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Graduate unemployment: employment seeking experiences and perceptions of unemployed young graduates in townships of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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Graduate unemployment: Employment seeking experiences and perceptions of unemployed young graduates in townships of Johannesburg, South Africa.

A Masters Report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

by course work and research report

In Sociology

By

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Declaration

I, Lesaoana Mokhali, declare that this is my unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Art in Sociology by me at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has never been submitted before for any degree at this institution or in any other university.

Lesaoana Mokhali

Signature: 

Date: 19- August- 2022

Abstract

The rate of youth unemployment in South Africa is one of the highest in the world. It has become one of the fastest growing social problems that affects the wellbeing of individuals and society at large. What is particularly concerning about this phenomenon is that it has been shown that it disproportionately affects historically disadvantaged communities compared to other population groups. This study aims to add to existing literature in the area of youth unemployment, focusing particularly on youth graduate unemployment. A primary objective of the study was to explore experiences and perceptions of Black unemployed graduates residing in townships. This was done to explore their transition from university to the labour market despite having qualifications.

It is a common belief amongst young graduates that attaining a tertiary qualification would automatically open doors to employment opportunities. However, there are various challenges that some graduates face in their attempts to join the labour force. While there is a great deal of literature on graduate unemployment, studies have largely ignored the personal experiences and perceptions of graduates, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds. In the study, the authors explored young unemployed graduates' personal experiences to understand how internal and external factors, such as the type of qualification, geographical location, race, socioeconomic status, lack of skills and experience, lack of career guidance, and skill-labour market mismatch, interact with disadvantaged graduates.

The study employed a qualitative method to collect data from fifteen Black unemployed graduates from various townships in Johannesburg. These graduates are actively seeking employment in a variety of disciplines, especially those in the Humanities and Art. Candidates had to be unemployed graduates between 20-34 years of age. To gain a better understanding of how the graduate was experiencing the labour market, a qualitative study was conducted. An in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. The study found that despite actively seeking employment, the qualifications they have acquired do not match the skills required on the job market. Lack of experience and social networks were the leading reasons given by

graduates for their prolonged unemployment. The study found that the lack of career guidance, the lack of social networks to link graduates to possible employment opportunities were some of the factors that delayed the graduate's entry into the labour market

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List of Acronyms

ANC- African National Congress

SGISA- the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative

BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

DHET - Department of Higher Education and Training

GEAR- Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy

HBI – Historically Black Institution

HWI- Historically White Institution

IDC- Industrial Development Cooperation

ILO- International Labour Organisation

NEPA- Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency

NSFAS- National Student Financial Aid Scheme

NYDA- National Youth Development Agency

RDP- Reconstruction and Development Programme

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Management

TVET - Technical Vocational Education and Training

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

South Africa has been facing persistent social and economic challenges over the past few decades, which continue to affect certain segments of its population (Walker and Fongwa, 2017). These challenges are primarily attributed to the weak economy, persistent inequality, and high rates of unemployment, particularly among historically marginalized groups and the youth (Mtawa, Fongwa & Wilson-Strydom 2019; Adonis & Silinda 2021). In fact, unemployment and youth unemployment, in particular, have become the major constraints on the economic growth and social mobility of the poor in South Africa (Mtawa, Fongwa, & Wilson-Strydom, 2019). While entry into the labour market has been a challenge for most young people over the past decade and continues to be so (Nkoane & Seeletse, 2021). The state of youth unemployment in South Africa is attributed to several factors, including stagnant economic growth, skill shortages, lack of experience, and high costs associated with seeking employment (Mseleku, 2021; Nkoane & Seeletse, 2021; Graham et al., 2019). Additionally, unemployment among young graduates is increasingly becoming a developmental challenge in South Africa (Walker, 2015). While the rates of unemployed graduates are not as severe as those of young people with lower or no qualifications, it is nonetheless a growing concern (Walker, 2015:2).

The extent to which graduate unemployment is a problem in South Africa compared to unemployment rates for young people without degrees and international trends remains a subject of scholarly debate. Scholars like van der Berg and van Broekhuizen (2012) argue that graduate unemployment in South Africa is an exaggerated problem. Nevertheless, the issue of graduate unemployment remains an urgent policy concern as many graduates still struggle to find jobs despite having higher education (Baldry, 2013; Kraak, 2010; Pauw, Oosthuizen & Van Der Westhuizen, 2008; Rogan & Reynolds, 2015; Van de Rheede, 2012). Certain groups of graduates continue to experience difficulties in securing employment, despite the ongoing debate about the magnitude of the problem (Moleke, 2010).

While the alarming rate of youth unemployment in South Africa may be because of the skill shortage, on the other hand, graduates also cannot secure employment despite holding qualifications and respective skills (Baldry, 2013; Mncayi, 2021; Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). Education is often regarded as a key to success, a tool that can empower both the country's youth and the economy. In line with the statement, Post-1994, the African National Congress (ANC) emphasized that the future of the nation depends on the growth and development of the youth (Bhorata, Cassim, & Tseng, 2016; Adonis, & Silinda, 2021). The transformation agenda of higher education in South Africa, resulted in the government prioritizing the adoption of policies and developing various funding instruments (i.e., the National Student Funding Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursaries and loans) that not only widened access to tertiary institutions but also made available resources to those qualified to study at an institution of higher learning (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014; Mtawa et al., 2019). As a result, universities experienced a growth in the numbers of previously marginalized communities (i.e., from rural areas and urban townships) (Moleke, 2005; Graham et al. 2019). Many youths desire to participate in higher learning to improve their prospects in the labour market (Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019; Ngulube, 2020). The consensus among these youth is that qualifying at an institution of higher learning increases the possibility of being employed after graduating, however, many graduates still struggle to secure their first job (Van Lill & Bakker, 2020; Mseleku, 2021; Meyer & Mncayi, 2021). According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the aggregate unemployment rate among graduates in South Africa in the first quarter of 2021 was 11% (Stats SA, 2021).

The issue of graduate unemployment, as highlighted by Kraak (2013) and Graham, William, & Chrisoro (2019), is not limited to developing countries but also prevalent in developed countries. Recent literature suggests that gaining entry into the graduate labour market has become increasingly challenging for graduates worldwide. For instance, Unemployment rates are rising for graduates not only in African countries like Nigeria (Aminu, 2019) and Kenya (Ochieng, Otuya, & Ochieng, 2019) but also in Asian countries such as Taiwan, Mainland China, and East Asia (Mok, Xiong, & Ye, H. 2021). In South Africa, the problem of graduate unemployment is attributed to various factors that affect the employment prospects of individuals with tertiary

qualifications. For example, the inflexibility of the labour market (Graham et al., 2019; Mseleku, 2021) and a lack of essential skills required in the economy (Ngulube, 2020) have been identified as major contributing factors. In addition, most employers in South Africa prefer experienced graduates, making it challenging for recent graduates, especially inexperienced young graduates, to secure employment (Graham et al., 2019). Furthermore, Baldry (2013) argues that the quality of qualifications and the institutions attended affect the narrow employment prospects for graduates, while Mtawa et al. (2019) highlight the prevalence of unemployed graduates from historically disadvantaged institutions of higher education. Graduates from such institutions are often excluded from the labour market due to the assumption that they lack the necessary skills and experience (Mtawa et al., 2019; Mseleku, 2021).

1.2 Problem statement

Despite the evidence presented in various literature regarding graduate unemployment in South Africa, there has been a debate about the severity of the issue. While some literature contends that unemployment among graduates is not a significant problem (Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2012, 2016), the increasing rate of graduate unemployment among historically disadvantaged populations in South Africa suggests otherwise (Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019; Allais, 2017; Baldry, 2020). Furthermore, while the overall rate of graduate unemployment may be low, it still exists, and its impact is disproportionately felt by Black, Coloured, and Indian graduates (Graham et al., 2019). Graham et al. (2019) attribute the increasing rate of graduate unemployment among historically disadvantaged populations to a spatial mismatch that continues to affect South Africa today. Moreover, the intersectional factors of race, class, gender, and geographical location play a significant role in determining the employment prospects of graduates, particularly Black graduates who come from rural and township areas (Mncayi, 2016; Graham et al., 2019; Baldry, 2020). Ndlovu and Ndebele (2019) highlight that some graduates find themselves in chronic unemployment, particularly those from previously disadvantaged universities. Therefore, the ongoing debate on this issue underscores the need for policymakers, the private and public sectors, and civil society to recognize graduate unemployment as a significant problem that requires urgent attention.

Career choice has a profound impact on an individual's employment prospects, as some fields have more opportunities than others (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). However, most youths from townships have limited access to career guidance in their high schools, which restricts their exposure to different career options and labour market needs (Mncayi, 2016; Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017). Furthermore, some students enroll in courses that are not their preferred option or are not deemed desirable in the labour market but are welcomed as they have the potential to improve their standard of living (Graham et al., 2019). These issues highlight the importance of researching the experiences and perspectives of unemployed graduates from townships in Johannesburg. Consequently, there is a pressing need to understand the experiences and perspectives of graduates' transition to the labour market and the factors that influence their employability. This study seeks to bridge this gap in the literature by examining the experiences, perspectives, and understanding of unemployed graduates regarding the relationship between their employability, chosen career path, and their status of unemployment as they attempt to enter the labour market. The findings of this study have the potential to inform policymakers and the private sector on how best to support unemployed graduates from historically disadvantaged populations in South Africa.

1.3 Justification of the study

Education is still considered a promising solution to address inequality and promote better livelihoods among those who come from marginalized communities (Graham et al., 2019). In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the enrollment of young people in tertiary education (i.e., universities, universities of technology, Further Education and Training colleges (FETs), and this trend is expected to continue) (Graham et al., 2019). Furthermore, there has been an uptick in young people applying for government funding schemes such as the NSFAS, and funding offered by the Department of Education on a provincial level, such as the Gauteng City-Region Academy (GCRA) to support their post-secondary education, indicating a strong desire among young people to improve their chances in the job market (GDED, 2021). However, despite these efforts, the rate of unemployment among graduates with tertiary qualifications is on the rise, which can be a significant burden on their mental health and self-esteem (Ndlovu &

Ndebele, 2019; Graham et al., 2019; Baldry, 2013). This issue undermines the efforts of graduates, their families, and the state to combat the ongoing crisis of youth unemployment (Graham et al., 2019). These concerns have motivated this research study, which seeks to explore the experiences and perceptions of graduates from historically marginalized communities in Johannesburg townships, as they transition from tertiary institutions to the competitive labor market.

The relevance of this study is evident in the existing literature, which identifies a research gap on graduate unemployment in Johannesburg townships, particularly among historically marginalized communities (Moleke, 2005, 2010). Given the prevalence of graduate unemployment in these communities, it is crucial to examine the challenges faced by graduates in securing employment. This study aims to address this gap by shedding light on the unique obstacles that graduates from marginalized communities encounter in their pursuit of employment. The findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing important insights into the needs of graduates from historically marginalized communities. This, in turn, will inform policymakers of the specific interventions required to effectively address the issue of graduate unemployment in these communities. The study's outcomes will also offer insights into the challenges faced by unemployed graduates and provide them with a platform to share their experiences and perspectives. Overall, this research will advance the current understanding of graduate unemployment in Johannesburg townships and the challenges faced by graduates from historically marginalized communities. As such, the study has important implications for policy, practice, and the well-being of unemployed graduates.

The issue of graduate unemployment is a major concern in South Africa, as the country strives to combat persistent social problems such as inequality, unemployment, and poverty that have persisted since 1994. In response, the government has implemented various initiatives, such as the Itukise internships and the South African Graduate Development Association (SAGDA), aimed at reducing graduate unemployment (Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014). Despite these efforts, however, a growing number of graduates are finding it difficult to participate in the economy after completing their studies, particularly among those from townships who believed that a

tertiary education would improve their employment prospects and future opportunities (Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019; Graham et al., 2019). This research study seeks to explore and describe the experiences and perspectives of unemployed graduates from townships in Johannesburg, with a focus on the challenges they face when trying to enter the labour market despite their qualifications. Specifically, the study aims to gain an understanding of graduates' experiences and the relationship between their employability and their status of being unemployed. The research will be conducted in the field of Humanities and Arts, as these fields have a significant number of graduates who struggle to secure employment compared to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields of study (Mncayi, 2016; Moleke, 2010).

1.4 Research objectives

Given the significant lack of qualitative studies that focus on the impact of career/degree choice on graduate employability and insights from the perspectives, understanding and experiences of unemployed graduates in Gauteng, this research poses and seeks to answer the following questions:

What are graduates' experiences and understanding of the relationship between graduate employability and their unemployed status?

To answer the research question, the following objectives were considered to guide the study:

1. To understand the experiences of graduates regarding their unemployment status despite their tertiary qualifications.
2. To understand in what way graduates, perceive employability in their chosen career path to be connected to their unemployed status.
3. Finding out which interventions graduates consider for improving their employability.

By examining these objectives, we will be able to understand the factors that hinder the transition to the labour market and how they manifest themselves in the high rate of graduate unemployment in Johannesburg.

1.5 Structural outline of the thesis

This research study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

Chapter one provided a background to the research study regarding the socio-economic challenge of unemployment that is faced by South African youth and graduates' youth in particular. It highlighted how the legacy of apartheid and the structural inequalities that characterized it linger 27 years after it was abolished. The chapter also outlines the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the aim and objectives of the study, the justification for the study, and the presented research questions that guided this study.

Chapter two: A literature review of graduate employability

This chapter discusses the existing theoretical and empirical literature on the concept of graduate employability. It highlights the growing trend of unemployed graduates on a global, local and provincial level.

Chapter three: Research method

This chapter describes the method chosen to conduct the study. It lays out the research design, sampling methods, and instruments used to gather and analyze the collected data.

Chapter four: Research findings and analysis

The research study findings, their integration with the literature, as well as a discussion of these findings will be presented in chapter four.

Chapter five: Discussion of findings

Chapter five will discuss research findings concerning the existing literature on graduate employability. Moreover, the chapter discusses the implications and the limitations of the research study. Recommendations from the discussions were also made in this chapter, and the conclusion of the research study was also provided.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Developing countries like South Africa, where the unemployment rate is among the highest in the world, face an alarming issue of graduate unemployment (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). This chapter will review the relevant existing literature and research studies concerning the socio-economic crisis of youth unemployment, with a particular focus on graduates unemployment. To complete this review, journal articles, internet websites, and research reports were used as reading materials.

2.2 Youth unemployment in the global context

2.2 1 Youth unemployment in the global context

The crisis of youth unemployment and unemployment among young graduates, in particular, is a challenge that is experienced by both developed and developing countries (Curtain, 2015). Youth constitute a significant proportion of the global population (ILO, 2021) and represent a crucial asset for building a better present and future (Curtain, 2015). However, they are also the most vulnerable group and are prone to various socio-economic ills, with unemployment being the most prevalent one, and the focus of this paper (ILO, 2020; Mago, 2014). Youth unemployment was on the rise even before the Covid-19 pandemic, but it has now reached an unprecedented level compared to any other financial crisis before the pandemic (ILO, 2021). For example, in G20 countries, the unemployment rate among young people in 2020/2021 increased in developed regions such as the United Kingdom (11.2%), Spain (30.6%), India (22.9%), and Brazil (13.2%), while the youth unemployment rate in South Africa is at a staggering 66.5% (ILO, 2021).

The International Labour Organization (2021) also highlights an increasing trend of graduate unemployment that has had a negative impact on the global labour force. Taking the example of India and China, two members of the BRICS and countries considered to be in their developmental phase with emerging economies, previous literature shows that the challenge of graduate unemployment is not unique to South Africa. All developing and emerging economies at some point experience this challenge of excess graduates that the labour market cannot absorb.

A 2021 study by the ILO highlights that youth unemployment in developing countries is steadily rising and has become more prevalent than global adult unemployment (ILO, 2021). Graduate unemployment has also been experienced in developing countries such as India and China, and it is prevalent among young graduates compared to adult graduates, (Chakraborty, 2010; Nepram, Singh & Jaman, 2021). The character, origin, and impact of graduate unemployment are similar across countries (ILO, 2021; Nepram et al., 2021; Yang, 2018).

For instance, Chakraborty (2010) explains that upon gaining independence in 1947, India rebuilt its economy and met the high demand for technically skilled and academically qualified labour. The Indian government and higher education institutions were tasked with preparing graduates to keep up with structural changes in the economy that required skilled labourers (Nepram et al., 2021; Chakraborty, 2010). However, as Tilak and Varghese (1991) point out, as time passed, the increased number of graduates could not be absorbed by the labour market. There are various factors of graduate unemployment in India that have shaped and continue to shape the employability of graduates, factors such as the quality of higher education, the type of qualification, the mismatch between graduates' skills and the skill requirements in the labour market, and the quality of tertiary education attended (Chakraborty, 2010; Nepram et al., 2021; Singh & Raj, 2018). Furthermore, Singh & Raj (2018) also argue that the massification of higher education in India has resulted in the erosion of the quality of higher education. This is due to un-uniform and outdated curricula, as well as institutions that are too small to be viable and have low quality due to sub-standard programmes.

On the other hand, China has also experienced a rapid increase in unemployment among young graduates because of the massification of higher education (Litao and Yanjie, 2010; Bai, 2006; Yang, 2018). The Chinese government also aimed to transform its economy and increase access to higher education by 15% by 2010 (Litao and Yanjie, 2010; Yang, 2018). This led to educational reforms that were advanced to increase higher education enrollment as well as to meet their goal of transforming their economy (Litao and Yanjie, 2010:2; Bai, 2006:1). However, Liu (2009:1) argues that the Chinese government failed to account for the labor market's capacity to accommodate the growing numbers of graduates, leading to an oversupply of qualified labor that could not be absorbed by the market. Another contributing factor to the

rise in graduate unemployment in China is the quality of tertiary institutions attended by graduates, as suggested by Liu (2009). Liu (2009:45) explains that a poor quality of institutions reduces the chances of young graduates securing employment on the job market. For example, Liu (2009) and Litao and Yanjie's (2010) studies demonstrated that holding diplomas from institutions with lower standards made it difficult for these graduates to be absorbed into the country's labor force.

Moreover, unemployment among graduates in China resulted from a mismatch between the skills graduates gained and the skills that were demanded in the expanding sectors of the economy (Litao and Yanjie, 2010). Yang's (2018) study found that graduates' fields of study also played a role in China's rising unemployment rates, particularly among those who majored in Humanities and Social Sciences than graduates from technical or economically orientated fields of study. Furthermore, Litao and Yanjie (2010) suggest that many Chinese sectors focus mainly on labor-intensive work such as industries, factories, construction, and manufacturing, all of which offer employment opportunities that are not aligned with what graduates have studied and the skills they have acquired. Consequently, the number of underemployed graduates grew. According to Yang (2018), the industrialization and mechanization of production means in China created a significantly increased demand for graduates with technical skills than graduates with general skills like humanities graduates, contributing to the struggle for Humanities and Social Sciences graduates to secure employment after graduation. Yang (2018) further attributes graduate unemployment to poor graduates' computer skills and command of the English language.

