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Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities Graduates Pursuing Postgraduates Studies in South African Higher Education Institutions

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Course assignment title: Masters Research Report

Protocol Number: SOCL-2024-04

Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities Graduates Pursuing Postgraduates Studies in South African Higher Education Institutions

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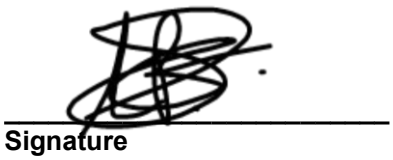
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Declaration

I, Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi, hereby declare that this research report is my original, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Sociology degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This work has not been submitted previously for any degree of qualification at this or any other university.

Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi



Signature

Date: 15 February 2025

Dedication

This research is a dedication to all Humanities graduates in various South African higher education institution who are and/or have experienced unemployment.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I give all glory and honour to God, whose presence has been my source of strength throughout this journey. His word Isaiah 41:10 *"fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* has been my anchor in moments of uncertainty. It is through His will, mercy and grace that I had the opportunity to embark on and complete this master's program.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Thabang Sefalafala and Professor David Dickinson, for their invaluable expertise, constant guidance, and unwavering support. Their encouragement during challenging moments and their insightful advice were instrumental in keeping me motivated and focused on my goals. Their mentor ship has been a guiding light throughout the research process, and I am deeply grateful for their dedication.

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To everyone who played a role, no matter how small in helping I realize this dream- Thank you. This accomplishment is a testament to the collective love, faith and support that surrounded me at every step of the way.

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List of Acronyms

BEE- Black Economic Empowerment

B-BBEE- Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment

COVID 19- Corona Virus Disease of 2019

CSO- Central Statistical Office

CW- Corruption Watch

G20- Group of Twenty

GEAR- Growth, Employment and Redistribution Policy

NDP- National Development Plan

NRF- National Research Foundation

ILO- International Labour Organization

NGO - non-governmental organizations

NPO- non-profit organization

NEET- Not in Education, Employment or Training

QLFS- Quarterly Labour Force Survey

SACAP- South African College of Applied Psychology

SRD- Social Relief of Distress grant

UCT- University of Cape Town UFS-

University of Free State

UJ- University of Johannesburg

UN- United Nations

UNISA- University of South Africa

UP- University of Pretoria

WITS- University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Youth unemployment is a significant issue in South Africa, with substantial impacts on the economy and societal stability. High unemployment in countries like South Africa is a major economic concern due to the widespread social and economic problems it creates (Oluwajofu et al., 2015). This is because it reduces overall economic wellbeing, lowers production, and weakens the skills and knowledge of the workforce. Furthermore, even among graduates, unemployment remains a pressing issue, highlighting the mismatch between educational outcomes and labour needs (Jones et al., 2024; Mseleku, 2021; Yezengaw, 2018). Although

unemployment is a more significant problem for young South Africans with lower or no qualifications, the growing number of unemployed graduates is also becoming a pressing concern (Kingdon & Knight, 2007). While unemployment remains disproportionately high among young South Africans with lower qualifications, as highlighted in the latest SA Quarterly Labour force Survey at 9.6%, the escalating number of unemployed graduates poses a growing concern

"While some studies might reveal the high unemployment rate in South Africa, there is no denying that it is a significant challenge for young graduates" (Terrance, 2024). A study by Mokhali Lesaoana (2023) on graduate's unemployment highlighted that there is a disagreement among researchers about how serious graduate unemployment is in South Africa. This research will provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of unemployed Humanities graduates who are pursuing postgraduate's studies. Moreover, it aims to cover the nuanced challenges they encounter in seeking employment after their undergraduate qualifications. It is important to study this further because even though there are studies about how graduates holding the following qualifications; human resources, industrial psychology, labour relations management, public administration, public management and politics have to wait long to secure employment (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016) the question remains why do some of these humanities graduates seek to further their postgraduate studies.¶

This study will explore the question of why unemployed Humanities graduates choose to further their postgraduate's studies and understand the challenges they face in finding employment after their undergraduate degree. Drawing from Craig Jeffrey (2010) study of unemployed young men in the North Indian city of Meerut, Rajesh, a man in his early thirties, spent thirteen years at Meerut College in North India. During this time, he earned multiple degrees in Humanities, including a PhD. Despite his impressive qualifications, Rajesh is unemployed and describes himself as merely passing time. He seems to have adopted a lifestyle of idleness as a kind of social identity. Therefore, this study aims at understanding why do most Humanities graduates choose to further their studies.

Lastly, this study will further explain how wage labour experiences (or lack thereof) might have influenced Humanities graduates to pursue their postgraduate qualifications to acquire skills that could make them more competitive in the wage labour market in the future. Students who are currently pursuing their Humanities postgraduate's studies who did not get employed immediately after their junior qualifications will be interviewed. A study by Michelle Vanessa Yenou Mouchipku (2019) about employability of Humanities graduates in South Africa focused on understanding the employability trends among humanities graduates in South Africa and providing recommendations on how to make them employable it relied heavily on the employment statistics from UJ Humanities students and no other South African University institutions. This study offers important insights into the intersection of higher education qualifications and employability

outcomes in the Humanities. Mouchipku's findings align with this study in emphasizing structural labour market constraints, the undervaluation of Humanities skills, and the persistent mismatch between graduate aspirations and employment realities. By engaging directly with this work, the present study situates its findings within a broader discourse that underscores systematic rather than purely individual determinants of graduate unemployment.

Moreover, Jeena (2017) asserts that, "high numbers of Humanities students are left unemployed." It is worthwhile to investigate the reasons why students in South African humanities department choose to pursue further studies after completing their undergraduate degrees. As highlighted by Alias (2014), current skills training initiatives in South Africa have limited effectiveness in reducing unemployment. This is largely due to an overemphasis on addressing skill mismatch while overlooking the broader social and economic factors that contribute to unemployment. Recognizing this limitation, this study aims to investigate the motivations behind Humanities graduates' pursuit of postgraduate degrees. Furthermore, it will delve into the deeper economic forces that contribute to unemployment among graduates in this field.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite South Africa's efforts to alleviate poverty and reduce unemployment through various social protection programs, the unemployment rate remains persistently high, with the official unemployment rate now standing at 32.9% up from 32.1% in the last quarter of 2023 (Stats SA, 2024). As of the latest Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2024) report, the unemployment rate among graduates is 9.7% and notably concerning, however this statistics changes over time. According to statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate for university graduates between the ages 15 and 34 was an astounding 33.6% in the first quarter of 2023, however currently unemployment rate among young individuals (aged 15-34 years) is 45,5 %, in contrast to the national average of 32,9% in the first quarter of 2024. This suggest that about one in three of these age group's university graduates are having trouble finding work. In 2024, South Africa faced a significant crisis with many newly qualified doctors remaining unemployed despite having completed their community service (SA News, 2024). The recent economic slump caused by COVID-19 has made it harder for graduates to find jobs (Olabiyi, 2021:112; Rotimi, Enimola, and Ochidi, 2021:61). As such, this puts pressure on universities to prepare students with skills that go beyond their degrees, this way graduates can be more creative and find work or even create their own jobs (IgbokweIbeto, Agbodike, and Osakede, 2018:1). Regardless of, the high prevalence of graduate unemployment and studies by Michelle Vanessa Yenou Mouchipku (2019) on understanding employment trends among humanities graduates in South Africa, there is limited understanding of how unemployed Humanities graduates perceive their current situation and the factors influencing their decision to further their studies. This knowledge gap hampers the development of effective interventions and policies to support these graduates.

1.3 Justification of the Study

This study will inform policymakers, educational institutions, Humanities graduates on the importance of furthering their postgraduate studies, and support organizations about specific needs and challenges faced by Humanities undergraduate degree holders, aiding in development of targeted support mechanisms. Given the statistics above on the high rate of youth unemployment in South Africa and relevant studies addressing graduate unemployment. According to Fongwa (2018) and Van Der Berg & Van Broekhuizen (2012), graduates with degrees in Humanities and Arts tend to face longer job search times compared to graduates in the fields like engineering. This suggests that Humanities and Arts graduates may take a while to be absorbed into the workforce after finishing their studies, while engineers can find jobs relatively quickly. This study sheds light on the specific challenges that led Humanities undergraduate degree holders to pursue their postgraduate studies. This study will reveal whether unemployed graduates believe postgraduate degrees enhance their employability or lead to over qualification in the South African context and if it is important to pursue a postgraduate degree in Humanities for better employment opportunities. Examining which postgraduate programs graduates find most valuable can inform universities on tailoring programs to better address job market needs.

1.4 Research Objectives

This research delves into the experiences and perspectives of unemployment among Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies in South African higher education institutions. Recognizing the significant lack of both qualitative and quantitative studies addressing the reasons and importance for Humanities graduates to choose to further their studies, this research seeks to explore the central question: *Why do Humanities graduates with an undergraduate qualification decide to pursue postgraduate studies?*

In the context of limited unemployment opportunities in South Africa, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore how unemployment has motivated university graduates to pursue postgraduate studies.
2. To examine the lived experiences of unemployment among graduates
3. To investigate why postgraduates, feel compelled to pursue postgraduate studies and whether doing so enhances their job prospects after completing their postgraduate degrees.

1.5 Structural Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

This chapter provides an overview of the study, situating it within the broader context of youth and graduate unemployment in South Africa. It highlights the persistent socio-economic challenges that disproportionately affect Humanities graduates, examining systemic factors such as structural inequalities, labor market

misalignment, and the undervaluation of Humanities qualifications. The chapter introduces the research objectives, questions, and rationale, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive exploration of the coping mechanisms employed by unemployed graduates.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The methodology chapter outlines the qualitative approach adopted for this study, emphasizing the use of indepth interviews and surveys to gather rich, nuanced data. It discusses the sampling methods, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques employed, ensuring credibility and dependability. The chapter also acknowledges the limitations of the study, such as participant recruitment challenges and reliance on specific South African institutions, while justifying the chosen methods as suitable for addressing the research questions.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter examines existing literature on graduate unemployment, focusing on international and South African contexts. It explores themes such as structural racism, the precarity of wage labour, and coping strategies like pursuing further studies and qualification diversification. The chapter also integrates Nyerere's concept of self-reliance and cooperative economics, situating the study within broader theoretical and policy debates about addressing unemployment among Humanities graduates.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

Drawing on thematic content analysis, this chapter presents the findings of the study, categorized into key themes such as skill diversification, further studies, and the pursuit of global opportunities. It provides detailed participant narratives to illuminate the lived experiences of unemployment and coping strategies. The chapter critically analyses these findings, linking them to the study's theoretical framework and existing literature to highlight systemic challenges and individual agency.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter synthesizes the study's key findings, emphasizing the resilience and adaptability of Humanities graduates in navigating unemployment. It discusses policy implications, advocating for systemic reforms in higher education and labor market alignment. The chapter also outlines recommendations for future research, addressing gaps in understanding the specific experiences and strategies of unemployed Humanities graduates in South Africa.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The qualitative study utilized face-to-face and online in-depth interviews, guided by an interview schedule. All interactions with participants were conducted in English, as all respondents were proficient in the language. Twelve interviews were conducted in total: Six interviews were conducted on the Wits University campus with postgraduate Humanities students, following approval from the faculty registrar to carry out the research on university premises. The remaining six interviews were held online via Google Meet, as some participants were enrolled at other South African higher education institutions. The interviews lasted approximately 1 to 1 hour and 30 minutes each.

This study utilised a purposive sample of twelve (12) participants who were selected from among Humanities graduates willing to participate following the survey phase. While initial recruitment efforts targeted a broader pool of potential participants, responses plateaued at twelve. The data collected revealed substantial thematic overlap among participants' accounts, indicating data saturation, a point at which no new insights were emerging.

In qualitative research, sample adequacy is assessed in relation to the richness and depth of the data rather than the numerical size alone. Given the study's exploratory focus and the homogeneity of participants' experiences, the sample of twelve is adequate for the purpose and scope of the study and is commensurate with the findings and conclusions drawn.

Although qualitative data analysis is inherently open-ended, this study adopted an inductive approach as recommended by Creswell (2018). This approach involved organizing, coding, and interpreting data from the ground up, focusing on identifying themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, 2018).

The sample was biased toward educated youth with tertiary qualifications, excluding those without formal education. This limitation arises because individuals with tertiary qualifications are not the only ones seeking employment, even though they may pursue similar aspirations in the job market. Furthermore, thematic content analysis (TCA), as articulated by Arye & McCaffery (2022), was employed in this study. Key elements of qualitative research- credibility, dependability and confirmability- were upheld using data triangulation. Credibility was achieved by sharing my interpretations and a summary of findings with participants to confirm that they accurately represent their experience. Under the analysis and findings chapter I have provided detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and findings to give readers enough context to judge the validity of my conclusion. Dependability was achieved by keeping a detailed documentation of all steps in this research process, including raw data, analysis notes and decisions made during the study. My supervisor also reviewed my work and provided constructive feedback on my methodology and interpretations and lastly

confirmability was observed by constantly reflecting on my biases, values and assumptions throughout the research process to ascertain that they do not influence the findings of this research. I used transparent data analysis by providing an overview and table 1 providing the list for categories and themes that emerged when analysing the 12 interview transcripts. Furthermore, verbatim quotes under the analysis and findings chapter were used from the participants of this study to support my interpretations and that findings are grounded in the data.

2.2 Research Design/ Qualitative Research

"A qualitative study is a constant process in which improved understanding to the studied community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied" (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Weiss,1995). According to Smith & Jones (2018), a quantitative study involves collecting and analysing numerical data to understand phenomena, relationships, or trends. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative study is called a mixed methods design.

This study uses the two approaches since in-depth interviews will be conducted which are a method to administer qualitative research and surveys will also be used as to derive participants for the study. Surveys are a method to collect data using a quantitative approach. This research will investigate the perspectives of previously unemployed? Humanities graduates in various institutions in South Africa who have obtained an undergraduate degree and are currently pursuing their postgraduate studies.

2.3 Justification for using a Qualitative Design

2.4 Population Sample

For this study, unemployed graduates from various Higher education institutions in South Africa who are currently pursuing their postgraduate studies in Humanities and who hold an undergraduate qualification in Humanities and are actively seeking employment were used as the population of this study.

