with skills needed in the labour market. Since individuals are perceived to be highly qualified, the model claims that it guarantees that they are indeed better placed to learn on-the-job skills. Employers to this end believe that by recruiting graduates they are reducing training costs (Blaug, 1987), as the educated would be quick to pick up the needed skills in the workplace. Trainability therefore precedes employment and higher education is seen as an important determinant of training.

In support of Thurow (1975), Varghese asserts that employers see hiring educated individuals as advantageous, in that they would then spend less towards their training costs, the employees having proved their competency to learn through higher education, with certificates as proof of attainment. This would give the educated a better chance to get more rewarding jobs.

**The bumping and pooling hypothesis**

The 'bumping and pooling' model maintains that employers adhere to a certain pattern of values when hiring employees (Varghese, 1982). These preferred practices inform employers on how to financially compensate workers. As with the cognitive skill model, the bumping and pooling model believes that being highly educated will enhance production in the workplace. Varghese (1982) claims that the model awards individuals equal opportunities of acquiring higher levels of educational attainment. All that individuals have to do is to educate themselves in order to increase their chances of being given priority in the labour market. Workers, according to this model, are classified as educated or uneducated, skilled or unskilled (Fields, 1974). Employers choose to hire people on the basis of their education, as this is seen as an important tool for production in the workplace. In this kind of set-up, as Varghese (1982) puts it, the educated enjoy the benefits of a good pay structure and individuals are paid better, as a result of the priority they experience during the process of hiring, than merited by their capacity to produce.

The model encourages competition and increases the chances of the highly educated in society. However, this poses problems for the highly educated, because if the labour market experiences an influx of graduates, those highly educated will be forced to settle for jobs they are more qualified for. The effects of this change will be felt by the less educated, who will be pushed out of their jobs by those better educated, as the hiring process will favour them.

**The job-ladder model**

According to Varghese (1982), the principle behind the job-ladder model is fairness, based as it is on the level of educational attainment individuals possess. As a result, the more educated have a chance of securing employment. The implication with this kind of thinking is that the educated have invested their time, effort and money in their education and so deserve to be appropriately compensated for their sacrifices. This model also encourages competition, as individuals are forced to upgrade their educational achievements in order for them to get better paying jobs. This is important not only for their personal gains in terms of earnings, but also because education is seen as a prerequisite for employment. If applicants are not qualified enough they may find themselves jobless, as all the jobs may have been filled by the highly educated.

**The segmented labour market model**

In this theory, Varghese (1982) maintains that earnings are largely influenced by socio-institutional factors, rather than the capacity of individuals to be productive in the workplace. This, by and large, links wages to jobs rather than individuals, and because of this education does not seem to be playing any significant role in the labour market. Education is seen as one of the factors that influence workers wages and is not a prerequisite. The relationship between education and productivity is an artificial one, as there are powerful people in society who ensure that there exist in society hierarchies, inequalities, and discrimination (Sanyal, 1985).

Bowles (1972) supports Varghese's (1982) view and acknowledges that there exists some minimal relationship between education and earnings. He maintains that this theory is a derivative of the correlation between socio-economic background and the educational attainment of individuals. It is claimed that those who are better educated in society are those who come from middle class families. This theory refutes the

claim that higher levels of education influence employee wages. The theory maintains for those who are highly paid, their socio-economic backgrounds played a leading role in enabling them to progress to higher levels of education.

**Conclusion and conceptual framework**

Debates in literature maintain that there may be contextual issues that mediate the relationship between education and employment. For social and economic development to be realized, reformers claim that the education system should be restructured to provide the skills needed to do so. This is also necessary for individual students as they may be able to progress in life. Higher education is expected to develop students in ways that will enable them to meet these demands. Traditionally, the labour market dictated career choices for graduates. Students enrolled in higher education with the understanding that they would get a particular job on completion of their studies. In other words, graduates depended on the labour market for employment. Even then, the options for changing jobs were minimal or non-existent. This led graduates to stay in one job for most of their working life. The labour market has since been restructured in a radically different way, due in part to globalization .

This literature review outlined current debates in education and the labour market, and in so doing highlighted the fact that they serve an important purpose. New trends in the labour market are those of highly knowledgeable and skilled labourers, with graduates increasingly in demand. As a result, today, there is more mobility of labour as graduates have and can dictate their own terms of employment. This may actually help explain why graduates make particular employment preferences and choices. As a result of these new trends, loyalty to employer has also declined in comparison to loyalty to self. This implies that the more skills one possesses, the more choices one has in terms of what one wishes to do. There is therefore greater flexibility that skilled labourers enjoy due to the fact that work is more open and market driven.

The highly skilled do not only enjoy mobility and flexibility in the labour market, to a larger extent they also enjoy autonomy. Graduates have autonomy to either stay in one job or move on to the next, depending on whether there are better job prospects elsewhere. Nowadays, graduates can also negotiate employment terms with employers and all this is linked to globalization. To a larger extent this creates

consequences for the type of worker needed in the labour market in this new era. Globalization highlights this, and points to a prominence of high knowledge and skills, particularly those related to technology, mathematics and science.

