Learner and Employer Perspectives on Learnership Implementation at MultiChoice

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Abstract

Youth unemployment continues to be a sticky and persistent challenge in South Africa, and while skills development initiatives are in place, the light at the end of the tunnel is still dim. Post-apartheid in 2001, the ANC led government implemented learnerships as one of the key policy instruments to address skills shortages and rising unemployment. Learnerships provide skills development through a combination of theory and practical workplace learning. This study draws on the perceptions of learners, employers and experts to understand learnership implementation at MultiChoice. The research was designed as a case study on MultiChoice and in conducting this study, qualitative research methods were deployed through the use of online interviews. Further to this document review and analysis was undertaken to further understand learnerships as well as draw insights from other studies and research on learnerships. The study is premised on the expectation that learnerships are positioned to tackle challenges of high unemployment and skills shortages. A key finding of this study is that learnerships have not been highly effective in reducing unemployment among the youth nor have they catapulted the skills required to advance careers and drive industry growth. This is due to factors such as low demand for certain skill types, limited number of jobs available and perceptions of learnerships to be inferior to university degrees. The central argument is that the high learner completion results have not been met with an equally robust job creation framework. Over and above this, the expectation placed on learnerships to address unemployment is cumbersome and to a large degree not realistic given that employability is not a function of skill only but of availability and creation of jobs. Learnerships have been effective as a skills development initiative through equipping young people with skills and experience to assist them in finding employment. There is however, opportunity to enhance the design of learnerships to improve the quality of learnership outcomes as well as repositioning the value and role of learnerships in the discourse on high unemployment.

Declaration

Declaration on plagiarism

I Rugare Ncube Student number: 0610598V, am a student registered for Masters in Management, Public and Development Management in the year 2018.

I hereby declare the following:

I confirm that the work I submit for the above course is my unaided work. I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others. I am aware that the correct method for referencing material and a discussion on what plagiarism is, are explained in the WSG Style Guide and these issues have been discussed in class during Orientation.

I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the source) is wrong. I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my unaided work or that I have failed to correctly acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Signature: 

Date:_02/07/2021_____

Dedication

To my parents, Elliot and Leah Ncube, who taught me the value of inquiry and hard work

To my offspring Unashe and Maita, may you pursue your dreams to fruition

To my husband Walter, your unwavering support and love carried me through to completion

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Finally, a big thank you to my family and friends, who cheered me on and never stopped believing in me. Your encouragement and sacrifices helped me complete this. Thank you.

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Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
APA	American Psychology Association
ATR	Annual Training Report
BANKSETA	Bank Sector Education and Training
BBBEE	Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment
CATHSSETA	Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority
CIGS	Cultural Industries Growth Strategy
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DOL	Department of Labour
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EM	Employer
EX	Expert
FET	Further Education and Training
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFC	Gauteng Film Commission
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HWSETA	Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	Information Technology
MICT	Media, Information and Technologies Sector
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NFVF	National Film & Video Foundation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills authority
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan

NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NSF	National Skills Fund
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIVOTAL	Professional, Vocational, Technical and Academic Learning
QCTO	Qualifications Council for Trade and Occupations
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDA	Skills Development Act
SDLA	Skills Development Levies Act
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities
SSP	Sector Skills Plans
STATSSA	Statistics South Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WBL	Work Based Learning
WEF	World Economic Forum
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1. Introduction: Background to Learnerships within the Skills Development Context

Shortage of skills has been a recurring challenge in South Africa pre 1948, then between 1948 and 1993 under grand apartheid and post-apartheid 1994 to date. The aftermath of the first world war post 1918, was characterised by a flood of semi- skilled labour to 'support' the booming mining and agricultural activities on the African continent, South Africa included (McGrath et al., 2004). This was followed by a chronic skills deficit post the second world war in 1945, as Britain drew on the colonial resources in Africa to supplement men and resources for war purposes (Killingray, 1986). This was due to rapid conscription of military and civilian resources in Africa and Europe to bolster war machinery efforts. The South African mining and manufacturing industry, catapulted into developing semi-skilled labour to sustain its growth, drawing on the existing pool of locals (McGrath et al., 2004). However from 1948-1993 under apartheid policy, there was contention between state and industry on the purpose and implementation of skills development policy (Akoojee et al., 2008). For the state it's skills development policy, was an instrument for social control in the segregation of Whites and Africans, while for industry they expected the skills development policy to feed their growing skills needs (McGrath, 1998; McGrath et al., 2004). This contention between state and industry resulted in the skills landscape inherited by the ANC government in 1994, which was riddled with skills shortages at all levels i.e. low, intermediate and high skills (Kraak, 2008; Kraak et al., 2006).

Developing the nations skill set became a critical policy issue for the ANC government and they embarked on tackling this issue through Active Labour Market Policies. In 1998 an enabling regulatory framework was created, to address structural problems in the labour market. The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 amended in 2008 (SDA), Skills Development Levy Act 9 of 1999 (SDLA), and the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), institutionalised skills development for South Africa with the purpose of tackling skills shortages and high unemployment. These instruments gave birth to the establishment of learnerships in 2001, a mechanism to tackle the low skills base by facilitating new entrants into the labour market and enhancing skills of existing employees.

A learnership is outcomes based integrating theory and work-based skills training, which culminates in a qualification recognised in the National Qualifications Framework. Learnerships are a tripartite agreement between a learner, an employer and skills provider accredited by the Qualifications Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO). A learnership is defined as “a work based learning programme that leads to an NQF registered qualification. Learnerships are directly related to an occupation or field of work, for example, electrical engineering or project management” (Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 amended in 2008). The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a comprehensive system for the classification and registration of quality assured national qualifications. Its main purpose is to provide an integrated national framework to facilitate and enhance the quality of education and training in South Africa

Through The SDA and the NSDS, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), were established to drive the skills development agenda across all economic sectors in South Africa. SETAs develop and register learnership programmes, quality assure qualifications, disburse national skills development levy funds and monitor education and training (Van der Westhuizen, 2012). SETAs are mandated with facilitating Workplace-based learning programmes which are defined in The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 as “an approach with a quality assured curriculum through which a person internalises knowledge, gains insights and acquires skills and competencies through exposure to a work-place to achieve specific outcomes applicable for employability”.

Learnership success is based on indicators of the NSDS, measured through Annual Training Reports (ATRs) and Sector Skills Plans of SETAs. Indicators of learnership success in the NSDS focus on learner throughput, completion rates, employment rates and utilization of training levies by employers. The SETAs, Department of Labour (DoL) and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) also commission nationwide evaluations of learnership programmes under the NSDS objectives, (see (BANKSETA, 2017; Bloem, 2015; DHET, 2013; DoL, 2005, 2006, 2008; Goga & van der Westhuizen, 2012; HSRC, 2012; Kruss et al., 2011; NSA, 2019).

Outcomes of these evaluations and ATRs on learnerships show progress has been made in driving skills development targets, as the majority of learners enrolled completed a learnership, with some gaining employment. However the skills crisis remains persistent and high unemployment is prevalent especially among the youth, revealing that learnerships are

not producing the right skills, at the right standard and volume to support sustained inclusive economic growth (Bloem, 2015; Goga & van der Westhuizen, 2012; HSRC, 2012). Research conducted to understand the perspectives of employers, learners and SETAs on challenges of implementing learnerships have in the main highlighted capacity challenges of SETAs to effectively manage learnership programmes, mismatch between learnership curriculum and needs of employers, as well as low participation by some employers (Babb & Terry, 2005; Davies & Farquharson, 2004; Grawitszky, 2011; HSRC, 2012; Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010; Rowe, 2017; Visser & Kruss, 2009).

The learnership system has churned out a large number of mostly low level skills that are not aligned to the nation's industrial strategy. Learners find themselves with a recognised qualification but with limited employability prospects, while employers are left bereft as they find themselves saddled with learners they cannot employ, leaving SETAs at crossroads (Fuller & Unwin, 2003). In its 2019 annual report, the MICT SETA acknowledged that training initiatives needed to follow the high skills digital path , however this needs to be balanced by provision of low end skills to achieve inclusive digital transformation for all. It is against this backdrop that a compelling need emerges to conduct a study aimed at understanding employer and learner perspectives on effective implementation of learnerships.

The evaluation of learnerships against Sector Skills Plan remain relevant in measuring output objectives of the NSDS, however there is an opportunity to contribute to the skills development debate through exploring learner and employer experiences to understand implementation challenges of learnerships (Marock et al., 2008; Rowe, 2017). Assessing learnership programmes at sector and national level is riddled with limitations posed by sectoral differences, persistent patterns of exclusion and complexities in implementation (DHET, 2013; DoL, 2008; Du Toit, 2012; Kruss et al., 2011; NFVF, 2009). This presents an opportunity for the further research at a more granular level.

Skills required are different across sectors and past studies have mostly focused on understanding implementation and success at a sector level. There is merit in understanding implementation of learnerships from the experiences and perceptions of learners within a single company. This research seeks to understand the effectiveness of learnerships implemented by MultiChoice which falls under the Media, Information and Communication and Technology (MICT) sector .

1.1. Problem Statement

Learner tracer studies in the MICT sector between 2011 and 2016 show large numbers of learner throughput. However of concern is the low conversion rate, with 54% of learners absorbed into employment (NSA, 2019). Employers in the MICT sector mostly attribute the low conversion rates to learners graduating in occupations that are not in high demand (NSA, 2019). Current analysis on the low effectiveness of learnerships points to an implementation culture that is preoccupied with numerical targets at the expense of looking at the quality, sustainability and relevance of learnerships (Marock, 2006; Marock et al., 2008; Wildschut & Kruss, 2018). This effectively limits our knowledge on "whether the current workplace based learning system is functioning as expected" (Wildschut & Kruss, 2018, p.198).

There is evidently a gap in understanding the varied experiences and perceptions of learners and employers who go through the work place based programmes. There is a need to unearth the causal relationships that exist between programmes implemented and skills required by industry (Kraak & Young, 2009; Marock et al., 2008; Rowe, 2017; Wildschut & Kruss, 2018). In addition most studies on learnerships were post implementation presenting an opportunity to understand issues during implementation.

This study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by drawing insights from the perceptions of employees and learners involved in learnership programmes implemented at MultiChoice between 2017 and 2020. This allowed the research participants to include past learners who are now employees, as well as current learners. This study contributes to the discourse on learnership implementation through understanding perceptions and experiences of the employer and learners involved in the programme. This adds luminance on some of the factors that contribute to persistent skills shortages and high unemployment, in-spite of the high number of learnerships completed.

1.2. Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to provide insights into learnership implementation at MultiChoice which falls under the MICT sector. The study seeks the perceptions and experiences of learners and the employer to understand what impedes and facilitates learnership success. This will increase existing knowledge on learnerships as a mechanism for skills development.

- The study was conducted at MultiChoice which is part of the MICT sector, therefore it provides insights into organisation and sector-related peculiarities and needs, contributing to understanding learnership implementation in the sector.
- More broadly the study provides further insights through literature review and information from participants in the study on implementation of learnerships within the work based learning framework.

The main objective of the study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of learners and the employer on learnership implementation. Secondary objectives are to

i. Explore the role of the employer in implementing learnerships and perceived success measures of learnerships within the organisation,
ii. Gain insights from learners on their experiences and perceptions of how learnerships have contributed to their career growth and employment prospects
iii. Provide further insights through review of literature, interviewing experts at the MICT sector and training providers

1.3. Research Question

The study seeks to answer the question:

What are the perceptions and experiences of learners and employers on implementation of learnerships at MultiChoice?

Specific questions to be answered by this study are:

1. What are employer perspectives and experiences on how learnership programmes contributed to the skills development needs of the organisation?

2. What are the perceptions of employees on how learnerships support career development of existing employees?

3. What are the perceptions of learners on how learnerships facilitated them to obtain and retain employment?

4. What are the perceptions of experts on learnership implementation in the MICT sector?

1.4. Context of the Research Project

The study will focus on learnerships implemented at MultiChoice. MultiChoice is one of the major players in the MICT Sector and a key employer in the industry with more than 7 000 employees in South Africa. In line with learnership regulations under the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 amended in 2008, MultiChoice implements two types of learnerships; employed learnerships referred to as Section 18.1 and Section 18.2 unemployed learnerships. Section 18.1 employed learnerships are targeted at its existing permanent employees and there is no age restrictions. The unemployed learnerships are geared towards external learners and targeted at youth between 18-35 years of age. The number of learners supported through the learnerships is informed by both the skills needs of the organisation and employment equity requirements and targets. The study will look at the implementation of both employed and unemployed learnerships as that will enrich insights on the experiences of learners on both these programmes.

Multichoice implements learnerships using the following criteria set out in the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, which categorically states that a learnership must:

- Consist of a structured learning component;
- Include practical work experience;
- Be governed by an agreement between the learner, employer and accredited training provider;
- Lead to an NQF registered qualification
- Include job rotation, on-going mentorship and assessment to fully support the learner

Learnership implementation at Multichoice is driven by the Learning and Development unit under the Human Resources Department. Implementation is guided by the company's learnership policy which stipulates the governance of learnerships and addresses the recruitment, selection, appointment, termination processes of learners.

1.5. Justification of the Research

This section discusses the importance and benefits of carrying out this research study. The purpose of the study is to provide insights on learnership implementation from the perceptions of learners and the employer. The intention is to be able to identify what facilitates and impedes learnership success.

Learnerships are core to the education and training policy framework of South Africa, as they drive skills development. As alluded to earlier, skills development enables the constant supply of a capable workforce which is key for a nation to becoming and remaining competitive on the global stage. This study contributes to insights on the delivery of learnerships, which at a macro level can enhance understanding of the challenges employers face in implementing learnerships. This in turn can support review and design of policy on the qualitative aspects of learnership implementation by stakeholders at the micro level.

As the Fourth Industrial Revolution increasingly puts pressure on economies to rapidly respond to changes and development in technology, now more than ever before, skills in ICT are a key national asset that unlock opportunities brought on by technology. As this research, is focused on MultiChoice which is one of the big players in the MICT sector, it holds promise for further insights on the current skills challenges the sector experiences and will augment knowledge on implementation success, failures and lessons for the Sector. Case studies on implementation of learnerships have been conducted in other sectors, but there is paucity of studies on learnership implementation in the MICT sector. In addition this case study will also include current learners and past learners. This provides rich primary data which makes for a solid qualitative project to contribute lush knowledge on perceptions of learnership Implementation, beyond numerical targets which has been the focus of a lot of studies in the field.

Research on learnerships continues to be central in the context of South Africa, where the legacy of apartheid is still deeply felt and visible in the stark inequalities persistent in our society. The link between education and training and progression of society is well established as it provides access and opportunity to marginalised sections of the population. As South Africa continues to grapple with runaway unemployment especially of the youth, its incumbent on us as researchers to keep investigating ways and ideas that can help reduce causes of unemployment. This research attempts to do that in its own humble intentions.

South Africa is a recognised economic powerhouse in the Southern African Region and in Africa at large. Policy and regulation implemented in South Africa on a vast number of topics such as education, economic development and youth development influence the direction of policy in the region and the continent to a large extent. Therefore this research and

insights from it, can be useful for analysis of and informing similar research in other African countries.

In conclusion, the timing of this research is not only fortuitous but almost perfect, as the National Skills Development Strategy III was concluded in March 2020, with the promulgation of the National Skills Development Plan of 2030 (NSDP 2030). The NSDP 2030, is distinct in that it incorporates lessons learnt from NSDS III and re-routes the course of skills development and economic development for the country. The slogan of the NSDP 2030 “Our Future - Make it Work” calls on every member of society to do their part. This research is doing its part to contribute to realisation of “An Educated, Skilled and Capable Workforce for South Africa” (National Skills Development Plan 2030, 2019).

1.6. Outline of the Report

This research report is made up of six chapters.

Chapter one introduces the study, providing the background to the study and leads to the problem under research . The research context as well as the research methodology adopted in conducting this research is also covered in chapter one.

Chapter Two undertakes a review of literature (theoretical and empirical) on learnership implementation. The context of skills development is further expanded and related studies on learnerships are reviewed to understand the purpose, methods and findings of these studies, we then summarise by developing a conceptual framework to guide the study.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology employed in conducting this research, expounding on the data collection methods employed in the study and analysis done on data collected.

Chapter Four, then presents the findings of the research from the data collected on perspectives of learners, employees and experts on learnership implementation.

Chapter Five discusses and interprets the findings presented in Chapter Four within the context of the theories and findings discussed in the literature.

Chapter Six provides a conclusion and key recommendations from the research.

1.7. Summary of Chapter 1

This Chapter has presented the background, problem statement, research objectives and a quick overview of the research process.

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

In this section we review and interrogate literature as part of the process of developing a conceptual framework that informs and supports how the study was undertaken. In doing this we look at the context of skills development and the specific intervention of learnerships which is the focus of this study. We then look at past and current empirical studies on learnership implementation looking at their purpose, methods and findings. We then look at the theoretical framework of work-based learning to have a good understanding and knowledge of the established facts, issues and interpretive frameworks in work-based learning. We then conclude with a conceptual framework that summarises the literature review.

2.1. The Context of Skills Development – An Overview

Skills development has become a term used in a wide range of contexts and it's important for this research to quickly bed down a definition that we will adopt in all discussions in this study. Skills is defined as the ability to satisfactorily undertake a task in something one has been trained in (Heery & Noon, 2008; Ivanovic & Collin, 2006). Skills are also defined by Vorwerk, (2009) as "the embodiment of acquired knowledge, experience and the practised ability to read and respond to changes in the environment", (p.85). For purposes of this study, skills development will refer to acquisition and increase in skills levels to satisfactorily accomplish tasks. This implies that there is an expected outcome to skills development.