It is pertinent to emphasize the similarities between each of these BRICS members. This is because the character, origin, and impact of unemployed graduates in China, India, and South Africa are similar. In all these countries there are common factors that contribute to the trend of graduate unemployment. After the restructuring of the economy and the massification of higher education in all three countries, for example, unemployment trends among graduates started to emerge. Furthermore, for some graduates, the transition experience is negatively impacted by skill mismatches, geographical location, and socioeconomic background to name a few (Yang, 2018; Nepram et al.,2021), In all three countries graduates from the Humanities and Arts fields,

in particular, struggle to be absorbed into the labour force (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2016; Yang, 2018; Nepram et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Youth unemployment South African context

In South Africa, the definition of youth employment is either narrow or broad. Narrowly defined, it refers to when a young person is actively looking for employment but is without work, while the broad definition includes young people who have given up looking for employment or are not actively engaged in the search (Kingdon and Knight, 2001). South Africa was already facing a steadily growing unemployment rate before the Covid-19 pandemic, which peaked during the pandemic due to safety regulations (Ranchhod and Daniels, 2021). According to StatsSA (2021), the official unemployment rate in South Africa increased by 1.8% in the second quarter of 2021, rising from 32.6% to 34.4%. The youth unemployment rate in South Africa is over 50%, which is the highest among other countries. South Africa has been struggling with increasing youth unemployment, exacerbated by the legacies of apartheid and various forms of inequality (Dias and Posel, 2007; Mokgahloa, 2005). The following tables provide the percentage of unemployment by province and metropolitan area in South Africa.

The provincial unemployment rate: Official and Expanded Q2: 2021

Province	Official unemployment rate	Expanded unemployment rate
Eastern Cape	47.1%	53.0%
Free State	36.5%	45.2%
Gauteng	35.4%	42.7%
KwaZulu-Natal	32.5%	47.1%
Limpopo	30.4%	49.9%
Mpumalanga	35.2%	46.5%
Northern Cape	28.1%	50.3%
North West	35.2%	46.9%
Western Cape	25.8%	29.1%

A summary of the unemployment rate by metropolitan area

Metropole	Unemployment rate	Employed/population ratio (absorption)
Mangaung	23.0%	42%
eThekwini	26.0%	42.7%
Cape Town	27.6%	47.4%
Buffalo City	32.6%	40.4%
Ekurhuleni	33.1%	44.7%
Tshwane	35.8%	46.2%
City of Johannesburg	37.3%	42.9%
Nelson Mandela Bay	39.8%	39.2%

The youth in South Africa represents a considerable proportion of the total population. Youth is a segment of the population that falls within the 18 -35 age bracket of age (NYP, 2021). With the rising unemployment rate in South Africa, young people are the most affected; they make up most of those without work (StatsSA, 2021). Research studies concerning unemployment in South Africa (Cloete, 2015; du Toit, et al., 2018; Chatindiara, 2019; van Lill & Bakker, 2022) show that unemployment is the number one concern among youth, and this holds for those with or without qualifications. These studies show that today's youth are ever more uncertain about their future employment prospects in the labour market. This is a cause of significant concern to a nation that is still developing and healing from the legacies of the South African past that were characterized by social and economic discrimination along racial lines (Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). The persisting high unemployment rate leads to increasing inequality, social exclusion, wasteful use of resources, increasing insecurity, and suffering among the unemployed (Mokgohloa, 2006).

Graham & Mlatsheni (2016:51) argue that the socio-economic crisis of youth unemployment in South Africa is caused by the ever-changing nature of the labour market and the skill mismatches resulting from the education system. According to De Lannoy (2015:52), the majority of South African youth struggle to secure employment because the labour market currently requires a

skilled labour force. For Graham & Mlatsheni (2016:51), this crisis is not new; it is the result of a policy shift that took place in the late 1990s to early 2000s towards a high productivity economy, driven by the restructuring of work aided by advancements in technological growth, hence the need for skilled workers.

The struggle of young people is compounded by the fact that they are considered inexperienced and less productive compared to a matured labour force (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2016). This is mostly attributed to the poor or lack of education and training of young people in some parts of the country (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2016; Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). Previous literature also shows that unemployment disproportionately affects youth from previously disadvantaged communities, those residing in rural areas and townships, and predominantly Black youth (Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). In addition to being rejected by the labour market, this youth also struggles to derive a living from the informal sector in South Africa. This is because the South African informal sector is said to be small compared to other countries and lacks the elasticity to absorb the growing number of unemployed youth (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2016).

2.3 Factors influencing youth unemployment in South Africa

South Africa, like most developing countries in the world, has been experiencing slow economic growth, which culminated in a declining economy and a shrinking of job opportunities (Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). Previous literature concerning youth unemployment trends in South Africa by Patel & Choga (2018) and Marumo & Sebolaaneng (2019) argue that unique to South Africa, the unemployment trend that the country is currently experiencing is a result of a restructuring of the economy experienced post-1994, which subsequently has also resulted in the restructuring of work in general. The transition to a democratic state was accompanied by the transformation of the economy to include those who were previously marginalized, resulting in the influx of unskilled workers; hence, the growth in unemployment post-1994 (Patel & Choga, 2018; Marumo & Sebolaaneng, 2019; Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020).

In addition, after the 2008/2009 financial crash, many capitalists/employers prioritized growing their capital reserves over creating employment opportunities (Marumo & Sebolaaneng, 2019). And more recently, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the global economy and has also contributed to the growing trend of youth unemployment (Shukla, 2020). Due to the pandemic, the economy and the labour market have been disrupted in South Africa (Shukla, 2020). The measures (i.e., subsequent waves of lockdowns and restrictions) that were taken to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus further weakened the economy, resulting in the loss of jobs and an increase in unemployment, particularly among young people (Ranchhod & Daniels, 2021).

There are significant shortfalls that are often attached to youth's inability to secure employment in today's economic environment. Various factors cause them to be overlooked when selecting workers. Critical skill scarcity is the factor that often leads to joblessness (Patel & Choga, 2018). Du Toit & Roodt (2009) define critical skills as specific skills that are required for certain professions (i.e., this includes basic skills such as literacy and problem-solving skills. While the concept of scarce skills may be used to highlight the shortage of skills targeted at certain jobs, particularly skills that require experienced individuals. It is also a useful tool that highlights the growing trend of the skill gap. This trend is cited as a major cause of unemployment among the youth of South Africa. The skill gap, according to Du Tout & Roodt (2009), refers gap between the skills that job seekers have and the set of skills that employers/ occupations require. South African youth have been said to be less productive, less skilled, and less experienced when compared to the older generation (Patel & Choga, 2018; Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). The youth are said to lack education and training; hence, a high number of them are locked out of the labour market (Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). The skill gap can result from a myriad of factors that have accumulated over the years, like change in technology, which is always accompanied by changes in workplace organization, and even job losses (Cloete, 2015).

In South Africa, the skill gap can be attributed to the scarcity of critical skills because of the changing structure of the economy from a primary economy, i.e., mining, and farming, to a service-oriented one that took place post-1994 (Cloete, 2015). According to Cloete (2015) and

Patel & Choga (2018), the abolishment of the apartheid regime brought with it many changes in the social and economic sectors in South Africa. For instance, there was an unprecedented migration of Black people who were confined from rural areas (i.e., previously called Bantustans) to urban areas, mostly urban townships, to be near employment opportunities (Moleke, 2010). This increased the number of the unskilled labour force, and the changing structures of the economy could not absorb them. (Ngulube, 2020).

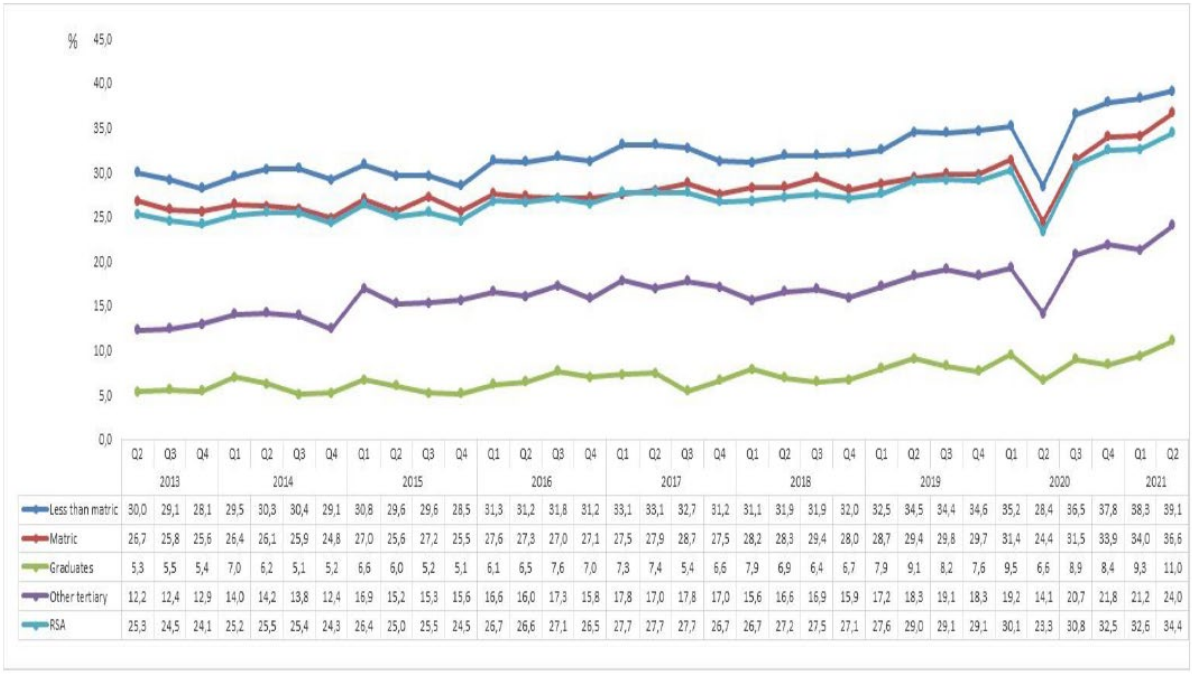
Education has always been seen as a key that unlocks the doors to employment and better employment with benefits; i.e., it enhances an individual's job prospects by enhancing their literacy and problem-solving skills (Baldry, 2016; Ngulube, 2020). However, the link between the effects of education on employability has to be put into question, particularly considering the increasing trends where young people who are better educated still find themselves unemployed because of the inability of the labour market to absorb them (Mbekeni & Phiri, 2020). The unemployment crisis in South Africa is a problem that has been highlighted to disproportionately affect historically disadvantaged segments of young men and women, particularly black rural and township youth, most of whom have inherited the socio-economic struggle of their parents (Modise, 2018; Mago, 2018; Mthembu, 2016). This segment of youth has been highlighted in various studies as being the hardest affected. While rural areas have been reported to have the highest number of unemployed youths, townships are a new breeding ground for youth without work (Modise, 2018; Mthembu, 2016).

Unemployment among young people in townships is becoming a serious threat to the goal of eradicating inequality and poverty, as well as rebuilding the economy (Mago, 2018). For years, township dwellers have been deriving livelihoods from the informal sector, but because of the size and rigidity of the sector in South Africa, it could not create sufficient employment opportunities for the increasing number of job seekers (Charman, 2016). This is further made difficult by the concentration of large corporations/businesses with an unfair advantage over the production and distribution of goods and services in townships (Modise, 2018).

2.4 Graduate unemployment and the South African labour market

The unemployment rate in South Africa is a growing issue and university graduates are not spared from this crisis. Graduate unemployment has been intensifying since increasing access to higher education in South Africa (Edayi, 2015; Mncayi, 2016). The increase in access also translates to an oversupply of qualified graduates in the labour market, while the available employment opportunities could only accommodate a few (Mncayi, 2016; Van Broekhuizen, 2016).

Figure 2 shows graduate unemployment in South Africa in the second quarter of 2021 registered at 11%, showing steady growth from the first quarter, which was 9.3%. However, the is still a higher expectation attached to the idea that pursuing a qualification from an institution of higher learning would significantly improve an individual's chances of better employment prospects (Baldry, 2016; Wildschut et al., 2018; Ngulube, 2020). Moreover, there has been a growing trend of qualified graduates struggling to find employment in this competitive labour market. What is more concerning is that young graduates are the most susceptible to being unemployed compared to older cohorts (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). In addition, unemployment among graduates resides disproportionately among Black and Colored graduates who reside in townships (Wildschut et al., 2019; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019).



	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
	2013			2014				2015				2016				2017				2018				2019				2020				2021	
Less than matric	30,0	29,1	28,1	29,5	30,3	30,4	29,1	30,8	29,6	29,6	28,5	31,3	31,2	31,8	31,2	33,1	33,1	32,7	31,2	31,1	31,9	31,9	32,0	32,5	34,5	34,4	34,6	35,2	28,4	36,5	37,8	38,3	39,1
Matric	26,7	25,8	25,6	26,4	26,1	25,9	24,8	27,0	25,6	27,2	25,5	27,6	27,3	27,0	27,1	27,5	27,9	28,7	27,5	28,2	28,3	29,4	28,0	28,7	29,4	29,8	29,7	31,4	24,4	31,5	33,9	34,0	36,6
Graduates	5,3	5,5	5,4	7,0	6,2	5,1	5,2	6,6	6,0	5,2	5,1	6,1	6,5	7,6	7,0	7,3	7,4	5,4	6,6	7,9	6,9	6,4	6,7	7,9	9,1	8,2	7,6	9,5	6,6	8,9	8,4	9,3	11,0
Other tertiary	12,2	12,4	12,9	14,0	14,2	13,8	12,4	16,9	15,2	15,3	15,6	16,6	16,0	17,3	15,8	17,8	17,0	17,8	17,0	15,6	16,6	16,9	15,9	17,2	18,3	19,1	18,3	19,2	14,1	20,7	21,8	21,2	24,0
RSA	25,3	24,5	24,1	25,2	25,5	25,4	24,3	26,4	25,0	25,5	24,5	26,7	26,6	27,1	26,5	27,7	27,7	27,7	26,7	26,7	27,2	27,5	27,1	27,6	29,0	29,1	29,1	30,1	23,3	30,8	32,5	32,6	34,4

Current literature on graduate employability categorizes the causes of graduate unemployment into individual factors and structural factors within the labor force. *Individual factors* have been highlighted to play a role in the trend of graduate unemployment (Moleke, 2010; Wildschut et al., 2018). These include factors such as demographic factors like race, age, and gender. *Educational factors* also contribute to the rising rate of unemployed graduates (Moleke, 2010; Wildschut et al., 2018). This includes the institutions of higher education attended and the type of qualification attained.

Moleke (2010) and Wildschut et al. (2018) demonstrate that graduates with degrees in the humanities have lower prospects compared to graduates with different degrees, i.e., STEM degrees. Graduates from Historically Black universities in South Africa take longer to be absorbed into the labor market after completing their studies compared to those from historically White universities (Moleke, 2010; Van Broekhuizen, 2016; Wildschut et al., 2018). This is imperative to understand because, as Wildschut et al. (2018) argue, these disparities between the type of qualification and the type of university attended influence the decision of employers, being biased toward graduates from Historically White Institutions (HWI) than graduates from

Historically Black institutions (HBI). This is because of the assumption that HWI has better educational standards and produces better graduates than HBI.

2.5 Graduate employability

The employability of graduates is not only a concern for individuals but also for the social and economic development of the country. The concept of employability in the context of graduates' employment pertains to the competencies of a graduate to get and keep a fulfilling job after completion of their studies. It entails having a set of skills, personal attributes, understanding, and knowledge, which will probably increase the chances of graduates being employed and securing jobs they deem satisfying (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

South Africa, as a developing country and a country that is still characterized by stark inequality and poverty along racial lines because of its dark history, needs to give full attention to the concept of employability. Defining the concept has proven difficult and complex, partly because many parties have defined the concept based on various perspectives, i.e., researchers (both in theory and policy), employers and institutions. Whether the term is assigned a straightforward and simple definition from the dictionary, which is "the extent to which a person possesses certain skills, knowledge, attitudes, etc., that make them suitable for paid work" (*Oxford Learners Dictionaries*), employers' perspective regards the employability of individuals as characteristics that enable them to flourish in their line of work. South African organizations have also come up with a definition. While implying that employability development is a priority for the government, it again emphasizes the importance of individual skills (Wildschut, Mncwango, Rogan, Rust, Fongwa, & Meiring, 2018).

As a concept within academia, employability is closely related to its application to examine trends between education and supply and demand on the labour market side of things. This is work and those seeking work in various contexts (Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011). The perspectives differ fundamentally in that they emphasize the individual's personality and aptitude for work, or the factors that influence the individual's ability to obtain a job (or a "match" in job search theory), change jobs or improve their current one. An individual's employability is

defined as the qualities and skills necessary to meet the ever-changing demands of the workplace and to enhance their potential and aspirations within their chosen career field (Lowden et al., 2011). The working definition of employability used in this study refers to developing skills and adaptable workforces in which people who can work are encouraged to develop the skills, knowledge, technology, and adaptability to enable them to enter and remain in employment for as long as possible (Lowden et al., 2011; Ngulube, 2020; Moleke, 2010, 2016).

Those who desire to increase their chances of being employable choose the route of obtaining a degree from higher education. Unfortunately, they have met with the unfortunate fate of unemployment despite their qualifications (Wildschut et al., 2018). The concept of graduate employability in this context highlights the universally changing relationship between the role of higher education and the labor market (Tomlinson, 2017). Tomlinson (2017) argues that the changing relationship between the labor market and higher education is attributed to the oversupply of graduates in a stagnant labor market, where there are a smaller number of jobs available or where some skills are no longer in demand. The result of this change is competition for employment among graduates in the labor market. Because of limited employment opportunities, employers search for highly qualified graduates who display employable skills and attributes (Lowden et al., 2011). Hence, those who lack or are assumed to lack the necessary employability skills find it difficult to successfully transition to the labor market.

2.6 The employment-seeking behaviour and experiences of unemployed youth graduates

The employment search behaviour of graduates in South Africa is considered to play an important role in the growing unemployment rate (Ali et al., 2016; de Witte, Rothmann & Jackson, 2010; van Hooft et al., 2013). The process of searching for employment, according to Van Hooft et al. (2013), is defined as a goal-oriented and self-regulatory process that those seeking employment have to navigate through to find employment. Thus, individuals' behaviours shape the success or unsuccess of the employment search process (Van Hooft et al., 2013).

For Maarten, Willy, Hans De Witte & Feather (2005) and Ali et al. (2016), the employment-seeking behaviour of graduates is influenced by contextual features such as the level of the graduate's motivation, self-determination, and expectations they have to secure employment. These factors play a critical role in influencing the employment-seeking behaviours of graduates, hence their employment search success (Ali et al., 2016).

These factors have also been explored by many authors who illustrate how these relate and interact with each other to the transitioning experience of graduates into the labour market, that is, whether they experience the employment search process negatively or positively (De Witte et al., 2010). Moreover, Ali et al. (2016) argue that graduates' employment search behaviours determine whether they maintain engagement with the search process and how prepared the graduates are to find employment (preparatory behaviours having clear career goals, valuing securing employment, etc.). This is also determined by having an effective job searching strategy, as well as being active in the labour market (active employment searching behaviours, e.g., engaging with various search strategies) (Ali et al., 2016).

Due to the time-consuming and unpredictable nature of the process of seeking employment, having the motivation to keep searching for work while facing setbacks and various obstacles is critical to the success of finding employment. In their study, Maarten et al. (2005) and Ali et al. (2016) highlight employment search intensity as a factor that influences job search behaviours (i.e., initiating and maintaining the search process) that can be used to predict the chances of employment seekers finding employment. Maarten et al. (2005) refer to employment search intensity as the devotion of one's time and efforts in an attempt to secure employment. Maarten et al. (2005) and de Witte et al. (2012) argue that employment search intensity is shaped by their motivation to keep searching for employment opportunities in the face of challenges. That is, employment search intensity increases when motivation levels are high, and low levels of motivation lead to low search intensity (Maarten et al., 2005; de Witte et al., 2012). Thus, having a high level of search intensity increases a person's chances of finding employment that is suitable for the applicant, and it is most effective if an individual has resources at their disposal (de Witte et al., 2012). Resources that will allow them to be engaged more frequently with the labour market to increase reach to opportunities which may translate into employment offers.