2.5 Sampling method

Non-probability sampling method

Purposive sampling method

The participants for this study comprised of ten females and two males. The criteria that were used to determine the participants for this study were:

Participants of this research study ranged between the ages 23 to 35 which means they are youth (Stats SA, 2024), even though in South Africa, the term "youth" is defined as individuals aged 15-34 years, this definition

is based on the National Youth Commission Act of 1996, which specifies the youth age group as 14 to 35 years. It is worth noting that definitions of youth can vary by country and organization. The second criteria were that they hold an undergraduate qualification in Humanities from any institution. A country was not specified for the purposes of majoring unemployment rates among the Humanities graduates in other African countries. The participants were from various Higher Education institutions in South Africa and currently pursuing their postgraduate studies in Humanities. And lastly, the graduates needed to have previously or are currently unemployed despite pursuing postgraduate studies.

The participants of this research ranged between the ages of 23 and 35, comprising ten females and two males (Thabo and Vishal). Vishal is Indian, one female (Emily) is classified as White, while the remaining ten participants are Black Africans. Among them, two participants are foreign nationals: Nomvula from Zimbabwe and Zanele from the Kingdom of Eswatini they are both furthering their postgraduate studies in South African higher institutions. The other ten participants are South African citizens.

Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality. Most participants identified as middle class, except for Thabo, who classified himself as a poor working class individual, citing his upbringing in Alexandra, Johannesburg and Lisa who classified herself as Upper working class, citing that majority of her family members from parents, siblings to uncles and aunts have a university qualification, they mostly studied the STEM qualifications and her mother relocated to the United States and has a business there she is the only odd one out studying Humanities among her family as she joked about it.

2.6 Data Collection Techniques

For the purpose of this research, data collection was conducted through a combination of in-depth interviews and online surveys, the survey was shared through the Faculty of Humanities mail, on my WhatsApp and LinkedIn. There was no specific number that I had intended as surveys were used as a recruitment tool and only 12 people responded showing interest to participate in the study. These methods were employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and to capture nuanced perspectives from the participants.

2.7 Surveys and Interviews

2.7.1 Probes in qualitative interviews and surveys

In-depth interviews were implored as they allowed the participants to share their thoughts and experiences as Humanities undergraduate degree holders about the reasons, they opted to further their postgraduate studies. In depth interview's work is not as concerned with generalizing to a larger population of interest but rather it is more logical in its process (Dworkin, 2012; Weiss, 1995). The aim of the in-depth interview is to create

themes from the data and then analyse relationships between these themes while intending to answer how the lived experiences of research participants can be understood.

2.8 Data transcription and analysis

The data were thematically analysed using the NVivo software program. Braun & Clarke (2006) contends that thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns (themes) within data. It is widely used in qualitative research for its flexibility and ability to provide rich, detailed and complex accounts of data. The 12 transcribed interviews each with 13 pages were read and re-read to become deeply immersed as a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done to be able to use NVivo a qualitative data analysis software that supports thematic analysis by organizing, coding and analysing data systematically (Bellotto, 2018). To use this software, it must be installed in your Personal computer. I used my credentials from my former higher education institution to be able to access and use the features of this software programme. Step to step guideline used:

1. Data Preparation and Familiarization:

- Begin by importing your qualitative data (e.g., interview transcripts, focus group discussions) into NVivo.
- Thoroughly familiarize yourself with the dataset by carefully reviewing all the data.

2. Data Coding:

- Create nodes within NVivo to represent specific codes or categories.
- Code relevant segments of text within the data to these nodes, effectively grouping similar ideas and concepts together.

3. Initial Theme Identification:

- Organize related codes into broader categories or themes.
- This can be achieved by grouping nodes under parent nodes or creating hierarchical tree structures within the NVivo software.

4. Theme Refinement and Visualization:

- Utilize NVivo's analytical tools (e.g., matrix queries, coding comparisons, cluster analysis) to refine and ensure the consistency of identified themes.
- Visually represent the relationships between themes using tools like mind maps or word clouds.

5. Defining and Describing Themes:

- Clearly define the scope and focus of each identified theme.
- Revisit the coded data to gain deeper insights into each theme.
- Utilize NVivo's annotation and memo functions to record and document your observations and interpretations.

6. Report Production and Integration:

- Export coding reports and utilize direct quotes from the NVivo software to support and substantiate the themes presented in your analysis.
- Seamlessly integrate NVivo outputs and findings into your written research report.

To analyse the qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was employed, utilizing NVivo for data management and coding (Bellotto, 2018). This involved identifying and coding recurring words and phrases with similar meanings across all twelve participant transcripts. This process facilitated the organization of the voluminous data into a more manageable and structured format. By examining the interconnections between these coded segments, key themes emerged from the data.

After completing the coding of all transcripts (approximately 180 pages), a systematic approach was required to analyse the overall content. Given the substantial volume of data and the lack of readily available guidance for managing such a large dataset, a customized thematic analysis table was developed. This table enabled the categorization of data by mapping each participant to their associated codes, generated by NVivo. This approach proved effective in grouping related data into meaningful clusters.

Upon completing the coding of all 12 transcripts, I advanced to the next stage of data analysis. This required developing a structured approach to interpret the overall content of the data. Initially, the task of making sense of approximately 180 pages of transcribed text felt overwhelming. Drawing from Bellotto (2018) for guidance on managing large datasets, I constructed a table that mapped each code to the corresponding participant. Using this table, I grouped related data points into clusters. Since the coding was guided by my research questions, patterns began to emerge, allowing me to identify categories. I further analysed these patterns for overarching themes, as suggested by Bellotto (2018). When additional layers of meaning appeared, they were categorized as secondary themes. For instance, systemic racism and corruption emerged as primary themes, while participants also highlighted specific issues like nepotism, bribery, and the hiring of family members in government spaces, as well as the absence of personal networks in corporate environments, which were classified as secondary themes related to structural and systemic employment barriers. Given the subjective nature of these challenges, I incorporated direct quotes from participants to support the rationale for each theme. This aggregated analysis helped in distinguishing various trends across participant experiences, thereby facilitating the identification of primary and secondary themes, as shown in Table 1.

I then interpreted the data by examining how the emerging themes responded to my research questions and whether my initial assumptions were validated. I also considered disconfirming cases—instances where individual experiences appeared to challenge the patterns identified. For example, one participant, who did not view further postgraduate studies as a strategy for better employability, explained that his decision to pursue further studies was unrelated to unemployment. Upon deeper analysis, it became evident that this participant, an African male, had access to employment through personal connections. Exploring such contradictory experiences enriched the credibility of the study's findings, as recommended by Bellotto (2018).

Fifty percent of the data collected was transcribed using Otter AI software, while the remaining fifty percent was transcribed using the Microsoft word voice recorder. This transcription process was extensive and timeintensive, as it requires significant editing to address the limitations of these tools. Both software applications were only capable of detecting English, which excluded other African languages used by participants. Additionally, the English transcription was often inaccurate, necessitating manual verification.

To ensure the accuracy of the data, audio recordings were replayed multiple times, and follow ups were conducted with participants to clarify any ambiguous or missing information. All transcripts were carefully reviewed and stripped of any identifying information to maintain participant privacy and confidentiality. To further protect anonymity participants were given the option to provide pseudonyms, which were used in place of their real names throughout the research process.

Table 1: Emerging Categories and Themes

Categories	**Primary Themes**	**Secondary Themes**
Structural and systematic barriers	Systematic racism and corruption	Nepotism, bribery and personal connections
Employment Strategies	Diversification of qualifications	Interdisciplinary studies in governance, psychometry, economics
Adaptive responses	Further studies post-unemployment	Shift towards global opportunities (e.g., UN, G20)
Economic solutions	Cooperative economics (Ujamaa)	Perceived exclusion and fairness in employment opportunities
Global career trajectories	International opportunities	Work abroad, exposure through global platforms

2.9 Ethical consideration and Participant Recruitment

This research study titled **Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities Graduates Pursuing Postgraduates Studies in South African Higher Education Institutions** received ethical clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Social Science Non-Medical Ethics Review Board (Protocol number SOCL-2024-04). Permission to conduct the research at the WITS premises was granted by the office of the Deputy Registrar on the 26th of August 2024 (see Appendix A and B), authorizing the use of university premises and the involvement of students as research participants. The research adhered to all university regulations governing research on campus, including the right of participants to withdraw at any time.

To ensure informed participation, a consent form and participant information sheet (see Appendix C and D) were distributed to participants before the in-depth interviews. These documents provided an overview of the research objectives, including the aim to explore the motivation of Humanities faculty graduates for pursuing postgraduate studies. Participants were given ample time to review these materials and were encouraged to ask questions or seek clarification before signing the consent form.

Participants were recruited through an online survey (see Appendix F) distributed to 3156 Humanities students at Wits via student mail. To enhance outreach, the survey link was also shared on my WhatsApp and LinkedIn platforms. Individuals willing to participate were contacted and invited to join, a dedicated WhatsApp group created for communication purposes. This group facilitated the co-ordination of interview schedules and documents, such as consent forms and participants information sheet.

To uphold anonymity and confidentiality, participants were given the option to select pseudonyms, which were used instead of their real names in all group communications and documentation. Upon agreeing to participate, participants were contacted individually via the contact details they had provided in the survey to arrange suitable interview dates. Once interviews were scheduled, updates and general information were shared through the WhatsApp group to streamline communication and minimize individual notifications.

The following table with guidelines to ensure that the research does not cause any harm to participants was adhered to.

Table 2: Guidelines for Ethical Considerations

1.	NO HARM SHOULD BE CAUSED TO PARTICIPANTS
2.	Respect the dignity of participants
3.	Ensure a fully informed consent
4.	Protect participants' privacy

5.	Ensure confidentiality
6.	Protect the anonymity of participants
7.	Avoid deception
8.	Conflict of interest
9.	Maintain honesty and transparency all the time
10.	Avoid misleading and false reporting

Following the interviews, participants were asked to complete a biographical questionnaire to provide demographic details. This process was separate from the interviews to ensure the accuracy of demographic data while preserving anonymity. Participants were reminded of their rights, including the option to skip any questions they were uncomfortable answering or to withdraw without consequences. In the event of withdrawal, all data associated with the participants, including consent forms and recordings, were destroyed to maintain ethical standards.

The study strictly adheres to the ethical guidelines set out by the University of the Witwatersrand, ensuring that participant's privacy, confidentiality, and autonomy were safeguarded throughout the research process.

2.10 Study limitations

Although interviews tend to be strenuous, time-consuming, and require building rapport with research participants, they are nonetheless capable of generating rich descriptive material. On the other hand, surveys can be administered at a low cost and high speed. They are mostly virtual, interactive and flexible, not requiring interviewers to be present. Busy individuals, who are typically well-educated and well-off, are more likely to respond to survey questions posted on their computer screens (Szoknoki & Hoffman, 2013). Additionally, I used snowballing sampling, where existing participants recruited through surveys helped identify future participants from among their acquaintances.

Out of 20 survey responses, only 12 participants expressed eagerness to take part in the interviews. However, scheduling interviews with some participants became challenging due to their busy schedules. Given that I was conducting interviews with participants from different South African institutions, some interviews had to be conducted online, which occasionally led to connectivity issues. Despite these challenges, I managed to complete the interview successfully.

Moreover, while Alumni surveys could have provided a valuable comparative perspective, access to such databases, particularly from institutions where I am not alumnus proved difficult. Most alumni records are restricted and not publicly available. This limitation is acknowledged, and it is recommended that future studies with broader institutional access integrate such secondary datasets.

My interview process was hybrid, combining in-person and online sessions to accommodate the varying availability and geographical locations of participants. Balancing my own busy schedule with that of my participants was another challenge. To ensure the success of this phase, I had to be flexible and manoeuvre around my commitments to align with their availability,

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodological approach adopted for this study, highlighting the use of in-depth interviews and surveys as primary data collection methods. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, guided by the approval granted by the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Social Sciences NonMedical Ethics Review Board (Protocol Number: SOCL-2024-04) and the permission provided by the office of the Deputy Registrar. Recruitment was conducted through a combination of targeted emails, online surveys and social media platforms, ensuring diverse participant engagement.

This chapter further outlined the research design and methodology utilized to investigate the experiences of unemployed Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies in South Africa. Employing a qualitative approach, the study relied on in-depth interviews and surveys to gather rich, personal narratives from participants across various South African higher education institutions. Thematic content analysis, facilitated by NVivo software, was employed to systematically code and identify key themes within the data, ensuring a thorough and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences.

The research adhered to rigorous ethical guidelines, including informed consent, participant confidentiality, and adherence to ethical protocols. While challenges such as participant recruitment and scheduling were encountered, the hybrid approach of in-person and online interviews facilitated comprehensive data collection. The inherent limitations of qualitative research, such as potential subjectivity and connectivity issues, were acknowledged and mitigated through rigorous data integrity measures.

The adopted methodology effectively addressed the research questions and objectives. The data collected through this process provides valuable insights into the lived experiences of unemployed Humanities graduates, establishing a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of findings presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

South Africa's labour market reflects the enduring legacy of apartheid, characterized by deep-rooted systematic racism and inequality. Policies like B-BBEE, aimed at addressing racial disparities, have often fallen short of their intended goals, primarily benefiting a select elite while failing to address widespread

marginalization (von Holdt et al., 2023; Vilakazi, 2021). This is a symptomatic of broader structural constraints, including neoliberal economic policies and historical exclusion, which perpetuate unequal access to employment and opportunities across racial, class, gender and national lines.

At the individual level, these structural challenges manifest in precarity, unemployment and limited life choices. Young graduates, particularly, face significant hurdles in navigating a labor market characterized by limited opportunities and pervasive inequality (Sefalafala, 2024; Kenny, 2016). The experience of unemployment highlights complex interplay between individual agency and systematic constraints, forcing individuals to make difficult choices about their future, such as pursuing further education (Jeffreys, 2010) as a potential pathway to overcome unemployment.

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review on graduate unemployment, with a particular focus on the South African context. It examines the persistent impact of historical legacies, such as apartheid, on the current labor market, characterized by systematic inequalities and limited opportunities for graduates, particularly those in the Humanities. The review explores the challenges faced by young graduates, including mismatch between their qualifications and the demands of the labor market, and the ongoing impact of policies like Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) on addressing these disparities. By analysing both macro-level structural factors and micro-level individual experiences, this chapter provides a foundational framework for subsequent empirical analysis.