The context of skills development is informed by this "expected outcome", which brings us to the importance of skills development. According to the 2004 World Bank Report on Skills Development in Sub-Saharan Africa, skills development is pivotal to growth and prosperity of the individual, their community, their place of work and therefore the economy. Skills development is linked to the competitiveness of nations on the global stage as it equips economies to harness the opportunities both internal and external to their environment (Johanson & Adams, 2004). This view is augmented by (Tabbron & Yang, 1997), who posit that the rapid transformation that developed economies underwent in the 80s and 90s created an intense demand not just for skills but for multi-skilled labour. The value of skilled labour and in particular a highly skilled worker was written in great detail by Drucker in the 1950s, when the term knowledge worker was coined to resonate with labour that is trained to be highly productive, adaptive and creative (Drucker, 1959). In addition Drucker (1973)

and Davenport (2006) grounded the notion that successfully meeting the challenges of change in the global economy requires a workforce that is trained to inherently learn, apply new ways of thinking and solve complex problems. Investing in the education and training of human capital, reaped dividends for markets like the UK, USA and China as they took the lead in the global market stage in the 80s and 90s, propelled by their agility to respond to modernisation, technological developments and demographic trends, (Tabbron & Yang, 1997).

A key feature of the 80s was the resurgence in interest and investment in Vocational Education and Training (VET), by developed countries, as a mechanism of quickly responding to growing skills development needs and demographic trends (Field et al., 2010). VET is defined as "the training in skills and teaching of knowledge related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation in which the student or employee wishes to participate" (UNESCO, 2017).

The nature of VET places practical based training in the hands of government education policy with the training of specific occupations left to employers. VET provides a mechanism for supporting unemployed young people to transition into the world of work as it provides them with initial hands on experience during the course of study (Field et al., 2014). However VET programmes are constantly neglected as they fail to keep pace with labour market needs due to outdated curriculum which takes a long time to be updated (Field et al., 2010; Johanson & Adams, 2004). In addition VET tends to be skewed towards younger people whereas the labour market requires adults to be upskilled and retrained. This then catapults the role of employers in skills development, to focus on upskilling existing employees due to their vested interest in attaining and retaining skills needed to become competitive and grow. This need by industry ushered in structured work place learning in a wide range of occupations, a concept underpinned by the theoretical framework of Work Based Learning (WBL) (Johanson & Adams, 2004).

Work Based Learning cuts across adult education and human resource development fields of study and is defined as learning at work or through work (Gibbs & Costley, 2006; Nottingham, 2017). By cutting across these two fields of study, Work Based Learning is an approach that fosters integration between academic learning and industry (Burns & Marshall, 2004). As Governments in countries such as the UK, pushed for policy to develop skills, there was a wave for these skills development policies to be market led as the rapid

change in technology and ways of doing business required industries to be at the forefront of the skills they required (Field et al., 2010). The concept of WBL began to grow in popularity, as it expanded on skills development beyond apprenticeships that were restricted to specific trades, to adopting the same approach to a broad range of sectors especially the services sector (Field et al., 2014).

A key feature of WBL, is a three way partnership between industry, education institutions and government to develop and implement learning curriculum that supports objectives of industry (Burns & Marshall, 2004). This partnership approach to skills development has been implemented in countries across the globe and is commonly referred to as workplace skills training or work integrated learning (Nottingham, 2017). In South Africa work based learning is referred to as Learnerships which are supported by a robust legislative framework.

At this juncture it's important to take pause and consider how Learnerships came to be implemented in South Africa. The sections above have highlighted how in general skills development has come to be a critical lever in national economic growth. The next section will paint a picture of South Africa's skills development journey, after which we will focus the discussion on defining Learnerships and the supporting legislative framework.

2.2. Skills Development in the South African Context

As outlined in the preceding section a solid and growing skills base is one of the pre-requisites for economic growth and enables a country to compete on the global stage. Skills shortages in South Africa have been a "sticky" and persistent challenge pre and post 1994. It has been a sticky challenge as a number of interventions have been implemented (as presemted in this chapter) to address skills shortages, however South Afric remains plagued with the challenge of skills shortages.

The approach to skills development in South Africa as in many other countries has been and continues to be influenced by international trends and developments. In the 1940s, prior to the first world war, skills development in South Arica was closely woven into the social policy fabric that sought to consistently ensure semi-skilled and skilled labour was for white immigrant labourers from Europe, while low level skilled labour was the purview of the black Africans (McGrath et al., 2004). From about 1948 under formalised grand apartheid, manpower losses due to the first and second world wars and growing economic activity in

the mines, farming and factories, exerted pressure on the skills requirements of South Africa (Field et al., 2014; McGrath et al., 2004). The capital intensive nature of economic activity together with laws that forced the majority of black designated South Africans to remain in rural areas resulted in a bifurcated skills regime and growing levels of unemployment (Barnard & Lysenko, 2007; Kraak, 2004). The bifurcated skills regime was characterised by a declining pool of highly skilled workers and increasing numbers of lowly skilled labour (McGrath et al., 2004). In the 1960's the growing need for high to medium skilled labour to address the growing skills shortages especially in a burgeoning manufacturing sector, resulted in a wave of half hearted; education reforms by the apartheid government that saw increased focus on training and skills for the previously marginalised Black, Colored and Indian communities (Barnard & Lysenko, 2007; McGrath et al., 2004).

By the 1970s and 80s, efficacy of the apartheid labour market policies was increasingly questioned by industry. This was as a result of the negative impact of education and training reform that had been designed to maintain racial supremacy and division (Chisholm et al., 2009). Industry began to strongly believe that big business should play an active role in shaping the labour market and that the state needed to curtail its influence in the training sectors (McGrath et al., 2004). Therefore in the late 1980's significant reform was made that extended training and urban settling to a large number of black designated populations, however participation of these groups in the economy continued to be stifled by the structural inequalities that prohibited access to opportunity and resources (Barnard & Lysenko, 2007).

With the growing waves for democracy in the 1990s and unbanning of leaders of the ANC, there was focused research and thinking to transform the labour market by stripping it of its racial bias and there was significant push to elevate skills development to a macro-economic policy level (Barnard & Lysenko, 2007). However, as aptly described by Lugg (2009) , the fine balancing act of political negotiations and the need to re-enter the global stage resulted in discussions that were skewed towards economic development at the expense of education reform as the apartheid government was unmoved on its stance on education until a new constitution was in place.

Therefore at the dawn of democracy in 1994, the ANC government found itself squarely saddled with the growing burden of skills shortages, poverty and unemployment, as the pent up pool of work seekers were now released into the labour market, due to the repealing of laws that had restricted their participation (Lugg, 2009). These post-apartheid legacies,

meant the ANC led government needed to execute skills development interventions aimed at achieving equity and redress at a scale and speed that was unprecedented (Akoojee & McGrath, 2004; Mcgrath, 2005; Smith et al., 2005).

The approach to restructuring the labour market consisted of multipronged efforts aimed at driving economic growth, that would in turn fuel labour demand and relieve pressures of skills shortages, unemployment, exclusion and poverty (Groener, 2013; Visser & Kruss, 2009). This demanded human resources development strategies where private and public sectors work together to build a skills development framework that not only stimulated economic growth but addressed social needs (Groener, 2013). The government therefore adopted an Active Labour Market Policies approach to effectively tackle the development of the countries human resources and this was supported by a robust legislative and regulatory framework (Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010; Potgieter, 2003; Visser & Kruss, 2009).

The next section gives a detailed narrative of the key pieces of legislation and regulation that encapsulate skills development , with a particular emphasis on Learnerships, which are the focus of the paper. This effectively situates Learnerships within the skills development framework.

2.3. Legislative Overview

In 1994, after the democratic elections brought the ANC government into power, a policy framework for Education and Training, that integrated education and training was put in place (Kraak, 2004). This was the overarching bedrock of all policies related to education and training post-1994. Integration was important as it aimed to rebalance the tipped scales of political ambition at the expense of the economy, characteristic of the apartheid government operating model, thereby bridging relations between state and market forces (Lugg, 2009). In addition this thinking towards integration was favourable as it resonated with the global trends at the time that favoured integration of education and training as it enabled lifelong learning, fostered social justice, legitimised the role of the developmental state and embraced the growing advancement of technology in the world of work (Akoojee et al., 2008; Bundy, 2005; Mcgrath, 1996).

A key critique of the integration of education and training approach is that it was not accompanied by a common understanding of terminology. The tension lies in what Lugg (2009), referred to as a superficial consensus as there did not exist a common

understanding of what integrated education and training meant. For others it was an integrated approach that involved key stakeholders and ensured there was reduced exclusion of groups marginalised under apartheid, while for others they viewed it as a practical integration of concomitant bodies and systems in implementation that would ideally bring institutional and resource alignment, building a 'single system' across the value chain of education and work (Lugg, 2009; Mcgrath, 1996; Unterhalter & Young, 1994).

The aspect of integrating education and training is key to any discussion of the South African skills development framework as the strong intention of the government culminated in the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (RSA 1995). Establishment of SAQA operationalised integration through the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework NQF, which is essentially a quality assurance system for education and training in South Africa (Akoojee et al., 2008; Isaacs, 2000; Lugg, 2009). The NQF resulted in an integrated system of training and recognition which relied on qualifications to merge different learning pathways, without overhauling existing institutional arrangements (Lugg, 2009). Implementation of the NQF would be expounded through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), a body tasked with setting standards and bringing uniformity to outputs of training systems that were once fragmented and served an opposing purpose under apartheid (Isaacs, 2000; Lugg, 2009).

A key feature of the education system relevant to this study was the Further Education and Training (FET) sector which focuses on development of artisanal skills categorised as intermediate skills. Post 1994, FET colleges were loosely linked to the economy as a result of the diminishing popularity of apprenticeships under apartheid (Akoojee et al., 2008; Mcgrath, 2005). Increasingly whites focused on higher skills and largely ignored the need to keep investing in trade related skills that were now increasingly being performed by black designated groups (Akoojee et al., 2008). As a consequence, as the government was implementing a plethora of initiatives to integrate education and training , there was a tidal wave of high youth unemployment and a growing skills deficit that forced attention to transformation of the FET sector and related legislation (Akoojee et al., 2008).

It was evident that there was a widening gap between outputs of the FET sector and the needs of the market. This prompted a review of the Manpower Training Act of 1981 and investigations into artisanal training. Drawing on research conducted prior to 1994 by the Human Sciences Research Council, the Green paper on Skills Development Strategy was

developed in 1997 laying the groundwork for a sand shifting skills development strategy that forged greater links between the FET sector, labour market and industry (Akoojee et al., 2008).

The Green paper made calls and recommendations for employers to fund skills development through a levy grant framework. More importantly it grounded the notion of employers not only training their own employees, but extending training to the unemployed thereby supporting the upskilling of the national workforce to close skills shortages, drive economic growth and reduce unemployment (Akoojee et al., 2008).

Recommendations from the 1995 Green Paper for a Skills Development Strategy led to the enactment of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 amended in 2008, (SDA) and Skills Development Levy Act 9 of 1999 (SDLA) to institutionalise skills development and create an enabling regulatory framework for sustained interventions.

The SDA provides an institutional framework for establishing national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the profile of skills in South Africa. The SDA creates an enabling environment for increasing investment in education and training in the labour market, mandates employers to actively influence and participate in the development of skills as well as systemically reduce unemployment. The SDLA provides a framework for funding skills development through the National Skills Fund (NSF). The SDLA, stipulates and gives employers a platform to financially contributie to training of the workforce. Through the Skills Development Levies Act of 1998 employers pay three grants towards training; mandatory grants, discretionary grants and PIVOTAL (Professional, Vocational, Technical and Academic Learning) grants.

In addition to the funding mechanisms, the SDA provided for the establishment of Sector Education and Training Authorities. The SETAs are tasked with developing and implementing customised skills development strategies based on the skills needs of the economic sector they represent. The make-up and number of economic sectors has changed over the years, as some economic sectors were merged or redefined. In July 2019, through The Sills Development Act the Minister of Higher Education and Training confirmed the re-establishment of 27 SETAs for the Period April 2020 to March 2030 (Department Of Higher Education And Training, 2019:1002).

In his analysis of skills shortages in South Africa, Erasmus (2009), shows concern of the role of SETAs and lacklustre performance by SETAs. The SETAs are tasked with identifying the skills needed through current and future needs analysis of skills required by the economic sectors (Erasmus, 2009). However SETAs are preoccupied with reporting on number of people trained through Sector Skills Plans, as they do not have the capacity to conduct robust analysis of the labour market to plan for the market of the future (Erasmus, 2009). SETAs are supposed to play a critical role as the bridge between training and socio-economic needs of the economy to ensure skills development redresses past imbalances and addressed future needs of the labour market. However it would appear they are challenged in effectively fulfilling this role.

The need for structured implementation of the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act (No 9. of 1999), promulgated in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) in 2001. The NSDS is positioned to drive transformation of education and training by improving the quality and quantity of training and giving implementation effect to the SDA and SDLA. The NSDS had 3 phases with the final phase in 2016 extended to March 2020. The NSDS is the journey map for economic prosperity, employment growth and social development for South Africa.

At the core of the Skills Development Act is the introduction of learnerships. Learnerships are an extended form of apprenticeships as they are not restricted to trades but are expanded to any occupation (Fester, 2006; Mcgrath, 1996). Learnerships cut across sectors from construction and engineering to banking, tourism and other service sectors. learnerships fall within the framework of work based learning as their focus is on enhancing acquisition of knowledge and skill to build competency in the workplace (Mcgrath, 1996). This approach brings the how to do things and why things are done together, which is the combination of theoretical concepts learned in the classroom and practical hands on experience in a work environment, this is a key defining characteristic of learnerships (DoL, 2002; Fester, 2006; Mcgrath, 1996). For Learners to qualify and obtain certification for completing a learnership, they are assessed against occupational standards registered on the NQF. These occupational standards are developed and set by industry stakeholders consisting of SETAs, employers and standards generating bodies.

Learnerships comprise a tripartite contractual agreement for a determined period between a learner, an employer and training provider (DoL, 2002). Learnerships are at the heart of

skills development and a key mechanism to human resource development in South Africa, however they are not without challenges (Akoojee et al., 2008; Mcgrath, 1996). A learnership is truly effective and adds value to both the learner and economy if it is able to fulfil a need in the labour market (Akoojee, 2008). In addition to unlocking value to achieve objectives related to unemployment and participation in the labour market a learnership needs to provide an opportunity to a learner who was not employed, had limited access to training and therefore excluded from participating in the labour market (Mcgrath, 1996). Lastly absorption into the labour market through securing and sustaining employment is critical in defining the success of a learnership in the broader macro economic context as that drives derives value for the individual, the community and the economy (Akoojee & McGrath, 2004).

Therefore learnerships are a powerful mechanism that equips a learner not only with skills, but with qualifications and experience that enable them to fully participate and contribute to the growth of the economy. This thrusts upon employers, education institutions and training providers the serious task of ensuring there is sufficient investment, relevant curriculum and appropriate practical workplace experience for learners to sustainably participate in the economy (Akoojee et al., 2008; Fester, 2006). At the core of this study is to understand employers and learner perceptions on whether learnerships are living to their intended outcomes as outlined above.

Breier (2009) points out the cracks in this intricately woven skills development framework, the jarring reality that skills shortages sit uncomfortably next to a growing pool of unemployed youth. This contradiction points to the shortcomings and disconnects within the skills development strategy. Some of the unemployed youth have competed studies at FETs but are unable to qualify in their technical fields as they struggle to find work place experience which is a core requirement to obtain a qualification (Breier, 2009). In a parallel vein, those that have managed to complete the learnership, remain unemployed as employers perceive the acquired skills to be mismatched to what they require in the workplace (Breier, 2009; Erasmus, 2009). As a result there is growing rift between higher education and the skills required in workplace, which contributes to the crisis of skills shortages and high unemployment.

Since enactment of the Skills Development Act in 1998, learnerships have been rolled out across different sectors in South Africa. This study is focused on MultiChoice which is part of the MICT Sector. The next section will briefly outline the ICT industry to set the scene for

the context in which this study is situated, including a discussion on learnerships in the MICT Sector.

2.4. Research Context

The ICT industry in South Africa is made up broadly of three sectors; telecommunications, broadcasting and postal services, with a number of interconnected sub sectors below them. This case study on MultiChoice focuses on the Film and Television industry which falls under the broadcasting sector. A case study in the Film and Television industry, is pertinent given the wave of change in the industry that requires new ways of thinking and working influenced by the capacity to adopt and use ICTs (DoC, 2014). In both developed and developing countries the developments in ICT are of strategic importance in driving economic growth and shifting the production base of the economy (DoC, 2004; ICASA, 2020). With the transition to democracy in South Africa, the winds of change also reshaped the film and television industry, as it opened up private and alternative media players to government broadcasting, resulting in a rapid expansion of the industry (GCIS, 2012). Coupled with this, technology has fast tracked shifts in the industry creating an environment of rapid and consistent change in business models, that effectively impacts the supply and demand of skills in the industry (ICASA, 2020).

The broadcasting industry is a key contributor to South Africa's GDP. In 2019 it generated R38 billion in revenue and employed at least 4.4 million (ICASA, 2020; PwC, 2019). Interesting to note is that revenue in the sector has grown by 7.5% over the 5year period 2015 – 2019, while employment in the sector has declined by 1.6% over the same period , with a decline of more than 7% between 2018 and 2019 (ICASA, 2020). Of those employed in the broadcasting sector 75% are classified as skilled and 25% as semi-skilled or unskilled (ICASA, 2020).

Growth of the film and television industry is a classic example demonstrating the shift of the South African Economy from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge based economy (DoC, 2014). This shift is accompanied by the demand for a different skill set and one that has to quickly morph due to prominent digital disruption in the film and television industry (PwC, 2019). The industry pulls a labour force that is highly-educated and highly-skilled in a variety of jobs as the value chain has diverse skills covering producers, production crews, engineers, broadcasters, distributors, and retailers among others (Cultural Strategy Group,

1998; DoC, 2014). In addition more than 70% of the film and television industry is based in Gauteng, demonstrating a concentrated urban skew of employment opportunities in the industry (GFC, 2019). This presents a dual problem of reduced access and limited participation in ICT opportunities for learners and communities (DoC, 2014).