In South Africa, the growing number of unemployed graduates who lose motivation to seek employment due to long periods of unemployment is a concern, with many choosing to find alternative means of improving their livelihoods (Baldry, 2016; Mamaleka, 2020). Ali et al. (2016) found that discouraged employment seekers may switch to alternative activities to cope with being unemployed, particularly when their motivation is significantly lower than the target activity of finding employment in their fields of study. These alternative activities include working in semi-skilled jobs (such as retail stores), or choosing to further their studies as a way to cope with the stress of being unemployed (Mamaleka, 2020).

Some unemployed graduates rely on support structures, either through familial relationships such as close family members and friends who offer financial support, or social media groups tailored for job-seeking graduates (van Hooft et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2016). However, the success of these support structures is dependent on the individual's motivation to continue searching for employment opportunities. Thus, maintaining high levels of motivation is critical to the success of finding employment, particularly for graduates who face various challenges during the employment search process in South Africa.

2.7 Demographic factors influencing graduate unemployment

2.7.1 Race and graduate unemployment

In South Africa, literature concerning graduate unemployment or unemployment in general shows that race is still a contributing factor (Baldry, 2016). Previous studies show that Black youth make up the largest segment of the unemployed population, and graduate unemployment is also prevalent among Black graduates (Wildschut et al., 2018; Baldry, 2016). Previous studies by Moleke (2006) and Baldry (2016) found that the spatial mismatch, as a result of the apartheid system, contributes further to the differences in employment among races. Both authors contend that the high rate of unemployment among Blacks is attributed to the fact that even after the democratic dispensation, Black people predominantly reside in areas without economic activity. As a result, they have to travel long distances to metropolitan areas to access employment opportunities (Meleke, 2006; Baldry, 2016).

In the context of graduate unemployment, Baldry (2016) notes that Black graduates are five times more likely to be unemployed compared to Coloured, Indian, and White graduates. As noted by Moleke (2006), unemployment among Black graduates followed the massification of higher education as a measure to increase the participation of deserving individuals from previously disadvantaged communities in higher education and, thus, the economy.

Wildschut et al. (2018) studies support these findings and also argue that Black African and Coloured graduates have the lowest prospects of getting employment in comparison with other races, even if they hold the same qualification. Van Broekhuizen and van der Berg (2012) contend that the reason there is a prevalence of unemployed among Black graduates compared to their counterparts has to do with the fact that Black graduates are from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and joining the labor force might be the only way for them to earn a living. In their argument, Black graduates have limited to no financial resources that they can rely on after graduation, thus forcing them to consider labor market participation as one reliable source of earning an income (Van Broekhuizen and van der Berg, 2012).

2.7.2 Age and graduate unemployment

In South Africa, according to Graham et al. (2019), the age of some graduates is one of the reasons why they struggle to find employment, especially recent graduates who are 35 years of age and below. This finding is corroborated by Fongwa's (2018) study concerning unemployed graduates. The study's findings show that, while unemployment is prevalent among younger graduates from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, younger graduates have difficulties finding employment compared to older graduates. According to Fongwa (2018), this is because employers often think young graduates lack workplace skills, while mature-age graduates may have experience in the workplace.

Moreover, Van Lill & Bakker (2020) argue that younger graduates are less likely to be demanded by employers who perceive younger graduates as inexperienced and thus pose a risk factor than older graduates do. Similarly, a study of graduate unemployment in the banking sector (Oluwajodu et al., 2015) found that younger graduates struggle to secure employment in

the banking sector compared to the older cohorts because older graduates are viewed as mature, and some are viewed to have gained experience over the years.

Comparably, this trend of young graduate unemployment is not unique to South Africa. The trend has also been noted in BRICS economies such as India (Singh & Raj, 2018). Young graduates in India are more likely to struggle to find employment than their adult counterparts. Among the reasons for high unemployment in India is the lack of experience of young graduates (Singh & Raj, 2018).

2.7.3 Gender and graduate unemployment

The concept of gender also seems to play a role in the increasing rates of unemployment and graduate unemployment, with females having the highest amount of unemployment percentage (Beaudry, 2019; Wildschut et al., 2018). In the South African context, this illustrates that women's responsibilities are still centered on unpaid household chores and child-rearing. Furthermore, their economic participation remains relatively limited (Beaudry, 2019). Wildschut et al. (2018) and Baldry (2016) suggest that even after the massification of higher education, which resulted in the increase of women in institutions of higher learning, they continue to experience higher unemployment rates compared to males. Wildschut et al. (2019) and Prozesky & Beaudry (2019) argue that this is because in South Africa, some workplaces still prefer white men, followed by white women, then black men, with black women coming last.

Age also plays a role in the increasing unemployment of women in South Africa. According to Prozesky & Beaudry (2019), women between the ages of 18 and 25 have difficulties securing work compared to males of the same age. Another factor that contributes to higher levels of unemployment among women, according to Allais (2017), is the field of study and the type of education they have received. Most women opt for qualifications in the humanities and education compared to male-dominated fields like engineering (Allais, 2017). As a result, unemployment prevails among female graduates compared to male graduates.

2.7.4 Socioeconomic status and graduate unemployment

Another factor that influences the ability of unemployed graduates to be active and effective in the process of employment search is the socio-economic status of the individual graduate (Baldry, 2013). It affects the ability to engage in the process of job search effectively and consistently (Baldry, 2013; Moleke, 2006). According to Ali et al. (2012), the socio-economic status of graduates also determines the kinds of resources at their disposal as well as the employment opportunities they are exposed to. Ali et al. (2012) argues that graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds usually have reduced access to employment opportunities and resources that they can use to enhance their success in the labour market. Consequently, their socio-economic background weakens their employment prospects (Moleke, 2006; Mamaleka, 2020). Furthermore, according to Case et al. (2018), graduates' employability is also determined by the relationship between graduates' socioeconomic background and the quality of their qualifications. In their study, Case et al. (2018) found that because of their cultural capital, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to do better in higher education due to the environment they grew up in. This further puts them in better positions to access certain knowledge and resources that give them an upper hand in the labour market (Case et al., 2018).

The transition from higher education to the labor market is challenging for graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds, compounded by the low-income level of graduates' families, which serves as an obstacle for them to successfully navigate the labor market (Case et al., 2018). This is because to navigate the labor market, an individual needs financial resources to get around looking for employment opportunities. This becomes a serious problem when the graduate's family is unable to provide monetary assistance, which then leads to inconsistent employment search behavior (Case et al., 2018; Mamaleka, 2020). This is because searching for employment in newspapers or on the internet requires financial resources to complete. For example, printing and photocopying applications and all necessary documents, sending applications through the post office, or handing them in person are all cost-intensive (Walker, 2015; Case et al., 2018). Consequently, graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds face many challenges that require them to sacrifice just to ensure their applications reach the right people (Walker, 2015).

Graduates' prospects in the labor market are limited by the lack of capital, so some may settle for opportunities that are available even if they don't align with their goals (Walker, 2015). Baldry (2013) also agrees that there is an undeniable relationship between the graduates and their socio-economic background, which not only determines whether they can afford to engage in the employment search process but also predisposes them to certain opportunities, such as economic resources.

2.7.5 Geographical location

In South Africa, besides the intersecting issues of race, age, and gender that influence employment, the social factor of geographical location and mobility has been identified to shape the employment search process and prospects of young unemployed graduates (Kraak, 2010; Mamaleka, 2020). South Africa is characterized by unequal employment opportunities among its provinces and unequal opportunities between the underdeveloped rural or townships and the developed urban areas (Sekatane, 2004:20). Graham & Da Lannoy (2016) attribute the growing number of unemployed graduates to a spatial imbalance in South Africa. Graduates seeking employment are disadvantaged when employment opportunities are not found in their region but located elsewhere.

According to Sekatane (2004), the increasing unemployment rates are higher in undeveloped rural and township areas because of the lack of employment or training opportunities when compared to urban areas. This finding is corroborated by van Aardt (2012), who argues that graduates residing in metropolitan areas (also considered economic hubs) have a better chance of finding employment because of the plentiful employment opportunities that exist in the areas. Hence, it is easier for graduates seeking employment to access the labor market. According to Moleke (2015), inaccessibility of employment opportunities because of graduates' geographical location contributes immensely to the low employment search intensity that delays entry into the labor market. Being located far from economic hubs means that graduates have to endure the higher financial burden related to employment search (i.e., traveling costs to economic hubs, access to the internet (cafes), etc).

Furthermore, previous literature by Moleke (2015) and Baldry (2016) concerning graduate unemployment also highlights the employment differences among various races that exist in South Africa as a result of spatial mismatch. Kraak (2010) and Moleke (2015) found the difference between black and white rates of unemployment in South Africa to be strongly influenced by geographical location.

The highlight of the persisting legacy of the apartheid regime is that still, in modern-day South Africa, the majority of the unemployed population reside in locations that have little to no economic activities and therefore have limited access to employment hubs. Employment opportunities are reserved or mainly available in certain areas, in this case being metropolitan areas. There is a common belief among black graduates that geographic area matters when looking for employment. Hence, there is a growing trend of black graduates relocating from rural and township areas to cities to increase their chances of finding work.

2.8 Factors influencing graduate employability

2.8.1 Skill mismatch

Among the various factors that affect graduate employability in the labour market, also identified is the growing gap between the labour market in terms of what employers need and the supply of some skills offered by graduates (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). Graduate employability skills are one of the critical components that determine the employability of graduate students (Ngulube, 2020). Employability skills, in this regard, refer to the transferable skills/core competencies that employers expect graduate students to have (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019).

Some of the important basic skills that graduate students are expected to have learned in tertiary institutions include basic skills such as proficiency in the English language (i.e., oral presentation skills), computer proficiency, and the ability to research and use information on their own (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). According to Wildschut et al.

(2018), employers are also interested in graduates who can display soft skills such as intellectual capacity, teamwork, integrity, communication skills, analytical, and problem-solving skills. There is, however, a gap between employers' expectations of graduates and the skills they believe graduates should possess in the workplace, resulting in high rates of graduate unemployment, as per Ngulube (2020) and Baldry (2016) studies.

This finding is supported by Graham and De Lannoy (2017), who argue that the reason some unemployed graduates find it difficult to secure employment is that they do not meet the expectations of workplace skills required by potential employers (i.e., skill mismatch). Similarly, for Reddy, Bhorat, Powell, Visser & Arends (2016) and Walker (2015), the reason for the growing dilemma of unemployment experienced by graduates is because employers prefer graduates who are sufficiently trained or already productive - graduates who can carry out tasks without a lot of supervision, as opposed to graduates who are only equipped with theory and still need training to be productive. While Van der Berg and Van Broekhuizen (2012) attribute the skill gap to graduates who have studied in specialized fields that are not in demand in the labor market, graduates from the humanities and arts are identified as a group that struggles the most to find employment than graduates from other fields of study (Van der Berg and Van Broekhuizen, 2012). Moreover, Mncayi (2016) and Moleke (2015) also state that the prevalence of unemployment among graduates, particularly black graduates, is because most furthered their education in a field that is not in demand, such as Humanities and Arts, as they could only qualify for those fields.

2.8.2 Lack of work-based experience

A study by Griesel & Paker (2009) highlights the rising unemployment rate among graduates in South Africa, which is related to the lack of practical workplace experience. Griesel & Paker (2009) argue that the reason why graduates struggle to find employment is that employers view them as lacking the experience and skills required to effectively carry out work. Employers require graduate students who are workplace-ready, that is, recent graduates with the ability to

move from the theoretical side to the practical side (i.e., application of theory) (Griesel & Paker, 2009).

Similarly, Mokgohloa's (2006) study found that the reason graduates without work-based experience struggle to find employment is that employers prefer graduates who are already work-ready rather than new graduates who still need extensive training to be productive. Inexperienced graduates are regarded as a risky investment, and the process of training them is seen as costly and time-consuming. Hence, employers become reluctant to employ them (Cloete, 2015; Walker, 2015). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2005), the lack of opportunities where graduates can gain work experience, either through avenues such as leadership, internships, voluntary work, etc., exacerbates youth graduate unemployment..

Wildschut et al. (2019) attribute the lack of workplace readiness to include the ability to develop an extensive method of problem-solving, the ability to plan, start, and finish projects/tasks independently and in groups, the ability to research and choose relevant information to address practical workplace issues, and the ability to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of the workplace. Universities have come under scrutiny in this case, as to whether they can successfully impart these skills to their students (Wildschut et al., 2019; Walker, 2015; Moleke, 2015).

However, a research study by Wildschut et al. (2019) highlights the fact that universities do impart most of these skills. An institution of higher learning has been successful in assisting graduates to develop skills related to time management, teamwork, and acceptance of other cultures. For example, skills built during students' time at institutions of higher learning through tests (weekly or quarterly) and exams and assessments are some skills that are used to build students' time management skills (Wildschut et al., 2019). Furthermore, Ndlovu & Ndebele (2019) also show that assessments that require group work help students build teamwork skills.

In narrowing down the possible causes of unemployment among graduates, Walker & Fongwa (2017) argue that the lack of practical experience and skills is prevalent among graduates from historically disadvantaged institutions. Hence, Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) suggest work-integrated learning at a tertiary institution that will expose students to the work environment as

part of their qualification, so that they gather enough work-based experience and skills that will enable them to easily secure employment.

2.8.3 Intellectual ability and personality skills

According to Griesel & Paker (2009) and Wildschut et al. (2019), employers typically expect graduate students to be intellectually capable and have a solid knowledge base that will prepare them for professional duty and the demands of the workplace. Graduate students are required to show skills such as critical thinking, the capacity to formulate ideas and assumptions; the ability to form logical arguments, show quality research skills, and the capacity to continue learning (Griesel & Paker, 2009; Wildschut et al., 2019).

Griesel & Paker (2009) highlights that companies are also interested in graduates who show an interest in working with ideas (i.e., innovative), hence the desire to keep learning as we live in a world that is constantly changing. However, Wildschut et al. (2019) argue that there is a significant gap between the quality of skills possessed by graduates and the skills employers expect of them, thereby contributing to the increasing rate of graduate unemployment in South Africa.

The Griesel & Paker (2009) study also suggests that employers value graduates' skills. Among the personal skills that employers look for in graduate students are openness, initiative, self-motivation, negotiation skills, locus of control, flexibility, emotional stability, and the desire to learn to adapt to the ever-changing nature of the workplace (Griesel & Paker, 2009; Wildschut et al. 2019; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). In their research, Wildschut et al. (2019) conclude that one factor contributing to recent graduates being unable to find employment after finishing their studies is failing to meet employers' expectations. In this respect, the activities that are conducted in higher education institutions can be viewed as being structured to provide students with the skills they need to achieve in the workplace.

2.8.4 Institution Type, the field of study and type of qualification

Similarly, the type of institution a graduate attended and the type of qualifications they possess also have an impact on the employability of graduates in South Africa (Moleke (2005)). Baldry (2016), Graham et al. (2019) and Moleke (2005) argue that even though all institutions of higher learning may be open to everyone regardless of race, gender and culture, historically Black institutions (HBIs) are still predominantly attended by Blacks, while only historically White institutions (HWIs) racial composition of students has changed and most are inclusive.

In their research study, Wildschut et al. (2018) found that Black students from HWIs (i.e., University of Witwatersrand) have better chances of being employed compared to black graduates from HBIs (i.e., University of Fort Hare, University of Limpopo, etc.). A study of employment prospects of graduates in the South African banking sector by Oluwajodu et al. (2015) also shows a high preference for graduates from HWIs (perceived as high educational standard) compared to graduates from HBIs (perceived as low educational standard). The problem this highlight is that graduate students from HBI have difficulty getting absorbed into the labour market, as contrasted to graduate students from HWI (Bhorat et al., 2016). And this highlights why Black graduates coming from HBI account for the greatest number of those who are unemployed.

Graduates' field of study and their type of qualification also present a critical aspect that plays a role in the employability of graduate students (Wildschut et al., 2018). This is because employers tend to base the idea of the level of experience and employment attributes on the value of the qualifications the graduates hold (Kraak, 2012; Walker, 2015; van Broekhuizen, 2015). Wildschut et al. (2018) suggest that employers, when recruiting, usually consider not only the graduates' qualifications but also consider their capacity to execute/ perform the job. Previously literature by Fongwa (2018), Walker (2015), and Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen (2012) highlights graduates from the faculty of humanities and art are more prone to taking longer to be absorbed into the labour market when compared to graduates from faculties such as engineering who can find employment within a short time after completing their studies.

Walker (2015:16) argues that Humanities and Arts may not be in demand; however, they are crucial to enhancing and addressing critical social, economic, health, and public policy issues affecting South Africa and the world. According to Walker (2015;13), the reason graduates of humanities and arts struggle to find employment in the labour market is that the qualifications are less in demand in the labour market. Moreover, they are not sought after because they are considered "too general" in the skills that they impart, resulting in employers that are sceptical of the capability of graduates who have obtained these qualifications (Moleke, 2005:7).

While other fields of studies such as engineering, science, health science, and commerce confer job-specific skills that are easy to understand in the labour market and clear in what skills/capabilities students ought to have when they enter the workforce to be productive at work (Moleke, 2005; Fongwa, 2018; Mncayi's, 2016).

2.8.5 The lack of career guidance/counselling

The role played by career guidance is another factor that influences the employability of some graduates (Graham and Mlatsheni, 2015). Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) argue that while there is a high demand for a skilled labour force, some graduates find themselves unemployed due to skill mismatch. The purpose of career guidance programs is to inform and assist youth in making the best choices when pursuing a career path and to respond to the demands of the labour market (Moleke, 2015). The importance of career guidance is seen as a means to assist individuals to make rational decisions when selecting a career pathway that is in line with opportunities that are available in the labour market (Nel and Neale-Shutte, 2013).

For Nel and Neale-Shutte (2013), career guidance in tertiary institutions should be substantially improved and offered to students upon enrollment until they exit the higher education system, especially concerning majors that are highly in demand in the labour market. Research by Moerane (2016) and Kraak (2010) advocates for career guidance that is sensitive to the realities of the labour market in South Africa. The argument is that students need to be properly guided on their chosen career path and made aware of the pitfalls and how to avoid becoming trapped in unemployment.

Similarly, McConnell (2009) underscores the need to develop a local, market-driven career guidance program to help students make informed decisions when embarking on a career path. Providing career guidance is a great way to improve labour mobility in a time of increasing skill mismatches due to the inadequacies of the educational system and the skills required in the job market (Moerane, 2016). Moerane (2016) attributes the growing unemployment rate among graduates to the lack of or poor career guidance. As a result, graduates struggle to find employment due to them choosing careers that are not in demand in the South African labour market, or out of desperation, they choose a career that is not their first choice just to improve their chances compared to a person with only a matric certificate.

In South Africa, most institutions of higher learning provide support services designed to enhance the employability of their graduates. These services include career support services such as career guidance, CV writing, interview and work etiquette workshops. As well as providing information about internships, work placements, and training opportunities, they are also a means of connecting students and graduates with potential employers.