3.2 Graduate Unemployment in International context

Young people worldwide, irrespective of their geographical location-from Senegal and Greece to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Chile, Mozambique, and the United States- confront a range of challenges stemming from their unique cultural, social and political contexts (Honwana, 2019). This phenomenon, termed “waithood” by (Honwana; Singerman, 2007), describes a prolonged and dynamic transition into adulthood. Importantly, waithood is not confined to developing nations; young people in affluent countries also experience similar forms of marginalization and face restricted opportunities.

In many African societies, young people often experience a prolonged period of “waithood”, a transitional phase characterized by limited autonomy and exclusion from key societal structures. This period, regardless of social class, is often marked by challenges such as unemployment and difficulty in establishing independent households or families. As Honwana (2019) highlights, the ability to secure employment and provide for oneself and others is a crucial determinant of adulthood, significantly impacting self-esteem and social roles. However, the experience of waithood varies significantly based on factors like gender, class and education. Men often face societal pressure to secure stable employment, establish independent housing, and fulfil

financial responsibilities associated with marriage and family life. While women may have higher educational attainment and participate actively in the workforce, societal expectations often prioritize marriage and motherhood as markets of adulthood (Honwana, 2019; Kenny, 2016). While childbirth can signify entry into adulthood for women, their full transition often depends on their male partners overcoming their own state of waithood. Middle- class youth, with their stronger social and economic networks, tend to navigate the challenges of waithood differently. Similarly, labour migration to South African mines served as a crucial rite of passage to adulthood for many Mozambican men. Despite the exploitative conditions, these jobs empowered young men to assume roles as providers and family heads, while enabling women to fulfil traditional roles within the household (Honwana, 2019).

Considering Zimbabwe as a discourse, for over two decades, Zimbabwe's economy has struggled, leading to high unemployment rates, particularly among the young population (UNICEF, 2023). The available jobs often lack quality, providing neither sustainable nor well-paying work (Robalino et al., 2021). Many individuals find employment in the informal sector or agriculture, where wages are typically low, and skills diversity is limited. A recent Policy Advocacy Lab organized by the SIVIO Institute highlighted unemployment as a critical issue hindering Zimbabwe's economic progress.

Gumbo and Moyo (2013:2023) contend that, high levels of unemployment in Zimbabwe have compelled many individuals to participate in informal economic activities and politics, driven by limited formal employment opportunities. These activities vary from small-scale street trading to other forms of unregistered business ventures. The ongoing socio-economic struggles faced by the Zimbabwean youth result in persistent efforts to improve their prospects, leading to political engagement and activism. The prevalence of unemployment, even among educated individuals, has created fertile ground for political mobilization, as those engaged in informal activities often advocate for a political environment that promises improved formal job opportunities (Moyo, 2023). Political activism among this group is largely fuelled by hopes that such engagement will enable them to overcome their socio-economic hardships (Moyo, 2023).

According to studies by (Chimonyo, 2023; Pswarayi, 2020) on the experiences of unemployed Zimbabwean graduates living in Johannesburg, youth unemployment in Zimbabwe is the highest among the country's labour market. With a new government in place, Zimbabweans can only hope for gradual economic recovery and job creation, as such progress will take time. The rise in youth unemployment has been significant, largely due to the government's successful Education for All policy, which has resulted in many unemployed youths possessing Ordinary Level and advanced Level certificates, diplomas, or degrees (Chimonyo, 2023).

Moyo (2023), proposes the concept of "waithood", which refers to transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe find themselves in waithood (Magadi & Gwekwerere 2024; Moyo, 2023). In July 2016, images of Zimbabwean graduates selling goods on the streets of Harare, dressed in their graduation gowns, went viral. These graduates engage in informal sector activities, such as street vending, while awaiting opportunities in the formal job market (Magidi & Gwekwerere, 2024; Moyo, 2023). Despite their qualifications, they are compelled to seek alternative means of earning a living due to the scarcity of jobs where they can apply their skills.

Moyo (2023) describes waithood as a period characterized by experimentation, improvisation, and creativity, during which young Africans adopt various survival strategies to navigate daily life. They actively seek out and attempt to make the most of any available opportunities in an ongoing effort to improve their circumstances. He further proposes the term "waithustlinghood" to describe the employment conditions of the unemployed graduates in Zimbabwe. The graduates are waiting while hustling as street vendors or getting involved in political activism to survive being unemployed.

In conclusion, the enduring unemployment crisis among graduates in Zimbabwe illustrates deep-rooted economic and structural issues, with many resorting to informal employment and 'waithuslinghood' (Moyo, 2023) as a survival strategy. Despite their academic qualifications, limited formal job opportunities have forced graduates into precarious livelihoods, often fuelling political activism and migration in search of better prospects (Moyo, 2023). These insights offer a critical comparative perspective for understanding graduate unemployment in South Africa and beyond, underscoring the shared socio-economic struggles faced by Humanities graduates across borders. This study utilizes the concept of "waithood" to explore the experiences of unemployed Humanities graduates in contemporary South Africa. Waithood, characterized by prolonged delays in achieving key societal milestones such as employment, financial independence, and family formation, aptly captures the uncertainties and structural barriers that these graduates face in their transition to adulthood.

3.3 Graduate Unemployment in the South African Context

3.3.1 Understanding youth unemployment and factors influencing youth unemployment in South Africa

"Youth unemployment refers to the situation where individuals aged 15-24 who are willing and able to work are unable to work and to find jobs" (Statistics South Africa, 2021). This age group frequently faces unemployment challenges compared to various factors to name a few: lack of work experience, skills mismatch, a shortage of adequate information needed to make informed decisions about in-demand jobs, insufficient initial capital to apply for jobs or start a business (Sass & Xulu- Gama, 2022). Contrastingly, the

T&T Statistics (CSO) which is the Central Statistical Office in India has a broader definition of unemployment than just people actively seeking work (Byrne & Strobl, 2004), they also consider people who have not been actively searching in the past three months, but still want a job and were looking for work before that period. There is a varying degree in the definition of unemployment however for the purpose of this study we will focus on the definition of youth unemployment by Statistics South Africa under the National Youth Commission Act of 1996 as defined under the methodology chapter.

There are varying, socio-economic factors influencing youth unemployment such as coming from a lowincome background and being unable to afford higher education and residing in areas with limited internet access to search for jobs, or seek funding for further studies. Sass & Xulu-Gama (2022) assert that, in response to these barriers, unemployed youth have adopted various strategies, including entrepreneurship, informal employment, and community engagement. For example, youth often engage in informal employment such as street vending, Landau (2019) refers to being a street vendor as hustling (p. 80). In Thieme's view (2021), hustling is not just about making money, it is also a way for young people to express themselves using shared local codes and build their local standing, hustling reveals how these young people, lacking access to traditional opportunities and support navigate complex relationships with various institutions. Moreover, youth engage in casual labour, and freelance work. Community engagement efforts include volunteering, community development projects and all these examples of the extra work done by unemployed youth as a human activity is aimed at creating opportunities and fostering resilience within their community. Securing employment presents a significant financial hurdle for unemployed youth in South Africa. Beyond the challenges of finding suitable positions, even the basic steps of seeking employment can be cost-prohibitive. Tasks like obtaining certified documents from the South African Police Service (SAPS) or travelling for interviews require funds. Research by Graham & De Lannoy (2017) highlights this issue, estimating that young people on average incur around R560 for transport and other job-seeking costs, this was further supported by an article by Majadibodu (2024), *unemployed youth attribute the high unemployment rate to corruption and nepotism, and highlight the challenges they encounter in finding job opportunities amid the ongoing rise in unemployment.*

3.3.2 Different types of unemployment

It is worth noting that, the group most vulnerable to youth unemployment are those who just graduated from university and are ideally will be finding their first jobs and those continuing their studies, or those 'not in employment, education or training (NEET) (Graham & De Lannoy, 2017). Those not in employment, education and training are most vulnerable because they are not getting any skills training or a form of education to be in a better chance of getting employment. While the International Labour Organization (ILO) has a standard definition for unemployment that includes those that are actively seeking work, they acknowledge it might not be an ideal definition for developing countries (Byrne & Strobl, 2004) like South Africa.

There are four kinds of unemployment namely; Structural, frictional, seasonal and demand-deficient (Cyclical). Structural unemployment arises from shifts in the labour market (Mseleku, 2021) these shifts create a gap between the skills employers are looking for (demand skills) and the skills available in the workforce (supplied skills) within a particular location. For example, Mercedes Benz South Africa decides to relocate to overseas and retrench workers, these workers are skilled in machinery but may lack mining skills for instance since in South Africa there is countless of mining industries to mention the least SASOL mining or they may basically be lacking a skill needed for new available jobs, this skill gap will lead to structural unemployment. Secondly, frictional employment is a term used to describe a situation where someone might appear unemployed based on official statistics, but they are just waiting for the right job opportunity. This can happen because information in the labour market is never perfect (Amadeo, 2022; Hick, 2012). There might be a skilled worker waiting for a specific type of role that is not advertised yet, or they might be networking and making connections that have not yet resulted in formal job offer. For example, there can be Humanities graduates highly skilled in conducting research and actively seeking work, but there might be a few relevant job openings per year. Thirdly, demand deficit unemployment, also known as cyclical unemployment, happens when there is a general weakness in the economy meaning businesses and consumers are spending less, leading to a decrease in the overall demand for goods and services (Amadeo, 2022). As a result, companies need less labour to produce what has been bought, and unemployment rises. Lastly, seasonal employment follows the rhythm of the seasons, with jobs appearing and disappearing throughout the year, these jobs are often found in industries that are highly dependent on specific weather conditions or consumer trends (Amadeo, 2022). For example, agriculture, tourism and construction all depend on the season of the year and weather conditions (summer, winter, spring, autumn). For the purposes of this study focusing on the first three types of unemployment namely; structural, frictional and seasonal unemployment will be more feasible in understanding why some of these graduates experienced unemployment.

3.4 Graduate unemployment and wage labour

Wage labour is a dominant system of work in modern societies. It plays a crucial role in shaping who we are and how we connect with others, by participating in wage labour, people contribute to society, define their purpose, and build social relationships, most importantly it allows them to earn a living (Sefalafala, 2024). Wage labour fulfils a dual role in our lives. On one hand, it is seen a fundamental aspect of who we are, shaping our identity and sense of dignity. It allows us to connect with others and build a sense of community. On the one hand, it's a practical tool, a means to an end (Sefalafala, 2024). Through wage labour, we perform work that contributes to society, whether it is producing food or generating income to support ourselves and our families. Franco Barcheisi (2011) asserts that in the newly formed democracy of South Africa, work and wage labour challenge the very definition of what it means to be a citizen. For black South Africans, these concepts go beyond finding a job. They represent a complex web of limitations and possibilities. On the one hand wage

labour offers a chance to overcome the material precariousness (insecurity) left behind by past policies of dispossession (expropriation), it holds the potential social solidarity, fostering connections within Black communities (Barcheisi, 2011). However, wage labour also confronts Black South Africans with the limitations of the post-apartheid era. The expectation of a truly equitable and improved life under a non-racial democracy might not always be met by the realities of the job market. In essence, work and wage labour become a test for post-apartheid citizenship, forcing Black South Africans to navigate a complex landscape of hope, historical trauma, and the ongoing struggle for economic and social justice (Barcheisi, 2011). Be that as it may, it is worth exploring how in the post-apartheid South Africa unemployed graduates experience wage labour and how this in the job market pushed them towards further education and investing in acquiring skills or qualifications that could make them more competitive in the wage labour market, this will help to explore the expectations of graduates regarding future employment after completing their postgraduate degrees.

3.5 Macro structural issues that influence graduate employability

3.5.1 Structural racism and B-BBEE policies

The post-apartheid transformation agenda in South Africa, particularly the implementation of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies, aimed at redressing historical injustices by promoting black ownership and participation in the economy. However, these efforts have often been criticized for perpetuating structural inequalities. Von Holdt et al. (2023) highlight how BEE policies, while intended to democratize economic opportunity, have inadvertently created a narrow elite of beneficiaries, leaving broader socio-economic disparities unresolved. This critique underscores the tension between symbolic transformation through policy and the majority of black South Africans.

Vilakazi (2021) contends that, achieving meaningful structural transformation in South Africa hinges on the full inclusion of black individuals within the economic landscape. Despite compromising most of the population (over 90% according to Stats SA, 2020), black South Africans face significant economic disparities compared to their white counterparts. This stark inequality, deeply rooted in historical injustices, erodes social cohesion.

To foster sustainable economic growth and address these racial imbalances, Vilakazi (2021) emphasizes the need for inclusive policies. These policies should focus on; opening markets to the entrants and black-owned business: creating a more equitable playing field for black entrepreneurs. Developing a black capitalist class: Empowering black individuals to participate fully in the economy as business owners and investors. The development of a black capitalist class is not merely an economic imperative but is also crucial for maintaining political stability within the country.

The 1994 democratic transition in South Africa, while ending apartheid, did not fundamentally alter the underlying structures of racial capitalism (von Holdt et at., 2023; Habiyararemye, 2022; Modiri, 2015). The

ANC government, initially pursuing a more interventionist approach (Singh, 2010), eventually embraced neoliberal policies, including Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (von Holdt et al., 2023; Vilakazi, 2021). BEE, intended to redress historical economic exclusion of black South Africans (Vilakazi, 2021), primarily aimed to integrate black individuals into existing white-owned businesses. This often involved incorporating politically connected black individuals into ownership structures, creating a new black elite while maintaining the dominance of white capital (Habiyararemye, 2022). While BEE promoted some racial economic transformation, particularly in terms of ownership shift (Vilakazi, 2021), it ultimately served to adapt racial capitalism rather than dismantle it. The legacy of apartheid, characterized by epistemic violence and the concentration of wealth in white hands (Makgoba, 2024; Vilakazi, 2021), continued to shape economic realities despite political change.

While B-BBEE Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment act of 2003 expanded its scope to encompass employment equity, skills development, and socioeconomic transformation, criticisms persist regarding its preferential treatment of a politically connected black elite, leaving the broader black population largely marginalized (Makgoba, 2024; von Holdt et al., 2023). This observation, when considered within the context of this research, underscores the systematic challenges inherent in BEE and B-BBEE, which are deeply intertwined with broader societal issues such as inequality, nepotism, corruption and exclusion. The policies' limited success in fundamentally altering the distribution of economic power highlights the need to explore alternative models, such as cooperative economics and reduce reliance on top-down approaches (Vilakazi, 2021; Nyerere, 1974) to improve both graduates and youth employability.