These characteristics of the Film and television industry are in line with the effects of rapid ICT development, resulting in some jobs such as secretarial and booking keeping becoming obsolete , as e-skills redefine how work is performed (DoC, 2014). In tandem, technology is creating a new set of jobs that make it imperative to build an e-astute citizen that can harness and unlock opportunities created by ICT platforms (DoC, 2014).

South Africa's position on global e-readiness has always been an area the nation grapples with. In 2004 the Economist's Intelligence Unit (EIU) ranked South Africa's e-readiness index at 32 out of 68 countries , while its global competitive index as ranked by WEF put it at 34 out of 115 countries (EIU, 2005 , (WEF, 2006). This compelled a need for an aggressive skills development plan to address the skills shortages and invest in infrastructure and frameworks to enable tapping into ICT opportunities.

South Africa's Human Resource Development strategy, embodied in the Skills Development Act of 2003, took a particular focus in 2004, to bridge the digital divide and prioritise e-skills. The "Digital Divide" is defined as the gap and imbalances between those who are able to access and reap rewards afforded by use of ICTs and those who cannot access and therefore do not participate in these opportunities (DoC, 2014; Ifinedo, 2005). Bridging this divide would equip young people with relevant skills and position the economy for future growth (DoC, 2014).

The legislative and policy framework to specifically support skills development in ICT is further elaborated in the 2004 ICT charter. The 2004 ICT Charter had the objective of broadening access of black South Africans to ICT opportunities in the economy. However a framework was required that ensured collaboration across all stakeholders ,while ensuring a multisectoral approach, thus birthing the e-skills institute in 2010. The e-skills institute was tasked with ensuring a systematic and structured approach, resulting in the development of the National e-Skills Plan of Action (NeSPA), (DoC, 2013) to promote e-literacy for all sections of society. NeSPA provided the framework for the strategic implementation of ICT actions linked to the National Development Plan 2030.

The ICT Charter and NeSPA identified a set of common challenges that needed to be tackled to ensure the ICT sector fuelled growth and development across the economy as envisaged. Three main challenges are particularly interesting and relevant to this study. The first is the lack of coordination of the various skills development initiatives in the industry (DoC, 2004). By its nature ICT cuts across industries therefore there would be a plethora of initiatives as each industry tried to incorporate ICT in their skills development programme (DoC, 2014). This led to the second challenge of emerging misalignment between policy frameworks, ICT skills development programmes and the long term needs of industry, (DoC, 2004, 2014). This culminated in the third challenge of continuing skills shortage and increasing youth unemployment amid institutions churning out leaners with qualifications the industry did not recognize or value (DoC, 2004, 2013, 2014).

This naturally brings attention to SETAs, as their legislative mandate is driving coordination between training providers and industry, while ensuring that the curriculum delivered is aligned to the skills and capacity needs of industry. SETAs play an important role of balancing supply of skills with economic and social needs that drive skills demand (Marock et al., 2008). In their role its key to note that SETAs are unable to generate demand but their value lies in as near accurate as possible in forecasting skills requirements (Marock et al., 2008). The SETA accountable for skills development in the ICT sector is the Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority (MICT SETA).

The MICT sector is made up of just over 30 000 companies across five subsectors: Advertising, Film and Electronic Media, Electronics, Information Technology and Telecommunications. MICT sector is estimated to have a combined GDP exceeding R300 billion (almost 10% of national GDP) and provides employment to 2.2 million people (MICT SETA, 2019; Schofield & Dwolatzky, 2019). More than 50% of employees and 60% of companies in the MICT sector are based in Gauteng (MICT SETA, 2019; Schofield & Dwolatzky, 2019). This further confirms the spatial skew of the ICT sector, resulting in a sector that predominantly excludes populations outside of large urban metro areas.

Based on the statistics above, it is clear the MICT sector is a key contributor to South Africa's economy. Therefore this case study is worthwhile as it is contributing to knowledge on skills development in a sector that is important to the future of the economy. Rapid technological

advancement is a key influence in the labour market structure of the MICT sector, therefore acquisition of key skills continues to be a challenge, worsened by emerging technologies (MICT SETA, 2019). In an environment where change is constant, the MICT SETA has to continuously work on closing the gap of skills required to bridge old and emerging technologies (Schofield & Dwolatzky, 2019).

In response to tackling the ever changing skills needs of the sector, the mission of the MICT SETA is focused on facilitating and accelerating provision of high quality skills development for the sector (MICT SETA, 2019). In addition the MICT SETA has to balance the provision of critical sector skills in the context of larger e-skills requirements of the nation. As a result the MICT SETA continues to develop and drive initiatives focused on reskilling and upskilling learners to keep up with skills demand of the economy (MICT SETA, 2019).

The MICT SETA offers five learning programmes to support skills development. These are Bursaries, Learnerships, Work Integrated Learning, Internships and Skills Programmes. Of interest to this study are learnerships. For the 2018/19 Financial year MICT SETA had the strategic objective of increasing the number of learners provided with training and practical work experience (MICT SETA, 2019). A total of 3 429 unemployed learners were enrolled into learnerships against a target of 3 000, and 1 596 learners completed learnerships against a target of 1 500 (MICT SETA, 2019). In terms of employed learnerships 164 workers were enrolled against a target of 100 and 4 completed the learnerships against a target of 50 (MICT SETA, 2019). The performance of unemployed learnerships shows successful implementation of the programmes against numerical targets and it would be interesting to find out if the same success sentiment is felt by the learners who completed the programmes. The underwhelming performance of employed learners also piques interest to understand the factors behind this.

This leads us to direct the discussions towards understanding past and current empirical research on learnership implementation. In doing this we seek to discuss the objectives of past research, underpinning theoretical frameworks, their findings and research methods. This allows us to learn from these studies and frame this research within the context of existing knowledge.

2.5. Past Studies on learnership implementation

2.5.1. Are Learnerships a Fading Dream?

From the dawn of democracy in 1994 to date, skills development continues to be a priority for the SA government. South Africa's skills development framework is based on a multi-disciplinary approach with four levers. 1) Education and training focused on qualification and curriculum development, 2) organisation development entailing strategy and planning to match training to skills needs, 3) economics focused on research to support modelling and forecasting of skills supply and needs, 4) industry expertise looking at value chain and production processes (NSA, 2019). Learnerships, falling under education and training, are the focus of this study and remain a critical cog of the National Skills Development Strategy. As alluded to earlier in this paper, learnerships are one of the top interventions to address unemployment and scarce skills shortages (HSRC, 2012; Kraak, 2008).

However, 26 years post democracy, in spite of the strong political and moral will to improve outcomes of skills development, progress towards sustainably addressing the apartheid skills legacy has been disappointing (Groener, 2013; Losi, 2020). Reports on delivery of skills development, including learnerships show how these initiatives have to some extent addressed inequalities in access to opportunities for skills development (see DoL, 2008; Groener, 2013; NSA & DHET, 2019; Petersen et al., 2016; Wildschut & Kruss, 2018).

Empirical evidence shows there has been increased access to skills development opportunities. In its 2019 review of the NSDS III for the period 2011 – 2016, the National Skills Authority (NSA) reported that 23,000 companies out of 300 000 companies registered with SETAs claimed skills development grants, resulting in an enrolment of 1.1million learners through the SETAs, of these learners just over 342,000 were learnerships. In terms of financial contribution to skills development R63billion was collected through skills development levies. In spite of the increased participation and access to skills development shown by the figures above, South Africa is still plagued with high youth unemployment and shortage of skills.

As at the end of Q4 2020 the official unemployment rate (persons actively looking for employment) was 32.5% with expanded unemployment rate (includes those not actively looking for work) sitting at almost 42.6% (STATSSA, 2020). Even more worrying is the high number of young people aged between 15 – 24 years who were not in employment,

education or training (NEETs). Though the numbers of NEETs saw a 2.2% year on year decline, it was sitting at 3.1 million in Q4 of 2020, representing 29.8% out of 10,3 million young people (STATSSA, 2020).

The statistics on unemployment reveal the harsh truth that although significant resource and effort has been poured into improving labour market outcomes, the country still has a long journey ahead in addressing national unemployment (Groener, 2013). Therefore there is a constant need to review and assess implementation of skills development, to be able to generate and share information that can potentially lead to better labour market outcomes.

In the context section of this paper we established that learnerships fall within the framework of work based learning as their focus is enhancing acquisition of knowledge and skill to build competency in the workplace (McGrath 1996). In other contexts and territories similar programmes are referred to as Work Integrated Learning (WIL). Work Integrated Learning refers to “career-focused education that includes classroom-based and workplace-based forms of learning that are appropriate for the professional qualification” (NSA, 2019, p.149). Initiatives under Work Integrated Learning and Work Based Learning are labelled different names such as apprenticeships, learnerships, work placements, cooperative education and work place learning (NSA, 2019). However the common basis is that they all attempt to link theory and practice to produce a well-rounded and competent individual who can immediately add value to the labour market. The review of literature will include studies on some of these initiatives as well.

The review of work integrated learning initiatives such as learnerships continues to be heavily focused on outcomes with limited focus on the process of how, why and what learners need, to acquire the right skills (Jackson, 2015). This view supported by Marock (2006), who posits that the preoccupation with meeting set targets on numbers of learners supported “resulted in an implementation culture that was preoccupied with achieving the numbers – at the expense of quality, sustainability and relevance” (p.25). These views are augmented by a case study on three SETAs that found that over the period 2009 – 2010, most SETAs over delivered on their learnership targets (HSRC, 2012). This suggests that there is possible lowballing of targets, which would in part explain the dire state of the labour market despite the high number of learners supported.

2.5.2. Are Employers Dropping the Ball?

Hattingh (2006), brings in another angle to the lacklustre performance of learnerships, suggesting that learnerships fail as a result of half-hearted attempts by employers in implementing the workplace learning component which constitutes at least 60% of a learnership. This places great focus and emphasis on the role of the employer in achieving successful outcomes from learnerships. However Mummenthey & Du Preez, (2010), are of the view that employers value the concept of learnerships but feel unprepared and unsupported by the SETAs and training providers to capably implement the learnerships.

In a case study that sought the perceptions of employers on learnership implementation, employers expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with the level of information shared by SETAs, with 24% of employers in the construction industry being unaware of the learnership (Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010). A complimentary angle is provided by Marock (2006) and Fuller & Unwin (2003) who attribute employer dissatisfaction to be in part due to the supply forces (training providers) that are motivated by the financial reward of churning out large numbers of learners. This approach does not consider the demands and needs of the labour market resulting in an oversupply of the "wrong" skills, leaving gaping hole of critical skills needed (Marock, 2006). It's important to note that despite the hard selling of high learner numbers by training providers employers are not necessarily ignorant or innocent in this.

With the introduction of Advanced Modern Apprenticeships in the UK in 2003, the trend in the UK was for employers to spend more funds on training their own employees as the training costs were subsidised by the government. This trend presented itself differently in South Africa, whereby employers in the hospitality industry feeling pressured by SETAs, took on a large number of learners, supposedly with the intention of training them, but in practical terms it reduced the cost of labour for the employer (Marock, 2006). It's important to note positive echoes by Jackson (2015) and Rickard (2002), that the elevation given to work based learning programmes is significant progress in its own right. These programmes build a much needed bridge between education and the world of work, which is essential for a system that is responsive to skills needs, thereby enabling global competitiveness (Jackson, 2015; Rickard, 2002).

The intentions of employers and the objectives of work based learning programmes are not in direct conflict with each other. Ultimately learners are given an opportunity to work in the organisation and the work experience gives them an edge compared to those young people

who did not participate in the programme. Its therefore critical to underscore the importance of these programmes in addressing issues of unemployment and access to opportunities.

2.5.3. Is government Passing on the Ball?

Further to this both Fuller & Unwin (2003) and Marock (2006) allude to the problems of unemployment and social exclusion as being of public interest and therefore not a matter to be solved by the private sector, effectively positioning the government as key lead stakeholder in skills development. Iatagan et al., (2010) posit an opposing view that there is common acknowledgement of the responsibility of the state in establishing an enabling framework for skills development and investing in education. Therefore, the role of individuals, training providers and employers becomes critical and more important in enhancing and expanding the quality of outputs from education institutions.

However Fuller & Unwin (2003) are of the view that even for government the notion of modern apprenticeships is there to serve social goals of including academically challenged youth rather than meeting the skills needs of industry. The high numbers of learners supported amidst high unemployment, may seem to support the view that programmes such as learnerships are concerned with addressing past practices of social and economic exclusion, however it would be simplistic to interpret it as just that. It's amiss not to recognise that in the South African context employers are expected to shape the skills training curricular in light of their immediate and future skills needs. Therefore the persistent crisis of high unemployment and skills shortages cannot be saddled solely on government initiatives, such as learnerships.

2.5.4. Are Learnerships Relevant in all Sectors?

There is concrete evidence that in some occupations such as nursing, engineering and finance, learnerships equip students with relevant skills at the appropriate level (Fuller & Unwin, 2003; NSA, 2019; Rickard, 2002). In a case study on learnership implementation of the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA), employers of nurse trainees were of the view that learning outcomes of Nursing learnerships are directly linked to defined qualifications and practical performance expected on the job (NSA, 2019). This brings to the fore a contested view put forward by Fuller & Unwin (2003) that modern apprenticeships which are the equivalent of learnerships have the worst performance in sectors that previously did not have a history of apprenticeship, primarily service sectors.

In South Africa as in elsewhere in the world, learnerships or work based learning programmes, were conceptualised or revamped as an extended form of apprenticeship applicable to all sectors (Fuller & Unwin, 2003; OECD/ILO, 2017; Smith et al., 2005). In the UK these were termed modern apprenticeships extending into sectors such retail, social care and finance (Fuller & Unwin, 2003). While in South Africa, the orchestrated "death" of the traditional apprenticeship gave rise to learnerships that course corrected decrease in training by enterprises and enabled demand driven skills training across all sectors with industry firmly in the driving seat (Visser & Kruss, 2009). Its therefore important to quickly assert if performance in these programmes is indeed sector specific as suggested by Fuller and Unwin.

Work based learning in non-traditional sectors such as social care and retail has been described as relying on simply providing exposure to learners and not intentionally providing opportunities to learn (Vorwerk, 2009). However Aderibigbe & Mosia,(2019) dispute this view based on their study on the perceptions of students of business studies at TVET. Interestingly the study revealed that workplace learning seems to provide students of business studies with "better opportunities to learn and prepare them for the workplace" more than classroom based learning (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019, p81). The students described their work experience as authentic and meaningful and perceived their work experience as to have contributed to the achievement of the organisations' goals (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019). This is further augmented by the fact that students engaged in a wide range of tasks felt a deep learning experience and were able to see the link between theory learnt in class and the practical tasks carried out in the work place (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019; Vorwerk, 2009).

The value of work based learning across sectors is further highlighted by Jackson (2015) who refers to observing an improvement in soft skills such as problem solving, team work and communication through work based learning programmes in Australia. These soft skills are sector agnostic, and this evidence begins to cast a shadow on Fuller and Unwin's assertion. In an online survey to obtain perceptions of students on work placement, Jackson (2015) found that students from multiple disciplines were of the view that the experience enhanced their ability to solve problems, improved their understanding of corporate responsibility and how technology can be applied to their discipline. It is evident that this

was learning they did not assimilate through theory and these learnings are the makings of a professional in the workplace.

These views are also supported in the outcomes of the study by Rickard (2002) on work based learning for health students. In the study students were able to see the bigger picture, as the programme expanded their knowledge of the context in which they operate and this in turn increased their confidence and fostered motivation to excel (Rickard, 2002). In as much as there has been progressive documentation of tangible improvements in learners exposed in non-traditional apprenticeship sectors, the stark realities of high unemployment and shortage of critical skills compel us to consider the arguments by Fuller and Unwin above.

2.5.5. Why are Critical Skills Still Scarce?

Amidst the high number of learners that have obtained qualifications there is still a growing list of scarce and critical skills in areas such as Software Engineer, Data Analyst and Surveyors (INSETA, 2020). This gives pause for thought to what Fuller & Unwin (2003) refer to as the accumulation of 'dead weight' in the skilled workforce. The churning out of high numbers of unemployed youth from modern apprenticeships in the UK, resulted in a pool of entitled youth who believed they should employed, juxtaposed with employers who are unable to absorb them (Fuller & Unwin, 2003). However it should be noted that this line of thought is valid given that modern apprenticeships were not implemented in the same framework as learnerships in South Africa.

In the UK modern apprenticeships were not underpinned by legislation but governed by what Fuller & Unwin (2003), refer to as 'leaflet laws'. Therefore each employer decided the duration and remuneration they would apply to the apprenticeship. At this juncture we heed the caution by Davies & Farquharson (2004) to avoid comparing learnership models across countries as there are nuances in culture and governing frameworks that inform implementation and outcomes. The discussion therefore does not seek to draw comparisons but distil insights that are worth probing in the context of the study on perceptions of learnership implementation.

One such insight is that specific trades such as engineering, law, finance and health, have communities of practice which give learners a sense of belonging and purpose, whereas other sectors do not ,hence learners are left feeling marooned without an occupational identity (Fuller & Unwin, 2003). This feeling of despair is elaborated by the findings of Marock (2006), that some learners felt out of sorts after completing learnerships as they would have pursued studies in fields they have no interest in. Such an outcome is as a result of learners accepting whatever opportunity comes first, that offers relief from the pressures and difficulties of being unemployed, even if it means enrolling in a learnership they do not have a passion for.

However Vorwerk (2014) offers an alternative perspective citing communities of practice are not restricted to trades but to all occupations. He further elaborates that the education system does not create professionals but instead prepares students to become professionals in their next phase of learning e.g. as articled clerks, cadets or graduate trainees (Vorwerk, 2014). In contrast to Fuller & Unwin's view, the discouraging performance of learnerships in particular, is mostly due to a "loss of the apprenticeship culture" (Vorwerk, 2014, p.56).