With reference to the inter-play of these facts, the study looks at the relationship between the university degree and the labour market, in order to find out what influences career preferences and choices of the graduates. What follows are the key aspects of my theoretical framework.

**Theoretical framework**

The theoretical starting point of the study is to find out how university degrees influence the career paths and workplace practice of graduates. A variety of frames have been proposed by differing schools of thought, through which one could better understand the relationship between the degree and the labour market. Drawing on these, the key points that inform my framework are:

1) The complex nature of the relationship between the degree and the labour market.
2) Flexibility, mobility and autonomy as enjoyed by graduates.
3) An increasing demand of higher knowledge and skills, especially in mathematics; science and technology.

To clarify these presuppositions, the study drew on the work of Blaug (1987), Castells and Carnoy (1999, 2001), Roizen and Jepson (1985) and Squires (1990). It was not possible to draw on studies on education and the labour market in Botswana as most of them proved to be irrelevant for this study. Studies in Botswana on education and employment concentrated on school leavers at primary and secondary schools, with the aim of establishing the extent to which these groups are employable in the labour market. No focus has yet been placed on graduate labour.

**The complex nature of the relationship between university degrees and the workplace**

This study is based on the presupposition that university degrees influence career paths of graduates in complex ways. The emerging picture of the relationship between university degrees and the labour market is an increasingly complex one, with much of the complexity primarily resting on a number of factors. These include changes which take place within the labour market. These changes could be cyclical, as Squires (1990) put it, having to do with the fast growth or depression of the economy of a given country. Other changes, which are structural in nature, have to do with employment patterns, involving changes in the content of work and in the level of work.

The argument presented above implies that graduates should by and large possess skills and knowledge that will enable them to respond positively to such changes. The study conducted by Roizen and Jepson (1985) becomes useful in this instance as it highlights the importance of university education in equipping students with skills that are 'enabling' and 'transferable'. According to these writers, on completion of their studies graduates should be able to adequately utilise the knowledge and skills learnt through the courses so as to handle complex situations in the workplace. However, because of the labour market, even if the course provides good knowledge and skills; the labour market may demand other things, such as employers being content that having a degree equals good education. Therefore they may just hire graduates based on this belief.

**Flexibility, mobility and autonomy as enjoyed by graduates**

Blaug (1987) and Castells and Carnoy (2001), on the other hand, maintain that due to the demands of globalization the labour market has changed. According to them the main feature in this global era is knowledge. Knowledge and information seem to have suddenly gained popularity. The networking of states due to globalization has ensured that knowledge and information can be accessed to a greater level. Initially, in many states this was not possible because they were experiencing a lot of problems that did not allow them to access this knowledge and information. Nowadays, individuals can also invest in education so as to acquire higher knowledge and skills

that can put them in the same arena as other countries. These changes affect the labour market in profound ways.

The labour market now is characterised by mobility, flexibility and autonomy, as articulated by Blaug (1987: 86) and Carnoy (1999: 8). Possession of high knowledge and skills has become an important tool for graduates, it being the one that gives them the autonomy to have a range of job choices and preferences (Blaug, 1987; Carnoy, 1999; Squire, 1990). This also puts graduates at the upper end of the negotiating table, enabling them to sell their skills at the highest price in the market and freeing them to move between jobs (Blaug, 1987, Carnoy, 1999). The labour market has become more flexible (Carnoy, 1999), allowing graduates to do whatever they want to do, since they have the necessary knowledge and skills needed. This study strives to find out what influences the choices and preferences of the graduates in job selection.

In practice, this mobility, flexibility and autonomy can assume the form of substitution, because, more often than not, people end up working in jobs for which they were not trained. This represents a shift in paradigm, brought about by the fact that at times there are shortages of skilled people and at times an abundance of supply in manpower (Squires, 1990). Where there is shortage of manpower, situations arise in which people find themselves working for jobs for which they are under-qualified (Squires, 1990). In cases where there is a high supply of manpower, on the other hand, highly qualified people are working in non-graduate jobs. This leads to systematic displacement of workers as graduates are to a larger extent perceived to be in position to do just about anything.

**An increasing demand for higher knowledge and skills**

Lastly, Castells and Carnoy (2001) maintain that in this new information and knowledge era, there is an increasing demand for people who have training in technological subjects, notably mathematics, science and technology. The new neo liberal market is one that is characterised by open markets, now open to competition. This implies that more people need to be more competent for them to be competitive, especially in more economically productive subjects such as mathematics and science, technology and business. Graduates therefore need to be equipped with knowledge and skills in these technological subjects, so that they can go out and compete in the

world of work. Knowledge of these technological subjects will give the graduates the prominence and status they need to impress employers, be competitive and thereby secure the jobs they prefer.

These theories provided a framework with which to analyze the choices that both the graduates and employers make. More importantly, the works of Squires (1990), Castells and Carnoy (1990), and Roizen and Jepson (1985), contribute immensely to my study, since they have the capacity to explain why degrees do different things, why employers demand certain kinds of workers and why graduates themselves opt to do certain things as opposed to others.