3.5.2 Corruption and Nepotism within the South African Government

Bribery and nepotism are significant obstacles to job creation in South Africa, as highlighted by The Cost of Corruption (2018). Corruption, a pervasive societal issue, severely hampers economic growth and job opportunities (von Holdt et al., 2023). According to the Minister of Economic Development, Ebrahim Patel, corruption had a measurable impact in the previous year, resulting in the loss of 76,000 jobs and R27 billion in financial losses directly linked to state corruption in South Africa. Various forms of corruption, such as collusion, price fixing, and bribery—where payments or favours are offered to those facilitating illicit deals—exacerbate the problem (The Cost of Corruption, 2018).

Moreover, (Pityana, 2017; The Sunday Independent, 2010; Swedass, 2005), assert that, corruption perpetuate a destructive cycle fuelled by excessive consumerism, blurring the lines between ethical and unethical behaviour. The relentless pursuit of material wealth and power distorts moral boundaries, leading to a society dominated by greed and superficiality. Voices advocating for integrity and morality are often silenced by the pervasive influence of corruption, which infiltrates all levels of society, including state institutions.

Individuals who prioritize material gain over moral and social values are ultimately destined to fail. Remaining passive in the face of corruption is tantamount to accepting falsehoods as truth. This complacency allows the erosion of societal values to continue unchecked, leading to widespread societal failure and subjugation (The Sunday Independent, 2010).

The consequences of corruption include inflated operational costs that disadvantage smaller businesses and lead to their exclusion from competitive markets. Additionally, widespread corruption erodes investor confidence, thereby reducing foreign direct investment, which further stifles economic development (The Cost of Corruption, 2018).

Corruption Watch (2024) has received over 46,900 complaints of alleged corruption since its inception 12 years ago. These reports provide valuable insights and guide CW's activities. People from all over South Africa submit an average of 11 reports of corruption and abuse of power each day. This highlights the courage of ordinary citizens in exposing wrongdoing (Corruption Watch, 2024). In 2023, CW received 2,110 reports, primarily focusing on the mining sector (38%). This concentration is likely due to CW's targeted interventions in mining communities affected by corruption. The second highest number of complaints was in the policing sector (23%), followed by business (16%), basic education (12%), and state-owned entities (11%). This reflects the government's failure to provide essential services and protect citizens' rights.

The predominant types of corruption reported in 2023 were maladministration (34%), fraud (21%), employment irregularities (16%), bribery/extortion (15%), and procurement irregularities (13%). Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Cape Town together account for 71% of corruption incidents among the top five municipalities with the highest number of reports. The other two municipalities are Dannhauser and Matjhabeng. Gauteng received 37% of complaints, followed by KwaZulu-Natal (19%), Free State (10%), and Western Cape (9%). These four provinces, representing 75% of reports, are considered corruption hotspots (Corruption Watch, 2024).

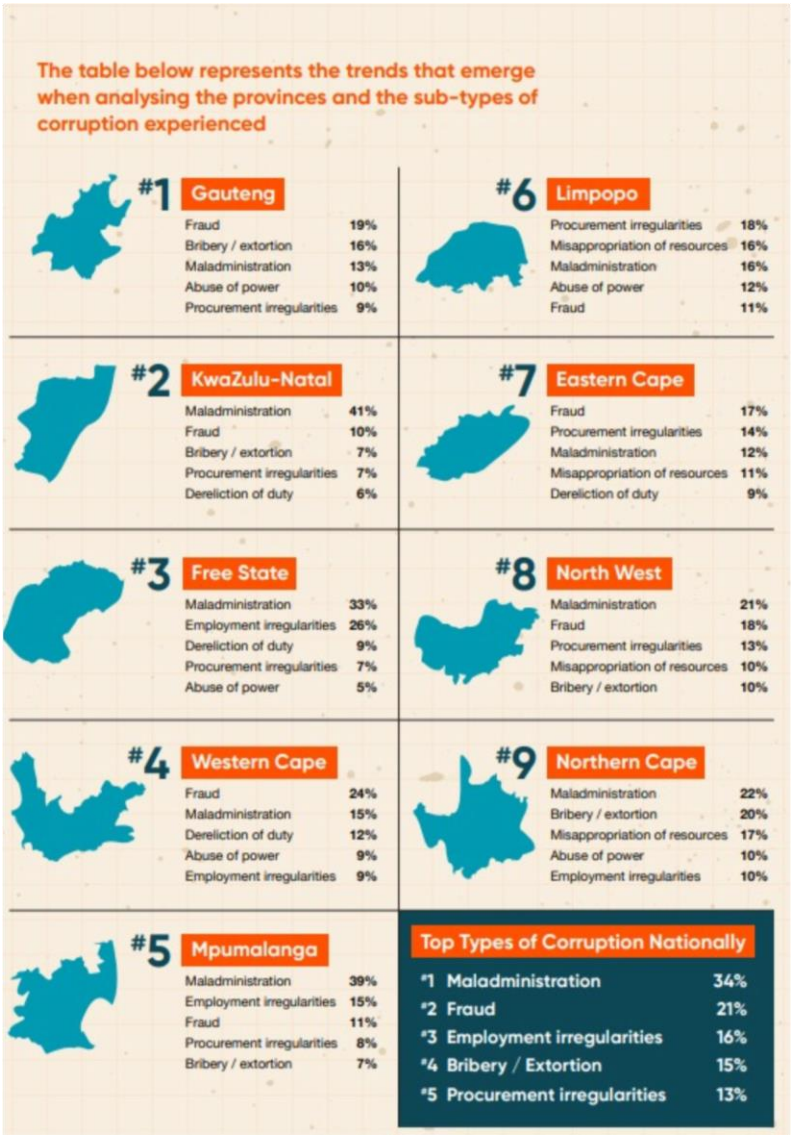


Figure 1: The trends that emerge when analysing the provinces and the sub-types of corruption experienced **source_ (Corruption Watch, 2024 online)**

Nepotism refers to the practice of favouring relatives or friends for employment or other benefits, often at the expense of more qualified individuals (Rapanyane et al., 2022; Sewdass, 2005).

According to Rapanyane et al. (2022). In 2013, Thuli Madonsela, the Public Protector, found evidence of nepotism in the South African government. She discovered that Minister of Communications Dina Pule had misused public funds to benefit her boyfriend, Phosane Mngqibisa. Mandonsela's investigation revealed that Pule had approved millions of rands in taxpayer money for Mngqibisa's business trips, even though he was not qualified for these positions. The investigation also found that pule had lied about her relationship with Mngqibisa (Rapanyane et al., 2022). This case highlights the dangers of nepotism in government. When public officials use their positions to benefit family and friends, it can lead to corruption and misuse of taxpayer money.

In 2015, former President Jacob Zuma faced public scrutiny for appointing his daughter, Thuthukile Zuma, as the Chief of Staff in the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services. This appointment made her the youngest head of a government department in the history of the African National Congress (ANC). Notably, she was hired just two months after starting as a communications officer in the same department, resulting in a significant salary increase of R1 million per year (Rampanyane et al., 2022).

Another instance of nepotism occurred when Deputy Minister of Police, Maggie Sotyu, appointed her daughter, Bonine Sotyu, to a top position at the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) in 2015. This appointment raised concerns as Bonine Sotyu was selected over 89 other, more qualified candidates. Investigations later revealed that Maggie Sotyu had improperly influenced the selection process, highlighting a pattern of nepotism in South African politics (Rampanyane et al., 2022).

3.6 Micro structural issues that influence graduate unemployment

3.6.1 Intersectionality of Race, Class and Gender with precariousness

In South Africa, both during and after the apartheid era, the country experienced a system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the National Party government between 1948 and 1994. Over this period, numerous laws institutionalized racial discrimination, classifying the population into racial categories based on skin colour, namely White, Coloured, Asian/Indian, and Black (Body & Body, 2008). The apartheid framework determined the distribution of social status and access to resources, with each racial group assigned a specific place in the societal hierarchy. White citizens held the highest status, whereas Black citizens occupied the lowest position in this social pyramid (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013).

The roots of what are now evident as racially driven unemployment and poverty in South Africa can be traced back to apartheid-era economic and education policies, as highlighted by Seekings and Nattrass (2005). These policies ensured sustained white privilege and entrenched Black disadvantage in the labour market. The longterm effects of apartheid policies reflected in disparities in skill development, entrepreneurship, and access to resources continue to perpetuate the connection between race and class in the post-apartheid era. White South Africans leveraged the racial benefits accrued during apartheid to build and maintain class advantages, which they continue to exploit in the contemporary labour market (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005).

Furthermore, apartheid policies regulated all aspects of life for different racial groups, dictating where they could live, work, study, and socialize. The overarching aim of these laws was to preserve white dominance while systematically disadvantaging other racial groups in South Africa.

Gender inequality significantly perpetuates socio-economic disparities. Women generally earn less, hold fewer assets, and occupy lower-prestige jobs than men. Among single-parent households, those led by women are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty compared to those headed by men. Income disparities further illustrate this: households with the lowest per capita income are predominantly female-headed, whereas those with the highest income are mostly male-headed (Statistics South Africa, 2024). These inequalities underscore the ways in which gender intersects with race and class to shape economic outcomes in South Africa.

The intersectionality of these factors is deeply rooted in South Africa's colonial and apartheid histories. Kenny (2016) highlights that labour regulation and labour rights have historically been conditioned by race, gender, and skill. During colonialism, Black labour was defined as "unskilled" and subjected to coercive laws designed to secure cheap labour for South African capital. Women, on the other hand, were perceived as offering labour at lower wages, often seeing employment as a temporary stepping stone to marriage or better opportunities. White women's labour was protected through regulation, but systemic associations of low skill and low wages perpetuated precarious labour conditions for marginalized groups. This bifurcated labour regime established precarity as a central feature of South Africa's employment system (Kenny, 2016).

Standing (2011,2014) further elaborates on the concept of the "precariat," a social class characterized by insecure employment, a lack of occupational identity, and transience. The precariat comprises individuals who live through unstable jobs, alternating with periods of unemployment or labour-force withdrawal. They rely on various forms of income wages, state benefits, and even charity while lacking a sense of economic stability or social protection. Standing (2014) categorizes the precariat into three groups: (1) those displaced from working-class communities and traditions of skilled labour, (2) marginalized groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities with insecure rights, and (3) educated individuals thrust into precarious circumstances after being promised stable, fulfilling careers. The latter group, primarily in their twenties and thirties, is particularly relevant to this research, as they often feel frustrated and betrayed by a system that fails to deliver the opportunities they anticipated.

This study investigates the experiences of unemployed humanities graduates within this broader framework of the precariat. By focusing on the intersections of race, class, and gender, it aims to uncover how structural inequalities rooted in apartheid policies and reinforced by contemporary labour market dynamics continue to influence graduate unemployment. In doing so, it sheds light on the precarious existence of educated young people who face systemic barriers in translating their qualifications into meaningful and stable employment.

Through this lens, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how micro-structural factors perpetuate socio-economic disparities in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.7 Coping mechanisms for graduate's unemployment

3.7.1 Graduate Unemployment: Coping Mechanisms Through Further Studies and Cooperative Economics

In the context of graduate unemployment, the challenges of finding meaningful employment often compel individuals to explore innovative coping strategies. Two significant approaches pursuing further studies and embracing cooperative economics have emerged as critical mechanisms for addressing the socio-economic realities of joblessness among graduates. These strategies align closely with the themes of self-reliance, collective action, and structural reform explored in my research.

Further Studies as a Coping Mechanism

Pursuing further education serves multiple purposes for unemployed graduates, particularly in enhancing employability and productively utilizing time. This practice aligns with Jeffrey's (2010) "time pass" concept, which highlights how unemployed youth engage in meaningful activities while awaiting employment opportunities.

First, engaging in advanced education provides graduates with opportunities for skill enhancement, enabling them to acquire specialized knowledge and competencies. This proactive approach mitigates the risks of underemployment, where degree holders occupy positions that do not require their qualifications (Talent Disrupted, 2024). Additionally, further studies help graduates maintain psychological well-being by providing structure and purpose during periods of joblessness (Jeffrey, 2010). Academic environments also foster networking opportunities, connecting graduates with peers, professors, and industry professionals who may facilitate future job prospects (WSJ, 2024).

This study aligns with previous research by Oluwajodu et al. (2015) and Fongwa (2018), which found that unemployed graduates consider postgraduate studies to enhance their employability in the competitive labour market. Participants in this study indicated that furthering their studies is perceived to increase their chances of finding employment, especially when employers often prefer candidates with a master's degree or relevant work experience. This is particularly relevant for Humanities graduates, as a postgraduate qualification is seen to stand out from other candidates and open more career opportunities.

However, while further education enhances employability, it does not guarantee employment. The alignment between qualifications and labour market demands remains crucial for securing meaningful opportunities, a consideration highlighted in my research on systematic inequalities and structural challenges in the job market.

Cooperative Economics and Graduate Empowerment

Julius Nyerere's principles in "Freedom and Development" (1974) emphasize self-reliance and collective action, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding how cooperative economics can address graduate unemployment. By pooling resources, skills, and knowledge, cooperatives offer a sustainable model for creating employment and fostering socio-economic resilience.

Evidence from South Africa's Ntabankulu Local Municipality demonstrates how business cooperatives enable unemployed graduates to share risks and benefits equitably. These initiatives, while challenged by limited funding and managerial expertise, highlight the transformative potential of collective enterprise in mitigating joblessness (Obiaha & Sotshangase, 2014).

Globally, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that cooperatives provide approximately 100 million jobs, offering both salaried positions and avenues for self-employment (ILO, 2012). In Tanzania, cooperatives have been particularly effective in addressing youth unemployment in the agricultural sector, empowering young individuals to access resources and markets collectively (Anania & Sambuo, 2017).

Implications for this Research

The strategies of further studies and cooperative economics align with the broader themes of my research, including structural inequalities, the need for skill diversification, and the promotion of innovative employment pathways for Humanities graduates. The emphasis on collective action echoes the concept of ujamaa (familyhood), suggesting that community-driven approaches can serve as a counterbalance to systemic barriers (Nyerere, 1974).