This loss is as a result of work practitioners who in themselves are unprepared, ill-equipped or in some instances unwilling to impart skills and knowledge to learners (Hattingh, 2006; HSRC, 2012; Vorwerk, 2014). In the case study reviews of three SETAS by the HSRC in 2012, they found that employers do not always fully comprehend the skills development system and the role they are supposed to play. It is therefore not surprising that results from learnerships look bleak given the high youth unemployment in South Africa, nor is it confounding that learners exit with a feeling of despair.

2.5.6. What do the Learners Say?

Further studies in learners perceptions on learnership implementation paint a mixed landscape peppered with varying degrees of satisfaction. Zwane (2012) conducted a quantitative study on the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) to compare perceptions of leaners and employers on learnership implementation. The study found that learners felt that the learnership did not adequately equip them for the world of work and they had expectations that they would be immediately placed in managerial positions (Zwane, 2012). This suggests that learners are

not well prepared for learnerships and have limited industry knowledge. In the same study, employers expressed that learners did not bring the right personality and attitude to the industry (Zwane, 2012). This view is supported by Marock (2006); Mummenthey & Du Preez, (2010) where they gleaned similar perceptions from employers, elaborating that learners felt a sense of entitlement, lacked discipline and ethics.

Marock (2006) suggests that the success of learnerships is predicated on the attributes and attitude they bring to the learnership. Important personal characteristics for success include maturity, confidence, commitment, passion and motivation (HSRC, 2012; Marock, 2006; Rickard, 2002). This does not imply that students should have all these attributes and come perfectly ready for work experience. In their paper on the value of continuously training human resources to remain competitive, Iatagan et al., (2010, p.5141) clearly state that organisations are not asking educational systems to provide " 'finished' products but for individuals who have, along with the basic knowledge, entrepreneurship, flexibility in training, various competences" with an aptitude for learning and creating sustainable social relationships.

Providing a similar redeeming argument for youth, Lancaster (2004) provided relevant insight on the general collisions that characterise the current work place. As a result of people working and living longer, for the first time in history four generations find themselves seated on the same table, and what can be easily dismissed as poor work ethic and entitlement is in fact symptoms of a generational gap. Bearfield (2009) further elaborates that millennials or Gen Y, those born between 1977 and 2002, are mistakenly labelled as entitled and having false confidence, when in fact they are the product of transformed parenting philosophies of their time. In spite of the challenges posed by generational gaps and the general unpreparedness for the workplace exhibited by learners, all is not lost.

2.5.7. Of Coaches and Mentors

A key component of the learnership model is for learners to have access to a mentor or coach. In light of the challenges described in the preceding paragraph, the mentor should provide a guiding light and provide steady steer as the learner navigates the workplace. Hattingh (2006) avers that an active role by coaches and mentors in the design and implementation of learnerships will greatly assist in solving most the problems that impede learnerships from achieving their intended benefits. The mentor is instrumental in initiating

the learner into the work community, using their wisdom and experience to play the role of a trusted advisor (Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010; Stanz & Mosoeunyane, 2007). The mentor not only provides counsel, they should be role models, providing job shadowing opportunities to mentees and giving personal and academic advice to learners (Stanz & Mosoeunyane, 2007). When a mentor delivers well on their role, this enhances the learners perception that they are learning and having a deep meaningful experience (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019).

In the same vein, a coach is equally valuable. A coach is described as a subject matter expert providing specific expertise that enables the learner to perform skilfully (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019; Hattingh, 2006). Coaches support the learner by creating opportunities for learners to practically apply their skills, taking on the role of teaching, correcting and reinforcing (Hattingh, 2006). The reality is learners do not always have the luxury of having a coach and a mentor during their learnership, therefore it would be prudent to assume that a blended package of personal support and competence support should be made available to the learner. This is an area that this study will explore as part of the research.

Supervisors assigned to manage the students usually take on the dual role of being both mentor and coach to the learner. In the study by Rickard (2002) students expressed frustration, as the supervisors were often busy and sometimes impatient with the students. Dolan and Zeiling (1994) as cited in Stanz & Mosoeunyane (2007) assert that cross gender mentoring can produce undesirable outcomes such as emotional exhaustion. However, empirical evidence from a quantitative study on perceptions of learners by Stanz & Mosoeunyane (2007), on a group of 280 learners in Mpumalanga, concluded that gender does not make a difference in the relationship between mentor and mentee. These findings can be attributed to the generational collisions attributed to earlier, as Gen Y is more tolerant and accepting of differences in race, gender , embracing diversity and expecting others to be the same (Bearfield, 2009; Lancaster, 2004). It would be important to this case study to get insights into the views of learners and mentors on these matters related to generational differences and the role of mentors and coaches.

2.5.8. Emerging Themes From Past Studies

The review of past studies on work based programmes has unearthed a plethora of perceptions and evidence on the learnerships implementation. The review of empirical

literature has provided a framework in which to couch this case study as there are areas that the research can borrow from as well as close some gaps. It is clear that the increased emphasis on integrating work and learning to achieve learning outcomes of vocational education demands constantly evaluating the effectiveness of this pedagogical strategy (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019).

As the review of literature has shown the assessment and evaluation of learnership programmes continue to be predominantly outcomes focused with scant attention paid the process of what, why, how and from whom learners and employers will achieve the skills required to increase employability and availability of critical skills (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019; Davies & Farquharson, 2004; Marock et al., 2008).

Findings from past studies reviewed, are of significant interest to the this study as they have themes that this research is pursuing. Some employers are unprepared for learnerships, feel inadequately supported by training providers and view some of the skills as redundant to their needs as an organisation (Marock, 2006). Training providers have been found to rely on the ability of employers to respond to technological advances, training initiatives do not result in reduction of skills shortages and learners were offered limited practical experience (Fuller & Unwin, 2003; HSRC, 2012; Marock, 2006; Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010). In addition to this, unique sector specific models are required to meet labour market needs of the different sectors, and in some sectors there are no clearly defined career pathways making growth and transition difficult (HSRC, 2012). Perceptions of learners revealed that they need mentorship and coaching to assimilate into the workplace, as well as some level of preparedness to choose the right courses (Hattingh, 2006; Marock, 2006; Rickard, 2002; Zwane, 2012). Related to this the role, capability and competence of a mentor was underscored as being one of the critical success factors for learnership implementation .

Opposing views have also emerged on the effectiveness of learnerships. The HSRC case studies of 2012, put forward that it was evident that inappropriateness of learnerships to labour needs is not the issue, but that the biggest challenge is effective implementation. However there is a compelling view that research studies undertaken do not satisfactorily explain differences in success from one sector to another and that employer participation

needs to be more prominent (Davies & Farquharson, 2004; Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010).

There was positive sentiment also riding on these findings which highlighted that work based learning initiatives provided leaners with increased confidence, improved their work readiness skills and improved problem solving for employed learners (Aderibigbe & Mosia, 2019; HSRC, 2012; NSA, 2019; Rickard, 2002).

The majority of studies highlighted above were ex post facto, provided a sector view and used mixed-methods research methods (quantitative and qualitative). The studies also relied on the numerous progress implementation reports done by the government for the numerical success indicators to triangulate findings of their empirical research. The triangulation approach employed in these studies, appeals to the proposed study as it enriches data from the field, thereby enhancing existing knowledge.

Recommendations from these studies centred on improved policy coordination frameworks of the various skills development frameworks, enhancing capacity of SETAs and streamlining their efforts (Davies & Farquharson, 2004; NSA, 2019; Rickard, 2002). In addition Feldman (2016) highlights the need for nuanced sector studies to understand the challenges and opportunities in each sector. These views and findings present opportunities that this research explores, by focusing on perceptions of learnership implementation within a single company in the MICT sector, during implementation as opposed to post implementation. This approach will provide deeper nuanced insights as every organisation is different and the setting allows the study to include current learners, past learners and the employer in one single study. This enables the study to identify relationships in the immediate context that may impact perceptions and experiences of participants in a single case study.

2.6. Theoretical Framework for Understanding Learnership Implementation

Learnerships fall within the practice of Work Based learning (WBL), which is defined as learning at or through work combining theoretical concepts and quality practical work experience (Gibbs & Costley, 2006; Nottingham, 2017; Portwood & Costley, 2000). In adopting WBL as a field of study we agree with Nottingham (2017) and Wiesenberg & Peterson (2004) that characteristics of work based learning cut across two related fields of study; adult education and human resource development, without sitting squarely in either. This is explained through WBLs specific focus on continuous learning, the application of theoretical concepts to the professional environment, which supports innovation and growth of the workplace (Bravenboer & Workman, 2015; Costley & Armsby, 2007; Gibbs & Costley, 2006; Nottingham, 2017).

The purpose of Work Based Learning is to support development of a skilled workforce , which is key to economic growth, by forging closer links between learning agencies, learners and employers (Burns & Marshall, 2004; Lemanski & Overton, 2016). WBL has interrelated components which include partnerships, learning, needs of the learner, needs of the employer and labour market which should result in sustainable employability (Bravenboer & Workman, 2015; Costley & Armsby, 2007; Gibbs & Garnett, 2007; Nottingham, 2017). This study focuses on learnership implementation from the perspective of learners and employer, therefore we will focus on the learning component of work based learning.

Learning in WBL is underpinned by two main inter related theories: learning theory and socio cultural theory (Manley et al., 2009). Learning theory focuses on attributes such as self-motivation, aptitude for learning, self-reflection and supported reflection, and is concerned with how the learner learns and how they transform theory into practice (Manley et al., 2009; Raelin, 1997; Reeve & Gallacher, 2000). Socio cultural theory emphasises the role of interactions, context and culture in supporting learning for individuals (Manley et al., 2009; Raelin, 1997). As emphasised by Manley et al. (2009) and Lemanski & Overton (2016) these elements of socio cultural theory contribute to successful outcomes for the learner and sustainable growth for the employer through improved employability and enhanced outcomes for the workforce. WBL is characterised as learning in situ and therefore traditional education and cognitive psychology approaches that view learning as linear do injustice to understanding implementation of WBL (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mawoyo & Robinson, 2005). In understanding learnership implementation the proposed study will adapt an analytical framework that looks at how the attributes of learning and socio-cultural theory have been

applied and their contribution to effective learnership implementation. The context within which learning takes place is of critical importance and directly contributes to appropriateness and quality of learning to meet the needs of the learner, organisation and industry (Felce et al., 2016). Learning happens through the learner adapting to the environment and taking on new experiences to expand existing concepts (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). This is also referred to as craft knowledge by Kuhlee & Winch (2017) which involves 'contextual knowledge', 'implicit knowledge ' and 'embodied knowledge', (p.35). This type of knowledge is education in action at both the learner and organisational level (Whitty & Furlong, 2017). Therefore the context of the organisation and how it influences learnership implementation will be a key attribute that this study will seek to understand. WBL bridges the gap between education and work, and is underpinned by attributes such as independence, initiative and cooperation (Komariah, 2015). It is through these attributes that we will collect data and interpret research findings.

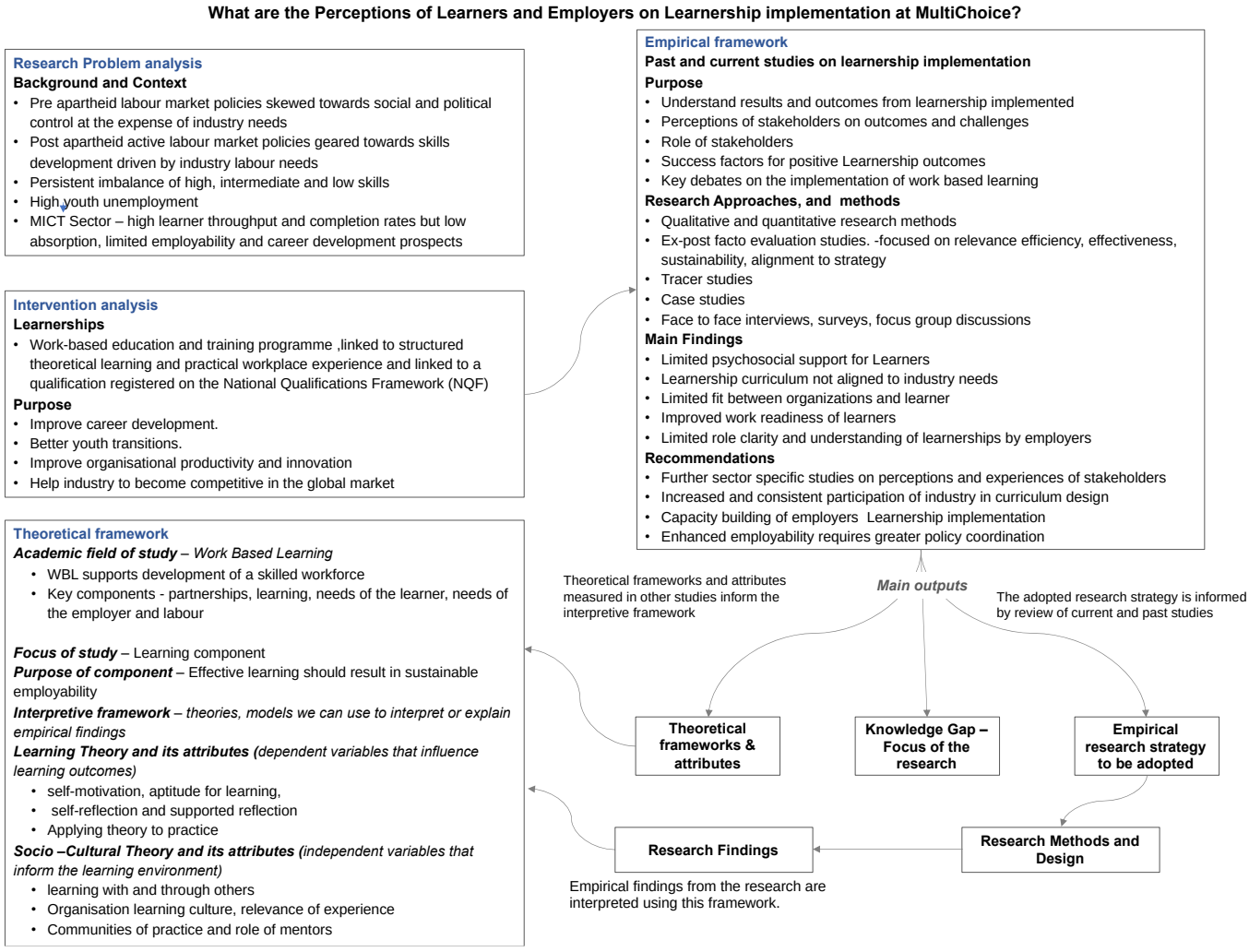
2.7. Conceptual Framework

Kumar (2014) defined a conceptual framework as a clear roadmap of how a research project is conducted after interrogating pertinent literature on the research topic. This study focused on understanding learnership implementation at MultiChoice through the perceptions employers and learners. The literature review conducted in this section, is concluded by deriving a conceptual framework adopted in conducting this study. We have briefly outlined the research context by setting the global context for skills development and painting the skills development journey and labour market policies of South Africa pre and post - apartheid. We then detailed the research context drawing out key insights on the ICT industry and the role of the MICT SETA in delivering learnerships. Zooming into the intervention (learnership implementation), we looked at how since 2001, a large number of learners have completed learnerships, with some obtaining employment. Analysis of the problem shows that in spite of a high number of learnerships being completed, scarce skills shortages and high unemployment persist in South Africa.

Our review of past and current studies on learnership implementation revealed the knowledge gap in understanding the implementation perspectives of learners and employers in a specific context within the MICT sector. In addition most studies focused on measuring outputs, while this study will contribute to growing literature on impact studies that focus on specific sectors to understand experiences and views of stakeholders involved

in implementation. A pictorial representation of the conceptual framework adopted for this study is presented below.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

The purpose of this research was to provide insights on the implementation of learnership programmes, through the perceptions and experiences of learners and the employer. Multichoice South Africa was adopted as a case study for the research as it implements and support learnership programmes as part of its skills development initiatives. The researcher believed that a deeper understanding of learnership implementation would increase existing knowledge on what impedes and facilitates learnerships as a mechanism for skills development. In an attempt to understand the learnership implementation at Multichoice the study pursued 3 research questions: (a) What are employer perspectives and experiences on how learnership programmes contributed to the skills development needs of the organisation? (b) What are the perceptions of employees on how learnerships support career development of existing employees? (c) What are the perceptions of learners on how learnerships facilitated them to obtain and retain employment?

This chapter describes the methodology applied in conducting the study and covers the following (i) rationale for choosing a qualitative approach (ii) description of research design (iii) the sampling method used and the sample that formed part of the research (iv) description of how data was collected (iv) an outline of how the data collected was analysed (v) issues of trustworthiness (vi) limitations of the study. The study will conclude this chapter with ethical considerations of the research and a summary of the chapter.

3.1. Rationale for Adopting a Qualitative Research Approach

The research approach is informed by the paradigm in which the study is situated. The purpose of the study is to understand experiences and perceptions of employers and learners on learnership implementation. This placed the study in the constructivist paradigm, as the information gathered during the study was context dependent and multiple realities informed research analysis and findings (Creswell, 2009; Wagner et al., 2012). The philosophical underpinnings of constructivist paradigm are rooted in the belief that reality is constructed by individuals and that knowledge is just not there but created (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of the study was achieved by allowing participants to co-create knowledge through sharing their opinions, experiences and perceptions of learnerships.

The research adopted a qualitative research methodology, as the key features of qualitative research which comprise detailed insights, inferences and multiple perceptions were best

suited to meeting the purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wagner et al., 2012). Qualitative methods in research allowed the research to achieve understanding of unique experiences within the same context and understanding in itself proved sufficient in achieving the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As is characteristic of qualitative research, data was collected through open ended research questions which allowed reality to be shaped by emerging issues in the context (Wagner et al., 2012). In addition multiple sources of data were considered, as reports and documents on learnership implementation produced by Multichoice informed the data collected during the research process. This approach is in line with descriptions of qualitative research where the researcher is the main instrument in collecting data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 1998).