However, Walker (2015:10) found that despite the availability of the services, students do not take full advantage of them, and their participation is fairly low. According to Walker (2015;10), about 90% of students were not interested in such services offered at their institutions. Further, it has been shown that problems with career guidance are contributing to the unemployment of humanities graduates in the labour market. Studies by Oluwajodu et al. (2015) and Moleke (2015) have criticized higher education for not providing adequate career guidance, especially to graduates from the humanities, which is one of the reasons why such graduates are largely unemployed.

When a student is provided with proper career guidance earlier in their university career, they may choose majors that are highly sought after and in demand in the labour market (Moerane, 2016). Students would be able to select majors knowing exactly how likely they are to find employment after graduation. If they chose to pursue majors that were not in high demand, they would at least be informed about what the job market is like before doing so.

2.8.6 The value of social networks and limited and ineffective employment search

Young graduates suffer from high unemployment rates not only due to the lack of skills but also because of the absence of networks that can lead them to potential employment opportunities (Wildschut et al., 2018). In Altman, Mokomane, Wight, & Boyce's study (2012), the authors argued that networks play a significant role in securing employment by pointing people to job opportunities through their social networks, including family, friends, and acquaintances. This is because people often find employment through word of mouth or are directly connected to potential employers by those close to them (Altman et al., 2012).

Moreover, Graham and Mlatsheni (2015) assert that graduates from the lower or working-class are more likely to remain unemployed as they lack social capital, which could provide access to employment opportunities. Burns et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of having a social network when transitioning into the labour market, as employers are more likely to hire someone referred to them by someone from their trusted social network. Walker & Fongwa (2017) also support the idea that a person's social network quality can adversely affect their employment prospects because the network determines both the opportunity and the type of employment opportunities available to the job seeker. Therefore, having better social networks enhances one's chances of accessing information about various potential employment opportunities that align with their career goals (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). Furthermore, ineffective job search strategies are also linked to increased unemployment among recent graduates (Graham et al., 2019; Wildschut et al., 2018). These strategies are not equally effective for Black and White graduates (Graham et al., 2019: Wildschut et al., 2018; Baldry, 2016). A study by Graham et al. (2019) found that White graduates usually find employment faster than Black graduates because their effective job search strategies make use of social networks, whereas the latter relies on ineffective strategies such as applying through newspaper ads.

2.9 Programmes and interventions to address graduate unemployment

2.9.1 Perceived role of universities in increasing employability

Traditionally, the attainment of qualifications from a higher education institution has always been correlated to success in the labour market (Fongwa, 2018). Thus, in the context of skill-

based and innovative-driven economies, higher education is a place where students go to attain skills to make them competitive in the labour market. According to Wildschut et al. (2018), higher education is vital for economic growth and social development in our country. Higher education can also open the labour market up to those who were previously excluded from it (Fongwa, 2018; Wildschut et al., 2018). Developing employability skills is thus considered key to enhancing graduates' employability (Ngulube, 2020). Employers also expect graduates to possess these employability skills (Ngulube, 2020). As stated in Fongwa (2018) and Wildschut et al. (2018), South African higher education institutions face the challenges of imparting both the theoretical knowledge and the skills necessary for the workplace. Many universities and other institutions of learning have been tasked with engaging with labour market demand to provide them with skills that are most in-demand in the economy, in addition to playing a role in knowledge production and innovation (Griesel & Parker, 2009).

However, literature shows that there is a steady rise in unemployment among younger graduates in South Africa because of the numerous reasons mentioned above (Mamaleka, 2020; Ngulube, 2020). The unemployment rate among graduates in South Africa has increased from 5.5% in 2013 to 7% in 2018, according to "Revisiting Graduate Unemployment in South Africa – 71point4" (n.d.). Younger graduates had a 10.3% unemployment rate in 2013 and a 12.4% unemployment rate in 2018, while mature graduates had 3% and 4.3% unemployment rates, respectively.

With younger graduates experiencing rising unemployment, higher educational institutions are often criticized for failing to produce graduates with the skills needed to secure employment; i.e., graduates who are not work-ready (Wildschut, 2018; Lowden et al., 2011). As Ngulube (2020) argues, the missing qualities and competencies required by employers make transitioning from tertiary education difficult for graduates. According to research, employers believe graduates' tertiary qualifications do not make them ready for work; citing the lack of and the quality of skills as a challenge they encounter when recruiting (Griesel & Parker, cited in Pop & Barkhuizen, 2011). Furthermore, unemployed graduates also expressed disappointment at the lack of assistance from their institutions in connecting them to employment opportunities after graduation (Moreane, 2016). According to Moreane (2016), unemployed graduates expressed

dissatisfaction with institutions of higher education for failing to help them connect with potential employment opportunities, leaving them to struggle on their own.

Even though tertiary institutions are aware of South Africa's growing unemployment trend, they do not take action. Hence, some graduates consider furthering their studies in an attempt to improve their employability skills as well as their chances in the labour market (Case et al., 2018). The desire to study further has been shown to stem from different circumstances. Some graduates intended on having careers in academia, some to increase their earning higher salaries, and for some, it is their last resort to escape the unemployment rut (Case et al., 2018).

2.9.2 Programmes to enhance graduate employability

In addressing the growing crisis of unemployment among the youth of South Africa, the government and various stakeholders such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the private sector developed interventions (programmes) aimed at assisting unemployed graduates to access information about employment opportunities and offering work-based training to prepare them for the labour market (Meagher, 2016:484). In addition, these interventions include internships and learnerships offered by the government, and public and private enterprises during the student's study period or after graduation (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). For instance, programmes such as the South African Graduate Development Association (SAGDA) and the NYDA were developed to bridge the gap between the lack of work-related experience and the labour market (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015).

This organization, according to Graham and Mlatsheni (2015), functions as a mediator between unemployed youth and the labour market by providing information about vacancies in the labour market and providing work-based experience and skills development to assist them in finding employment. These organizations, including NGOs, are intended to help link employment seekers that are registered on their online database to organizations that offer internships or learnership programmes in South Africa (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). By acting as an intermediary, these organizations offer not only practical workplace training but also the social

capital that employment seekers lacking the necessary social networks may be able to connect with potential employers (Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015; 16).

There are several controversies about internships, including low remuneration or misalignment between graduate interns' career goals and organizations offering internships. However, they serve as a key bridge between inexperienced graduates and possible employment opportunities (Koyana, 2014). By providing networking opportunities and exposing graduates to real-world work environments, as demonstrated in previous studies, internships provide interns with the opportunity to apply theories learned at their respective institutions of higher learning. According to Kraak & Dieltiens (2015), internships have proven to be successful in transferring skills to graduates/interns that can lead to employment.

Previous literature by Walker (2015) has highlighted the importance of having support structures geared toward improving career guidance in high schools and at a tertiary level. The goal is to improve access to comprehensive career guidance to help individuals choose a field of study based on the demands of the labor market (Walker, 2015; Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015). Most institutions of higher education in South Africa have such support structures in place (Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015). Through these support structures, students will be able to participate in a range of programs geared toward enhancing their employability after graduation (Walker, 2015; Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015). These include access to career guidance officers, where they can connect with potential employers and internship opportunities, as well as access to assistance with writing CVs and interview techniques (Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015).

However, Walker (2015:10) observes that despite the presence of these programs in tertiary institutions to enhance graduate employability, there is a low level of participation, and students are not taking advantage of these interventions. Walker (2015) found that nearly 90% of third-year students were unaware of campus career development resources (Walker, 2015:10). Consequently, some graduates may have difficulty finding employment after leaving tertiary institutions without knowledge and information about what lies ahead in the labor market, particularly those without a social network connecting them to prospective employers, and some may have difficulty adapting to their new workplace (Walker, 2015:9).

2.9.3 Entrepreneurship as a possible solution to graduate unemployment

To overcome the two major socio-economic problems of poverty and unemployment that face South Africa, particularly among the youth in general and graduate youth in particular, there has been a call for an urgent need to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship in our society (Naong, 2011). Many authors and policymakers still see entrepreneurship as one of the viable interventions that can offer a way out of the unemployment crisis for the increasing number of graduates that find themselves unemployed after they graduate (Naong, 2011; Baldry, 2013; Nel and Neale-Shutte, 2013; World Bank, 2013).

Thus, the call for increased participation in the economy by youth graduates to curb unemployment and poverty, especially among previously disadvantaged groups, has been a priority for the newly elected democratic government (Baldry, 2013). The new democratic government developed in its wake several economic programs such as the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy (GEAR), as well as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA) in their attempt to bridge the inequality gap created by the apartheid regime (Ali & Jabeen, 2016; Gwija et al., 2014).

However, as Baldry (2013) and Nel and Neale-Shutte (2013) argue, these policies have not resulted in the expected inclusion of previously marginalized communities. South Africa is still one country with a high level of poverty and unemployment, and the youth are the most affected. Moreover, the development of government initiatives and support structures aimed at the development of entrepreneurship among youth graduates who want to venture into self-employment, such as the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), Industrial Development Cooperation (IDC) and Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency (NEPA) to name a few, have also not resulted in a significant change in the demographic regarding the ownership of start-up businesses in South Africa (Gwija, Chuks, & Iwu, 2014).

According to the Center for Development and Enterprise (2007: 1), South Africa, in comparison to other developing countries, still has levels of entrepreneurship that are below average and it is getting worse. Engagement in entrepreneurship activities is deemed significant, especially in the

South African context, where rates of unemployment and the widening inequality gap are high (Gwija, Chuks, & Iwu, 2014).

Furthermore, writing about entrepreneurship as an alternative source of employment for graduates, Naong (2011), Gwija et al. (2014), and Ali & Jabeen (2016) argue that now more than ever, it is pertinent to understand entrepreneurship in South Africa. This is to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship among recent graduates and to identify both internal and external factors that act as barriers for them to undertake the journey into entrepreneurship. Increased entrepreneurial engagement of graduates has the potential to create employment opportunities for the youth in general, reducing unemployment, and contributing to the socio-economic development of the country (Van Praag & Versloot, 2007:33).

Similarly, Omar and Rajoo (2016:372) urge the wide-ranging adoption of entrepreneurship as an alternative way for graduates to forge a living, create employment and contribute meaningfully to the country's economy. However, despite their desire to venture into business start-ups, young people in South Africa face numerous challenges in either starting or maintaining their enterprises. Some of the challenges that young people face begin with their struggle to access resources such as capital. Previous studies have highlighted that there are few micro-finance and micro-credit institutions geared toward supporting aspiring young entrepreneurs (Fatoki, 2010; Gwija et al., 2014; Ali & Jabeen, 2016). Young people are still an underrepresented group when it comes to having access to these institutions. Among the barriers that South African youth encounter when trying to secure the capital they need to run their businesses is their lack of experience in the field of entrepreneurship and the lack of collateral (Ali & Jabeen, 2016).

This explains why South Africa has a small number of start-up businesses among youth, with some venturing into business with low-level capital and low levels of survival against giant conglomerates (Ali & Jabeen, 2016). Another barrier that youth graduates face in their quest to become business owners is the lack of experience and expertise to run or maintain an enterprise, thus raising the probability of their venture failing (Gwija et al., 2014). Chigunta (2002:6) argues that with many graduates transitioning to the labor market at a young age, little to no business management skills and capabilities, combined with inadequate work or business contact experience, negatively impact their attempts to venture into start-up businesses.

2.10 Conclusion

Chapter two of this research study contained a literature review concerning the South African crisis of unemployment in general and graduate unemployment in particular. It defined the concept of unemployment from a global, national, and local perspective. Post-1994, South Africa experienced drastic changes in the functioning of the structure of the economy (Moleke, 2010; Wildschut et al., 2018). This was moving away from an economy that was solely dependent on mining and agriculture, to an economy that focuses on the service sector Moleke, 2010; Wildschut et al., 2018. This change resulted in certain skills being rendered redundant in the labour market (i.e., skill mismatch/gap) (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). Hence the high rate of unemployment in South Africa.

In addition, the chapter discussed the concept of employability and factors influencing graduate unemployment. A review of previous literature on the concept of employability reveals a growing number of graduates who find themselves unable to secure employment for a lack of certain skills and competencies (Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). There are a variety of factors that affect graduate employability, including qualification, institution, and qualification obtained (Walker, 2015). The often-overlooked factors of geographical areas can also have an impact on some people's chances of obtaining employment, especially when combined with the other factors mentioned above (Kraak, 2010; Mamaleka, 2020). What is of concern, as noted in the literature, is that the growing number of graduates who have difficulty finding employment are Black and Coloured graduates from townships (Wildschut et al. 2018; Mamaleka, 2020). This research study, therefore, focuses on graduates from townships in Johannesburg. This is to understand their experiences of difficulty securing employment and their perspectives on the transition to the labour market after graduating. The next chapter discusses the research methodology that the study adopted.

Chapter 3: Methodological approach

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on literature concerning both the global and local challenges of graduate employability. It highlighted the challenges that graduates endure after the completion of their studies and embarking on their journey of job hunting in the competitive labour market. This allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the crisis of graduate unemployment both in a global and local context and to situate the current study.

In social science research, some of the most imperative decisions that a researcher has to take are methodological. This chapter describes how the phenomenon of graduate unemployment and employability is investigated. This is to address the proposed research question and to fulfil the set objectives of the study outlined in chapter one. It describes the methodology that the researcher used to explore the experiences and perceptions of unemployed graduates that took part in the study.

In this study, it was decided that the qualitative research method was the most appropriate approach for the study. The research methodology adopted in the study was carefully chosen to include the appropriate research design, study setting, target population, sampling strategy, data collection process and instruments, data analysis, as well as ethical considerations.

3.2 Research design: Qualitative research design

Neumann (2003) defines a research process as a systematic inquiry or examination into a social phenomenon, and it entails collecting data, documentation of critical data, analysis, and interpreting the data/information to establish meaningful information and conclusions. It is regarded as a primary source of knowledge production in academia (Greenstein et al., 2003).

In the Social Sciences, there are two main broad approaches to research that are widely recognized and used to study social phenomena. The two types of research are qualitative and quantitative (Greenstein et al., 2003). Each of these research methodologies has distinct characteristics, employs different techniques, and has strengths and weaknesses that make them

suitable for exploring a range of research topics/questions that the researcher may choose to investigate.

To better understand and describe the experiences and perceptions of unemployed graduates navigating the transition from graduation to the labour market, the present study, as mentioned above, will use a qualitative research approach because of its exploratory and descriptive nature. This will also highlight the participants' understanding of the relationship between their chosen career/degree choice and their employability.

3.3 Justification for using qualitative research paradigm

Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) define qualitative research as tools that are used to study human experiences from their perspective, i.e., how they make sense of their environment. Therefore, qualitative research design provides us with a suitable research paradigm. It aligns with the objectives of this study; i.e., gaining insight into the socioeconomic crisis of graduate employability from unemployed graduates' perspectives and experiences. According to Greenstein et al. (2003), the strength of the qualitative paradigm is that it is a research approach that is conducted in its natural habitat/setting and primarily involves developing/constructing a complex yet holistic picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, it is suitable to study any social phenomenon as it gives every individual in the research setting an equal opportunity to voice their opinion despite what their social position may be (Greenstein et al., 2003).

A qualitative research paradigm is useful when a researcher wishes to understand and describe the behaviour or experiences of those under study (Greenstein et al., 2003). As well, the researcher gets a deeper understanding (i.e., familiarity) of the research problem as they describe the situation and life events from the perspective of the participants rather than the researchers (Fossey et al., 2002). It provides contextual descriptions that will foster an understanding of the complex relationship between graduate unemployment and career choice. The outcome of a qualitative research method will then provide an improved perspective on the prevailing trend of

graduate unemployment in Gauteng province, i.e., how graduates make sense of their experiences of being unemployed despite having qualifications.

The qualitative paradigm will also afford the study an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of graduate employability in South Africa, an understanding that is difficult to capture quantitatively. This is particularly relevant given the gap in research that looks qualitatively at the social problem of graduate unemployment in townships around the Johannesburg metropolitan area.

3.4 Population Sampling

According to Fossey et al. (2002), the sampling techniques that a researcher uses in qualitative research have direct effects on the sample size to be considered. Qualitative research samples are small, but they allow for the purposeful recruitment of participants who have a working knowledge of the topic being researched. Greenstein et al. (2003) define the sampling process as a method of gathering information about the population by studying only a subset of the entire population under study. The sampling process allows researchers to study a variety of research problems using a small representative sample because it is impractical, time-consuming, and extremely expensive to gather data from every potential unit of analysis that fits the criteria of the research topic being studied.

For this study, unemployed youth graduates who are based in Johannesburg townships and who are actively looking for employment formed the population of this study.

3.5 Sampling method

A non-probability sampling method was used to identify eligible participants for the study. According to Greenstein et al. (2003), the non-probability sampling method is a sampling strategy where the selection criteria (characteristics) are not based on the statistical principle of randomness, but on convenience. The goal is to make the data collection process manageable (Greenstein et al., 2003).

The purposive sampling method was further used to select suitable participants for the study, and it comprised 15 unemployed graduates who were actively looking for employment. While the selection of suitable participants for the study depends on the subjective judgment of a researcher, the purposive sampling strategy enhances the selection of research participants as it provides the research study with an information-rich sample/participants (Galletta & Cross, 2013). This ensures that the selected participants provide the needed information that the study seeks to understand and be studied. Therefore, participants were chosen based on characteristics relevant to the research study, i.e., a participant who might relate the experiences of being unemployed despite having qualifications and who has perceptions of the chosen career/degree path and their current unemployment status.

The participants that were selected were members of the selected social groups (i.e., Facebook and WhatsApp) aimed at informing participants about job opportunities and job-hunting-related tips. According to Greenstein et al. (2003) and Galletta & Cross (2013), researchers are more likely to secure access to communities they intend to study if they can overcome entry barriers.

As such, to gain access to the Facebook groups, the group administrators (i.e., key informants) of three groups dedicated to alerting job opportunities from all fields of study were approached, and permission to share recruitment information on the group was granted. To recruit eligible participants, a recruitment information sheet (APPENDIX B) was posted on the group page on Facebook. The information introduced me as a researcher; it explained where I come from and the purpose of the research study.

And for those contacted by WhatsApp, the recruitment information also showed where I got their contact details from (i.e., name and cell phone number). I told them who I was and described the purpose of the research study. The snowball sampling method was then applied to find the rest of the participants. A snowballing sample method is a non-probability sampling method that uses chain referrals to recruit research participants with similar characteristics that are scarce (Greenstein et al., 2003). Through chain referrals from primary participants, the snowball sampling method allowed the researcher to identify four unemployed young graduates. Therefore, a total of fifteen participants were recruited and voluntarily showed that they were available and took part in the study.

The participants for this study comprised eleven females and four males. All the participants were willing to contribute to the research, and they also provided signed consent forms after the researcher debriefed them on the purpose and aim of the study.

The criteria that were used to determine the participants suitable for the study were: The sample must be in the age bracket of 18-35 years of age, defined as a youth. National Youth Policy defines youth as a population that falls between the ages of 15 and 35 years of age. Participants of this research study ranged in age from 22 to 29, which makes them youths. The second criterion is that they have to hold a tertiary qualification from a South African University and/or the University of Technology. The participants were from various universities and universities of technology. And the last criterion is that the graduate must be unemployed for a certain number of months after the completion of their studies. All participants in this study were unemployed and were actively looking for employment.