Moreover, the role of education and cooperative models highlights the importance of policy interventions and institutional support in fostering equitable access to resources and opportunities. These insights provide a critical lens for analysing how Humanities graduates can navigate the challenges of unemployment, emphasizing resilience, adaptability, and collective empowerment.

In conclusion, the pursuit of further studies and cooperative economics offers unemployed graduates practical and transformative tools to address the complexities of joblessness. These approaches not only align with the theoretical frameworks explored in my research but also contribute to a broader understanding of socioeconomic development through self-reliance and collective effort.

3.7.2 Diversification of qualification

Research on South African graduate unemployment reveals a growing trend of qualification diversification as a key strategy for enhancing employability. This involves individuals acquiring additional skills or pursuing

further education in fields with higher employment prospects, reflecting a proactive adaptation to the prevailing labour market conditions.

A recent report (McGinty, 2024) underscores the significant impact of both qualification type and field of study on employment outcomes. Graduates from humanities and arts backgrounds often face greater challenges in securing employment compared to their counterparts in fields like health and education. This disparity has driven many graduates to seek qualifications in more marketable fields to improve their job prospects.

However, a critical gap exists in the literature regarding how graduates specifically utilize qualification diversification as a coping mechanism for unemployment. While previous research (McGinty, 2024) highlights several key aspects of this trend, including:

- The pursuit of STEM fields and vocational training by graduates from underrepresented sectors to align their skills with market demands.
- The potential of diversification to not only enhance employability but also broaden career options.
- The significant financial and emotional challenges that often accompany this transition, emphasizing the crucial need for institutional support such as affordable postgraduate programs and comprehensive career counselling.

3.7.3 Global Opportunities

The high rates of youth and graduate unemployment in South Africa have led to a loss of faith in the country's education system. Many young people are resorting to alternative survival strategies rather than pursuing higher education. Additionally, there is a significant brain drain as educated South Africans seek better job opportunities abroad. In response, President Cyril Ramaphosa called upon South Africans living abroad to return and contribute to the country's development. To better understand the reasons behind emigration, News24 conducted a Twitter survey, gathering responses from South Africans living overseas. The survey revealed that many young people are leaving due to disillusionment with the state of the country, including the mismanagement and abuse of public resources by elected officials. This lack of faith in the government and its institutions is hindering South Africa's ability to compete on a global level. (Rampanyane et al., 2022; Sass & Xulu- Gama, 2022).

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complex factors contributing to graduate unemployment in South Africa, focusing on the experiences of Humanities graduates. It highlights the interplay of structural inequalities and individual coping mechanisms, such as pursuing further education or engaging in cooperative economic

ventures. The following chapter presents the empirical findings of this research, providing valuable insights into the lived experiences of unemployed Humanities graduates and their strategies for navigating the challenges of the South African labour market.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter before the literature review which is the methodology chapter outlined the research design employed in this study, focusing on the methods used to collect and analyse data. Drawing on the findings for this research, a literature review succeeded the methodology chapter. It examined the experiences of unemployed Humanities graduates who are currently pursuing their postgraduate studies in various South African institutions and investigated the factors contributing to their employability challenges such as; BBBEE policies, corruption and nepotism in securing employment, structural racism, class, gender and lastly few job opportunities in their chosen field of study. Specifically, the study centres on Humanities graduates in South Africa, analysing their decisions to pursue postgraduate studies as a strategy to enhance their employment prospects.

Using a qualitative research approach, this section discusses the demographic profiles of the participants, which include individuals who have completed undergraduate qualifications and are either currently pursuing or have completed postgraduate studies. It also explores their experience of unemployment, perceptions of employability, and the motivations driving their pursuit of advanced qualifications. Through thematic analysis, the study critically examines these narratives to identify patterns and characteristics unique to this cohort.

Why do Humanities graduates with an undergraduate qualification decide to pursue postgraduate studies?

4.2 Description and characteristics of participants

Table 3: Research Participants Profiles

Age/ Gender	Ethnicity	Nationality	Origin	Current Academic qualification & institution	Undergraduate studies and year completed	Year of unemployment/	Participant's pseudonyms
23/F	White	South African	Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni	Master of Arts, Wits	University of Johannesburg, 2022	2023	Emily
23/F	Black	South African	Mpumalanga, Middleburg	Honours at Wits	University of the Witwatersrand, 2023	N/A	Naledi
24/F	Black	South African	KwaZulu Natal	Masters in developmental studies, UCT	Nelson Mandela University, 2019	2022	Ayanda

24/M	Indian	South African	KwaZulu Natal, Ladysmith	Masters in governance, Wits	Rhodes University, 2022	2023	Vishal
23/F	Black	South African	Gauteng, Vereeniging	Master of Commerce, Wits	University of Pretoria, 2023	2023	Lebohang
25/F	Black	South African	Eastern Cape, Bisho	Master of Social Science, UFS	Nelson Mandela University,	2023	Busi
					2022		
25/F	Black	Swaziland	Kingdom of Eswatini	Diploma in Conflict Counselling	Wits, 2023	2024	Zanele
26/M	Black	South African	Limpopo	Master of Arts in Development Studies, Wits	University of Johannesburg, 2019	2020	Thabo
26/F	Black	South African	Gauteng	Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Psychometry, UNISA	SACAP, 2020	2020-2023	Dineo
27/F	Black	South African	Mpumalanga, Nelspruit	Bachelor's of Arts Honours, Wits	Monash University, 2021	2022-2023	Lisa
28/F	Black	South African	Mpumalanga, Hazel view	Bachelor of Arts Honours, UNISA	University of Pretoria, 2022	2023	Palesa
35/F	Black	Zimbabwean	Zimbabwe, Bulawayo	Masters in Multidisciplinary Human Rights, UP	University of Zimbabwe	2014-2021 (hustling)	Nomvula

Summary of qualitative sample

Table 4: Frequency table of the participants age group

AGE GROUP	**FREQUENCY**
20-25	7
26-30	4
31-35	1
TOTAL	12

The frequency table reveals that most participants (7 out of 12) fell within the 20-25 age group, indicating a concentration of younger individuals in the sample. The next most frequent age group was 26-30, with four participants, while one participant belonged to the 31-35 age group. This distribution suggests that the sample

predominantly represents a younger demographic, with a limited number of participants in the older age bracket.

This age distribution might influence the research findings as younger individuals may have different perspectives, experiences and challenges compared to older individuals. For example, younger unemployed graduates might be more likely to prioritize job search strategies focused on career exploration and skill development, whereas older individuals might be more concerned with financial stability and long-term prospects.

Therefore, it is important to consider the potential impact of this age distribution on the study's findings and conclusion.

4.2.1 Description of the 12 participants

The study involved 12 individuals aged between 23 and 32 years, comprising ten females and two males. This diverse group encompassed individuals of various ethnicities, including ten Black South Africans, one Indian South African (Vishal), and one White South African (Emily). The sample also included both South African nationals and foreign national, with ten South African citizens and two participants, Nomvula and Zanele, hailing from Zimbabwe and the Kingdom of Eswatini, respectively. Academically, the participants demonstrated a wide range of qualifications, from bachelor's degrees to master's degrees, obtained from institutions such as the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, Nelson Mandela University, Rhodes University, South African College of Applied Psychology, the University of Cape Town, the University of Johannesburg and Monash University.

The duration of unemployment varied among participants, with some experiencing unemployment since 2019, while others had been unemployed more recently. Notably, most participants identified as middle-class, apart from Thabo, who identified with a working-class background due to his upbringing in Alexandra, Johannesburg. The diverse group, with its varied backgrounds and experiences, offers valuable insights into the lived realities of unemployed graduates across different contexts and academic journeys.

4.2.2 Description of outliers

Two participants in the study, among a total of 12, stand as outliers. They are from Zimbabwe and Eswatini (Swaziland) and completed their undergraduate degrees in their respective countries. Both are currently enrolled in postgraduate studies at South African higher education institutions. The participant from Eswatini is a 25-year-old female Zanele, who is pursuing a diploma in Conflict Counselling at Wits University. The participant from Zimbabwe is a 35-year-old female Nomvula, studying for a Master's in Multidisciplinary

Human Rights at the University of Pretoria. Both participants experienced significant unemployment challenges with their undergraduate Humanities degrees.

Nomvula from Zimbabwe has faced prolonged unemployment, relying on precarious work to make ends meet. Even in Zimbabwe, unemployment among graduates with Humanities qualifications is a notable issue, highlighting systematic challenges in the job market for this field (Moyo, 2023).

4.3 Themes

Participants in the study shared their experiences and perspectives as young Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies in South African higher education institutions. They highlighted systemic challenges, such as structural racism and inequality perpetuated by policies like B-BBEE, which restrict access to employment opportunities based on race, class, and gender. These barriers often motivate graduates to pursue further education as a coping mechanism to address unemployment.

In response to these challenges, participants emphasized strategies such as cooperative economics, diversifying qualifications, and seeking global opportunities. The study focuses on three key themes:

1. Structural racism and the implications of B-BBEE policies.

2. Corruption and nepotism within the South African government.

3. The intersectionality of race, class, and gender in shaping precarious employment conditions.

Additionally, participants explored coping mechanisms, including further studies, diversification of skills, and accessing international opportunities.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Structural racism and the implications of B-BBEE policies

The 1994 democratic transition in South Africa, while ending apartheid, did not fundamentally alter the underlying structures of racial capitalism (von Holdt et at., 2023; Habiyararemye, 2022; Modiri, 2015). The ANC government, initially pursuing a more interventionist approach (Singh, 2010), eventually embraced neoliberal policies, including Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) (von Holdt et al., 2023; Vilakazi, 2021). BEE, intended to redress historical economic exclusion of black South Africans (Vilakazi, 2021), primarily aimed to integrate black individuals into existing white-owned businesses. This often involved incorporating politically connected black individuals into ownership structures, creating a new black elite while maintaining the dominance of white capital (Habiyararemye, 2022). While BEE promoted some racial economic transformation, particularly in terms of ownership shift (Vilakazi, 2021), it ultimately served to adapt racial capitalism rather than dismantle it. The legacy of apartheid, characterized by epistemic violence and the concentration of wealth in white hands (Makgoba, 2024; Vilakazi, 2021), continued to shape economic realities despite political change.

Structural barriers within the education system further limit opportunities. Dineo described biases from a high school teacher that altered her field of study and made her choose the Humanities:

> *"My physical science white teacher used to side-line me. That made me feel like, 'Oh, maybe I'm not doing so well.' Slowly but surely, he killed my desire to be in his physics class, and my marks started to drop." (Dineo)*

Such experiences reflect systematic racism, where implicit biases within educational institutions undermine the potential of black learners, especially in STEM fields. Furthermore, Zanele shared struggles about structural racism as it is evident in her reflections on African epistemologies being side-lined:

> *"Higher education Institutions suppress you if you try to do things the African way because the standard is to do things according to the global North. Moreover, even the people who encourage you to think big are like, 'I did not mean that big, bring it down.'" (Zanele).*

These experiences show how structural racism within academic spaces marginalizes African perspectives, prioritizing Eurocentric standards over indigenous knowledge systems (Ndofirepi & Hungwe, 2022; Mpofu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Cross & Ndofirepi, 2017).

Other participants discussed systematic racism embedded in institutions that marginalize Humanities graduates:

> *"It seems like the system is alienating us even more as the Humanities graduates. if you are not studying law or STEM, you are being pushed further away. Why are we sending people to school if the education will not help them?" (Ayanda).*

> *"Government policies often overlook the unique challenges Humanities graduate's encounter. More targeted job creation initiatives are needed in fields like education and arts. Existing policies prioritize technical and STEM fields while neglecting the humanities." (Palesa)*

> *"Policies do not seem to include Humanities students as much as they focus on science and IT. There is no specific space for us in the labour market. Put jobs aside for Humanities students the same way you do for IT (Information Technology) specialists. It is not fair that we are overlooked when we also work hard." (Lisa).*

> *"There is a disconnect between what we study and the industries hiring. It feels like some streams, like Accounting or Science, get preference in both sponsorship and job opportunities while the Humanities students are often overlooked." (Naledi).*

This underscores how structural inequalities continue to devalue Humanities qualifications, reflecting broader societal biases.

Furthermore, a male participant highlights concerns about the impact of policies influenced by Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). The post-apartheid transformation agenda in South Africa, particularly the implementation of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies, aimed at redressing historical injustices by promoting black ownership and participation in the economy. However, these efforts have often been criticized for perpetuating structural inequalities. Von Holdt et al. (2023) highlight how BEE policies, while intended to democratize economic opportunity, have inadvertently created a narrow elite of beneficiaries, leaving broader socio-economic disparities unresolved. This critique underscores the tension between symbolic transformation through policy and the majority of black South Africans.

> *"BEE served its purpose after apartheid for a short period of time, but now we need to employ people who are qualified, like the youth. Even companies by the tool to mandate policies from national government to include this amount of specific racial groups in your company. Indian men are often marginalized by these policies especially BEE." (Vishal).*

These statements point to perceived imbalances created by policies aimed at redressing historical inequalities, with the participant expressing frustration about how such policies can sometimes create barriers for certain racial groups. He further describes how systematic racism manifests in both education and employment opportunities:

> *"Even with 98% in subjects like physics and maths, students are rejected for medicine, but others with 70% get in. you further experience systematic racial issues even in governance. It is quite difficult for an Indian man to get into spaces of government." (Vishal).*

These examples reveal lingering inequalities in access to higher education and professional opportunities, despite post-apartheid reforms.

Other participants critique how structural inequalities affect education and employment opportunities (Vilakazi, 2022):

> *"My mom was a coloured woman growing up during apartheid, so obviously she did not get the opportunities that she should have gotten, I am also scrutinized of how I look, because people care about what you look like, and not necessarily what you say, I always say I am mixed to people that is how people perceive me even though my dad is white." (Emily).*

> *"When I got to university, I realized that we are not exposed to the same resources. Some people know about opportunities we can only dream of, for instance being part of the G20 while you are still a student." (Lebohang).*

This statement reflects generation barriers created by the apartheid-era discrimination and how racial identity continues to influence perceptions and opportunities in South Africa.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Corruption and nepotism within the South African government

Nepotism refers to the practice of favouring relatives or friends for employment or other benefits, often at the expense of more qualified individuals (Rapanyane et al., 2022; Sewdass, 2005).