The qualitative methods described above allowed the research objectives of the proposed study to be achieved by delving into multiple insights and experiences of participants complimented by review of existing reports. The researcher employed in depth investigations that could not be arrived at through statistical processes or other forms of research that seek to quantify data such as quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Mason (2002) points out that qualitative research is particularly good at supporting arguments that focus on how processes operate and are structured, which was a core focus of the study. Adopting quantitative methods would have been antagonistic to the purpose of the study, as quantitative research seeks to generalise findings as well as predict outcomes in some instances (Ellis, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This view is supported by Murad et al., (2018) as they put forward that after answering specific questions quantitative research equips the researcher with the confidence to extrapolate the results from the sample to a wider population. In contrast, qualitative research concerns itself with the feelings, thoughts and experiences of the population under study, rooted in the distinction that experience is a personal issue that cannot be extrapolated (Ellis, 2020). Findings from this study will add to existing knowledge and allow others to gain insights and deeper understanding of learnership implementation.

3.2. Case Study Research Design

The research design is informed by the purpose, process and context of the study (Wagner et al., 2012). On this premise, given that this study aimed at understanding experiences through engaging with personal experiences of participants within a specific context the research was designed as a qualitative case study. The research was designed as a case

study with clear boundaries, focusing on MultiChoice which is the unit of analysis and participants were limited to past and current learners at the company, and experts from the MICT SETA and training providers. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016) the unit of analysis and not the case determines whether a study is a case study or not. In this study the unit of analysis is Multichoice and the case is learnership implementation.

Case studies centre on lived experiences in real-life contexts, with in depth data collected through multiple sources answering “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2014, 2009; Creswell, 2009). This research followed the process of asking how and why questions to draw opinions, thoughts and feelings on learnership implementation. As described by Maxwell (2013) and Merriam & Tisdell (2016), using case study design provides deeper and detailed insights on specific issues in learnership implementation. The merits of the case study lie in its ability to explore theories and the findings playing a pivotal role in providing further insight into research on employability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014)

3.3. Population and Sampling

As a case study research design was used to gain insights of learners and the employer on learnership implementation ay MultiChoice, the case of study-the organisation- will be adopted as the population. This is supported by the views of (Schwandt, 2001) that a case is specific and bounded in time and place, where a phenomena can be studied. The proposed case site is Multichoice South Africa, which supports both employed and unemployed learnerships. MultiChoice is a leading entertainment company established 36 years ago and has grown to be an industry leader with an African footprint, however the case study will only focus on MultChoice South Africa. Given the nature of its core business of delivering entertainment through various digital platforms, there is a growng and constant need for nurturing and acquiring skills in the key fields of technology, digital transformation and innovation.

MultiChoice invests in the skills development of its own people and the industry through programmes such as learnerships. In the 2019 financial year Multchoice invested R191m in skills development and formally trained 3018 employees across the group (Multichoice Group, 2020). Specific to learnerships, MultiChoice invested in 400 entry-level learnerships to develop key sector skills in IT, project and general management (Multichoice Group, 2020). In addition there is increased focus in developing professional black talent through several learnerships, specialising in digital and data science, who can be integrated into the

business (Multichoice Group, 2020). In implementing programmes, MultiChoice works with the MICT SETA and training providers who facilitate the training and placement of learners. A sample for participation in the study was drawn from these stakeholders.

The intention of drawing a sample in a qualitative research is to find participants who have experience and knowledge of the matter under study (Ellis, 2020). This implies people are selected to take part in research on the basis of their ability to contribute towards the purpose of the research. Therefore the sample method purposively decides who participates to meet the objectives of the research (Ellis, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Non-random purposive sampling methodology was adopted as subjective criteria such as current learners, learners who have completed and employees involved in the implementation were applied in selecting participants. In addition expert interviews were sought from senior people at MICT SETA and training providers to get strategic expert views on implementation of learnerships. Bloomberg & Volpe (2016) emphasize that non-random purposive sampling is important in qualitative research, as it provides information rich data, appropriate insights and takes into account resources available, which would not be achieved with random sampling.

Random sampling seeks to minimize bias and ordinarily requires larger samples to be able to draw generalisations and extrapolate results to a larger population (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The focus of this study was not drawing generalisations, but in getting detailed nuances ,insights and allowing participants to share information about themselves (Etikan, 2016; Ritchie et al., 2014). As is characteristic of purposive sampling, the researcher decided who would contribute to the study based on the participants ability and willingness to provide required information.

The sample size is determined by the researchers judgement on the extent of data saturation during the research (Etikan, 2016). In conducting the research the sample consisted of learners, employees and experts who agreed to participate in the study. An initial sample of 26 participants consisting of Learners and experts was selected for interviews. The sample size was chosen based on the limited time available to conduct in-depth interviews, as well taking into account availability of the researcher and participants to undertake the study. The sampling also sought to get multiple views from different

stakeholders involved in learnership implementation therefore participants were spread across past and current learners' employees and experts.

The final participants in this study reduced from 26 to 16 as some learners and experts declined to participate. Participating learners comprised of 6 learners who had completed a learnership and were currently employed by MultiChoice and 5 learners currently enrolled in a learnership. The experts comprised 2 employees directly involved in learnership implementation, 1 representative from MICT SETA and 2 facilitators from training agencies.

A prominent advantage of purposive sampling is that participants are likely to provide information rich insights and willingly participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gentles et al., 2015). The disadvantage is that the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population which impacts the credibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However Ellis (2020) provides a satisfactory conclusion to the pros and cons by offering that findings from a purposive sample are "representative of the general experience of the issue under investigation" which is sufficient in meeting objectives this study, p (83).

3.4. Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research design mainly relies on three data gathering techniques namely, interviews, observations and document review (Wagner et al., 2012). These techniques were combined for the study to enrich data and enhance its trustworthiness through triangulation (Bryman, 2012). These techniques will be discussed in the appropriate sections in the report. It's important to mention that a detailed review of empirical literature on learnership implementation (as presented in Chapter 3 of this research report) was conducted prior to collecting the data for this study. The literature review provided understanding of the context of the study, pertinent issues and debates in learnership implementation, as well as inform design of the data collection instrument used in this study.

An interview schedule with semi-structured questions, was the primary data collection instrument designed and adopted for this study. The data collection instruments were modelled on the interview guides used in the HSRC case studies conducted in 2012 and research done by Denga, 2009 and Zwane, 2012, as these two studies are related to this research in that they focused on a specific sector and sought the views of multiple stakeholders. Three questionnaires were developed, one focusing on views of employees representing the employer, one on experts and the other on learners. There were some

similar questions on the employee and learner schedules to allow for comparison and cross checking of data collected as well as questions unique to employees and learners. Prior to collecting data, the questionnaires were shared with the employees involved in detailed implementation of learnerships at MultiChoice.

The data was collected through online interviews on MS Teams and Zoom, with the stakeholder groups identified. Prior to the interviews, all participants completed and signed consent forms and agreed to the interviews being conducted online.

Online interviews were chosen, as opposed to face-to-face interviews as it was deemed safer to avoid physical contact with participants given the presence of the highly communicable coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) at the time of data collection. The online interviews were conducted using either Zoom Meetings or Microsoft Teams Meeting digital platforms. An advantage of using these digital platforms is that there was a sense of time saved as there was no travelling time involved, it was convenient as the researcher and participants held the interviews in a setting most convenient for them and the technology enabled simultaneous recording and transcribing of interview, saving the researcher time.

Interviews were selected as they offered the advantage of providing thick vivid descriptions of how learners experience learnership implementation. Stakeholders were able to express themselves by explaining process and their rationale for their views. As the interview is a two-way process, the researcher was able to seek clarification and confirm understanding of views expressed by participants. This experience of the interviews is captured as one of the key advantages of interviews in qualitative research as the researcher can probe for more information, allow different perspectives to surface, captures emotions and a window into the social world of the participant (Creswell, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Bloomberg & Vople, 2016). The interviews were conversational in style, peppered with both light and deep discussions that allowed the interviewee and the interview to be comfortable with the process.

Bloomberg & Volpe (2016), do allude to some pitfalls of interviews as participants can be uncooperative, share limited views and have varying degrees of articulation. To counter some of these disadvantages, the researcher made use of document review to increase knowledge on the implementation of learnerships. Primary documents reviewed included Multichoice policy on learnership implementation, Site visit reports by training providers, Assessments of learners by training providers and management reports to MultiChoice provided by the training providers. Document review provides a valuable mechanism of confirming insights gathered from interviews and enable deeper understanding of the

phenomena under study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However as with all research processes Merriam & Tisdell (2016) caution on the need to ensure authenticity of documents reviewed and as documents are not produced for research , the form of some reports may not be easily understood by the researcher. In instances where the researcher was not clear as to the purpose and meaning in documents reviewed, the employees and training providers were contacted to provide clarity. A key feature of document review which lent itself particularly well to this research is the stability of the information, as the data is objective, remains constant over time and does not react to the agenda of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis focuses on preparing and organizing collected data for detailed analysis so as to make sense of the data collected. As described by Ritchie et al., (2014), data analysis is the process of simplifying and transforming data to enable the researcher to present the data in a way that can draw out insight's conclusions and recommendations. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) make a valid and critical point that in practice, it serves the researcher well to simultaneously collect and analyse data, as waiting until all the data is collected to start analysis creates a paralytic nightmare for the researcher as one can "literally drown in data" (p.196). This is referred to as constant comparative analysis of data which allows the research to narrow down and build up research focus depending on what is emerging from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the initial stages of analysis, summaries of main points, opinions and arguments made by participants made during the interview were noted down and any common themes or patterns identified. In succeeding interviews, the researcher would probe more intentionally in certain angles to better understand the themes and patterns emerging.

The data analysis approach adopted was informed by the constructivist paradigm which underpins the research methods adopted in this study. Therefore the data is analysed through how participants construct their knowledge, tell their stories and delights in the multiple realities by weaving a pattern of their multiple realities and noting their unique and different perceptions.

Case Study Analysis was adopted as the dominant or formal method to make sense of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was particularly adopted since in case study research

“conveying understanding of the case is the paramount consideration in analysing data”, (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.233). In case study analysis the setting is particularly important and therefore detailed analysis of the setting is important, particularly situating the data emerging within the context of the case. In addition well thought out management of data is critical in analysis of data from case studies as the propensity of gathering conflicting information from interviews and documents review is high in a case study setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The conceptual framework became critical in facilitating management of data and was employed to define categories, themes and codes enabling the researcher to organise and draw links between data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). It’s important to highlight that at this stage the conceptual framework was not static and therefore was revised in relation to the emergent themes from the data. This is the deductive and inductive process of data analysis, as the initial categories of the conceptual framework that were informed by a review of literature, are then morphed inductively through the themes and patterns emerging from the data collected during the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Processes of identification, collection, recording, coding and sorting of information were deployed in a reflective manner, critically observing issues from the data, while making meaning and bringing sense to the ambiguity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidel, 1998).

The analysis was guided by intentionally drawing a continuous loop between research purpose, research questions and the data emerging from the research. Data analysis aims to provide answers to the research questions, and its these ‘answers’ that inform the categories and themes that helped the research analyse findings and fulfil purpose of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Creswell & Poth (2018) present four forms of data analysis adopted for the case study analysis in this research, 1) detailed presentation of the context, 2) categorical aggregation where similarities and differences are drawn with patterns, themes and meaning emerging, 3) direct interpretation where meaning can be drawn from one specific finding, and 4) generalisations made about the case in terms of emerging themes which can be compared with published literature on the topic.

3.6. Trustworthiness

Differing terms and measures are applied to qualitative and quantitative research in ascertaining for lending credibility and effectiveness of research. In quantitative research validity and reliability are adopted, with reliability being extent to which the data collection

instruments are consistently accurate in collecting the data, while validity looks at whether intended research purpose and objectives were met by the data and processes employed in the research (Ritchie et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2012).

In qualitative research emphasis is placed on the extent to which a researcher presents and analyses that substantiates and confirms the reality of the context and persons under study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). There is ongoing debate on the appropriate use of terminology regarding trustworthiness of qualitative research. There is a school of thought that clamours for rigor and prefer the terms ‘validation’ and ‘reliability’ (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Wagner et al., 2012). Other authors are not comfortable with the traditional terms of validity and reliability adopted in quantitative studies and instead have elaborated and built a strong case for emphasising trustworthiness through the adoption of terminology of credibility, dependability and transferability instead (Bloom & Volpe, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This research concurs with the views of Merriam & Tisdell (2016) and Firestone (1987), notwithstanding the research type, the manner in which data is collected, analysed, interpreted and findings interpreted requires standards and rigor to convince the reader that they can trust the research findings.

According to Yin (1998) case studies are key to the elaboration of theories and analytic generalisation, therefore the relevance of research findings from the proposed case study cannot be underestimated. For the proposed study, the content and face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by piloting the questionnaire, using relevant literature on similar studies to craft the questions and expert verification of the questions (Wagner et al., 2012). Follow up interviews were done where needed to seek clarification and ensure accuracy of information collected.

3.6.1. Transferability

Transferability or generalizability is defined as the extent to which findings of research can be generalised to a wider population or other contexts (Ritchie et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2012). Qualitative research and case study design in particular have been criticised for the lack of generalisation of the research findings (Ritchie et al., 2014). However (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) argue that qualitative research should be judged by its authenticity expressed through the multiple realities generated, its ability to provide sophisticated understanding of an issue and the richer meaning provided by participants.

Authenticity of this research is achieved by richly detailing the experiences and perceptions of employers and learners of learnership implementation at MultiChoice. The findings are not generalisable but specific findings could be compared with similar contexts and enhance understanding.

3.6.2. Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy of findings and testing the validity of conclusions through assessing the logic of methods and research design applied in relation to the research purpose and the consistency between data analysis and interpretation of data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Data collection and analysis was informed by the constructivist paradigm, leaning on building multiple realities through interviews and case study analysis to understand the context and individual perceptions of that context. Triangulation of data sources and methods was adopted to enhance credibility of the research methods through augmenting interviews with document review. Interviews were conducted with different stakeholders to get multiple views on the same phenomena. In addition discussing assumptions and approach upfront with employees involved in detailed implementation of learnerships further enhanced credibility of the findings.

These measures ensured that the methods employed and interpretation of data collected is credible to the researcher, study participants and readers of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ritchie et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2012).

3.6.3. Dependability

Dependability or reliability focuses on the consistency and accuracy of research instruments deployed in research and the replicability and repeatability of the research findings. (Wagner et al., 2012). The replicability of research findings in qualitative studies have been questioned, on the basis that there is no single reality therefore it's impossible to replicate the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However Seale (1999) argues that reliability in qualitative research can be enhanced by "showing the audience of research studies as much as is possible of the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions" (p.158). In addition the researcher made use detailed field notes, recording software and accurately transcribing data to increase reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the study reliability was also enhanced by making use of a comprehensive semi structured questionnaire that enabled cross checking across participant responses to ensure that the raw data is consistent and dependable. Inconsistencies in data were not discarded but noted and understood when they do occur. Key themes emerging from the research were discussed with some of the participants to increase reliability of findings.

3.7. Limitations, Feasibility and Positionality

3.7.1. Technical Limitations

By its nature, qualitative research has inherent researcher bias, as the researcher is the main research instrument. Research bias was minimised by disclosing researcher interests, background and work experience. The case study design means the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population; this is an acknowledged weakness of the design. However the findings will be useful for the organisation under study and for similar contexts such as other organisations implementing learnerships rendering the research worthwhile. These limitations have been detailed in literature to include the researchers subjective feelings, difficulty in replicating the research, and retrospective gathering of information gathered which diminishes accuracy of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). Other technical limitations related to trustworthiness have been addressed under secton3.4 in the research report.

3.7.2. Administrative Limitations

The boundaries of the case are defined by the participants that the researcher has access to. Participants were limited to learners who have completed a learnership and received employment from the same organisation, as well as current learners. Employer views are limited to those employees that are still in employment and to the knowledge and information they were willing to share, given that organisational information may be regarded as highly confidential. This limitation was addressed through document reviews that have stability and are nonreactive to the research agenda.

The site of the case study is the employer of the researcher, therefore there was perceived power imbalance as colleagues were interviewed. This limitation was addressed by the fact that the researcher conducting the case study did not work closely with the division that implements the learnerships. The researcher was cognisant of this and made deliberate attempts to create an environment for honest free flowing dialogue, by not requesting for video calls and assuring the participants that their names and personal information would not be disclosed in the analysis and findings. In addition participant names were removed during data analysis and data was coded to reduce researcher bias. Trust of participants

was further sought by discussing the purpose of research as solely for fulfilment of the Master's Degree and providing them with emerging themes.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns are the cornerstone of a strong research design and these need to permeate to methods, research goals, research questions and trustworthiness (Maxwell, 2013). Ethics are important since the researcher as an insider or outsider to participants, needs to be sensitive to the intended or unintended impact of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). The research study was framed within an ethical research the framework to ensure research is worthwhile without subjecting participants to unreasonable demands. Participation was voluntary, based on informed consent, respect for confidentiality and any risks for participation avoided and managed. Specifically, Prior to the study Ethics approval was obtained from the university ethics committee and permission was obtained from Multichoice to adopt the company as a case study.

The basic premise was disclosing and communicating the purpose of the study and participants were informed of the manner in which data will be processed. With regards to all data collected, only the researcher had access to the data and in line with university requirements all collected data will be stored securely for at least 5 years. In analysing data participants privacy was protected and no information that can personally identify participants will be disclosed, aliases where used when making direct reference to what participants shared. Multiple blended perspectives where included in the report as well as contrary findings.

During the report writing process referencing was done correctly using APA guidelines and use of own words was adopted to avoid plagiarising the work of others. Reporting was done honestly, avoiding disclosing any information that may harm participants. This research report is only published for completion of the Masters Programme and nothing else.