3.6 Data collection techniques

According to Galletta & Cross (2013), there are three recognized methods used to collect data in Social Science, i.e., observation, reviewing documents or archival material, and interviews. People's narratives of their experiences and perceptions of their real form the primary data in the qualitative research paradigm. For the purpose of this research (i.e., understanding graduate experiences and perceptions), in-depth interviews were used to capture the data from the research participants.

3.7 Qualitative interviews

In a research project, one of the most pertinent decisions before entering an interview involves how data will be collected. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on how data gathered in qualitative research is gathered. For researchers, it is affecting how various aspects of conducting research are carried out. The Covid-19 pandemic safety regulations have presented researchers with challenges ranging from accessing research sites to approaching and engaging with the community of interest (Ndhlovu, 2020).

Qualitative data collection methods often rely on face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the research participants or in focus groups. However, other primary data collection methods are used to collect data in qualitative research. These are direct observation and online-based methods (i.e., online surveys, text, voice, and video tools (Greeff, 2020). These data collection tools help overcome the limitations of space and time, and they can be cost-effective for both the researcher and the research participants.

Accordingly, to adhere to the Covid-19 safety protocols, internet-based methods were required for recruiting participants and interviewing them. Social media platforms were the chosen method for collecting data. Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are some of the most used social networking platforms that share employment opportunities. They were recruited via Facebook and WhatsApp. Using WhatsApp (i.e., the voice notes feature) also provided an alternative to recording the interviews.

According to Galleta (2013), there are three strategies for qualitative interviewing. These include (1) informal conversation interviewing; (2) standardized, open-ended form of interviewing; and (3) semi-structured interviewing. In this research, data were collected through a series of semi-structured interview questions that were conducted through social media platforms, i.e., WhatsApp. And the participants were interviewed at times that were convenient to them.

However, the interviewing process was not without challenges. Many of the participants who had initially agreed to take part in the study either rescheduled or canceled their appointments. This became challenging for the researcher, as I had to revert to the recruitment processes and wait for a potential participant to reply to my request.

The interview process allowed the researcher to gain perspective concerning the experiences, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of participants about the concept of employability as graduates in Johannesburg. The flexible, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to freely follow up on ideas, probe further to get clearer or elaborate responses, and enhance understanding regarding the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Greenstein et al., 2003).

3.7.1 Pilot interview

The first interview with the recruited participants served as a pilot study for the research. Using the pilot study, the questions and themes drafted for the interview schedule were tested for relevance to the research study topic. From the pilot study, it was deduced that some questions were not as clear to the research participants, which resulted in unclear answers. The questions that participants struggled to answer were rephrased and put in a way that was easier to understand for subsequent interviews. By first conducting the pilot study, the researcher could then elicit meaningful answers to the remaining interview schedule (Greenstein et al., 2003).

3.7.2 Probes in qualitative interviews

Clarification of the participant's answers was elicited in two ways. To begin with, elaboration probes were administered in which participants were asked to elaborate more about their circumstances after answering the initial question (Given, 2008). Additionally, clarification probes were also used to clarify responses that the researcher did not fully understand (Given, 2008). Greenstein et al. (2003) advised that qualitative researchers using the semi-structured interviewing method should ask probing questions and prompt the participant's answers to enhance the information about their situation. Probing to get clarification was useful in understanding the participant's experience and perception of being unemployed, despite having qualifications.

3.8 Data transcription and analysis

Greenstein et al. (2003) argue that the researcher must fully engage with the process of transcription of the collected raw data (i.e., with this study, WhatsApp voice notes were converted into an audio recording, then transcribed) to familiarize oneself with the interview data. All the collected narratives were carefully transcribed with software called Otter AI. While the transcription process was performed by software, it is a long and tedious process. This is because it requires the transcriber to listen carefully to the narrative of the research participants.

This is to correct any mistakes that may have taken place during the transcription. While the software helps transcribe data, it does not recognize any languages other than English. Therefore, the researcher had to replay the audio to translate some of the participants' words that were said in an unfamiliar language to the software. All the transcribed text was cleaned of any information that might have been used to identify the research participants. To achieve this, instead of using the participants' real names, the research participants were given pseudonyms.

The data analysis process is defined as a stage in the research process where the collected raw data is ordered, and structured to extract and bring meaning to it (Mouton, 1996). Greenstein et al. (2003) maintain that qualitative data analysis is a process in which meaning is elicited from the raw data, in a systematic, disciplined, rigorous, methodological and comprehensive way. In social science, it refers to the breakdown of raw data into meaningful sociological text. It is considered an ongoing, interactive, ambiguous, creative and time-consuming process (Mouton, 1996). Greenstein et al. (2003) suggest some of the critical steps in analyzing data in qualitative research are for the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data, by listening to the recorded audio, reading and proofreading the interview transcripts, and reading other documents related to the data collected i.e., observational notes, etc. The process can be broken down into three steps: (1) collected data is sorted into categories; (2) the data is further formatted into a coherent narrative; (3) the last step involves writing the qualitative manuscript (Mouton, 1996).

Further, a technique of data analysis that this study uses is thematic content analysis. In thematic analysis, repeating patterns or themes are identified from interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2014). The themes in this research study were extracted from participants' narratives about their experiences and perceptions of their journey to employability. Therefore, the participants' narratives were carefully reviewed and analyzed for similarities in their experiences and perceptions. Similarities (while also noting the differences) in experiences and perceptions are grouped to form themes that are of interest in reaching the research objectives. The data from themes were analyzed, interpreted and reported addressing the research questions posed in chapter 1.

3.9 Ethical consideration

In this research study, consent from the interviewees was not obtained before conducting the interview. The participants were informed of the aim of the research study, i.e., gaining an in-depth understanding of the socio-economic problem of rising rates of youth unemployment in South Africa, especially among graduates. Using WhatsApp's social media app enabled the interviewer to establish rapport with the interviewee. This was done before the interview schedule to make sure that the participants were comfortable with the interview process. Upon agreeing to take part in the study, the interviewees were asked to complete a biographical detail and to sign the consent form. In addition, they were asked to feel free to ask questions to get clarification where they needed clarification. Furthermore, they were informed of their rights, that at any point during the interview, if they feel uncomfortable, they can withdraw from the study. No consequence will befall them.

Besides the concerns that arise from both the procedural and instrumentation used in a research project, the collection of data from research participants is also known to raise some ethical concerns that need to be carefully monitored throughout the research process. Before the commencement of the research project, a non-medical ethical clearance was applied for and granted by the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) School of Social Sciences Review Board (SOCL-2021-06) (APPENDIX A). Babbie & Mouton (2010) suggest that when conducting a research study, the researcher has the responsibility to ensure that both participants' human and civil rights will be protected. In this study, to protect the participants of the study, ethical considerations were adhered to. Among the ethical concerns addressed in this study was the right to full disclosure and informed consent; the right to privacy; the right to anonymity and confidentiality, and the avoidance of harm to participants.

The research participants were all given a participation information sheet (APPENDIX B) explaining in detail the purpose of the study. And an informed consent form (APPENDIX C) to consent to take part in the study and to use parts of their narrative in the study. Both documents provided the adequate, accurate information that the study sought to achieve. All participants signed a consent form that gives consent to recording the interviews (i.e., to use WhatsApp voice notes) and extracting quotes from the interviews. The research participants were informed about

their right to privacy, their right to accept or decline to be part of the study, and that their choice to not be a part would have no negative consequences or penalties. Thus, those who chose to participate did so voluntarily.

Upon signing the consent form, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time they wanted. In this study, all participants volunteered to take part in the study voluntarily and none of them withdrew from the study. And to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants, access to the research material was restricted to any outside persons other than (me, the researcher and the supervisor. Also, code numbers (e.g., Participant 1), rather than real names, were assigned to participants. This strategy of ensuring confidentiality is also extended to the data collection process, consent forms, recording, transcripts, data analysis, data reporting, and the publication of the research findings.

After the interviews were completed, recorded audio and electronic documentation of the study were stored on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed after five years. All participants were well informed of the above-mentioned procedures.

3.10 Study limitations

As Cuthill (2002) notes, in a qualitative study, the size of the sample is not meant to represent the whole/larger population, which means the findings of the study are not generalizable. But representative, and specific to the sample population selected for the study, which is Johannesburg.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter discusses the methodological design and approach that this study adopted. It began with an overview of the research paradigm, followed by descriptions of the sampling techniques and strategies that were used in this research study. It provided a detailed discussion of the data collection strategies chosen for the study, followed by an outline of the chosen methods to

transcribe and analyze the data collected. A detailed discussion of the ethical considerations of this study was also addressed. An issue that might have influenced the validity and reliability of the findings was also highlighted. Thus, to understand the experiences and perspectives of graduates from townships around Johannesburg, a qualitative research paradigm and its subjective nature were chosen as suitable paradigms for the study. The following chapter discusses the research findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings and analysis

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the research design and methodology used to conduct and collect data for this study. This chapter presents findings of research conducted among fifteen unemployed youth graduates living in Johannesburg's townships to capture their experiences and perceptions concerning their transition to the labour market. The description of the demographic profile of the research participants, which includes gender, age, duration of unemployed status, and type of qualification, will be presented first. Using a thematic method of analysis, the predominant themes and subthemes that emerged from the transcribed narratives of participants' experiences and perceptions concerning their status of unemployment will be discussed, compared and contrasted against the literature reviewed in chapter two. Discussion of the findings is centered on the main research question:

What are the graduates' experiences and understanding of the relationship between employability and their unemployed status?

4.2 Description and characteristics of participants

The objectives of this research study were to explore the experiences and perceptions of unemployed graduates transitioning to the labour market. To achieve this, a purposive sampling technique was used to recruit 15 participants who agreed to be interviewed. Although the participants were from different townships in Johannesburg, they were all connected by a common thread: they were graduates and currently unemployed, actively looking for employment. The characteristics of the participants of the study are summarized in table 4.1. This section contains information about the profiles of the research participants, such as their age, gender, employment status, and the type of qualifications they received.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of the research sample.

Participant's code	Age	Gender	Field of study	Level of education	Duration of unemployment	University attended	Geographical location
Participant- 1	26	F	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	3 Years	- University of South Africa (UNISA)	Daveyton
Participant- 2	25	F	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	1 Year	- University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Soweto
Participant- 3	28	F	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	2 Years	- University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Tembisa
Participant- 4	23	M	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	10 Months	- University of South Africa (UNISA)	Vosloorus
Participant- 5	26	F	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	1 Year	- North-West University (NWU)	Tsakane
Participant- 6	29	M	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	3 Years	- Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	Wattville
Participant- 7	24	F	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	10 Months	- University of Limpopo (UL)	Kagiso II
Participant- 8	23	F	- BCom (Economics and Human resource)	Undergraduate	1 Year	- University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Katlehong
Participant- 9	25	M	- BA Social Work	Undergraduate	1 Year	- Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	Kwathema
Participant- 10	25	F	- B. Ed- Arts and Culture (FET)	Undergraduate	2 Years	- University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Tembisa
Participant- 11	27	F	- BA- counselling psychology. - Honours - behavioural studies and High certificate in Financial Management	Postgraduate	2 Years	- University of Zululand (UNIZULU) - University of Zululand (UNIZULU)	Soweto
Participant- 12	24	M	- B. Ed- Arts and Culture (FET)	Undergraduate	8 Months	- University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Soweto
Participant- 13		F	- B. Ed senior phase and FET	Undergraduate	10 Months	- University of Limpopo (UL)	Tsakane
Participant- 14	23	F	- BA Social Work - Honours (Current)	Post-graduate	8 Months	- University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)	Katlehong South
Participant- 15	23	F	- BA-Political Science - BA-Law (Current)	Undergraduate	8 Months	- University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) - University of South Africa (UNISA)	Tembisa

Table 4.1 illustrates that most research participants were between the ages of 20 and 35 years. This shows that many of the participants are young graduates who have recently graduated from their respective tertiary institutions. According to StatsSA (2021), this age group is the group that is most affected by the socio-economic crisis of unemployment. As reported in the literature, the unemployment rate among youth in South Africa is 64.4% and 11% among graduates. This agrees with previous studies that highlight how the modern unemployed labour force in South

Africa is becoming younger. The growth of the labour market since 1994 accounts majority of the young group between the ages of 18 and 34 years (StatsSA, 2021). Table 4.1 depicts the distribution of participants in terms of their fields of study and gender. It is observed that almost all participants were from the Faculty of Humanities and Arts, particularly from the fields of education and social work.

Additionally, over three-quarters of the participants were female, with males accounting for one-fourth of the sample. The overrepresentation of social work graduates and females in this study is a multifaceted issue with various contributing factors. Social work as a profession is closely linked to social justice and human rights, which are crucial concerns in South Africa, given its history of apartheid and ongoing struggles with inequality (Strydom & De Lange, 2019). Hence, social work programs tend to attract a higher proportion of students from historically marginalized communities and those committed to social change.

Furthermore, the gender imbalance in social work education, with a higher proportion of female students than male students (Henriksen et al., 2017; Twigg & Atkin, 2015), can be attributed to societal expectations about gender roles, stereotypes about the nature of social work, and the perceived lack of prestige and financial rewards associated with the profession (Henriksen et al., 2017). Moreover, the study's sampling strategy, which recruited participants from social media groups dedicated to unemployed graduates, may have contributed to the overrepresentation of social work graduates and females in the sample.

Additionally, of the fifteen participants in the study, thirteen held a Bachelor of Arts degree, while the remaining two had completed postgraduate qualifications at the Honours level. All participants were unemployed in their respective fields of study at the time of the interview, with the duration of unemployment ranging from a minimum of 10 months to a maximum of 3 years.

4.3 Themes

The participants in the research study described their experiences as unemployed graduates and their perceptions of the situation. They discussed the factors contributing to their unemployment

and how these experiences are affecting their livelihoods and employment prospects. They shared the strategies they used to find employment. They also discussed how public and private institutions can enhance their employment prospects. In line with the research aims and questions, the following three themes in this study will be presented: (1) Employment seeking experiences and their effects on the employment-seeking behaviours of graduates, (2) graduates' perceptions of being unemployed, and (3) perceived ways to promote graduate employment in South Africa.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Employment-seeking experiences and their effects on the employment-seeking behaviours of graduates

The process of searching for employment in South Africa is challenging for some graduates. But it is the only way graduates can join the labour force in a desired sector/field of employment (Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2015; Mncayi, 2016; Van Broekhuizen, 2016). For some, it is the only way to better their socio-economic circumstances (Magagula, 2017). Gaining qualifications for a better chance in the labour market has proven insufficient to guarantee participants' employment (Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2015; van Broekhuizen, 2016). Among other factors identified in the literature review, employment search behavior of unemployed graduates has been identified as an influential determinant of unemployment status for young graduates (De Witte et al., 2010). When the motivation and determination of the unemployed graduate to engage in the labour market are low, they negatively affect the behavior and experience of the unemployed graduate (employment seekers may stop or deviate from seeking employment) (De Witte et al., 2010).

The following themes and sub-themes that emerged from participant narratives discuss the experiences and perceptions of unemployed graduates transitioning to the labour market.

4.3.1.1 The expectation of working immediately after graduation to improve one's socio-economic status

The post-1994 government initiatives to address the past socio-economic imbalances, especially regarding access to higher education, managed to increase the chances of academically deserving individuals to access institutions of higher education (van Broekhuizen, 2016; Magagula, 2017; Moleke, 2015). The number of graduates from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds has successfully increased, however, previous literature has shown that because of limited employment opportunities in the stagnant labour market, some graduates struggle to secure employment and continued to live in poor socio-economic backgrounds (Magagula, 2017).

This study also found similar findings. Dedicated to improving their socio-economic status and that of those around them, participants in the study indicated that they anticipated beginning the journey of an employment search as soon as they reached the end of their academic careers. For instance, Participant 11 of this study reported that upon graduating, she immediately began looking for work opportunities, the decision being driven by the need to be financially stable; however, she has been struggling to find work (Participant 11).

This finding is consistent with a study by Mamaleke (2015), which examined graduates transitioning from tertiary education to work. It was found that in anticipation of finding employment, graduates actively started searching for employment opportunities to increase their chances of finding employment by sourcing out information, joining networks, and applying to as many vacancies as soon as they were done with their studies. Participants narrated their expectations for finding employment after graduating as follows:

> *"The answer to that is yes, I search for employment opportunities whenever I get a chance. It is a part of my daily routine. I am always on the lookout for job opportunities online, on social media and sometimes I buy newspapers at the local garage every week you know" (Participant 14).*

> *"I have applied for social work positions ever since I graduated using different sources. Looking for work has become part of my daily routine; I have to stay actively looking if I*

am to find something. I have recently graduated, and I'm confident something will come up soon" (Participant 3).

Drawing from the participants' accounts, it was evident that the individuals were motivated, determined, and clear about their prospects of finding employment after the completion of their studies. They were driven by the need to improve their socio-economic status, escape poverty, and the desire to be someone of value in the communities they came from. But unfortunately, they have been struggling to get employment. Moreover, they hoped that having qualifications from higher education would improve their chances of securing employment in the competitive labour market.

This finding is in accordance with van Broekhuizen's (2016) and Moleke's (2015) studies that show that a vast number of individuals from poor socio-economic backgrounds in anticipation of finding employment have taken the initiative to better their livelihood by pursuing higher education and have taken the initiative to search for employment in their respective fields of study. These studies found that graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds found it difficult to secure employment in comparison with their counterparts from an affluent socio-economic background (van Broekhuizen, 2016; Moleke, 2015).

Similarly, Magagula's (2017) study also cited that the graduates' decision to transition to the labour market in search of employment immediately after graduation stems from their urgent need to improve the socio-economic background of their families and that it is this urgency that motivates and keeps graduates highly determined to continue to engage in the employment search process no matter what obstacles stand in the way. However, repeated disappointment also shapes both motivation and determination, which may prolong the duration they remain unemployed (Magagula, 2017).

4.3.1.2 Graduates' employment searching strategy

Another factor that determines the success of graduates in the labor market is how they engage with the employment search process (i.e., strategies for finding employment) as well as how graduates present themselves in the labor market. Searching for employment in the competitive labor market not only requires investment in time, money, and dedication but also requires creativity to enhance one's chances in the labor market (Moleke, 2015; van Broekhuizen, 2016).

Participants in the study reported that they were constantly in search of employment and that they creatively combined ways (both formal and informal) to come up with alternative means of exploring the labor market for opportunities. The participants reported that their job search process involved various strategies, such as browsing through employment advertisements in newspapers, using online social media platforms, handing in resumes to organizations, government departments, and companies of interest, and handing out CVs to neighbors and friends.

The findings are consistent with Mncayi (2016), whose argument was that the success of securing employment among graduates depends on the individual value they place on securing employment. That is, being active or not actively on the lookout for employment opportunities and being creative in the approach to seeking employment determines the likelihood that graduates will find employment (Mncayi, 2016). Participants in the study narrated their strategies for finding employment as follows:

> *"I am in the database in all the departments of labour in Gauteng. I have tried hand delivering my Cv. I have posted to different departments and vacancies; I am currently emailing my CV. I am registered on different sites like indeed, LinkedIn, graduate 24, and other sites. Looked in newspapers like express and the herald. I am on different types of Facebook pages where people post social work vacancies." (Participant 3).*

> *"Every possible way available. I'm in social media groups. I check the weekly local newspaper and company's websites." (Participant 4).*

This study shows the various employment searching strategies that the graduates employed to find employment. Although different search strategies, all of them used both formal and informal methods to search for employment. Previous literature supports this finding (Mncayi, 2016; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Twinomurinzi & Magundini, 2019) that the advancement of technology has allowed employment seekers to diversify their employment search strategies, providing new means to disseminate information about employment opportunities, thus enhancing employment seekers' chances of finding employment.