According to Rapanyane et al. (2022). In 2013, Thuli Madonsela, the Public Protector, found evidence of nepotism in the South African government. She discovered that Minister of Communications Dina Pule had misused public funds to benefit her boyfriend, Phosane Mngqibisa. Mandonsela's investigation revealed that Pule had approved millions of rands in taxpayer money for Mngqibisa's business trips, even though he was not qualified for these positions. The investigation also found that pule had lied about her relationship with Mngqibisa (Rapanyane et al., 2022). This case highlights the dangers of nepotism in government. When public officials use their positions to benefit family and friends, it can lead to corruption and misuse of taxpayer money.

Another instance of nepotism occurred when Deputy Minister of Police, Maggie Sotyu, appointed her daughter, Bonine Sotyu, to a top position at the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) in 2015. This appointment raised concerns as Bonine Sotyu was selected over 89 other, more qualified candidates. Investigations later revealed that Maggie Sotyu had improperly influenced the selection process, highlighting a pattern of nepotism in South African politics (Rampanyane et al., 2022).

Participants revealed how frustrating it is for government to hire their relatives:

> *"Can we now include people that are qualified, which is the youth? Can we give them a chance? Why do we have a minister in social development with no qualification in social work or psychology? The system is filled with people who are articulate but do not know the job." (Ayanda).*

> *"It is difficult to find a job in the South African labour market unless you know someone. Even when you apply, they might go quiet if there is no connection. All these jobs I have had were through friends connecting me to someone they know." (Thabo).*

> *"You have to be affiliated with a certain political party to penetrate spaces like parliament. It should not be like that. The government create jobs, but they are just for people to clean up the streets, and half of these people are graduates." (Vishal).*

"There is always this thing of knowing someone to get a job, if you do not have connections, you are left to pray and wait. Humanities graduates with experience in writing policy briefs are overlooked for less qualified individuals who get jobs for who they are and who they know." (Emily)

"You hear of these programs meant to help unemployed youth, but do they really work? Are they designed by people who know what it is like to struggle for a job? Sometimes it feels like you need connections to get anywhere. If you do not know someone, you are stuck." (Lebohang).

"Some of my peers got jobs because of connections, not qualifications. It is frustrating for those of us who do not have connections and those networks. The ongoing structural inequalities persist." (Lisa).

"Nepotism and favouritism make it harder for those of us without connections to find meaningful work. Government initiatives for internships and apprenticeships are not always accessible or well-funded for Humanities students." (Palesa).

"It is disheartening to see jobs reserved for certain groups or foreign internationals when locals are unemployed. Connections seem to matter more than qualifications. That is not fair to those of us who work hard." (Lisa).

These statements point to frustrations with governance structures that prioritize political loyalty over qualifications and fail to create sustainable, impactful jobs (Rampanyane et al., 2022). Further examples from the participants: *"The South African government would probably do well to hire more humanities students and less comrades, a lot of jobs go to someone's niece or nephew instead of qualified graduates" (Emily).* This reflects frustration with nepotism and the unintended consequences of policies meant to redress historical inequalities, as they often exclude merit-based hiring. This is supported by how the parents of young men in India who were unsuccessful in government employment examinations found it difficult to find bribes for their sons to get employed by the government (Jeffrey, 2010). If you do not have a bribery or connections your chances of employment seem to be limited especially in government spaces.

4.3.3 Theme 3: The intersectionality of race, class and gender in shaping precarious employment conditions

In South Africa, both during and after the apartheid era, the country experienced a system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the National Party government between 1948 and 1994. Over this period, numerous laws institutionalized racial discrimination, classifying the population into racial categories based

on skin colour, namely White, Coloured, Asian/Indian, and Black (Body & Body, 2008). The apartheid framework determined the distribution of social status and access to resources, with each racial group assigned a specific place in the societal hierarchy. White citizens held the highest status, whereas Black citizens occupied the lowest position in this social pyramid (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013).

One participant reflected on how his geographical area also influences the available opportunities and resources for him to get employed:

"Unemployment reflects inequality- it is not just qualifications but where you are from and who you know. Living in a township like Alexandra in Johannesburg, you are already judged or assumed incapable when applying for jobs." (Thabo).

The roots of what are now evident as racially driven unemployment and poverty in South Africa can be traced back to apartheid-era economic and education policies, as highlighted by Seekings and Nattrass (2005). These policies ensured sustained white privilege and entrenched Black disadvantage in the labour market. The longterm effects of apartheid policies reflected in disparities in skill development, entrepreneurship, and access to resources continue to perpetuate the connection between race and class in the post-apartheid era. White South Africans leveraged the racial benefits accrued during apartheid to build and maintain class advantages, which they continue to exploit in the contemporary labour market (Seekings & Nattrass, 2005).

Furthermore, apartheid policies regulated all aspects of life for different racial groups, dictating where they could live, work, study, and socialize. The overarching aim of these laws was to preserve white dominance while systematically disadvantaging other racial groups in South Africa. For example, "*even though I am a black woman, I have not experienced the benefits of being given first preference because of my identity" (Lisa).*

Gender inequality significantly perpetuates socio-economic disparities. Women generally earn less, hold fewer assets, and occupy lower-prestige jobs than men. Among single-parent households, those led by women are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty compared to those headed by men. Income disparities further illustrate this: households with the lowest per capita income are predominantly female-headed, whereas those with the highest income are mostly male-headed (Statistics South Africa, 2024). These inequalities underscore the ways in which gender intersects with race and class to shape economic outcomes in South Africa.

In this study participants highlighted the compounded challenges of being a black woman from a disadvantaged background. Financial constraints significantly impacted their academic and career choices:

Dineo highlighted that, *"As a student who is coming from an underprivileged background, university is not for black underprivileged students; it is not for the faint-hearted."* These quotes highlight the intersection of race and class, where financial barriers limit access to opportunities, perpetuating systematic inequalities (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013). Moreover, gendered expectations also emerge in Dineo's recounting of her

mother's sacrifices for her and her siblings to get education for better employment prospects. *"My mum is a housewife. She stayed at home to look after the family" (Dineo).* This reflects the social expectation of women, particularly in black families, to prioritize caregiving roles over personal aspirations, which can limit intergenerational upward mobility (Kenny, 2016: Moore, 2015). Another example that races, class and gender play a role in factors influencing unemployment in South Africa, particularly regarding expectations placed on black women:

> *"Black women have two oppressors: white men and black men. When you are oppressed, you feel the only way to get power is to oppress someone smaller. Black women face the double burden, compounded by systematic inequalities and patriarchal structures." (Zanele).*

> *"Growing in a public school with limited resources taught me resilience, but some backgrounds offer more advantages than others. As a black woman, I want to contribute to mental health advocacy, but opportunities in this field are limited." (Palesa).*

This was further supported by Ayanda and Lisa:

> *"As a black woman, you have to prove yourself to other races and also escape oppression from black men, it is like being oppressed twice, furthermore if you are unemployed in a black household, in as much as they do not tell you directly, there is always the subtle pressure to contribute" (Ayanda).*

> *"My parents provided for me when I was unemployed, but I had to work hard to maintain that privilege. As a black woman, you are expected to work twice as hard to prove yourself in a system that does not value your degree." (Lisa).*

This highlights how race, class and gender intersect to shape access to opportunities and the burden of expectations.

4.3.4 Coping mechanisms

4.3.4.1 Further studies post-unemployment

Dineo demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity in facing unemployment. In a study by Mokhali (2023), one of the participants highlighted that as a graduate from the Humanities. It is crucial to at least have a postgraduate qualification, as it can open other doors, as some companies want graduates with experience or a postgraduate qualification because they are considered competent than a person with an undergraduate degree. Similarly, in my study participants mentioned that, incorporating practical components and furthering postgraduate studies could enhance employability and skill development. For example:

"When I could not get a job, I chose to pursue postgraduate studies to improve my chances of getting a job, I had to Google what skills I have with my master's degree in governance and focus on transferable skills like monitoring and evaluation." (Vishal).

"It is not easy to have faith, but you must. Whether it is praying, meditating, or anything else that helps, find something that keeps you going, maintaining hope and focusing on small, positive steps is essential." (Emily).

"I decided to further my studies to enhance my qualifications and improve my employability in this competitive market, I have also prioritized self-care and set small, achievable goals to stay motivated and focused on my long-term aspirations." (Palesa).

"*With social work, they have auxiliary workers practicing in their first or second year of their undergraduate studies. Whereas with psychology, you only start to practice and qualify to get registered with the HPCSA in master's and that is not fair" (Dineo).*

"There needs to be more practical components in Humanities degrees to prepare graduates for the real world, instead of focusing only on the theoretical part, Humanities programs just like STEM programs should have a practical component especially in undergraduate." (Ayanda).

These quotes show adaptability and a commitment to personal development despite systematic obstacles.

4.3.4.2 Diversification of qualification

A recent report (McGinty, 2024) underscores the significant impact of both qualification type and field of study on employment outcomes. Graduates from humanities and arts backgrounds often face greater challenges in securing employment compared to their counterparts in fields like health and education. This disparity has driven many graduates to seek qualifications in more marketable fields to improve their job prospects.

In this research participants described how flexibility about career paths and adapting aspirations to match market realities were common survival strategies, even though they did not explicitly mention what they are hoping to achieve after their postgraduate studies but they did mention that this provided with a chance to learn new skills and adaptability. Adjusting focus to areas with better job prospects.

"If I do not get a job next year (2025), I might switch to psychology or another field, social development seems not to be working out." (Ayanda).

"I switched degrees from social development to monitoring and evaluation because it is more marketable." (Vishal).

"Keeping busy is key. I started applying for everything- HR, internship, anything that could give me a start. I even adjusted my LinkedIn to highlight skills they might want. I was proactive and adaptable when navigating unemployment. When I saw there was no space in Sociology, I started looking into HR." (Lebohang).

"Social Science students can wear many hats. We have so much value to offer if companies understand how versatile we are, emphasizing the versatility of humanities skills can help graduates present themselves as valuable candidates." (Lebohang).

"I was not going to pursue my master's if I was employed, but I did it to fill the gap and keep active, as you realize that an undergraduate degree in Humanities alone will not open doors, so you have to do more." (Thabo).

"Humanities students often feel hopeless, but there is a lot you can do with your degree. Adding courses of skills that show how you can apply your knowledge helps" (Kelly). The participant suggests exploring interdisciplinary skills and expanding one's capabilities to remain competitive.

4.3.4.3 Global opportunities and cooperative economics

Julius Nyerere's principles in "Freedom and Development" (1974) emphasize self-reliance and collective action, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding how cooperative economics can address graduate unemployment. By pooling resources, skills, and knowledge, cooperatives offer a sustainable model for creating employment and fostering socio-economic resilience. In my study Zanele and Ayanda both demonstrates how important self-reliance coupled with emotional support from family helps in coping with periods of unemployment. *"I want to have an impact. It is not about monetary gain; it is about contributing to my community" (Zanele).* This shift from financial aspirations to a coping strategy rooted in purpose and self-fulfilment (Nyerere, 1974).

"My mother will randomly ask me, 'Have you started applying for jobs again?' or send me job posts. It was her way of subtly pushing me to keep going, I also started journaling my goals and checklist to stay proactive and keep myself motivated." (Ayanda).

"Keeping yourself busy helps, if you just stay at home and wallow, it gets worse. Volunteering or helping out with family businesses can keep you going. Furthermore, I kept calling the places I had applied too, following up every few days, I think that is why I ended up getting employed." (Emily).

"My relationship with God is what keeps me going. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds that God has a plan for my life. Faith provided emotional resilience during challenging times. Moreover, put yourself

out there and network as much as possible, even at webinars or online. Someone might connect you to the opportunity." (Lisa).

"I had to find something to do to survive, that is why I am working in retail while completing my masters. During unemployment you lose your sense of dignity, you have to rely on others, but at the same time, you need to identify your strengths and position yourself." (Nomvula).

Nomvula underscores the importance of self-reliance and strategically positioning oneself to navigate external challenges, particularly in the face of systematic barriers. Similarly, Jeffrey (2010) illustrates how structural inequalities in India shape employment patterns, with Jats often transitioning to private services or farming, Muslims predominantly engaging in skilled artisan work within the informal economy, and Dalits frequently taking up manual wage labour or poorly compensated private services. These dynamics highlight how systematic disparities perpetuate unequal access to economic opportunities across different groups.

Reflective Synthesis

Beyond the thematic presentation, the narratives provided by participants reflect a deeper story of resilience, identify negotiation, and the contested value Humanities qualifications in the South African labour market. The repeated emphasis on adaptability, persistence in postgraduate education, and the search for meaningful employment highlight an enduring optimism despite structural barriers. This resonates with broader scholarly debates on the role of higher education in shaping not only economic but also civic and cultural participation. In connecting these findings to the literature reviewed, it becomes evident that the challenges faced by Humanities graduates are not isolated phenomenon but are embedded within broader socio-economic transformations and policy frameworks.

4.4 Summary of Key Findings and recommendations

Graduate unemployment in South Africa is a multifaced issue, influenced by various factors such as skills mismatch, economic constraints and social disparities (Alias, 2014; Banda et al., 2016; Gbadamosi & de Jager, 2009; Moleke, 2003; Statistics South Africa, 2012; Wheatley, 2001; Zikhali and Hadebe, 2019). This research revealed that Humanities graduates in South Africa face significant systemic barriers to employment. The job market prioritizes technical skills, while the critical thinking and communication abilities fostered by Humanities graduates are often undervalued. These challenges are further exacerbated by existing inequalities related to race, class, and gender, particularly for black women and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013). Despite these obstacles, participants employed various coping mechanisms, including networking, skill development, and seeking support from their communities (Nyerere, 1974). Faith and mental resilience were crucial in maintaining hope during periods of unemployment.

However, existing policies, such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), have limited effectiveness in addressing the specific needs of Humanities graduates. Furthermore, corruption and nepotism within the job market disproportionately impact these individuals. The intersectionality of race, gender, and class significantly shapes the experiences of Humanities graduates, with those at the intersection of these identities facing compounded barriers (von Holdt et al., 2023; Rapanyane et al., 2022; Vilakazi, 2022).