3.9. Summary of Research Methodology

This Chapter detailed the research methodology employed in this study. A qualitative case study methodology was adopted to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of learnership implementation of learnerships at MultiChoice South Africa through the perspectives of learners and employer. The sample was made up of 16 participants that were purposively selected to be part of the study, due to their knowledge and experience in

learnership implementation. Data collection was done through two methods, online interviews and document review. Prior to collecting data from the field, a review of empirical literature was carried out to derive a conceptual framework that informed the study design and analysis of data collected. Trustworthiness of the study methods and instruments deployed was enhanced through strategies such as rich descriptions of context and triangulation of data to lend credibility, dependability and transferability of the research process and findings. The purpose of this study was to provide insights on the implementation of learnership programmes, through the perceptions and experiences of the learners and the employer. This will enhance our understanding of some of the factors that impact learnership outcomes as well contribute to the knowledge of learnership implementation in different contexts.

CHAPTER 4 : PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4. Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the data collection processes undertaken by the researcher in conducting the study, as discussed in Chapter 3 above. The purpose of the case study was to understand implementation of learnership programmes, through the perceptions and experiences of a sample of learners and employees at MultiChoice. In addition views of experts and training providers involved in implementation were sought. The emerging and confirmed issues emanating from the study, enhance and deepen the existing knowledge on learnerships as a tool for skills development. In addition findings from the research can be applied in the implementation choices of learnership programmes by similar companies. This chapter presents findings from 16 interviews conducted with stakeholders involved in the implementation of learnerships at MultiChoice. This section of the paper begins with the response rate of participants, followed by biographical data of the participants and then the themes emanating from participant responses during the interviews. As this study is focused on perceptions of learners and employees, participants own words have been given prominence in elaborating themes emerging from the research.

4.1. Participant response rate

The response rate of the various stakeholders for this study was encouraging as a fair number of participants agreed to participate. Participants from past and current learners was less than planned. Participants from employees involved in implementation was achieved as all targeted participants agreed to participate. In addition there was satisfactory participation from training providers and experts. Table 1 below depicts a summary of the participants reponse rate. The table dhows the actual respondents compared to the proposed sample across the 3 respondent categories. In total 16 interviews were conducted against the 26 planned interviews.

Table 1: Participant Response Rate

Stakeholder	Designation	Proposed Sample	Actual Responses
Learners	Current Learners	10	5
	Past Learners	10	6
Experts	MICT SETA	2	1
	Employees Implementors	2	2
Training Providers	Training Providers	2	2
Total		26	16

Access to interview participants was smooth as the employees involved in implementation made the relevant introductions. There was reluctance by some learners to participate as a handful (five) that had initially agreed to the interviews, declined to participate closer to the interview.

4.2. Participant biographical data - Learners

In the introductory questions of the interview, some key information with regards to the age, gender and education level of the Learners participating in the study was sought. The table below depicts this data.

Table 2: Learner Biographical Data

Age		**Gender**		**Highest Educational Qualification**	
18 -24 Years	*25- 34 Years*	*Male*	*Female*	*Matric*	*Occupational certificate*
7	4	6	5	5	6

Learner respondents had completed or were undertaking various fields of study in the learnerships. The duration of the learnership was indicated as 12months by all learners interviewed. This was also confirmed by the training providers and the employer. The areas of study by the learners are presented below:

Table 3: Learnership Areas of Study

Areas of Study	**Current Learners**	**Past Learners**
Data Analyst	2	2
Project Management	2	1
Technical Support	1	2
Business Administration		1

All past learners had less than 2 years working experience and none of the learners interviewed indicated having work experience prior to commencing the learnership programme. Biographical data of experts, training providers and employees involved in implementation were not recorded as part of the data collection process.

The information obtained from the data was supported by quotes taken from interview transcriptions. To protect the identify of participants the following naming conventions have been applied to identify the different participant groups Past Learners (PL), Current Learners (CL), Employees representing employer (EM) Training Providers (TP) and Experts from MICT SETA (EX) .

4.3. Emerging Themes from the interview Data

Four major themes emerged from the study

a) **Embarking on a Learnership**
b) **learnerships are perceived to be a springboard into employment**
c) The role of the mentor
d) **Applicability of the theory to practical work component**

4.4. Embarking on a Learnership

For the most part, the process of applying and starting a learnership appears to be well structured as expressed by Learners, training providers and employees involved in implementing learnerships. Almost all participants were able to similarly articulate the process and appeared to show understanding, finding it quite easy to follow. Some direct views are presented below

> I went to the assessment in Roodepoort, I filled out forms, they said they would contact me, I came back for a test and I got the call I could come and start. (PL)

> It's been a simple process, if you meet people who can assist you in applying it's not a problem at all, you need to know [a] company that helps-they do it for free. (CL)

> Most of these young people are quite eager to start doing something meaningful and complete the required documentation, however of course others need help to provide all required information and that's why we are here…to help them as much as possible. (TP)

> The process requires quite a lot of documentation as a complete file is required to support, the contracting process, but the training providers are very astute in managing the administration requirements, it's not a pain at all for us (EM)
>
> I can even help my friends apply, in fact I do; it's so easy just follow and gather all the documents, show up for the tests and you're in. (CL)

Concurring with what the other respondents had mentioned , PL further explained "It's not that difficult, they ask you for your personal information, they give you a portfolio of information, you complete and submit it to the training provider, then you go for an interview". However it should be noted that a few learners were not very clear on what was expected of them during the application process and did not fully understand the process even though they managed to get onto the programme. PL commented "I just wanted to learn and get a qualification, I didn't know there was the placement, it was a good surprise". This is similar to the comments by CL "I remember the training provider telling me there was an interview, I didn't know what for, I just went and was interviewed, then I was doing the learnership…I made it"

However, there were some sentiments from training providers that the vetting process of getting learners on to the learnership was not always thorough and not always in their control. Training providers indicated that they source and recruit learners and sometimes they are given existing learners by a corporate and asked to place them at another host organisation.

In terms of entry criteria, training providers explained that learners are required to have a matric at a minimum to be able to embark on a learnership, and in addition competency in English and Maths Literacy is essential to successfully complete a learnership qualification. However in some instances learners who do not have full requirements get onto the programme and struggle to complete the qualifications. There was a suggestion that some training providers are not as thorough, and the recruitment is subjective to some extent. Concurring with this view was a comment by TP that "matric can be verified it's a yes or no, but the English and Maths literacy is determined though assessments conducted by the training provider, "therefore, competency becomes subjective and its sad but some who don't have the ability end up on the programme and they fail" (TP). The importance of vetting for competency and ability is further elaborated in the comments below

so you know one can't take for granted because people have metric that they're going to pass the qualification, so we do a very stringent vetting process. We have telephonic interviews with all the learners, we engage with them by asking them questions about their experience, about you know their general communication because that's very important because they have to be able to have a basic understanding of English and Maths Literacy to attempt the qualifications and then answer the workplace evidence in the Portfolio of Evidence. (TP)

One gentleman was allowed to enrol on project management level 4, but he really should not have been enrolled at all because he did not have the competency level on a Maths and English Literacy level to attempt a level 4 qualification, so you see there are loopholes in the system… eventually he had to be dismissed because he was non-compliant in all his interactions with us…he couldn't come to the party and it a waste of money for MultiChoice and a wasted opportunity for a competent learner. (TP)

it's very important that, that kind of decision making is made up front before one embarks on a learning program to give them fair advantage to be able to achieve the competence. (TP)

when I say able am not talking about disabled people you know physically, I'm saying able to a pass a qualification and then add value to the host company see that's also so important, so our role is to find able learners there is yeah there is a lot involved you know. (TP)

I personally get involved in this upfront process because I deal with the host companies myself, because it's my credibility also at the end of the day when I'm presenting CVs of learners, I've gotta make sure that they are going to not let that host company down, they're going to be reliable people they are going to arrive at work on time they are going to be compliant. (TP)

I really do believe that otherwise it's a disservice to the learner you know to, I mean shame wasting a year of their life for something that you know they can't even obtain

> because they don't have the necessary skills and knowledge it's very sad and a waste of money for multichoice yeah it is a lost opportunity that should have been given to someone else. (EX)

> you know people need to be competent or have a certain skill level before they go into a new learnership that's an instance of …you just didn't have the required requisite knowledge to cope shame actually it was a bit sad yeah 'cause you can imagine they'd struggle with the next level. (TP)

Cementing the above views, there was particular challenges that learners also faced over the lockdown period as a result of COVID-19, when they had to work and study remotely. These challenges were not anticipated during recruitment and some learners struggled with making use of IT services such as Zoom, MS Teams and working remotely. One training provider expressed how they really felt for the learner and organised calls with the learner to assist them. They commented “I just wanted to … help him, like fly to PE … but you know I couldn't … just goes back to vetting learners before they come on learnerships and I think that that is something that needs to be improved”. In addition, there was also mention of fraudulent practices by some learners that present dishonest information on their CV’s, “making claims on qualifications they do not have” (TP).

Some recruiters are not thorough in their vetting and send inappropriate people to training providers. One such incident was aptly described below

> That's what happened with (name withheld) in Project Management for Durban, she ended up lying on her CV. The recruitment agency did not pick it up and she had swindled two other training providers out of stipends, oh the stories I could tell you...there is a desperation among our youth, there really is a desperation they are wanting opportunities so badly. (TP)

Further to a near seamless application process, learners indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the process of onboarding onto the programme and into the workplace, CL expressed that “ they [MultiChoice] were ready for us when we arrived, we were given laptops even istationary and I even had a company tag with my face on it, just like their own

employees". This is also in line with what PL commented on " You know when you arrive, you are nervous, but these people are professionals, they know what must happen, everything is organised for us, we even had lunch and I began to feel better, they were expecting us, it felt good". CL indicated further that "I realised I am now in corporate, they communicate very well what our programme was and what would happen, I wasn't guessing, and I know who to dial if I needed something, they were prepared for us and it helped me".

However, it would appear that the employer sometimes perceives the onboarding of learners to be challenging as one EM stated that, "…for what should be a straightforward process, sometimes learners are not coming to the party, some do not always provide the documentation I need, and we have to go back and forth before they can fully start. I find, it depends on the learner, others are superstars and some need hand holding but we get there".

In addition training providers also expressed that " there is a need to understand where some of these kids come from, they are unsure of themselves and some don't pay attention to detail as required. I do find that once you clearly explain even if it's again and again, very few don't complete the documentation, most of them do". In addition, training providers made recurring observations that even though there is induction some learners just don't follow the rules or behave according to the workplace requirements. The training providers emphasized, "we talk about codes of ethics we talk about professionalism in the workplace that is part of our induction process, but people are just unreliable sometimes, it's the human condition".

All learners also expressed that they had the resources and support they need for the learnership, from both the training provider and employer. CL indicated " they [training provider] give us a tablet with all our study materials so we don't carry books around, they also explain what we need to be doing and I find it easy to follow". PL explained "Even when we start the work, my supervisor told me what I needed to do, it was already written down, so the following day I knew what to do"

4.5. Learnerships are perceived to be a springboard into employment

All Learners indicated that prior to starting their learnership, they had completed matric, were not employed and were seeking an opportunity to either gain employment or achieve a recognised qualification to propel them into employment. Based on participants descriptions of their expectations prior to applying for their learnership, Learners believed a learnership would give them leverage in getting employment. The Learners expressed this as follows

> After completing Matric, I couldn't get into university as the programme I was accepted for-Governance studies, did not qualify for NSFAS funding. I couldn't afford university and I didn't want to stay at home and my sister's friend told me that doing a learnership would help me to get a qualification, so I applied (PL)

> Eish you know it's difficult to get a job on your own. When I completed Matric, I heard about learnerships from the Department of Labour and they said it can help you get skills and get employed. I submitted my CV and they contacted me so I could start a learnership, it would help me get a job. (CL)

> I was very happy to get a job…I mean the learnership, as they pay me a stipend that improves things at home, and I can do things for myself and my family. (CL)

> As soon as I started the learnership with MultiChoice, I knew my foot was in the door and I started looking for vacancies so I can get employed. Yoh, I applied for many positions on the job portal…and maybe that's how I was now offered a 6-month contract…they saw I really I wanted a job. (PL)

> The good thing…you know about a learnership is the work placement, this company neh MultiChoice…they can offer many training opportunities and I went, and I got many skills and even certificates that if I don't get a permanent job here, I now have more qualification to apply for a job somewhere…they will look at me as qualified. (CL)

In describing their expectations of getting employment through a learnership, Learners that had completed a learnership and were now employed expressed how the learnership gave them an opportunity as cited by PL, who said "…where would they have known me about

me if I had not been their Learner-nowhere", and also PL who commented, "I now tell all my friends, apply for learnerships; it doesn't matter what you want to do; do the Learner [ship] and you can get a job sometimes".

Some of the current Learners expressed that although they were hopeful, they also knew employment was not guaranteed and therefore indicated they were anxious of what would happen. CL stated, "I just hope I am offered a job after I finish, I saw other leaving who had finished…they couldn't get a job here". Similar sentiments were offered by CL as she expressed "I can't imagine not getting a job here when I finish..yhuuuu, but it happens mos, I am doing my best so I can get a job, I also want to work here and get a permanent job".

There were however a few learners that expressed their confidence in the learnership qualification as opening opportunities for them beyond MultiChoice. This indicates Learners had found the experience valuable and felt they had achieved something by being part of the learnership. CL emphasized, " …but you know even after my contract ends, I now have experience and a qualification and with my skills I am now better than someone with Matric, I have a better chance out there". Echoing similar sentiments, CL stated " I am now similar to a graduate, they will also see I can do the work somewhere else and maybe even the SABC can offer me a job; I now know something about the industry". Another view suggests that the learnership experience provided networks and relationships that the learner can leverage going forward, one learner commented that,

> You know having spent almost a year here I have made serious connections, I can call them to ask for advice and I can ask them to refer me when I get a job, that is important. Where I am from, I don't know someone that can refer me or check [that] my CV is ok, but with the people I know even if they hear of an opportunity, they will buzz me…errr…I mean call me to say man, check this out. (CL)

Existing employees that had completed a learnership, expressed mixed feelings on the opportunities for career development the learnerships awarded them. The different views are as below:

> Now I have a learnership or a qualification, but I am still doing the same job, I haven't changed, I mean yes I know more, and they know I can do the job, but it hasn't changed. When I apply for other posts, I don't get them. (PL)

> It's not easy to get another job, sometimes I ask my manager can I do something else in the team and I am given a report to do, and I am happy, but I have the same post. One of my colleagues said I should apply for a secondment…you know to work in another team …I applied I am still waiting. (PL)

> Maybe I will do another learnership, who knows maybe could be something in tech, I see there are jobs there; the one I did- project management I don't see more jobs, just senior ones and I am not there yet. (PL)

The view by past learners also suggests that learners perceive learnerships in specific fields to award more opportunities for career development compared to others. This is echoed by another learner saying, " you know these things of jobs…depend on the type of learnerships, business administration is hard to get a job, but data analyst or technical support you get a better chance". An interesting perspective was introduced where other learners did not feel confident enough to start looking for growth prospects as they indicated a need to excel in their current role.

> My fear neh, is that I need to be able to prove I can do the job I have first, I need to show I am good, now if I start applying for other jobs what if I can't do them, I want to do what I am doing now so well, then when they move me, or I get another job it will be easy. My uncle said do not lift your head looking for other jobs already, lift your head to learn and keep your head looking down to do your job well. (PL)

> I still have a lot I am learning and when I talked to my manager, he explained to me what else I can do to learn what I am doing. In doing work you need to get a lot of experience and not just look to grow, where do you grow to? I mean I don't know much know but I am learning and will know more soon. (PL)

However other learners expressed positively that they could see how the learnership helped them grow and opened up other opportunities as stated below

> By the time I completed the learnership I had started interviewing with another department, I learnt how to use the software for accounting and now I could work with them, I trained on the software during my learnership, it gave me a new skill. (PL)

In some instances the exposure to different teams seemed to present opportunities for growth as expressed by past learners below

> During the learnership I got a new supervisor, and I learnt a lot shem. This supervisor was so good, they explained everything and let me work, I even made mistakes, but it was ok you know, then after my old supervisor came back, I finished the learnership, then asked the other one [supervisor] if I can come and work for them. I waited 3 months until there was a vacancy I applied and now I work with them, it works this learnership it opens doors. (PL)

> I am still in the same job but now I understand even better how to get my job done, it's so good to know what you are doing. What was nice is that I actually learnt more about what to do and how to do things differently. The training also helped me see other things, like how to do more research…and that is making me do a much better job. (PL)

> Now I want to apply for a degree, I understand I can apply and start maybe with a diploma you know and then keep studying to get a degree, I know I can do it as I have passed my learnership.(PL)

Perspectives of training providers and experts echoed similar sentiments as above, highlighting that learnerships were an important tool in skills development for the nation as a whole but the biggest shortcoming is the limited absorption into employment upon completion of a learnership.

> MICT SETA is the tool. It provides the right kinds of learnerships, but at the end of the day it's about the absorption of learners. So you know we are addressing skills development, but are those people being employed? That's, that's the big gap with learnerships right now. That is a huge anomaly that is happening in all corporates. It's not just Multichoice, it's happening everywhere. (EX)

> I tell the learners if Multichoice absorbs you be grateful, be humbly grateful and don't stuff it up. Be at work on time, Show the employer that you are really serious about this opportunity, Yeah, it's like a diamond in the dust. (TP)

As a result of the limited absorption there appears to have emerged serial learners , as learners then move from one learnership to another as they cannot find employment. As a consequence they prefer to stay on the learnership and get the stipend and an education while at it. One learner who was on their second learnership expressed that " it's better than me staying at home, at least I still get money to support at home". Another learner stressed that 'if I don't get a job offer, I will try to get onto another learnership, unemployment is not nice guys, I might as well learn, and they give me money". In support of the views and experiences of the learners, one training provider provided the following comment

> It can be disheartening. I mean a big joke amongst training providers is that you have a group … called professional learners. People, people who enrol from one learnership to another, just as a source of income. You know, and you can't blame these poor kids. (TP)

This feeling of being disheartened further manifests through the completion rate. Training providers quoted completion rates of between 70 -80% attributed to a few reasons. Training providers also shared further sentiments on this

> Upon realising they won't be getting an offer of employment with the host company, just at the last moment just disappear they not interested simply stop attending and do not hand in their completed work, they are not interested. (TP)

Training providers expressed that they "battle to get some of those learners to complete work and also then you know they're not available even on WhatsApp or whatever because they don't have the financial funds to be". One TP referred to the learners as "stragglers we battle to get them to complete the rest of their work". Tracking learners is difficult as they just "fall of the face the earth, and that is true in other corporates it's not just multichoice and … it's unfortunate because they've put in all the work and now they leave without the qualification".