Most participants pointed out that they browsed social media sites where a vast number of opportunities are posted regularly for those who qualify to apply, and where tips for successfully taking interviews are shared. Social media platforms that are mostly used to share information are Twitter and mostly Facebook, followed by WhatsApp. This finding is corroborated by a Mncayi (2016) study that also found graduate employment search strategies to include social networking and relying on each other for employment leads. Moreover, Twinomurinzi & Magundini (2019) and Graham & Mlatsheni (2015) studies also highlight the role played by social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, and WhatsApp to publicize information about employment vacancies and to supplement the internet of paper-based employment search strategies. Participants in this study narrated their use of social media platforms as follows:

> *"Social media platforms have been very helpful in the process of trying to find employment. For example, I am a member of several groups on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Colleagues share available teaching vacancies relating there." (Participant 13).*

> *"Social media is a powerful tool when you are looking for work. You can find thousands of work opportunities there posted by companies and members… that is why I am a member of such groups because I might get lucky one day and find a post that I qualify for." (Participant 8).*

These social media groups functioned as more than a space from which graduates could look for employment opportunities. It extended further than that; it incorporated both social and economic aspects of assistance. The groups, for example, are where members receive help with interview guidance, transport fares to get to an interview, and some with data so that they can stay connected to the internet.

This finding is in line with Kraal's (2015) study that highlighted the role that social media platforms and social networking for employment-seeking graduates acted as a coping and social support structure for the unemployed graduates, where members offered and received social support from their peers who are undergoing similar experiences. Moreover, this finding is supported by Graham & Mlatshen (2015), who also found that social media networking functioned more than as a platform linking people. For the graduates in her study, it also functioned as a support system where graduates could give and receive employment leads, advice, emotional, as well as financial support from peers undergoing the same experiences. Participants in this study narrated their use of social media as an information dissemination platform and social support as follows:

> *"These are more than social groups where we share job posts. We also support each other in many ways… If I have a question about what to expect when I go to an interview or when I need directions and so forth." (Participant 9).*

> *"The groups are very supportive. They advise all sorts like how to successfully take an interview, something that was not taught in tertiary. And sometimes just knowing that I am not going through unemployment alone and have the support of people I don't even personally know is comforting you know…" (Participant 15).*

However, in South Africa, the digital divide is a significant challenge, particularly in townships where access to technology and the internet is limited. According to Statistics South Africa (2020), only 40% of households in South Africa have access to the internet, with access being even lower in townships. This lack of access to digital technologies creates a significant barrier to employment search for job seekers living in townships, as many job vacancies are advertised

online, and online applications have become the norm in many sectors (Barnard, 2021). Even when digital technologies are available, there is often a lack of digital literacy in South African townships. Many job seekers lack the necessary skills to effectively use digital technologies, such as searching for jobs online, creating online profiles, and communicating with potential employers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the digital divide in South Africa, particularly in education. With universities switching to online teaching, many students from disadvantaged backgrounds were left out due to a lack of access to the internet and digital technologies. This gap in access has the potential to worsen already existing disparities and perpetuate poverty and unemployment. To address this issue, it is essential to not only increase access to digital technologies but also provide digital literacy training to ensure that all job seekers have the necessary skills to use these technologies effectively and improve their employment prospects (Mashamaite & Maumela, 2021).

The above quotes show that the graduates were highly motivated to look for employment opportunities everywhere possible, hoping to diversify their strategies. They pointed out that they still rely on newspapers as a source of employment posts, visiting departments for public vacancy posts in person, and they have integrated their methods with social media and internet-based methods to increase their chances of securing employment.

4.3.1.3 Motivation and determination for job-seeking

The graduates' level of motivation and determination to keep searching for employment despite facing unexpected challenges also factors in job search behaviors of unemployed graduates' chances of securing employment (Mncayi, 2016; Vleugels et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2016). This is because the level of determination in the face of disappointment contributes to the intensity with which graduates continue to seek employment (Mncayi, 2016; Vleugels et al., 2013).

In this study, the degree to which participants in the study maintained their motivation and determination to look for employment despite challenges differed. For example, participant 7

mentioned that she was motivated to pursue a career in social work after witnessing her mother, who is a member of community caregiving programs in their area, help those in need (Participant7). While for some, the source of their motivation was the desire to improve their socio-economic status or the desire to bridge the service gap that exists in their communities. Participants narrated this as follows:

> *"My main motivating factor for me to keep looking for a job is…to better my family financial situation, uh to be able to assist financially so to improve our living standards. I also need a change in my life. I have to think about building a foundation for my life…, something that is long overdue". (Participant 10).*

> *"I studied because I realized that most communities in SA don't have Social Workers, most can't access their offices, and some don't know the type of services SWs offer then I thought I would be able to bring change to different communities, institutions or NGOs" Participant 5).*

The quotes above illustrate the participants' sources of motivation and determination to pursue qualifications and career paths in their respective fields. A prominent attribute of participants in the study was their ability to maintain a high level of motivation and determination despite the rejections they faced in the labour market. This is a key attribute among study participants, evident in their expressed hope that success would follow if they kept searching for employment opportunities.

This finding is corroborated by Vleugels et al.'s (2013) study that found motivation and determination levels as major factors that influence the employment-seeking behaviours of unemployed individuals' engagement with the labour market processes and may affect their employment-seeking experiences. This is because both motivation and determination are linked with attributes of being resilient and optimistic, resulting in graduates who would be consistent with the employment search processes despite facing difficult circumstances and adversity (Vleugels et al., 2013; van Hooft et al., 2021).

Moreover, Vleugels et al.'s (2013) study also highlights the importance of unemployed graduates remaining optimistic about their prospects in the labour market as it increases their chances of finding employment. However, while some of the participants indicated their level of determination to be on the lookout for potential employment opportunities, they understandably subsided with every negative response they received from the labour market. This finding coincides with the study conducted by van Hooft et al. (2021) that highlights how the oscillation of these factors determines how enthusiastically individuals approach the process of employment search and how sometimes it results in a lack of optimism resulting in graduates experience having trouble finding employment. Participants in this study narrated their experiences as the following:

> *"I can't say it's none because people still get jobs regardless of the Stats reports, so I'm confident that I will also be allowed to be employed" (Participant 5).*

> *What I can say is that I was motivated after graduation and that motivation subsided with every application that got ignored or rejected. I feel like giving up some time and time, whatever job because I need to make a living" Participant 8).*

These findings confirm those from Graham & Mlatsheni's (2015) and Yu's (2013) studies that highlighted graduates who lost motivation to seek employment because of the negative outcomes they have received in their job search end up enduring unemployment longer than motivated ones. Thus, factors such as the level of motivation and determination have been demonstrated to play an instrumental role in the job searching experiences of graduates.

4.3.1.4 The impact of negative experience on job search behaviours

It is not uncommon for graduates transitioning from tertiary to the workforce to take longer than expected, which leads to feelings of disappointment, frustration, and helplessness (Ali et al., 2016). It has been shown that although graduates experience these difficulties, the majority maintain their employment search behaviour and attitudes (Ali et al., 2016). The transitional

experience to the labour market searching for employment has not been pleasant for most participants in this study, who described their experiences as mostly negative. These negative experiences manifested themselves differently for different graduates. Most, if not all, participants described feelings of frustration, demotivation, depressed, and some indicated how they felt like their dreams were being snubbed. Some expressed how they spend their days consumed by a feeling of uncertainty, not sure of what their next move is. The situation often led some to partially abandon the employment search; some applied for part-time jobs such as bank teller and retail positions, which only require a matriculation certificate, while some furthered their studies to escape being unemployed (van Hooft et al., 2021).

When asked about their experience of employment search participants narrated their experience as follows:

> *"Nothing. Just a lot of rejection emails and usually with a job post they tell you: if they don't respond to you within the next month, then consider your application unsuccessful." Participant 3).*

> *"This transition has been unpleasant. I've been applying online and dropping off my CV at different locations, but the response hasn't been great. After some time, the enthusiasm fades, and the reality of being unemployed hits you: people are getting jobs left and right. You end up thinking that you will never get employed." (Participant 12).*

As indicated in the literature review, many factors contribute and interact with one another to influence unemployed graduates' employment-seeking behaviour and attitudes (van Hooft et al., 2021). The negative experiences of participants in this study were shown to have affected their employment search behaviour, attitude and determination to keep looking for employment. They narrated that their level of determination to keep looking for employment subsided because of negative responses to their applications.

These findings are consistent with Moorhouse & Caltabiano (2007), Petruzziello et al. (2020), and van Hooft et al. (2021) studies that highlight those long periods of unemployment and

repeated rejection from the labour market are some of the factors that diminish motivation and determination of unemployed graduates to persevere in their employment search in the face of challenges. Moreover, van Hooft et al. (2021) study identified the oscillation of motivation and determination to find employment as a major cause that influences some graduates' employment search behaviour, thus prolonging the period they remain unemployed. Long periods of unemployment may also diminish psychological resources that foster resilience, perseverance, and determination, resulting in them taking any employment offer that comes their way, even if it does not align with their career prospects (Moorhouse & Caltabiano, 2007; van Hooft et al., 2021).

Similarly, this study also reflects this. For example, two participants in the study worked part-time in retail stores while actively seeking employment in their field of study. This is also in line with Petruzziello et al. (2020) study that found that graduates who spend a prolonged period without employment redirect their attention away from applying for employment in their field of study, which might qualify them for employment in semi-skilled sectors. One of the participants narrated their experience as follows:

> *"I stayed unemployed for a long time after graduation and life is not waiting for anyone. So, because there are jobs out there, working in retail, at least I can provide for my family, take care of things." (Participant7).*

These findings show that participants' motivation and determination for securing employment were subdued because of the negative experiences they encountered when trying to find employment. This is significant to highlight because it shows how the negative experience of graduates influences their employment search process and prospects with some graduates remaining unemployed for a longer period than expected (van Hooft et al., 2021; Petruzziello et al., 2020; Hooft et al., 2020).

4.3.1.5 Summary of employment-seeking behaviour and experiences.

Findings under this theme showed that participants' employment-seeking experience was mainly negative. The consequence is a change in motivation, determination and employment search behaviour. Being active in the labour market increases the chances of securing employment (Mncayi, 2016; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). However, factors such as a repeated rejection of graduates' efforts at employment applications have been shown to manifest in a decline in determination and the intensity that an unemployed graduate engages in searching for employment (Vleugels et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2016). Furthermore, the study shows that graduate employment-seeking behaviour was affected by their length of unemployment. The majority of participants in the study, as shown above, were unemployed for about a year. van Hooft et al. (2021) argue that employment search behaviours and the intensity of graduates decline the longer they stay unemployed.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Graduates' perceptions of being unemployed

Participants in the study expressed that they had high expectations of finding employment upon graduating. However, their experience of transitioning to the labour market has been met with an assortment of challenges that the participants were not expecting. Many factors contribute to this challenge, including personal, social, and political (Walker & Fongwa, 2017; Moleke; 2015). These events have reconfigured over time and shaped unemployment trends in South Africa (Walker & Fongwa, 2017). These factors range from micro-level factors producing barriers to individuals' chances of securing employment (i.e., skill mismatch, lack of experience, socioeconomic background, geographical area, and lack of social connection) to macro-level factors such as structural factors (i.e., stagnant labour market) (Walker & Fongwa, 2017; Moleke; 2015; Baldry; 2013),

4.3.2.1 Skill-labour market mismatch

In this study, qualification/skill mismatch and labour market demand for some skills were perceived as a factor that shaped the employment outcome. Across the globe and even in South Africa, there is a renewed debate on the employability of graduates, as earlier outlined in

countries like India and China, skill mismatch between the skill that graduates have acquired in tertiary institutions and the labour market (Nepram et al., 2020; Yang, 2018). In the South African context, literature has also highlighted the mismatch between the South African labour market and the skills and/or qualifications that the graduates have gained (Kraak, 2012; Walker, 2015; van Broekhuizen, 2015). According to van Broekhuizen (2015), matching skills to the labour market has become more challenging in recent years, and it has become more critical to adapt to the needs of the labour market, especially in South Africa, where unemployment levels are high.

The participants in this study described the disappointment that they experienced after spending long and costly periods of their lives studying for their respective qualifications, only to be frustrated when they reach the labour market, only to discover that nobody in the labour market wants to hire them because their gained skills are not valued in the workplace as others. Participants described their perception of their struggle with finding employment with their gained qualifications as follows:

> *"I am aware of the scarcity of employment in this qualification. Hence, I used to use my extra time to volunteer in NGOs. However, that still resulted in employment opportunities being slim to none after graduation as if what I have learned in university is useless because companies do not want to hire us" (Participant 4).*

> *"Having a degree from the faculty of humanities, especially social work, there seems to be no link with the industry, most of us are unemployed, South Africa, especially poor communities like ours needs social workers but the industry does not want to hire social workers. People who get employed are students doing your sciences, engineers, and doctors. For us, it is like we don't matter." (Participant 14).*

Most of the participants in the study come from the Faculty of Humanities (i.e., social work and teaching fields), and they revealed that they realized some qualifications in the South African labour market are in high demand than others because their counterparts in other faculties are getting employed, and they are still struggling to find employment. The skills that participants

perceived to be the most sought-after and prioritized, especially in South Africa, are those related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (i.e., STEM subjects).

This finding is in line with Oluwajodu et al.'s (2015), Mncayi's (2016), and Yu's (2013) studies that found graduates from the Faculty of Humanities have a hard time securing employment in the labour market compared to graduates who qualify for a professional and technical qualification, such as the Sciences, Medicine, or Engineering. This finding also supports Baldry's (2013) study that highlighted the prevalence of unemployment among graduates with qualifications from the Faculty of Humanities and Arts. According to Baldry (2013), the difficulty graduates have in transitioning from Humanities and Arts into the labour market is because of the general nature of qualifications in these fields.

This finding reinforces Walker's (2015) study, which also highlighted that because of the theory-oriented nature of some universities, some fields of study emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical skills and abilities to prepare graduates for the labour market. Hence, some graduates find it difficult to match and secure employment in the labour market (Walker, 2015). While South Africa has increased the output of qualified graduates, especially from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, because of skill/qualification mismatch, the possession of qualifications has not translated into employment or the improvement of the graduate's livelihood (Walker, 2015).

Qualification mismatch is evidence of the gap between what is required in the labour market and what graduates possess, especially among Humanities graduates, whom some participants felt lacked practical training.

4.3.2.2 The lack of work-based experience and practical skills

The lack of experience has been cited in various literature as the major contributing factor to high unemployment rates among youth with or without tertiary qualifications (Walker, 2015; Walker & Fongwa, 2017; Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2016). For most of the participants in the study, the lack of experience also emerged as being the main contributing factor to their unemployment status. Most participants had just graduated from universities and had not held a

job before; therefore, had no work experience. They objected that while they recognize that possessing appropriate experience and skills increases the chances of one finding employment, the reason that they remain unemployed is that the employers are more interested in candidates that have prior experiences than fresh graduates with theoretical knowledge only.

For instance, in an excerpt, a participant even equated how having a university qualification is like "*having a matric certificate*" arguing that without experience, it is hard to find employment despite having attained a tertiary qualification (Participant 3). These findings correspond with Walker's (2015) study, in which she found that fresh graduates struggle to secure employment because they lack practical experience and skills as a result of theoretically based curricula offered in most tertiary institutions. Participants expressed their experience of being passed over for a job in the following quotes:

> *"I feel like most job posts I have encountered so far want graduates with previous work experience or master's qualification. I am fresh out of university. I have no work experience whatsoever. Where am I supposed to have all these two or three experiences that they want? (Participant 12).*

> *The overwhelming thing about looking for work is that most companies want graduates with work experience. Most job posts want 3-5 years of work experience, which means those of us fresh out of university are excluded because we don't have that experience. (Participant 9).*

Many participants cited that their tertiary curriculum was theoretical and had very few to no practical components to enhance their work-based experience and skills. They pointed out that their theoretical/classroom-based curriculum was not instrumental in equipping them with essential experience for competing in the "real" work environment. Hence, their employment prospects were limited in the labour market. As indicated in previous studies by Moleke (2015) and Mncayi (2016) that argued that there is a misalignment between theory and practice that is part of tertiary education that advances theoretical knowledge more than practical skills, hence

their struggle to secure employment in vacancies that require the applicant to have practical experience. Moreover, this finding corresponds to Walker's (2015) and Van der Berg & Van Broekhuizen's (2016) study, in which they point out the misalignment between the theory that is taught in institutions of higher learning and skills that are required in the labour market as a major reason that graduates struggle to find employment. However, participant 7 indicated that while the university that she attended offered practicals in their last year of study (4th year), she is aware of universities that offer practicals as early as their first year. Participants who had no practical experience narrated their experience as follows:

> *"No, as much as it sounded like it. It didn't. They focused more on theory than placement experiences" (Participant 4).*

> *"Most of the work we did in university was theoretically based, and because of covid we did not have practicals as we should have, everything was online." (Participant 13).*

The above quotes show participants could not get employment because of a lack of work-based experience and skills required by employers. They believed that their struggle to find employment was because of the preference for those with experience and certain needed experience and skills. Thus, making them less competitive in the labour market than those who already possess the skills and experience required by employers.

Given the fact that participants were young graduates with the average age being 25 years, it is unlikely that they would have accrued the required experience in some of the vacancies in the labour market. This finding is consistent with the Oluwajodu et al. (2015) study that found that employers prefer mature graduates because of the assumption that they are more experienced than their younger counterparts.

These findings show that in today's labour market, having only qualifications to offer potential employers is not enough to secure employment. Those seeking employment have to have the required skills for the job. As Walker (2015) suggests, the solution to this problem is to expose

students not only to classroom learning, but also to practical experiences that will enhance the practical skills that can be used in the labour market.

4.3.2.3 The lack of social networks

The significance of social networks for graduates seeking employment cannot be overstated, especially in the South African context where social inequality and historical exclusion of Black South Africans from formal employment networks are prevalent (van der Westhuizen, 2019).

As highlighted in the literature review (Walker & Fongwa, 2017; Graham and Mlatsheni, 2015), familial social networks are one of the most revered and effective methods of searching for employment in the labour market. However, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack access to diverse and robust social networks that can connect them to relevant people and departments, limiting their access to formal job opportunities. According to Graham and Mlatsheni (2015), a robust social network (i.e., family, friends, and acquaintances, etc.) with embedded social capital can help connect the graduate to relevant people and departments, thus boosting the chances of one getting information or employment leads.

All the participants in the study highlighted their lack of social connections in the labour market as a factor that has contributed to them being unemployed. A recurring narrative among participants is that to navigate the transition through the labour market successfully, besides a qualification, a graduate also requires having social connections. This is to ease or enhance the process of job search. Participants described this as follows:

> *"Finding work for my qualification has been a challenge. I have applied, but it seemed like you needed to have connections to be able to find work as a social worker.". Participant 3).*

> *"Another thing about job seeking, my guy, is that you have to have connections, competition is high among us graduates, we compete for the same posts and those with connections always get the job. So, I can say having a connection is vital" (Participant 10).*

The belief among employment seekers is that to be successful in the labour market, it is not only necessary to have skills and experience; it is also helpful to know the right people. The quotes show participants believed qualifications become almost irrelevant if you don't have the right social connections; i.e., social capital. Similarly, to participants 3 and 10, the participant viewpoint is that "*you have to know the right people in the right places*" (Participant 11). That is people who will provide information and connect with those in positions of influence, status, power, and authority. Social networks have also been identified by Kraak (2015) as one of the common employment strategies that graduates employ to find information about potential employment opportunities. These findings correspond with Case et al. (2018) study, which also noted that the chances of a graduate securing employment are influenced by networking. Those who do not have a connection to the labour market tend to have a difficult time navigating the labour market (Case et al., 2018).