To address these challenges, policy reforms are crucial as highlighted by the participants in this study. This includes creating targeted job opportunities and internship programs for Humanities graduates under BEE and similar policies, as well as collaborating with industries to align Humanities curricula with labor market demands. Furthermore, enhancing skill development through workshops on transferable skills like digital literacy and project management, alongside providing comprehensive career counselling and networking platforms specifically tailored to Humanities graduates, is essential. Strengthening oversight and transparency in job placement programs to combat corruption and nepotism is vital to ensure fair access for all graduates. Finally, initiatives must address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, particularly black women in Humanities, by acknowledging and addressing the intersectional nature of their experiences.

In conclusion, this research underscores the significant structural and systemic barriers faced by unemployed Humanities graduates in South Africa. While participants demonstrate resilience and creativity in navigating the job market, addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. This includes targeted policy reforms, greater alignment between education and employment, and a commitment to equity and transparency at all levels of governance. By implementing these recommendations, South Africa can better leverage the valuable contributions of Humanities graduates to its social and economic development.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Overview of the study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study investigated the experiences and perspectives of unemployed Humanities graduates in South African higher education institutions, with a particular focus on their decisions to pursue postgraduate studies. The research was contextualized within South Africa's broader youth unemployment crisis, which disproportionately affected graduates in fields such as Humanities due to systemic barriers and a misalignment between educational outcomes and labour market needs. The introductory chapter outlined the socio-economic challenges faced by these graduates, including the undervaluation of Humanities qualifications and pervasive issues like nepotism and corruption (Vilakazi, 2021). These factors had compelled many graduates to consider postgraduate studies as a means of enhancing their competitiveness in a restrictive job market.

The problem statement emphasized the persistent gap between higher education outputs and labour market demands, especially for Humanities graduates. Despite numerous interventions aimed at reducing unemployment, the issue remained acute. This study sought to address gaps in understanding why Humanities graduates opted for postgraduate education as a strategy to navigate unemployment. The chapter concluded by outlining the research objectives, which included examining how unemployment motivated graduates to pursue further studies, analysing their lived experiences, and exploring whether postgraduate education improved employability outcomes.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design, employing in-depth interviews and surveys to gather detailed insights into the experiences of unemployed Humanities graduates. Participants were selected from various South African universities using non-probability purposive sampling. The sample consisted of 12 individuals, aged 23 to 35, representing diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Data collection was conducted through both face-to-face and online interviews, which were subsequently transcribed and analysed using thematic content analysis (TCA) with the assistance of NVivo software. This approach facilitated the identification of key themes related to structural barriers, systemic inequalities, and coping strategies. Ethical standards were rigorously maintained, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality, and adhering to institutional guidelines.

The methodology chapter highlighted the advantages of qualitative approaches for exploring deeply personal and context-specific issues. However, it also acknowledged limitations such as the reliance on a small, nonrepresentative sample and logistical challenges during data collection.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The literature review situated the study within the broader academic and policy discourse on youth and graduate unemployment, making comparisons between international and South African contexts. For instance, in Zimbabwe, graduates often resorted to informal sector activities and political activism to cope with limited job opportunities—a phenomenon termed "waithustlinghood." Similarly, in South Africa, systemic challenges rooted in apartheid-era inequalities were exacerbated by contemporary issues such as corruption and nepotism.

Structural racism and policies like Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) were critically analysed for their limited effectiveness in addressing socio-economic disparities (von Holdt et al., 2023; Vilakazi, 2021). Although these policies aimed to foster economic inclusion, they often benefited a small elite while leaving most marginalized populations excluded. Additionally, corruption and nepotism within government hiring practices further restricted access to equitable employment opportunities.

The review also explored micro-level factors, including the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. For instance, Black women faced compounded disadvantages due to systemic racism and patriarchal norms (Archibong & Adejumo, 2013). The concept of the "precariat" was applied to describe the insecure employment conditions experienced by many graduates, highlighting the broader implications of economic and social instability (Kenny, 2016).

Coping mechanisms were also examined, including pursuing further studies, diversifying qualifications, and seeking global opportunities. These strategies were analysed within theoretical frameworks such as Nyerere's principles of self-reliance and cooperative economics, underscoring the resilience and agency of unemployed graduates.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The findings chapter presented detailed narratives of the participants' experiences, emphasizing themes such as systemic barriers, coping strategies, and the role of further education in enhancing employability. Participants reported significant challenges in translating their undergraduate qualifications into meaningful employment, citing issues such as structural racism, the undervaluation of Humanities degrees, and corruption in hiring processes.

The thematic analysis identified several coping mechanisms utilized by graduates, including:

1. **Pursuing Further Studies**: Many participants described postgraduate education as a strategic response to unemployment, enabling them to acquire specialized skills and increase their marketability.

2. **Qualification Diversification**: Some participants sought additional qualifications in more marketable fields, reflecting a proactive adaptation to the demands of the labor market.

3. **Global Opportunities**: A few participants explored international employment or academic opportunities, leveraging global platforms such as the United Nations.

4. **Cooperative Economics**: Drawing on community-driven strategies, some participants engaged in collective initiatives to create employment opportunities and support local economies.

These findings highlighted the resilience and agency of Humanities graduates as they navigated systemic challenges while also underscoring the need for policy reforms to address the structural roots of unemployment.

Gaps addressed by this research

This research addresses several key gaps in existing literature on unemployment among Humanities graduates in South Africa. Firstly, while previous studies often focus on general youth unemployment or specific sectors

like STEM, this research specifically examines the unique challenges faced by Humanities graduates, such as the undervaluation of their skills and their marginalization in the job market.

Secondly, while most studies focus on employment trends or the structural causes of unemployment, this research explores the motivations behind unemployed Humanities graduates' pursuit of postgraduate studies as a coping mechanism.

Thirdly, this research goes beyond general observations of systemic barriers to explicitly link structural racism, nepotism, and corruption to the lived experiences of Humanities graduates. It also critiques the limitations of existing policies like B-BBEE in addressing these inequalities effectively.

Furthermore, this research moves beyond a sole focus on job-seeking by exploring a range of coping mechanisms employed by unemployed graduates, such as further education, diversifying qualifications, and seeking global opportunities.

Unlike many studies that rely heavily on quantitative data, this research incorporates the personal narratives of unemployed Humanities graduates, providing valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives.

Finally, this research goes beyond a purely South African context by drawing parallels with international experiences, such as "waithustlinghood" in Zimbabwe, contributing to a broader understanding of graduate unemployment in developing countries.

By addressing these critical gaps, this research provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of unemployment among Humanities graduates in South Africa, paving the way for more effective interventions to improve their socio-economic outcomes.

5.2 Conclusion

This study provided critical insights into the socio-economic realities faced by unemployed Humanities graduates in South Africa. It illuminated the interplay between systemic barriers and individual agency, emphasizing the importance of structural reforms in aligning higher education with labour market demands. By amplifying the voices of graduates, the research advocated for inclusive policies that addressed unemployment and promoted equitable opportunities for marginalized groups.

Moreover, it explored the experiences and perspectives of unemployed Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies in South African higher education institutions. The findings underscore the interplay between individual agency and systemic labour market challenges, revealing that postgraduate studies are often pursued both as a coping strategy and as an aspirational step towards meaningful work.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The results point to the need for stronger alignment between Humanities curricula and evolving labour market demands. Higher education institutions should consider expanding professional pathways for Humanities graduates through work-integrated learning, career services, and stronger alumni networks.

Recommendations

1. Universities and bodies such as the NIHSS and NRF should make policy documents and transformationstrategies more accessible to researchers and students to inform future graduate support.

2. Comparative studies between Humanities and other disciplines could illuminate cross-disciplinary employability trends.

3. Future research should incorporate alumni survey data and employer perspectives to triangulate graduateexperiences.

4. The role of postgraduate study as both a refuge and a springboard for career progression warrants deeperinvestigation, particularly in longitudinal designs.

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Appendix A: Ethics Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE **PROTOCOL NUMBER: SOCL-2024-04**

PROJECT TITLE Exploring previously UN (der) employed graduate's perspectives of social Mobility: A case study of graduate's aspirations at WITS.

INVESTIGATOR	Miss Sauhatsi, Lerato Priscilla
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	Sociology, School of Social Sciences
DATE CONSIDERED	04/08/2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	LOW RISK
EXPIRY DATE	03/08/2025
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE: 05/08/2024	**CHAIRPERSON** _____

(Dr Obvious Katsaura)

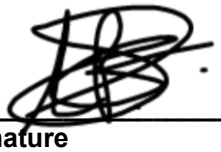
cc: Supervisor: Dr Thabang Sefalafala

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the above-mentioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research Procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

____13__/___08____/__2024_____
Date



Signature

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B: Research Permission Letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGISTRAR

26 August 2024

Lerato Sauhatsi
Student Number (1375806)
Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report
School of Social Sciences

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

"Exploring previously un(der) employed graduate's perspectives of social mobility: A case study of graduate's aspirations at WITS."

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: SOCL-2024-04)

Research Expiration: (03 August 2025)

Potgieter

Nicoleen Potgieter
University Deputy Registrar

Appendix C: Participant consent form

ConsentForm



Title of Research Project: *Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities Graduates Pursuing Postgraduate Studies in Various South African Higher Education Institutions*

Researcher: Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi

Master of Arts Candidate,

University of the Witwatersrand

Supervisor: Dr. Thabang Sefalafala

University of the Witwatersrand

Please read the following statements carefully

As a participant

I agree to the following

Please respond with a YES/NO below

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study. I havehad the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time,without giving any reason, and without consequences.
3. I understand that the interview will last no more than 1.5 hours and that I will be asked about my personalexperiences and perspectives related to my postgraduate studies and employment status.
4. I understand that all information provided will be kept confidential and that only the researcher will haveaccess to the interview transcripts and audio. The transcript will be securely stored in a password-protected folder.
5. I understand that my identity and any identifying information will be anonymized in any reports orpublications resulting from this research.

6. I agree to the interview being audio recorded

7. I agree to participate in the above study

……..signature of the participant

……...date

…….signature

…Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi…….name of researcher

……..date

Contact information:

Researcher:

Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi

Email: 1375806@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor

Dr. Thabang Sefalafala

University of the Witwatersrand

Email: thabang.sefalafala1@wits.ac.za

Appendix D: Participants information Sheet

Participants Information Sheet

Good day

My name is Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi. I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Thabang Sefalafala. I am conducting a research study about exploring the experiences and perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies in various South African higher education Institutions.

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences and perspectives of unemployed Humanities graduates who are pursuing postgraduate studies in South African higher education institutions. The study seeks to understand the challenges and opportunities encountered by these graduates, and how their experiences influence their academic and professional aspirations. The interview will take place on the premises of the University of the Witwatersrand at a time convenient for you and a neutral place for your comfort. For participants not in Johannesburg the interviews will take place online.

You are being invited to participate in an in-depth interview that will last no more than 1.5 hours. During this interview, you will be asked to share your personal experiences, thoughts, and perspectives related to your postgraduate studies and employment status.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview for online interviews I would like to record them as well. All information shared during the interview will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. The researcher will be the only person with access to the interview transcript and recording. These will be securely stored in a password-protected folder, ensuring that your information will not be disclosed in any reports or publications resulting from this research.

During the fieldwork, I will need to ask for some personal information about you including your biographical information.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. To guarantee anonymity, I will use pseudonyms in the final research report.

If you decide to take part in this study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop the interview at any point during the fieldwork should you wish to do so. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits or monetary reward for participating in the study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Thus, the risks for this study are no more than what happens in everyday life. Should some of the questions about unemployment may make you feel sad or upset, feel free to immediately stop the interview and continue at a later stage if willing. If you need some support or counselling services CCDU (Counselling Careers and Development Unit) 0117179140 are the contact details of the WITS counselling service.

The study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on details listed below. If you have any concerns of complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Resource Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Thank you for considering participation in this research. Your contribution is highly valued and will provide important insights into the experiences of Humanities graduates in South Africa.

Yours sincerely,

Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi

Master of Arts candidate

Researcher:

Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi, 1375806@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:

University of the Witwatersrand

Dr Thabang Sefalafa thabang.sefalafala1@wits.ac.za

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Exploring the experiences and perspectives of unemployment among Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Opening

A. *(Establishing Rapport)* [by shaking hands] My name is Lerato Priscilla Sauhatsi. A Masters Candidate: at the Department of Sociology at Wits.
B. *(Timeline)* The interview will take an hour to 1.5 hours. Are you available to respond to some questions currently?
I will start by asking questions about where you live, (your geographical area) who you live with and a bit of background on your studies and/or qualification. **Biographical information**

A. What is your name?
B. When and where were you born? (Locality urban or rural)
C. What is your current marital status?
D. Can you tell me more about your family structure, if married does your partner work?
E. Do you have any siblings and how many are currently working?
F. What kind of jobs are your siblings doing?
G. Do you stay with your parents?
H. Are your parents employed? If yes, what kind of jobs do they do if no, why?
I. Can you describe your educational background for me (which type of schools did you attend?)
J. What dreams and aspirations did you have as a high school student?
K. What kind of a student were you?

Aspirations

A. Can you describe your aspirations before entering higher education?
B. How have they evolved since graduating?
C. How has your personal and family background influenced your career aspirations and choices?
D. In what ways has your education shaped your sense of identity and your future aspiration?
E. How has your experience with unemployment affected your view on having a humanities degree?
F. Why did you decide to pursue a humanities degree?
G. How have your career aspirations shifted in response to unemployment?
H. Can you share any opportunities or positive experiences that have emerged from dealing withunemployment?

I. What role have support systems (family, friends, and mentors) played in your journey as an unemployed graduate?

J. What changes do you think are necessary at the policy level to improve Humanities students' employability after graduating?

K. What strategies have you adopted to navigate unemployment and pursue your further studies?

L. Do you believe that furthering your postgraduate studies will better your employability chances as a Humanities graduate? Why or why not?

M. What long term effects do you foresee from the current trends in unemployment especially forHumanities students?

N. How do you perceive the value of having a humanities degree in the current employmentlandscape?

O. What specific changes do you advocate for to support Humanities graduates with only anundergraduate degree in achieving their aspirations?