This trend was also referred to self-sabotage, as towards completion the learners don't hand in all their work to obtain a qualification that is viewed as steppingstone into employment.

> it's terrible … what you do with the learner who is now not earning any stipend, to them it's meaningless …they say yes I'll get a qualification, but I can't get a job so what's the point? and we're saying turn that around if you had the qualification you probably would stand a better chance of finding work. (TP)
>
> I can almost imagine that they get so despondent they don't even want the qualification in any case and they just lose interest, very sad but that's the reality of what we deal with and now with Covid it's even worse, it's absolutely even worse these learners getting jobs never mind our University graduates not getting work either. (TP)

Participants from both the MICT SETA and training providers emphasized that absorption and even meaningful employment was an area that South African corporates and government needed to work together on and improve. There was overall consensus that learnerships are a valuable tool for skills development and that successful outcome for learnerships is employment for the learners. As one EX put across, "this is just not for MultiChoice but for all corporates, SA businesses need to come together and solve for this". Related to this there were a number of interesting observations as captured below,

> Big business needs to realise that there is some sterling output from learnerships, I feel business does not recognise some of the talent as they perceive graduates and interns to be of higher calibre but there are some true gems being produced and in increasing numbers [from learnerships].(EX)
>
> But you know it's about absorption at the end of the day, it's great to give them opportunities but we you've got to give them meaningful work at the end of the learner ship. That's the bottom line for me. Yeah, that's all, if you're not doing that, there's no point in doing learner ships .(TP)
>
> I think it's a wonderful tool [learnerships] it definitely gives young people the ability to, you know, to really find suitable employment 'cause at the end of the day the learnership is a stepping stone to being absorbed to finding a permanent position or be in a position to even get temporary work and with the learnership behind them that carries so much more weight on the CV's so I think, you know there is a definite need for learner ships but absorption is something that needs to be looked at. (EX)

> I would say you know at least 70% of learners who aren't absorbed, now do not have work … don't have a stipend any longer, cannot find work but I think…that's not MultiChoice's problem I think that's a country problem. I think you know there is a shortage of positions available to these young people, I really do, my heart goes out to them really, yeah it must be something terrible for them because they've worked so hard for something, they get competency but yet they still can't find a job. (TP)

In addition there was further comment on how corporates can make intentional decisions on making learnerships a core focus in their skills development strategy. There were several comments that participating corporates achieve BBBEE recognition for supporting and hosting learners, and that there needs to be a deliberate effort towards moving from just "earning BBEEE points and ticking the box" (EX), to genuinely empowering these young people to gain meaningful employment. With the llimited rates of absorption "it smears most corporates out there, it is a checkbox scenario so that's not true skills transfer is it? no it's not, no not at all", (TP).

> I think is a point for you, you know you're doing your thesis aren't you yes, yes I think that's one of the controversial points that should come out of your thesis …is that you know it's got to be about opportunities within business in SA for these people going forward then that's true skills development and not just a process. (TP)

The employer perspective on the issue of absorption was clear, it is a sad reality that cannot be addressed "overnight", however this is an area that can "definitely be supported by aligning to succession planning and building the talent pipeline"(EM). There is recognition of "headcount challenges" where the business cannot hire more employees in light of cost challenges, however the participants did express that there are some intentional decisions that can be made to increase absorption of learners upon completion.

4.6. Role of the mentor

An emerging theme from participant responses was the role of the mentor in the learnership programme. It should be noted that the supervisor or line manager also plays the role of the mentor. There were interesting perspectives on this from learners, employees and training

providers. Overall there is no doubt on the importance of mentors, but it would appear that sometimes the mentor – mentee relationship is fraught with challenges

> Now this [mentorship] is a crucial role in the programme as the Learner needs guidance and support. The supervisor or line manage is the mentor, but sometimes this doesn't work out, as the mentor or supervisor may be ill-equipped or unprepared for the role. (EM)

> This is one area we [the organisation] can improve. The mentors can be trained and supported to mentor effectively, you know the demands of corporate and delivery, sometimes there just isn't enough time to teach so it requires structure and patience. (EM)

> …they [the mentors] need support to mentor and supervise effectively; but it's natural that sometimes the relationship doesn't always work out and we step in and assist. (TP)

> I do wonder if it's always clearly communicated to the supervisor what is expected of them as a mentor…mentorships are tricky, not everyone can be a mentor, it has a personal aspect to it and its actually a skil,l eh not everyone has it you know. (TP)

The views of the employer and training providers begin to allude to the challenges associated with mentorship of learners. Their perceptions suggest the need for structure and training of mentors for the mentor-mentee relationship to be successful. Perceptions and views of learner respondents support the views of employers and training providers, and provide more nuanced detail as shown below:

> It was tough to wake up in the morning to go to work and see my supervisor. She didn't believe learners could do the job and it was difficult engaging with her, I did not want to make a mistake. (CL)

> This is an area that wasn't smooth, one time I asked him how I can find other jobs to do, and it's like he didn't like the question, I stopped asking things and tried to focus on my work. (CL)

> My supervisor was good at explaining what needed to be done with the work, but when I asked him if they could help me with my CV, they said they were busy and that I should focus on doing the work. (CL)

From the learner's responses above it would appear that there was an uneasiness in the mentor-mentee relationship. The supervisors come across as losing patience when learners seek guidance on non-work-related matters. This sheds more light on the shortcomings that some supervisors may have in carrying out the role of mentor compared to what learner s expect. PL provided a clear view on this when he said, "You see the mentor needs to be available at all levels-work, and personal life and also studies, it was not always easy, but they tried, eh it's not easy". This view is also further expressed by CL who said
"Sometimes they treat us like students and not employees, it's like they are threatened by me taking their job….I want to say, it's cool please just teach me but let me show you what I can do also"

The views of learners, actually bring to the fore the suggestion by the employer that supervisors are not well prepared for the learner and their role in developing a learner. However some learners expressed having had a positive relationships with their mentors as it helped them navigate the workplace. In such instances the felt they were actively learning and enjoyed their learnership experience. Positive sentiments on mentors include:

> I had an amazing mentor, very welcoming and understood my background; I could talk to him when my child was sick. They also teach me how to write emails properly and that really helped, it made me improve even when I did my job they corrected and showed me in a nice way, not shouting. (PL)

> My supervisor was very helpful, they were there to guide and defended me when I made a mistake; they know all about being a team and it felt so nice, he had my back. He recommended I go for training and I even got another certificate and he helped me prepare for interview, very helpful man. (PL)

> I think my supervisor was a good coach, as I could talk to them. They helped me understand what Multichoice was about and how to do my job well…you know the systems they would teach me and tell everyone in the team, oh he is a super star, he can do it….aaaa it was good, made me feel I can do it. (CL)

The nature of relationship between mentor and mentee came across as varied as shown by the applicant respondents. Some respondents showed a hesitation to freely express their views and referred to their mentors as “hard”, “tough” or even “strict”. In addition there was a view that as a mentor “ they cannot be friendly, as they are the boss” which suggests that some learners experienced their mentors as more focused and interested in the work-related aspects as opposed to the personal and social well-being of the learner. The views of training providers on the expected role of the mentor, mirror the expectations of the learners. The training providers sometimes have to step in and provide social support to learners as some mentors are not always able to assist. This is encapsulated in the comment below

> we had for example a woman who was HIV positive or for example a man who suffered from epilepsy to the point where he couldn't do his work so I had to get involved with his manager in terms of how he would cope with the learnership and obviously implement at work. So it's yeah it's definitely not just you know the learner it's the learner’s emotional well-being their financial well-being what's happening at home, how they are feeling that day did something happen at work. (TP)

Based on the above the role of the training provider goes beyond just recruiting and training learners but they take a holistic approach and there were some comments by training providers that for them it’s about the “moral obligation” to support learners holistically, as it was “not just about earning revenue, but about the future and growth of the learner, the individual”. A well-articulated example of this role of the training provider is captured in the comments below

> I had a learner when we were having … xenophobic attacks in 2020, one of my learners was actually stabbed in the knee, so he sent me photos and then I had to help him get medication because he couldn't get his grandma to the hospital so there's been lots of instances where you know I'm talking to the mothers and fathers of the learner and it gets that personal yeah yeah yeah. (TP)

In addition training provides expressed that some employees involved in implementing learnerships at MultiChoice, also provided social support to learners as required. One employee at Multichoice was described as having “incredible emotional intelligence when it comes to connecting with learners and developing reports for the learners”. (TP)

Another perspective provided by training providers alludes to the fact that given that mentors already have full time jobs , expecting them to support or coach young learners is a stretch for them. It is common for a mentor to have three to four learners assigned to them at once. This then poses limited ability to fully support and mentor the learners as elaborated below

> Given the state of most corporate clients and the work involved with people … you know you've got to have lots of people involved to assist learners you can't just have one mentor for several learners because people are so busy they often can't find the time just being with the learners. (TP)

> …so you know you have to have a cross section of people within the organization that sign off their [learners] work but I think that you know if the host company is committed to the skills development process, then they will find the time and we have found people to be reliable in that role. (TP)

The views above begin to suggest enhancements that can be done in the manner in which learners are mentored or supervised to increase the benefit for both employers and learners.

4.7. Applicability of the theory to practical work component

Most participants expressed that the work placement complimented the theory, with a few instances cited where this was not the case. CL commented that " when I started the work, hands on part of it, it now made sense in relation to what they were teaching us first". Similarly a number of learners expressed "feeling ready" and "able to see the link" when asked how they felt about the theory and its applicability in the workplace. In some instances learners felt that the practical actually required "more thinking" as in the workplace "things can change so fast".

Some learners gave specific examples of how the theory and practical augmented each other, CL stated that " It was good that, they taught us how to write emails and conduct meetings…in the meeting I know what to do and I know how to communicate on email".

Employers involved in learnership implementation expressed confidence in the suitability of the theory aspect and they believed "It prepares them [learners] for when they land, they

have the concepts, now it's just applying and expanding", (EM). In addition there was mention of a healthy disconnect as technology and the way things are done in the workplace are constantly shifting and therefore learners have to keep pace through the practical work. This is adequately captured in the comments below

> Well it's not realistic to keep pace with the changes on the ground…it takes time to update curriculum and that's why the practical is critical, as in a way it closes the gaps between what they learn and where the company is at. (EX)

> I generally find they understand the concept, it's the how part they don't know and that is why the work placement is important….it comes in there to teach them how it's done and because they understand they learn quickly. (EM)

There was however, a number of respondents who mentioned that some learners were found wanting on skills or capabilities on the "softer side" when learners started their work placement. The missing skills were described as " timeliness, showing up, communicating, and how to carry oneself in the workplace". There was a comment from the training provider to further explain this, " you know we should understand it's like joining a family, you don't quite fit in unless you do things the way they do, talk, act and mimic". Some learners attested to this when they said phrases like "I didn't know 2 minutes late is like already late", "in this place you have to know how to say things and who to tell when something happens and you can't be there". These perceptions are aptly encapsulated in the comments below

> On my first…err no second day, I was answering a question in a group and I said, you know mos, and my manager called me aside after the meeting and told me to not use mos in all my sentences…it's not professional. (PL)

> I remember the first weeks, I was still staying far and I would always get to work like something past 9 and they asked me [if] I really was committed to this opportunity …it made me change I started waking up early. (CL)

> even though they've signed agreements they [learners] don't follow the workplace requirements of being at a host company you know arriving on time … you know meeting with the mentors at the designated time and date …sometimes people are unreliable. (TP)

It is apparent that some learners realised the areas they were not doing right and in some instances took the time to change. PL expressed that, “sometimes you don’t know these things and at least they show you and tell you and you improve”. However, according to the training providers, it would appear learners should know these things as they expressed that the “we do an induction at the beginning of the learnership where we talk about codes of ethics we talk about professionalism in the workplace that is part of our induction process for multichoice learners and indeed any learners we trained on behalf of other corporate clients”. One training provider further elaborated on this as follows

> so that's very important, that we follow the code of conduct that Multichoice would expect those learners to adhere to but the proof of the pudding …is that people do not adhere to that code of conduct …you know it's, it really is and unfortunately you know at the end of the day and I know that (name withheld) will verify this …that you know at the end of the day it's just about the stipend for these learners it's about money incentive, you know for them to earn this lovely stipend. (TP)

Another angle on the applicability of theory, is suggested by an employer who mentioned that “of course the theory is relevant, as we also inform development of the curriculum”. This suggests that the organisation is involved in the concepts taught in theory and the fact that the organisation also selects which programmes will be under the learnership, as alluded to by the training provider, shows that there is an effort to keep theory relevant to the needs of the organisation.

However training providers and experts from MICT SETA did emphasize that in some instances the practical work did not provide an opportunity to apply the theory learnt on the learnership. This was particularly true, where the hosting was done by a secondary organisation and not the organisation sponsoring the learnership. This was particularly in the case where the “opportunity to practice was limited or not available”. For certain courses such as IT support , some learners were not able to be placed in an area that allowed to practice this, instead ending up in a general role. The reasons cited for this by training providers, allude to the fact that employers are sometimes not too trusting of the ability of learners and to minimise risk they place them in general departments sometimes not related to their area of study. This challenge is further elaborated in the comments below

> when you host a person and I'm not talking about hosting about at Multichoice, I'm talking about us, the second level of hosting, which is to put them [learners] in a working environment during the learnership. We have to find suitable host employer…often they don't have the opportunity for them to practice the skill there. (TP)

> On Project management for example , they might not have opportunities for people to practice the theory of project management. You need luck, It's too late for learners who are ‘green’ If I could put that in inverted commas, [learners] who don't have enough experience to support the internal staff at their organisations from a project management perspective. You know, because they might make a mistake and then that could cause you know irreparable damage to the company. (EX)

> I'm sorry it's two fold. Yeah, you know, they don't always have the opportunity to practice the skill. So you might find a learner doing a you know IT support [learnership] not being hosted in that area in the organization. There might be in an admin role. Now that's very sad. So you know we have to try and address that as well. We do try with corporate clients, but the opportunities aren't always there and that's you know, that's a reality that we need to face. (TP)

The role of the mentor also came to the fore to support and close the gap, where practical opportunity linked to theory is limited or unavailable. In this case Learners need to build their portfolio of evidence by doing a lot of research in the host organisation. Mentors are then required to support learners to build their portfolio of evidence so that they understand how the theory can be applied in the workplace. This is an alternative that the training providers rely upon to close the gap between theory and practical skills learnt. The comments below provide further understanding on this

> They [learners] have to then find people in the organization that can assist them so you know we always say to people. Let's get somebody in the right Department to mentor you, if you are placed in a Department, that's not necessarily the same as your learner ship, but we will find mentors in the organization that will assist them to

give them the necessary workplace evidence. So we try that, that tactic that is proved to be very successful. (TP)

The workplace evidence needs to be real., so the mentor really has to help. You know it's not made up. Exactly, yeah. Because that's the danger. But you know, at the end of the day, we're not at the host company. We can't check and balance on a daily basis what the learner is doing. We can only do it through our site visits, you know. (TP)

In the design and delivery of learnerships, mentoring is key. Even for experienced workers, mentorship elevates the opportunity to learn in the workplace. We however find that this sometimes is a neglected aspect as focus is on supervision and some supervisors actually don't know there is a difference between mentoring and supervising. Its an industry wide challenge in our experience. (EX)

4.8. Summary of Chapter

This chapter presented the four main findings unearthed by this study. Themes were identified from the data collected from the research questions on employer and employee perceptions on learnership implementation. Findings also include the views and opinions of key stakeholders involved in implementation, namely experts from the MICT SETA and training providers. As is expected from qualitative research this chapter included samples of direct quotes from research participants, to convey their words, thoughts and expression. The intention in choosing and including the participants own words aims to enhance the confidence of the research audience by portraying the reality of the participants in the research context.

The main finding of this study is that learnerships are perceived to be a key vehicle in developing skills at a national level, however they fall short of effectively addressing unemployment among the youth. This finding is grounded in the opinions and views of all the participants involved in the interview discussions on their perception of learnership implementation.

In looking at the learnership application and on boarding process, for the most part learners expressed that the process was simple and easy to understand. Almost all learners indicated

that they had been referred to learnerships by friends or family. However a few of the learners indicated that they were not very clear on some of the steps involved in the process, especially the interview process. Respondents from training providers concurred that the process was well defined and that for the most part learners followed the process, however they were some key challenges raised with regards to the vetting of learners, as well as the integrity and commitment of the learners themselves in submitting the information required of them.

There was consensus among all participants, on the view of learnerships as a vehicle for skills development and a steppingstone into employment. In addition the value of the learnership was recognised by all participants, however the point of departure is that the expected outcome of gainful employment has not been achieved. With learner completion rates of between 70-80%, only about 10% of learners get absorbed by the host organisation, which leaves a vast number unemployed. This outcome is associated with sub outcomes of “serial learners” who view learnerships as an opportunity to continue receiving a stipend and a number of learners “self-sabotage” as they drop out towards the end of the learnership without completing all the requirements to obtain a recognised qualification. Employers and experts recognize and acknowledge the challenge of low absorption and there is consensus on the need to improve absorption, though viable solutions require national effort as opposed to a single company effort.

The third theme emanating from the data, is on the critical role the mentor plays in the development and growth of the learner. The mentor is usually the line manager or supervisor of the learner, and the expectation is that the mentor needs to actively provide all- round support and guidance of the learner. However all participants highlighted particular challenges associated with the mentor-mentee relationship. Some mentors are simply not prepared for the demands associated with mentoring, and it emerged that mentors need to be supported and guided to be effective coaches and supervisors.