Moreover, these findings are corroborated by Walker & Fongwa (2017) and Graham and Mlatsheni (2015), who noted that graduates who have social networks navigate the labour market easily because it affords them employment information and connections. Furthermore, the findings also show that the lack of social networks as a factor limits graduates to information that could lead to potential employment. This relates to previous studies (Kruss, 2016; Walker & Fongwa, 2017) which argue that graduates' social networks help to allow access to employment opportunities that might not be advertised in the public domain.

Moreover, the lack of social network intervention on behalf of the participants also stems from the fact that some participants were the first generation to be admitted to a university or to get a qualification. These findings echo Wildschut et al. (2018) study that shows the lack of connection is prevalent among first-generation graduates, especially those who do not have close relatives without any educational background. Both Wildschut et al. (2018) and Walker & Fongwa (2017) regard having a social network as a necessary cultural capital that is useful to connect employment seekers and potential employment prospects.

These findings are further supported by social network theories that posit that social relationships and networks play a crucial role in job search processes. The strength and diversity of an

individual's social network can influence their access to job opportunities, job-related information, and support during the job search process (Lin, 2020). Graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to have limited social networks that lack diversity and social capital. Their networks may not include individuals who can provide information or referrals to job opportunities, resulting in limited access to formal employment opportunities. This lack of social networks creates a significant barrier to entry for graduates, contributing to high levels of unemployment, particularly among Black South African graduates (van der Westhuizen, 2019).

Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "habitus" further illustrates the relationship between social networks and graduate unemployment. Habitus refers to the internalized cultural and social structures that shape an individual's actions and perceptions of the world around them (Bourdieu, 1984). In the context of graduate unemployment in South Africa, an individual's habitus can influence their access to social networks and job opportunities. Graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack the habitus and cultural capital required to navigate formal employment networks. They may lack the language, mannerisms, and knowledge of social cues that are valued by employers and gatekeepers in the job market (Bourdieu, 1984).

Consequently, they may struggle to develop and maintain social networks that are crucial for accessing formal job opportunities. Moreover, graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience a "culture shock" when entering formal employment networks, as they may not be familiar with the norms and expectations of these networks. This lack of familiarity can result in social exclusion and further limit their access to formal employment opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of graduate unemployment (Gouws, 2017). Hence, it is apparent that the absence of social connections not only impacts graduates' job search experiences but also shapes their employment-seeking behavior and prospects of securing employment.

4.3.2.4 The lack of career guidance and counselling

According to Graham and Mlatsheni's (2015) career guidance, one of the useful tools that university students under-utilize is to prepare themselves for the labour market. Having no career guidance and thus not knowing the realities of the job market is cited as a contributing factor to the rising numbers of unemployment among graduates (Moerane, 2016; Walker, 2015). Participants in this study also highlighted they had received little or no career guidance, either from their high school or at university. For instance, participant 1 indicated that she had to rely upon their knowledge to decide what to study, and what career path to take (Participant 1). Like some participants in this study, participant 1 progressed through tertiary education with limited information and knowledge of labour market realities and the chosen career path.

This finding corresponds with the Walker (2015) study that highlighted that lack of career guidance/ counselling also plays a role in the rising unemployment rate among graduates. The study found that the lack of guidance or relevant information on which field to study or the availability of employment opportunities in the labour market contributed to ill-informed decisions in choosing a career path that is not in demand (Nel and Neale-Shutte, 2013). When asked if they had career guidance before, participants in the study replied as follows:

> *"Ah… being young and not taking things seriously, career counselling was offered in the university, but I did not take it seriously, I attend a couple of sessions during my last year but stopped because he did not see the use…" (Participant 15).*

> *"To think of it, I have to say I have never received career guidance ever in my life. I would have benefited from it. I only knew in my last year at university that they offer career guidance. I wanted to do nursing when I was in high school and when it got to university, I could qualify because of my marks, so I chose my second choice, which is social work." (Participant 8).*

The findings in this study show that most participants did not receive career guidance or counseling during their secondary schooling or at university. Even though these services are

readily available, participants reported not receiving career counselling before enrolling at university. Hence, some made ill-informed decisions when choosing a career path. Moreover, this finding corroborates Moleke's (2015) and Walker's (2015) studies, which highlighted the lack of adequate use of career guidance and counselling contributing to graduates making ill-informed decisions about their studies and job opportunities.

The finding is also corroborated by Moerane's (2016) findings that reported that due to the poor or lack of career guidance, many students from disadvantaged communities choose career paths that are not in demand in the labour market. Some participants narrated that upon being rejected for the programmes they would have liked to pursue as their first choice, they enrolled in programmes that were their second choice. Participants decided based on what they needed at the time, which was getting a qualification to improve their socio-economic standing, and did not consider how it would affect their career prospects in the future.

This is in line with Moleke's (2015) study, which highlights how some graduates pursued career paths that were not their first choice but pursued qualifications to situate themselves better in the labour market than individuals with matric qualifications. Moreover, the findings are consistent with Moerane's (2016) study that highlighted that most graduates from poor socio-economic backgrounds were much more driven by the need to get a qualification to improve their employment prospects and be competitive in the labour market. According to Moerane (2016), most students either have no clear career goals or are desperate to get qualifications, with some students stating that the degrees they have attained were not their first choice. These findings showed that because of inadequate career guidance, some graduates end up struggling to secure employment based on their qualifications not being in demand in the labour market.

4.3.2.5 Socio-economic status

South Africa, being a country that is still characterized by stark inequalities, the gap between the haves and the have-nots keeps growing, and socio-economically, the country is still polarized (Moleke, 2006). Because of the growing inequality gap in South Africa, a fraction of graduates from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds face challenges (i.e., lack of or limited

resources) during their transition to the labour market, which affects their employment search behaviour and outcomes (Baldry, 2013; Moleke, 2006). According to Baldry (2013), the efficiency and consistency of engagement with the employment search process by unemployed graduates are shaped by their socio-economic status. Baldry (2013), argues that a high rate of employment is high among graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds due to difficulty accessing resources (i.e., internet access, newspapers, and employment searching strategies that require money). Participants reported that the employment search process is time-consuming and emotionally draining, but mostly it is most economically taxing. Participants in the study voiced out that their socio-economic status made their employment search efforts difficult as follows:

> *"So, it is difficult to stay actively looking for work because of the financial constraints. Applying online requires data, and data is costly. A paper-based method is the worst, you have to make a lot of copies. Scan this, scan that, and you have to move around dropping applications to companies only for them not to reply." (Participant 10).*

> *"Honestly, for me, the process has been challenging, especially financially. Who would have thought that looking for work is this expensive? every step of the process requires me to spend money, printing out my CV, photocopying or scanning all the relevant documents, and there are a lot of them hey... and on top of that, I have to travel to the department of education to drop off those documents. So yea the struggle for money is real." (Participant 13).*

This study shows that the socio-economic status of unemployed graduates contributed to the challenges they faced in their transition from tertiary to the labour market. Participants expressed concerns that the employment search process was getting expensive for them. Participant 1 shared similar sentiments that the "*financial constraints sometimes limit job search*" process due high cost of searching for employment, the constant printing or photocopying of employment application materials, this is beside the travel cost that she had to pay to submit applications or attend interviews (Participant 1). This influences the efficiency and consistency of the employment search process.

This finding is in line with Fongwa's (2018) and Case et al. (2018) studies, they found that rates of unemployment are prevalent among graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds because they had challenges accessing resources that would have increased their chances of employment opportunities. Similarly, the finding is corroborated by Baldry (2013), who also identified the prevalence of unemployment to be high among graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds, with the reason being limited access to resources, especially for those who have financial assistance. Like most graduates looking for employment, the beginning of the month is usually the time that, through familial connections, they can financially afford to venture out to search for employment (Walker, 2015; Case et al., 2018). Here, they are competing with others who have also travelled to department offices (Walker, 2015). As participant 8 highlights:

> *"Coming from a financially struggling family, the process has been a nightmare, to can only submit my applications to companies and organizations when I have money, and that is usually at the beginning of the months, the rest of the time I have to depend emailing at its cheaper you know." (Participant 8).*

The study shows that the graduates' socio-economic status influenced employment search behaviours. Some participants indicated they could only visit their relevant department, where public posts were advertised when they were financially able.

This finding is supported by Mamaleka's (2020) study, which also found the socio-economic backgrounds of unemployed graduates have become a hindrance to their employment search process. Mamaleka (2020) argues that those graduates could not effectively and continually engage in the process due to not having adequate financial resources. Moreover, the findings are corroborated by Case et al. (2019) and Walker's (2015) studies that highlight the link between the unemployed status of graduates and their low-level socioeconomic status. Their study showed that low socio-economic backgrounds hinder the ability to explore opportunities in the labour market.

4.3.2.6 Geographical area and graduate unemployment

While the socio-economic background of most of the participants in this study contributed to their problem of unemployment and was exacerbated by their geographical location. Prior studies by Kraak (2010) and Mamaleka (2020) found that in South Africa, geographical location influences the employment prospects of graduates. Moleke's (2005) study also reported that graduates in previously disadvantaged communities (i.e., townships and rural areas) are less likely to find employment compared to graduates who live in urban/metropolitan areas.

Participants in the study also reported that geographic location is a factor that affects employment prospects. Living in township areas where there are no employment opportunities and being financially constrained have made the job search process a challenge and a major frustration for the participants. Many of them highlighted that living in townships is a disadvantage in terms of access to the economic hubs of the province, far away from companies and organizations where employment opportunities are plentiful. Participants believed that living in an urban area offers a wide range of opportunities because both the public and private sectors of employment are located there. Participants narrated this as follows:

> *"And my experience is impacted by my location. I feel like if I were staying in Joburg, things would be better compared to where I am now. Joburg has a lot of companies and even government departments I can visit compared to here… more opportunities mean better chances to find work. (Participant 11).*

> *"Ah staying in the township is a barrier, nothing is moving here, opportunities are scarce, there are many of us graduating and sitting at home with degrees collecting dust… I think living in the urban areas near opportunities, I could be working by now or even volunteering… it's better than nothing, at least I'll be gaining experience… so yeah they were not fulfilled (Participant 8).*

The findings of the study reveal that a graduate's geographical location is also a major factor that influences their chances of being employed in the labour market. Participants' accounts reveal

that their location away from employment hubs had limited their access and made their efforts to secure employment difficult. This is because both public and private employment recruitment agencies and institutions are far from the places where participants live, thus acting as a barrier to accessing these services.

These findings are in line with Graham & Da Lannoy's (2016) and Tinashe & Chinyamurindi's (2019) studies that also found that geographical location plays a role in determining graduates' labour market outcomes. These studies highlight how graduates from disadvantaged communities have a hard time breaking into the labour market because of residing far from economic hubs and employment opportunities (Graham & Da Lannoy, 2016; Tinashe & Chinyamurindi, 2019). For Moleke (2015), this reflects the legacy of the spatial arrangement of the apartheid regime that restricted the working class, most of whom were Black, in township areas.

As participants searched for employment, they lamented they couldn't even access internships or volunteer opportunities to enhance their skills and experience, which is one way to increase their chances of securing permanent employment. Moreover, many of the companies and organizations they could approach are said to be in urban areas. Living in townships away from these opportunities was a barrier to the employment search process.

These findings are consistent with Baldry's (2016) study that highlighted that because of limited access to labour market opportunities, services, and infrastructures that promote graduate training and employability, graduates from previously disadvantaged communities such as rural areas and townships are more likely to remain unemployed after graduation. The findings show that experiences of employment search have been limited by the geographical areas where they live.

4.3.2.7 Summary of the reasons for unemployment

The transition from tertiary to the labour market is marked by various factors that affect the employability of graduates in South Africa, factors that could potentially prolong the unemployment and length of graduates (Edayi, 2015; Mncayi, 2016; Van Broekhuizen). In their

transition to the labour market, participants in the study experienced both internal and external factors that were hindering their employment prospects.

The participants cited several factors, including mismatches between qualifications and employment, a lack of job experience and technical skills, socio-economic background, inadequate career guidance and counselling, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of social connections. It has been shown in previous literature that youth graduates of the Humanities and Arts are more likely to be unemployed because they are not prepared for the labour market (Moleke, 2005; Baldry, 2013; Edayi, 2015; Mncayi, 2016). This theme also revealed that graduates felt they were not prepared for effortless employment because they lacked the relevant experience and skills that were needed in the labour market.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Perceived ways to promote graduate employment in South Africa

The responsibility to engage in the labour market in search of employment squarely lies on the shoulders of graduates after graduation, and participants showed that understanding (Oluwajodu *et al.,* 2015). Participants in the study did not exonerate themselves from the problem of unemployment. They were aware of their limitations and of how they affected the outcome of their employment search. Their perception of the role they play in improving their employability shows their awareness of the shortfall on their behalf. A lack of experience and skills caused this (Wildschut et al., 2019; Baldry, 2016). They discussed ways in which they think they could promote their employability by taking an independent route, i.e., self-employment through entrepreneurship.

4.3.3.1 Enhancing employability through studying further

According to Oluwajodu et al. (2015), studying further and obtaining a post-graduate qualification is considered by unemployed graduates as a means to increase their career prospects in the labor market, beyond just having an undergraduate qualification. This opens up more career avenues for exploration, as was also found in this study. Rather than waiting for opportunities that might never materialize, participants in the study reported that another option they were considering was further study

In addition to easing the pressure of unemployment, some participants considered studying further and adding to their qualifications as an opportunity to enhance their employability. This is in line with previous studies by Oluwajodu et al. (2015), Fongwa (2018), and Wildschut et al. (2018), which also found that graduates consider post-graduate studies, either at honours or master's level, to increase their chances of finding employment in the competitive labor market, as well as enhancing their prospects by upskilling. Participants in this study indicated their decision to further their employability through further study as follows:

> *"When applying for work, they want you to either have experience or have a master's degree, so to increase my chances, I would say attaining a master's degree is a way to go. It will increase my chances for sure. So yeh, that would be an additional qualification I would like to pursue." (Participant 8).*

> *Well as a graduate from humanities, I think it is important to at least have some sort of a post-graduate qualification you know, it can open other doors, the thing is some companies want graduates with experience or graduates with postgrad qualification because they are considered component than someone with an undergraduate degree, so yeah if I could get a post-graduate qualification, I think that will help me a lot. (Participant 10).*

Most of the participants in the study had only earned an undergraduate degree. A few had completed a second qualification, and some desired to further their studies to improve their chances of finding employment in the labour market. For instance, two participants in the study studied further and recently earned degrees with honours in 2019 and 2020 (participant 14 and participant 15, respectively). They enrolled part-time at Unisa for an Honours degree while still looking for work. This finding is in line with Oluwajodu et al.'s (2015) study, which also found that unemployed graduates, in their attempts to escape the unemployment rut, regarded furthering their studies as an option that could improve their chances of securing employment. Moreover, this finding is also corroborated by Moreane (2016) and Wildschut et al. (2018), who

found that unemployed graduates were encouraged to obtain another qualification to increase their prospects in the labour market because of the employment requirements for either a post-graduate qualification or practical experience.

Studying further was seen by the participants as a chance to either upskill or reskill to enhance one's employability and prospects in the labour market (Moreane, 2016). However, the ILO (2013) cautions that this may contribute further to mismatches between the skills that employment seekers possess and those required by the labour market. Graduates could be in danger of becoming over-skilled or over-educated (holding multiple credentials). This finding is supported by Morsy and Mukasa's (2019) studies, which found that high rates of unemployment among graduates are due to upskilling, contributing to the issue of mismatch between the skills gained and the skills required due to the changing nature of the labour market.

As shown in this finding, individuals perceive higher education institutions as instrumental in improving their employability. Furthering one's studies is thus seen as a means of upskilling to have better opportunities.

4.3.3.2 The promotion of self-employment through entrepreneurship

In this study, some participants believed that graduates should play a role in emancipating themselves from unemployment by creating alternative avenues of employment. While most participants regarded getting employment as the only way to escape unemployment, some regarded self-employment through entrepreneurship as an alternative option that can immensely improve their livelihoods and create employment for other struggling graduates. Participant 4 expressed a similar sentiment about starting a small business to escape unemployment and argued that with the help of the government, graduates would have a viable alternative to earning an income rather than being subjected to unemployment.

This finding is further corroborated by Fatoki's (2010) study, which highlighted the growing interest among unemployed graduates in participating in micro-enterprises as an alternative means to ease themselves out of the burden of poverty and to escape unemployment. Moreover, this view is in line with Ali and Jabeen's (2016:103) argument that the involvement of

unemployed young people in business ventures is imperative to combating unemployment. With support from relevant stakeholders and government institutions, successful start-up businesses would not only contribute to the creation of further employment but also to the growing economy of the country. In this study, participants expressed this desire to promote entrepreneurship as an alternative in the following manner:

> *"As graduates think, we need to have the necessary skills and the courage to start small organisations or businesses and employ each other, which is better than waiting for a handout from the government. But, without capital, these are just pipe dreams." (Participant 12).*

> *"Our government and the private sector have to create a conducive environment for us to start our own business because looking for employment has not panned out well for some of us. We need access to funding, which is also a challenge. You need to pay for every step of the application process. It is a daunting process. We have ideas that can solve the crisis of unemployment in South Africa. The only thing we lack is money." (Participant 10).*

This finding illustrates how some participants, in their attempt to escape the unemployment rut, consider the development of self-employment (i.e., entrepreneurship) as an alternative to finding employment. However, they face various challenges such as the lack of capital, expertise, or experience of being an entrepreneur. This is in line with previous studies that noted that in South Africa, young graduates face challenges to venture entrepreneurship after they graduate because of the lack of capital, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, and an unfavorable environment that limits self-employment possibilities (Fatoki, 2010; Gwija et al., 2014; Ali & Jabeen, 2016).

Few participants that considered self-employment lamented that they have not been able to get the finances to venture into entrepreneurship. Gwija et al. (2014) and Nel and Neale-Shutte's (2013) studies support this finding, highlighting how aspiring young entrepreneurs struggle to start or to even sustain their start-up businesses because of limited access to resources such as capital or credit. Moreover, participants were of the view that both the government and NGOs

should play a role in creating an environment conducive to them engaging in self-employment, that is, by advancing policies that foster self-employment and entrepreneurship.

In their struggle to get capital, they showed they were aware of government-sponsored initiatives that are aimed at supporting young people venturing into entrepreneurship. However, they narrated that having access to these programs is said to be a cumbersome process because of their bureaucratic nature. This finding corroborates Gwija et al. (2014) study that also found that unemployed graduates lamented the ineffectiveness of government agencies such as NYDA in assisting aspiring entrepreneurs. Young people were struggling to gain access to support from such government agencies.