P. How do you remain hopeful and motivated about your future despite the challenges posed by unemployment?

Experiences of unemployed graduates

A. Can you describe your career aspirations before graduating and how they have changed sinceexperiencing unemployment?

B. Why did you decide to further your Humanities postgraduate studies?

C. How did your education influence your initial career goals and expectations of wage labour?

D. How has the experience of being unemployed affected your sense of identity and self-worth?

E. In what ways have you had to rethink and adjust your professional aspirations due to unemployment?

F. Do you think Humanities graduates have better chances of getting employed after their undergraduate's degree compared to other fields of study? why/ why not

G. How has unemployment impacted your perception of having a qualification in Humanities?

H. Do you think there are sufficient job opportunities for Humanities graduates holding anundergraduate degree only?

I. What are primary challenges you have encountered in your job search and career development?

J. How have family, friends, or mentors influenced your experience of unemployment and your future aspirations?

K. What strategies have you adopted to cope with the challenges of unemployment and maintain yourcareer aspirations?

L. How has unemployment reshaped your professional identity and the way you view your career path?

M. What political changes do you believe are necessary to support unemployed Humanities graduatesand to improve their competitiveness in the job market?

N. How do you feel current government policies have helped or hindered your ability to findemployment and advance your career?

O. How have professional networks or community groups impacted your job search and careeraspirations?

P. Can you share an example of how you've adapted your career goals or strategies in response to unemployment?

Q. What advice can you give other unemployed Humanities graduates to survive their period ofunemployment?

Thank you for your time and honesty. I appreciate your patience

Appendix F: Survey Report

Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities graduates Pursuing postgraduate studies.

Survey Questions and answers

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Lerato Sauhatsi a Masters of Arts student in the Humanities Department at the University of the Witwatersrand, my supervisor is Dr. Thabang Sefalafala. I am conducting a study that explores the experiences and perspective of unemployment among Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies at South African Higher education institutions.

Researcher: Lerato Sauhatsi
Institution: University of the Witwatersrand
Contact details: WhatsApp Number 0795538054

Aim: This survey aims to identify participants who meet criteria for an in-depth interview and are willing to share their experiences. Your participation is voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential.

Eligibility Criteria:
- Hold an undergraduate degree in Humanities
- Currently pursuing postgraduate studies in Humanities
- Have previously or are currently experiencing unemployment

If you agree to participate, you can complete the online survey below that will take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time. The survey is to check if you meet criteria to participate in this study.

Your response will be kept confidential. We will not collect any identifiable information such as your name or

Email address however, if you agree to participate in an in-depth interview, you can provide your WhatsApp number using any pseudonym of your choice not your actual name the researcher will be in touch, above are

the researcher's details for your interest if you would like to participate. All data will be anonymized. The information you provide will be stored securely and only accessible to the researcher.

Topic: Exploring the Experiences and Perspectives of Unemployment among Humanities graduates Pursuing Postgraduate Studies at South African Higher Education Institutions.

Introduction:

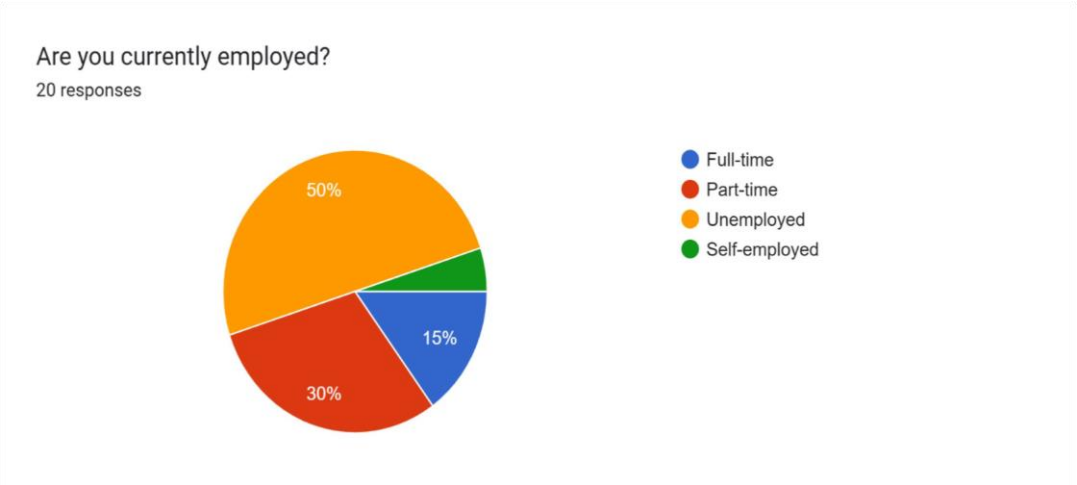
Thank you for considering participating in this important research study at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Confidentiality:

All your responses will be kept strictly confidential, anonymous, and pseudonyms of your choice will be used. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. While you may not benefit directly from participation, your response will help improve understanding of underemployment and social mobility, potentially informing future policies and practices.

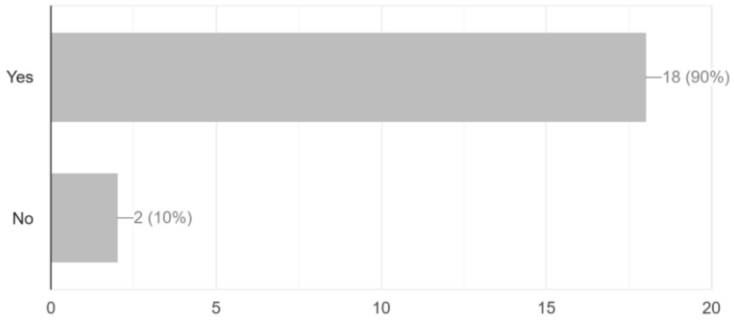
Thank you for participating in this survey! If you meet the eligibility criteria and are willing to participate in the study, we will contact you shortly to discuss the next steps.

This survey questionnaire was shared with 3156 students in Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand and through my WhatsApp and LinkedIn channels. Only 20 responses were attained and out of the 20 only 12 people were will to participate below are the questions and responses.



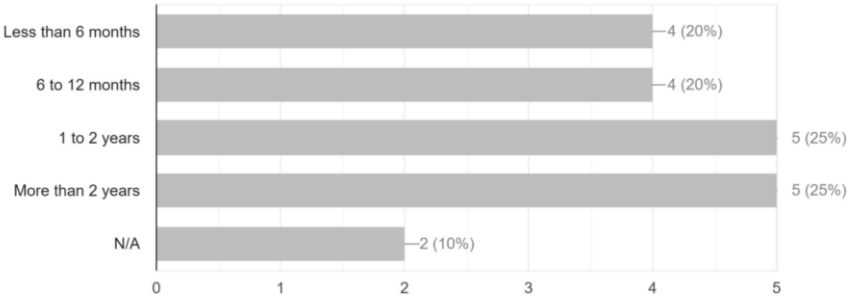
Have you experienced unemployment at any point before enrolling in postgraduate studies?

0 / 20 correct responses



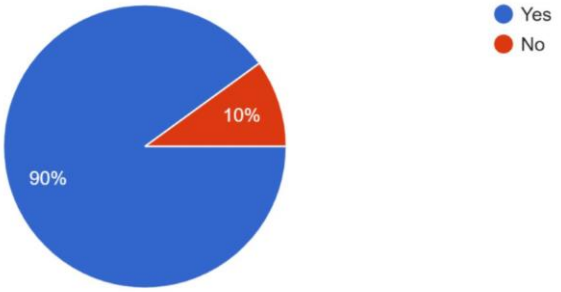
If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, how long were you unemployed Put N/A if not applicable

0 / 20 correct responses



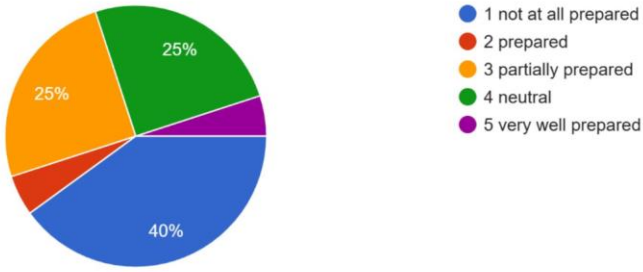
Are you currently enrolled in a postgraduate program in Humanities?

20 responses



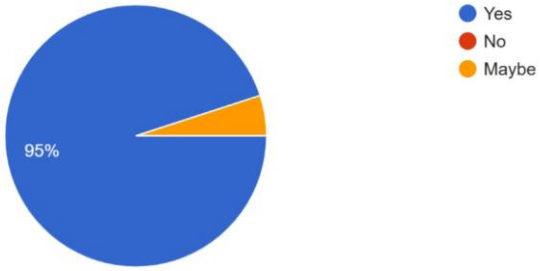
From the scale below, how has your unemployment experience been before enrolling for your postgraduate studies? Scale: 1 not at all prepared; ...partially prepared, 4 neutral, 5 very well prepared

20 responses



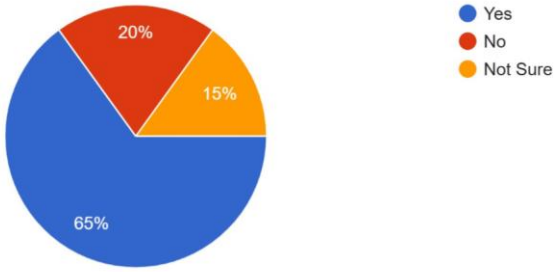
Would you be willing to participate in a study that explores the experiences and perspectives of unemployment among Humanities graduates pursuing postgraduate studies

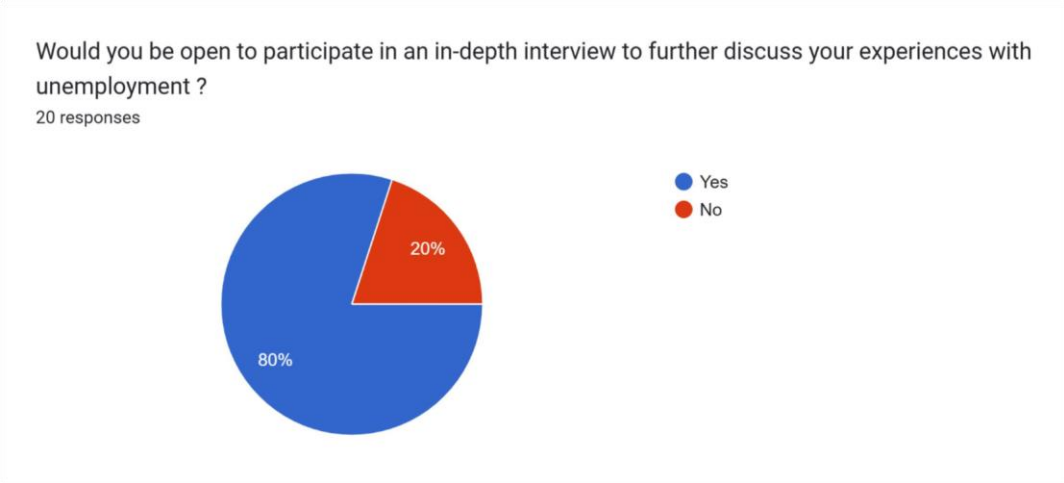
20 responses



Has unemployment affected your understanding of wage labour and the job market in South Africa? If so, how ?

20 responses





As you wait for employment opportunities, what activities have you engaged in during this period of "waithood" (e.g., volunteering, further studies, freelance work, etc?) Please describe

- Further studies 7 respondents

- Volunteering 6 respondents

-started a small business

- Coaching, networking and attending online seminars

- Had done an HR course and got referred to an unpaid position in social media

-Retail work

- Reading and writing

- Unpaid internships with academic institutions and NGOs

What challenges have you faced while waiting for employment as a postgraduate student in Humanities? Please describe

- N/A. 2 responses

- Mental health challenges because of the pressure of being unemployed, feeling like a failure. 2 responses

- Financial issues/ trauma. 3 responses

- Attitude of recruiters, lack of responses from companies, companies feeling comfortable wasting your time and being broke. 3 responses

- Not receiving feedback on my application.

- Societal pressure and family expectations. Seeing peers from other facilities progress, eg. 2 people I went to high school with, one did accounting, and the other went to do a 2-year diploma, have high end apartments

in Sand-ton and Bryanston, and have cars, with just a year and a few months of being employed. That takes a knock on a person's esteem.

- Meeting minimum requirements for HPCSA registration as a psychologist.

- It is quite difficult to get jobs that are linked to my qualification that are entry level. Most are senior level.
2 responses

- Unable to pay for my studies. Being part of the missing middle & unable to secure funding. Depression and being devalued by family members because I cannot contribute to the household finances & expenses.

-The uncertainty of financial stability. 2 responses

- Lack of money to buy data to market myself online.

- Constantly being rejected by companies because I only hold an undergraduate qualification in Humanities.

Please describe how has your experience of unemployment influenced your future aspirations, including career goals or academic pursuits?

- N/A. 2 responses

- Delays which led up to a sense of demotivation.

- It has made me more anxious about my future. I do not believe that I will be taken care of if I do not work. There is a lot of anxiety tied to my employment. I work harder that I need to work myself to exhaustion. I do not want to be unemployed ever again.

-It forced me to further my studies.

-Due to not securing any employment after completing my Honours degree, I had applied for a Masters in case such happens. I ended up going for Masters when I got accepted late February and it was more of, I accepted the offer because I did not want a possible gap year doing nothing.

-It has put me in a position where I sound very doubtful and somewhat unprepared about my future, whenever I am asked the awkward question of "so what are you planning to do after your studies"

- I feel I might only be restricted to academic spaces.

- My unemployment experience just encouraged me to return to school to better equip myself in terms of skills and education level.

- My experience with unemployment made me conscious of my decision to pursue postgraduate. I wanted to make sure that I had sufficient qualifications and to make sure that I was studying things that would get me a job.

-Ensure I am more prepared for the job market before completing my postgraduate studies

- The whole experience affected all the hopes and aspirations I had as it feels like not even an honours degree in psychology guarantees work after completion.

- It has honestly dampened my spirit, and I lost hope.

- I just started applying for jobs after a while and putting my career aspirations aside so as to just enter the labour market.

-Humanities is broad and mostly not a critical skill.

- I think I have been made to believe that unemployment is part of your journey not just as a humanities student but as women in humanities, I do not know if men face the same challenges as black women.

- It has discouraged me, looking at different opportunities in other fields, it has also encouraged me to become more open minded & diversify portfolio while I am still studying. Both positive & negative. And being unemployed has caused me to drop out of my master's program twice because of a lack of funding. - I wanted to do MA foreign policy.

- Holding a qualification that didn't help me gain employment has affected how I view my employability even as I do my postgraduate studies. Filled with fear and worry. I am sceptical about academic pursuits.

Current career goals are limited but I am interested in masters.