This finding is also consistent with Nel and Neale-Shutte's (2013) and Baldry's (2013) studies that noted that despite the existence of microcredit institutions and microfinance institutions in South Africa that target young entrepreneurs, young people are often the most underrepresented group when it comes to accessing funding. Their lack of collateral and experience in entrepreneurship exacerbated their situation, making it difficult to access credit (Nel and Neale-Shutte 2013; Baldry, 2013).

In addition to the lack of capital and business support, aspiring entrepreneurs struggle to venture into start-up businesses due to a lack of entrepreneurial skill or spirit (Fatoki, 2010). This is attributed to the fact that, of all the employability skills that graduates develop at institutions of higher learning, entrepreneurship is the least developed skill of them all (Gwija et al., 2014). To Baldry (2013), the increasing rate of unemployment among graduates in South Africa results from the economic structures and the type of education that shapes graduates to only see themselves as employees of establishments and rarely as potential employers.

4.3.3.3 Graduates' suggestions to promote graduate employment: the perceived role of the government, NGOs and the private sector

Since the massification of higher education in South Africa, the government and relevant stakeholders have developed numerous interventions to address the inadequate level of work experience among young people (Meagher, 2016; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Mamaleka, 2020).

Gaining work-based experience was among the options that participants thought would be instrumental in assisting them to secure employment in the labour market.

To get work-based skills, graduates often have to take part in internships and learnership programmes through institutions of higher learning or post-graduate programs run by governments, NGOs, and the private sector (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). This opinion was echoed by participant 7, who stressed that internships offer graduates a professional work environment, while interns also gain work experience while earning a living.

In the context of graduate unemployment in South Africa, the purpose of internship or learnership programmes is seen as a way to address the inadequate level of experience of new graduates transitioning to the labour market (Mamaleka, 2020). Participants believed that the experience of an employment search would continue to be a challenge for them and others unless the government, NGOs, and institutions of higher education offer internship and learnership programmes that provide graduates with sufficient work experience. Participants narrated this experience as follows:

> *"It has been three years now not employed as a social worker… I have tried to apply for a job… last year I applied for an NGO they say that they will give me a one-year contract... so I can waste my time there…. I know that when I get there, I will give my best, so why give me one year..." (Participant 2).*

> *"They gave me a bursary to do social work. So, the idea was that I was going to be absorbed into employment, but they didn't do as they promised, you understand? So, what they have done is that they said all the bursary holders must apply as the normal people outside. So, I didn't understand... I didn't understand that because it was not stipulated in the agreement that we had, the only said is that you must work your back, which I've done, I've worked my one year back after, after my graduation, and I told I was going to get employment…" (Participant 6).*

While internship or learnership programmes are designed to provide meaningful work experience, which will enable graduates to secure employment, this study shows that this was not the case for some of the participants, who found themselves unemployed despite taking part in these programmes.

In the case of participant 1, she expressed disappointment that the Department of Social Services pulled out of their agreement on a longer internship programme, and the one-year internship that she took part in was not long enough for her to gain the experience necessary for permanent employment (Participant 1). The findings are in line with Meagher's (2016) and Kraak & Dieltiens's (2015) study, which also found that although the government and private stakeholders are establishing internships as a way for graduates to bridge the skills and experience gap between them and the labour market, unemployment persists, particularly among young Black graduates.

Furthermore, this study found that graduates who participated in internships during their university studies or through government internships complained about the short duration of the internships. The internship period was not long enough for them to gain enough work experience to qualify for employment. In their opinion, the short duration of the programmes failed to provide the necessary skills and experience to secure employment, especially since the job market requires 3 to 5 years of experience. This finding is also supported by Graham & Mlatsheni's (2015) study, which found the duration of the intervention that the government and the NGOs offer its participants to be too short to accumulate enough experience and skills for graduates to secure employment. Thus, the internship only provides a temporary solution to the crisis that they face, with most returning to being unemployed after interning, continuing the vicious cycle (Walker, 2015). Moreover, according to Walker (2015), most graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds end up unemployed after taking part in internships because most internships do not build their growth or skill development in their field. This is because most take internship opportunities that they get, even if it does not align with their fields, just to escape unemployment.

4.3.3.4 Summary of perceived ways to promote graduate employment in South Africa

It has been suggested in the literature by Nel and Neale-Shutte (2013) that graduates taking the initiative to solve their unemployment problem, along with receiving assistance from the government and relevant stakeholders, can empower graduates and promote employment among themselves.

The findings presented in this theme showed that to combat unemployment and enhance their employability, participants had different perspectives on what needed to be their role in emancipating themselves. To enhance their employability skills, some participants were convinced that furthering their education would improve their chances in the competitive labour market and open up new avenues of employment. This is because having a postgraduate qualification is required for some vacancies (Morsy & Mukasa, 2019). Some sought self-employment through entrepreneurship as an alternative to increasing their employability (Fatoki, 2010). To achieve this, the participants indicated they would need help from the government, NGOs, and the private sector to create a conducive environment that would allow for self-employment to be possible (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Mamaleka, 2020).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Overview of the study

Chapter 1 of this study outlined the problem statement of the growing rates of unemployment among youth in South Africa. Graduate unemployment and a serious skills mismatch between graduates and the labour market have been rising in the South African economy since the massification of higher education (Ngulube, 2020; Wildschut et al., 2019; Fongwa, 2018; Ndlovu & Ndebele, 2019). However, there has been debate recently about whether graduate unemployment constitutes a serious issue that needs immediate attention compared to the more prominent problem facing young people, with some authors arguing that it is a minor issue that is exaggerated (van der Berg and van Broekhuizen, 2012). While other authors suggest that graduate unemployment should be addressed before it becomes a crisis in South Africa (Pauw et al., 2008).

Despite graduate unemployment in South Africa being minuscule in comparison to youth unemployment, understanding the underlying cause is crucial. The purpose of this study is to capture the experiences and perspectives of unemployed graduates residing in townships in the Johannesburg metropolitan area struggling to find work. Helping to understand the obstacles graduates face as they transition to the workforce will shed light on how to curb the problem before it becomes an overwhelming problem. In light of this, the following research question was formulated: *What are the graduates' experiences and understanding of the relationship between graduate employability and their unemployed status*? The research question aimed to explore unemployed graduates' experiences and understanding of the relationship between employability and their unemployed status. The findings of the study manifested in themes aimed at addressing the research question and to address the objectives of the study, which are as follows;

1. *To understand the experiences of graduates regarding their unemployment status despite their tertiary qualifications.*

2. *To understand in what way graduates', perceive employability in their chosen career path to be connected to their unemployed status.*

3. Finding out which interventions graduates consider for improving their employability.

Chapter 2 of this study reviewed previous literature regarding the employability of youth graduates in South Africa. In addition, an international and local contextualisation of graduate unemployment was provided. It emphasized several causes of graduate unemployment identified in previous studies. Many factors contribute to this, including the graduate's choice of degree, the quality of the university they attended, having no work experience, and coming from a low socioeconomic background. Additionally, chapter two explored the relationship between graduates' employment-seeking behaviour and their delayed entry into the workforce.

Furthermore, to gain a more detailed understanding of employment trends in South Africa, especially among unemployed graduates who reside in townships in Johannesburg, a qualitative methodology was employed. *Chapter 3* discusses sampling techniques, data analysis, and methods. A total of fifteen township-based participants in the Johannesburg metropolitan participants were involved in the study; two held postgraduate degrees and the other fourteen were undergraduate students. The study participants were interviewed to gain insight into their experiences and perceptions regarding their unemployment status after graduating from tertiary institutions. While this research study aimed to fill gaps in the literature and also contribute to sociological knowledge. It is pertinent to note that the study also had limitations. For instance, with the interest of the study being to explore the experiences of unemployed graduates living in townships in Johannesburg, this study sampled a very small fraction of unemployed graduates in South Africa. Therefore, the findings of this study are not generalisable to other South African townships, urban areas and provinces.

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study. Three themes emerged from the study. The study explored the experience and perception of unemployed graduates transitioning to the labour market in their quest to find employment. Participant perceptions and experiences differed. However, most participants agreed that the role of tertiary institutions is to prepare graduates with skills that will assist them in finding employment. Other participants asserted that the government and private sector should expand employment opportunities. Others, however, while others argued that the responsibility lies with the individual, who should not rely on government and higher education institutions for work, but instead create opportunities for themselves. In previous literature, it has been found that education is perceived as an investment. In this regard,

graduates are expected to inevitably increase one's chances of securing employment immediately after graduating.

In summary, the findings of this study showed that having a higher education qualification does not automatically ensure the employability of graduates. The graduates in this study actively sought employment opportunities after completing their studies, motivated to improve the economic circumstances of their immediate families and become financially independent since most are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the transition to the workforce has been nothing but a disappointment. The graduates remain without employment. This finding is consistent with findings from Moleke's (2015) and Van Broekhuizen's (2016) studies, which found that graduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds (rural and townships) are more likely to be unemployed than graduates from affluent backgrounds (urban).

The consensus among graduates is that investing in education increases the chances of individuals securing employment. Participants described their experience of the transition to the labor market searching for employment as negative because of repeated disappointment resulting from their employment application being rejected. The study suggests that both internal and external factors determine the employability of graduates. Cumulative negative experiences adversely affect graduates' employment search behavior, as well as their determination to keep searching for employment. As in previous studies, negative graduate experiences have been implicated in the delayed transition of graduates into the workforce (Van Hooft et al., 2021; Petruzziello et al., 2020).

The employment search behavior of some graduates changed due to having obligations that could not be deferred until they found suitable employment with the qualification they earned. This was after being unemployed for a long time after graduating. Some opted to work part-time in retail stores to earn a living. Others enrolled in postgraduate studies to enhance their employability. Moreover, in line with previous studies, this study illustrated that having motivation for employment-seeking experience, as well as being determined about the prospects of finding employment, has kept some participants active in searching for employment opportunities (Ali et al., 2016; De Witte et al., 2012). However, the low determination and negative employment-seeking experiences that some respondents identified as reasons for their

unemployment may have reduced their level of active involvement in employment seeking (Van Hooft et al., 2021).

Another major objective of this study was to understand in what ways the graduates perceived the employability of their chosen career path and how it might be connected to their employment status. This study's findings show that graduates were aware of and understood the factors that contributed to their failure to secure employment. Some factors that participants perceived to influence their chances of being employed include the lack of employment opportunities in their field of study, resulting in a mismatch between their qualifications and employment opportunities in the labour market, a lack of work-based experience and skills, the lack of career guidance, the lack of relevant social networks, and their socio-economic status and geographic location. Previous studies have also identified these factors, or a combination of them, as barriers to graduates accessing employment opportunities in the labour market (Moleke, 2005; Fongwa, 2018; Mncayi, 2016). The graduates' perceived difficulty in finding employment or ease of obtaining employment depends on these factors.

The participants noted, for instance, that their degrees and the skills they gained from them had lower employment prospects than those with other degrees, such as engineering or science degrees. The crisis of graduate unemployment in South Africa has been identified to be prevalent among graduates from the field of Humanities and Arts (Kraak, 2012; Walker, 2015; van Broekhuizen, 2015). This indicates that some graduates' fields of study in South Africa are fundamental to the success of their employment search process (Kraak, 2012; Walker, 2015). Graduates with qualifications from fields such as the Humanities, which are among the least likely to be absorbed, find this discouraging. Many graduates who struggle to enter the labour market feel they chose the wrong field of study, hence their struggle to find employment. They expressed that their attempts to find employment had been unsuccessful because they lacked these crucial resources.

Participants asserted that their social networks played a role in the ease of entering the workforce or finding employment in South Africa. Moreover, participants also could not secure employment because of their lack of work-based experience and skills. For example, the minimum requirement for most employment vacancies is to have 3-5 years of experience, and

being fresh out of tertiary, most participants lacked the required experience and skill and were passed over for candidates with experience (Cloete, 2015; Walker, 2015). Additionally, participants' socioeconomic backgrounds and living in townships also acted as barriers to accessing employment opportunities. The participants expressed feeling limited by living so far from employment opportunities and the challenge of gaining access to businesses or government offices.

Therefore, the graduates were aware of the factors that contributed to their challenge of securing employment. Most of them were actively working on interventions for their perceived struggle to enter the labour market and were confident that, once solved, they would find employment in a sector of employment they desired. Furthermore, this study sought to find out the interventions that graduates consider viable to improve their employability. Realizing the challenges of entering the labour market, participants in the study sought various measures to increase their chances in the labour market. Among the perceived interventions that the graduates considered as solutions were studying further, providing internships and learnerships, and providing self-employment through entrepreneurship.

The experience of being unemployed has pushed some participants to pursue post-graduate studies as a way of enhancing their employability skills (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Kraak & Dieltiens, 2015). However, as Rosy & Mukasa (2019) argue, graduates in this situation risk being over-skilled or over-educated (i.e., possessing multiple qualifications). This could lead to further intensification of skill mismatch, leaving the graduate in the predicament of being underemployed. Participants also considered the provision of internships and learnerships as a solution to their lack of work-based experience. However, they complained that the internships that were offered during their studies were too short for them to gain the experience and skills to secure employment, as it is required for them to have work-based experience (Walker, 2015; Wildschut et al., 2019). Additionally, participants regarded entrepreneurship as a viable intervention needed to mitigate their crisis of unemployment by providing employment opportunities, both for self-employment and for others experiencing a similar situation (Wildschut et al., 2019). They regarded this to be a role to be played by institutions of higher education, the government, NGOs and relevant stakeholders.

5.2 Conclusions

In the context of the high unemployment rate among young people in South Africa, this study explored unemployed graduate experiences from townships around the Johannesburg metropolitan area. The research study aimed to gain a thorough understanding of how unemployed graduates experience and make sense of their status of being unemployed despite having qualifications, as well as how this influences their employment search behaviours.

The findings reveal that maintaining high levels of motivation and determination is critical for employment seekers, especially in the face of challenges that characterize the employment-seeking journey. Both motivation and determination are implicated in changes in employment search behaviour, which may be the reason that some graduates take longer to find employment. This means that highly determined and motivated graduates are much more likely to secure employment than demotivated and undetermined graduates (van Hooft et al., 2021).

The transition from an institution of higher education to the labour market is a stage that is also characterized by both internal and external factors and challenges, such as skill mismatch, socioeconomic status, geographical areas, etc. These factors have also been identified in this study as a source that has delayed the entrance of graduates into the labour market (Kraak, 2012; Walker, 2015; van Broekhuizen, 2015). A combination of these factors contributes to the high rate of unemployment among graduates in South Africa, especially for individuals from low-income backgrounds.

Participants from poor socio-economic backgrounds found the employment search process unbearable due to financial constraints, as living in townships away from potential employers was also cited as a constraint in the employment search experience. This study highlights how the primarily theoretical qualification of graduates acted as a barrier to their success in the labour market, resulting in a mismatch between the qualification that the graduate held and the practical skill that employers measure the productiveness of graduates when selecting employers.

Moreover, developing employability skills, as well as an identity that enhances one's chances of securing employment, is a time-consuming task that should be taken advantage of during one's time at the university. This study emphasizes the importance of students engaging in

extracurricular activities and volunteering as much as possible to hone all their skills. Internships and volunteering are excellent ways to develop employability skills and gain experience in their fields after graduation.

Furthermore, the study highlights the link between higher education and the public and private sector's role in shaping the career path of students to prepare them for the world of work. This is done through interventions such as internships/learner-ships, introducing entrepreneurship skills as an alternative to job creation, and a solution to the social phenomenon of unemployment among graduates.

Going forward, it is evident that various forms of intervention are needed to address the socio-economic crisis of unemployment. These interventions are needed to develop graduates who not only have mastered the theoretical aspect of learning but also develop graduates who have employability skills. These interventions have to emanate from all relevant parties involved in preparing individuals for the labour market, i.e., from higher education to government to employers. To increase the chances of graduates finding employment, it is the responsibility of colleges and universities to produce work-ready graduates. As Oluwajodu et al. (2015) suggest, the education system can do more to smooth out the transition of graduates from tertiary education into the labour market. HE should focus on imparting skills that enhance students' employability skills, such as logical reasoning, communication, and critical thinking skills.

A multi-sectoral collaboration within education and the economy will be required to accomplish this. In particular, it will require working with both private and public stakeholders in developing revised curriculums that also afford students practical elements linked to potential employers. This will enable them to know the skills needs of the labour market. However, it has been noted that having gained these skills does not necessarily translate to graduates automatically gaining employment after graduation; it serves only to enhance the employability of graduates and allow them to gain the necessary experience to secure employment.

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Appendix A: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
SOCIOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE **PROTOCOL NUMBER: SOCL-2021-06**

PROJECT TITLE	A critical analysis of the relationship between graduate career/degree choice and status of employment in Johannesburg townships.
INVESTIGATOR	Mokhali,Lesaoana Edwin
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	Sociology
DATE CONSIDERED	20 September 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	LOW RISK
EXPIRY DATE	20 September 2022

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 21 September 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor Srila Roy)

cc: Supervisor:

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 are authorized to carry out the abovementioned 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.

_____ 22 /09 /2021
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B: Participation Information Sheet

Greetings,

I am Lesaoana Mokhali, a Masters student at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Department of Sociology. As part of my academic program, I am required to undertake a research project that aims to provide a sociological analysis of the experiences and challenges faced by unemployed university graduates in South Africa, who have transitioned from graduation to the labour market. The full tittle of the study is: ***Employment seeking experiences and perceptions of unemployed young graduates in townships of Johannesburg, South Africa.*** The study seeks to capture and understand the graduates' perspective and their understanding of the relationship between career choices and employability. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

The research study will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Samuel Kariuki. Your participation will entail an online interview with me on a platform of your choice at a time and day that is convenient for you. You may select a day and time that suits you best, and the interview will last approximately thirty minutes. With your permission, the interview will be recorded for accuracy purposes, and you will be required to complete a consent form before the interview.

Participation in the study is voluntary, and there will be no advantage or disadvantage for choosing to participate or not. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality, and no information that identifies you will be included in the research report or transcripts. The digital recordings and transcripts of the interview will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor, and will be stored on a password-protected computer for ethical and safety purposes. The data will be destroyed after six years.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in the study. However, you may choose not to answer any questions that you prefer not to, and you may withdraw from the study at any point.

If you agree to participate in this study, kindly contact me via telephone or WhatsApp on (071) 300-4777, or via email at 323964@students.wits.ac.za. Your views and perceptions on the subject matter are valuable and will contribute significantly to the research. A report on the analysed data will be made available to you, should you require it.

Thank you for considering this invitation to participate in the study. Your contribution will be greatly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Lesaoana Mokhali: Email- 323964@students.ac.za

: Phone- (071) 300 4777

Supervisor: Prof Samuel Kariuki

: Email: samuel.kariuki@wits.ac.za

: Phone -(011) 717-4435

Appendix C: Informed Consent Sheet

By signing this informed consent form, I, _____, consent to participate in Lesaoana Mokhali's study on Employment seeking experiences and perceptions of unemployed young graduates in townships of Johannesburg, South Africa. As a participant, I understand the following:

- Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.
- I have the right to refuse to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering.
- The tapes and transcripts generated from the interview will remain confidential and will only be processed by the researcher and their supervisor.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or research report, thereby ensuring my anonymity.
- My input regarding the materials to be used for quotes is entirely voluntary. I have the right to refuse to have my input quoted if I do not wish to have it used.
- I may choose to identify any material not quoted in the research report.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and all my responses will remain confidential.

I acknowledge that by signing this form, I have read and fully understood its contents, and I freely consent to participate in this study. The researcher will provide me with a copy of this consent form for my reference.

Signed _____

Date _____