The relationship between the theory taught in class and the practical work appears to be in tandem, however, there are contextual challenges that diminish the applicability of the theory in the workplace. One of the views is that learners are sometimes not ready or committed to observing the levels of professionalism required in the workplace, albeit they are taught this in theory and taken through induction on what to expect in the workplace. Another common view especially expressed by training providers alludes to the limitations

on the workplace for suitable opportunities for learners to experience practical application of theory. The overriding factor is that host organisations sometimes cannot afford the risk of a learner doing something wrong in a live environment. In other instances, the department the learners are placed in, do not have the applicable practical opportunity that corresponds to the theory learnt. This is prevalent in secondary host organisations that are providing work experience for learners sponsored by another organisation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATON OF FINDINGS

5. Introduction

The purpose of the case study was to understand implementation of learnership programmes, through the perceptions and experiences of a sample of learners and employees involved in learnership implementation at MultiChoice. In addition, the views of experts and training providers involved in implementation were sought to provide greater understanding to the case. The intention was to bring together the views, opinions and insights of these multiple stakeholders as one way of further enhancing existing knowledge on learnerships as a tool for skills development in South Africa.

This study is situated in the constructivist paradigm as it sought to understand the experiences and perceptions of employers, learners and experts on learnership implementation. In line with the constructivist paradigm as noted by Creswell (2009) and Wagner et al., (2012), information gathered during this study was influenced by the context, with multiple realities informing the data collected and discussion of the findings. Data was collected through individual online interviews with 16 participants. Research participants conisisted of past and current learners, employees involved in implementation who brought in the voice of the employer and experts from MICT SETA and training providers. The data collected was coded and analyzed and first grouped by perceptions of stakeholders on the questions asked and then categorized into themes in line with the conceptual framework as illustrated in Chapter 2. The study sought to answer the following 3 research questions (a) What are employer perspectives and experiences on how learnership programmes contributed to the skills development needs of the organisation? (b) What are the perceptions of employees on how learnerships support career development of existing employees? (c) What are the perceptions of learners on how learnerships facilitated them to obtain and retain employment?

This chapter includes a discussion on the perceptions of learners and employers on learnership implementation at MultiChoice. In Chapter 4 we presented the findings of the research along the four main themes emanating from the research questions and guided by the conceptual framework. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings by critically synthesising the findings from the different stakeholders and situating the findings in

literature, identifying similarities and contrasts in existing literature. We conclude this chapter with a discussion of limitations of the research and areas for further research.

In discussing the findings we are guided by the conceptual framework which allows us to interpret the findings through two main theories which house the four themes that emerged from the findings, specifically Learning Theory which covers the themes “embarking on a learnership and “applying of theory to practice”, and Socio Cultural Theory which covers “the role of the mentor” and “absorption of learners post completion”. The four themes above effectively encapsulate the perceptions of learners and employers in the implementation of learnerships at MultiChoice. The main finding of this study is that the success of the learnership model is in question, due to the low absorption of learners. Absoprtion of learners into employment is the universal measure of success of learnership programmes among the stakeholders interviewed and this measure has not be satisfactorily.

5.1. Interpretation of findings

While there were a number of different views from the stakeholders, there was overall consensus in the perception that learnerships were a valuable mechanism to drive skills development and increase the employability of unemployed youth. However, there were almost unanimous views and opinions that, when it comes to enabling the unemployed to gain employment, learnerships had not met expectations for the most part. This then puts into question the sustainability of this skills development intervention. In each of the four themes emanating from the study, the perceptions of learnerships by the different stakeholders is discussed, providing a comprehensive narrative of their views on learnership implementation at Multichoice.

5.2. Embarking on the Learnership

The opening questions of the interviews sought to gain participants' perceptions on the process of choosing and applying for a learnership. This was important in understanding the context and circumstances of the learners, as the context of the study is important in understanding qualitative research.

Learners expressed that they first heard about learnerships from family and friends who had been on a learnership or that they knew someone who had attended, and this encouraged them to apply. Related to this learners expressed that they were not always sure of the

process but went along with the requests of the recruiters. This view is confirmed by training providers that proffered that “learners were not always prepared for interviews and seemed to struggle in fully understanding that all documentation is required prior to starting a learnership”. In addition training providers mentioned that there were a number of recruittment agencies that advertised and raised awareness on learnerships. However, only one learner indicated they had responded to these particular adverts by recruiters. Challenges at the onset of a learnership are substantiated by Petersen et al., (2016) who found that limited awareness of key processes such as application and registration cause confusion in learnership implementation.

However from the employers' perspective, it would appear that they found the process of getting learners onboarded quite “stress-free” as they found the SETA and Training Providers to be efficient in enrolling learners. Interestingly, this finding contradicts the views of Pauw et al., (2009) that SETAs frustrate the process with their incompetence and mismanagement. It would appear then, that there has been quite an improvement in the coordination role of the SETAs as one employee specifically commented that

> *The SETA and Training providers are excellent at sorting out the administrative processes and they are on top of the situation which makes it easy for us, as an employer to implement the learnerships, no they are very good at it. (EM)*

Circling back to the manner in which learners heard about learnerships and their approach to applying, it would appear the learners seem to view learnerships as an almost informal process, open to anyone,. This evidenced by learners that indicated they really did not understand the process but went through with it all the same. This is also substantiated by the comments of training providers that the vetting process is not always very thorough, further cementing the perception that it is easy and simple to get onto a learnership. This is consistent with the finding of De Louw, (2009) that some learners do not adequately complete the application forms and do not fully meet the entry criteria but end up being enrolled anyway on the learnership.

However, it should be noted that some training providers, make a meticulous effort to vet the learners they recruit as they are aware that their reputation is at stake when implementing learnerships. As one training provider stated, “it’s my name and the company’s reputation on the line, so we are very careful in our selection process to get candidates with

the required competencies and abilities". This approach is supported by Vorwerk (2014) as he asserts that the successful outcomes of learnerships are also dependant on the caliber of the learners and their ability to execute the tasks. However, Vally & Motala, (2014) strongly assert that the very notion of applying screening criteria and credentials in deciding who participates and does not participate is subjective as it is not a complete predictor of trainability. This suggests that although there is perceived importance in the vetting process, it's an ability and willingness to learn that should also be considered. In the same vein, it should be stressed that there is a need for a selection mechanism to determine who is in and who is out given that resources are finite and not everyone can participate in a learnership. A case in point is given by one training provider through an example of a gentleman who ended up dropping out of the programme as he did not have the required competencies and ability to carry on with the programme.

It can therefore be surmised that learners' perceptions of a simple and easy application process, are in part informed by their approach to the application process and exacerbated by recruiting agencies that do not adequately vet learners. Interesting to note is that the employer views the application process as well structured, as the training provider ensures that all the necessary documentation is in place to support the contracting process. One employee did concede that " one of the challenges is when a learner does not submit even one document, this can hold up the process as our legal needs a complete file before we can contract". Evidently, there are several processes and requirements, that are not the purview of the learner, which the training providers have to complete to ensure contracting is done to commence the learnership. As Mummenthey & Du Preez (2010) observed, there is a high administrative burden associated with learnerships, and the training provider is saddled with this.

Following on from this we can deduce that, the reasons learners choose a learnership inform their perceptions of the value of learnerships. Almost all learners indicated that they had found themselves with nothing to do after completing matric, having failed to get into college or obtain gainful employment. One learner commented, " I did not get the place to study at university, and my friend told me about the learnership, so I applied". This suggests two notions with regards to the reasons why participants ended up on a learnership. The first is that they were encouraged by their friends and family and the second notion is that it is perceived to provide a route out of unemployment. This suggests that learnerships are not perceived to be an ultimate goal but a means to something else. The learners appear to

pursue learnerships as an alternative or something they can do until they find what they want to do.

This view is consistent with the argument by Vally & Motala, (2014) that vocational training programmes such as learnerships, are not the preferred choice by South African youth, as university-based education is viewed as superior, which infers that vocational education is not seen in a redeeming light.

Over and above this, the learners do not always necessarily choose a specific learnership but rather they are enrolled in a learnership that is available. Such a decision-making process or rather lack of decision making does seem to manifest in the limited commitment of the learner during the learnership. This makes us pause and consider the actual value that learners attach to a learnership. Value of the learnership becomes subjective to the needs and circumstances of the learner at the time, which does not necessarily align with the intended value of learnerships within the skills development framework. These findings are consistent with the results of a learnership tracer study conducted by IQ Business in 2014, in which learners expressed that the learnership had no real value unless it resulted in employment (IQ Business, 2014). This view is countered by Pauw et al., (2009), as they suggest that linking the value of learnerships to the potential for employability is a misguided notion, as there are a host of factors that influence employability beyond attaining a qualification.

The views expressed by the learners on how they felt “welcomed and expected” by the host employer indicate that there is value derived from this aspect. Learners seem to imply that they felt they belonged and were part of a team, which instills confidence and self-esteem which are crucial to learning and productivity in the workplace. These sentiments are echoed by the training provider alluding that, entering a formal workplace environment is an achievement for some of the learners and opens up their minds and lives to a world that is not within reach in the communities they come from.

Through discussing perceptions on the process of applying and enrolling in the workplace, it can be stated that learners and employers perceive the process to be quite easy. This is a testament to the robust framework and coordination role that is fulfilled by the SETA and Training providers. Contrasting views from literature on this, imply there has been marked

improvement in the efficiency of the SETAs and the coordination role played by training providers.

Linked to the finding above is the inconsistent vetting process of potential learners which has resulted in some “unqualified” earners slipping through the cracks and enrolling on a learnership programme they actually do not qualify for. Sentiments by Vally & Motala, (2014) suggest that the vetting process is perceived to be a good selector of talent but that this might not be the case. This view however is supported by examples given by the training provider, of learners who did not have the requisite competencies who end up failing or dropping out of the programme.

Another key outcome from the findings is that learnerships are not perceived by learners, as the preferred pathway post-matric, but rather a backup plan or alternative when students fail to get into university education or find themselves unemployed. In this choice, the value of learnerships is perceived through the employability opportunity and the stipend attached to the learnership. As a result, the work-based learning component and the stipend are perceived to be important and worth the effort and time of enrolling in a learnership.This leads us into the discussion of the second theme on the perceptions of the applicability of theory to the practical workplace experience.

5.3. Applying Theory to Practice

Views on the applicability of the theory in the workplace, give us insights into how learnerships are perceived to support career growth and meet the skills development needs of the organisation. Some of the learners interviewed had completed a learnership and were now employed, while for others they had continued to be in the same role, therefore it was important to get their perceptions and opinions of what they had gained by pursuing a learnership. In addition, the views of the employer in this aspect allow us to get their perceptions on how learnerships support their skills development needs as an organisation.

There was almost a universal response from participants that the theory taught was applicable in the workplace. Participants suggested that doing hands-on work, brought more understanding and there was a sense of “things coming together and now making sense” as expressed by learners. Similar views were expressed by employers, as they felt that the

students were adequately prepared with theoretical concepts to tackle the practical work. Employers did acknowledge that some level of disconnect between theory and practice is expected given the rapid change of technology and ways of working, and this was perceived as healthy.

The findings and perceptions above are consistent with the views of Maclaren & Marshall, (1998), that the gap between theory and practicals in the workplace is closed through knowledge creation which happens during work placement. The merging of theory and work projects is a continuous process, which in itself enhances skill and competency. Klees (2014) supports this view by exposing the short-sightedness of expecting education to supply the skills required, as he posits the development of skill is context dependant, therefore the workplace is supposed to cultivate skill and not just receive skilled people. This view is supported by the assertion of Vally & Motala, (2014) that acquiring skills and knowledge is a social activity and therefore learners should be given space and time to learn.

Employers went further to explain that they believed their involvement and input in the curriculum development process was one of the reasons theory and practice were probably not too disconnected. Though there is merit in the role played by the employer in curriculum development, it's important to be cognisant of not only the rapid change in the workplace but also the delays and long lead times of getting curriculum updated and accredited. Wedekind (2014) further suggests that employers need to realise that they do not have direct control over the curriculum and their interests are mainly on immediate issues that drive productivity, whereas the education system takes a longer-term view of developing wider competence.

The observations by Wedekind (2014) do suggest that the influence that employers think they have on the curriculum is not as significant. This is not out of any shortcomings of the employer but by the nature of the timeframe and processes involved in curriculum development, there is always a "healthy" disconnect. For the purposes of this study, it is well noted that the employer demonstrates an active interest in the theory and its alignment to what they need in the workplace. This is also substantiated by the intentional focus and recruitment of learners in the fields of data analysis, IT support and project management, which are aligned to the needs of the organisation.

Employers and training providers provided some interesting observations on how some learners seemed to struggle with soft skills of timekeeping, communication, etiquette in teamwork, and dealing with pressure. The perception here was that though these concepts were taught in theory, learners are generally found wanting in these competency areas. Kruss et al., (2011) finds these perceptions to be opposed to the nature in which soft skills are acquired. Soft skills are gained and assimilated through interaction with others, therefore it's hardly surprising that these would be missing or lacking at the start of the learnership. This view is supported by Vally & Motala (2014) commenting that generic skills such as a positive can-do attitude are acquired through work-based programmes, in interaction with others and are important as they cut across industries and job types. Augmenting this view, Kruss et al., (2011) found that upon completion, learners were more confident that they had acquired soft skills and rather less sure they had the technical hard skills. This is in line with the view of Hlatshwayo (2014) that technological changes actually deskill most workers while reskilling a small proportion of the workforce. This implies it is actually possible for learners to feel less skilled or unskilled in the technical aspects of their learnership if for example the work they are expected to do has now been automated or mechanised.

The assertion above by Hlatshwayo (2014) concurs with the comments by some learners that they felt there had been no change in their career prospects as a result of completing a learnership. Learners would have enrolled on a learnership expecting a promotion or a change in the role they were doing but evidently, there has not been much success in this aspect for the learners interviewed. It’s interesting to note that one learner did indicate having moved to another role. However, the move was facilitated by the previous supervisor and not by the skills they had seemingly acquired on the learnership. The career growth in this instance is supported by the social interactions at work that build networks and communities of trust.

It would be amiss to assume that there is always alignment between what is learnt and the work experience. By virtue of a corporate like MultiChoice sponsoring learners to be hosted for work placement in other organisations, this already presents a challenge on the relevance of work experience. In the first instance, the sponsoring of learners to be hosted elsewhere is not always in line with the skills development needs of the hosting organisation, though it can be argued the sponsoring organisation benefits from a wider pool of fresh talent. Secondly, there is no guarantee that learners in a secondary host company will be given work placement related to their area of study. This results in what Aderibigbe & Mosia,

(2019) referred to as robbed opportunities to learn and improve. Learners and some service providers alluded to the challenge of some learners being placed in departments that are unrelated to their area of study, hence implying it robbed them of an opportunity to practice. This is an area of contention as Vally & Motala, (2014) suggest that work experience alone in whatever field is not sufficient to improve skill and capabilities, as ultimately employability is not about the technical skills acquired but about what Feldmann (2016) aptly states as professional, social and personal skills. Bandura (2008) also supports this with the assertion that employability is not determined by technical ability but ultimately by the "perceived self-efficacy of the individual", (p.181).

Turning to the perceptions of the employer, even though the organisation would prefer that learnerships support their skills development plans, the reality is that this is not always the case. Contextual realities such as the need to achieve high learner numbers to support BBBEE requirements and implementing learnerships to fulfill social obligations can be in tension with the skills development needs of the organisation. In this study, both employers and training providers alluded to this as the " harsh reality' and "double-edged sword" the company and industry are faced with. This is supported by the findings of Pauw et al. (2009) where companies in a similar study on learnership implementation owned up to participating in learnerships to improve their BBBEE levels and benefit from the tax incentive schemes associated with learnership programmes. In the view of the researcher, it's a forgone conclusion that there is a social consideration that informs the support of learnerships. In the communities where corporates like MultiChoice operate, there is rampant unemployment and as a corporate citizen, MultiChoice has a moral obligation to do what they can to ease the burden of unemployment in communities. However, where feasible there should be an intentional strategy to align learnerships with the broader skills planning of the company.

5.4. The role of the Mentor

At the core of workplace experience is the 'learning' by the student, which happens in the work environment. In this study, all participants comprising learners, experts, and employers alluded to the critical role that the supervisor or line manager plays as the mentor to the student. A number of learners expressed and described their experience at MultiChoice through the relationship they had with their mentor. It would seem that there is a connection between their view of MultiChoice and their perception of the learnership based on how they

experienced the mentor. This perception is in line with the description of Maclaren & Marshall (1998), that work-based learning is a very personal experience and the interaction with the mentor is core to how this experience happens.

Important to note that there was a perceived link between the value or relevance of the learnership by the learner, with the relationship they had with the mentor. One learner commented that their mentor had helped them gain self-confidence and that even if they did not get absorbed into the organisation, they would rely on the mentor to provide a reference for other work opportunities. For learners that were employed, they echoed the same sentiments that in some way they felt their job and role had grown as their line manager had become more hands-on in supporting their development during the learnership. This is what Maclure & Norris (1991), specify as context dependant learning, which is personal and can be articulated and felt by the learner.

Upon entering the workplace for the first time, students expressed being excited and exuding enthusiasm to get started on projects and add value. This energy and eagerness needs to be channelled and managed appropriately. As Maclaren & Marshall (1998) point out the passion and prospect of their relevance can result in students becoming overly ambitious and unrealistic of what can be delivered in the workplace. They, therefore, do need solid support to reasonably plan and execute projects and not self-sabotage. When channelled correctly their learning enthusiasm translates into hard work and creativity that benefits the learner and the organisation. In turn, learners will come to perceive the organisation and the learnership as relevant to their growth and enhance their self-confidence. Equally rewarding, the host organisations will be able to trust learners with bigger projects and responsibilities which further enhances the self-efficacy and ability of learners in the workplace.

In contrast, where the learners did not have a good relationship with the mentor, they felt that the learnership had not added that much value to them and as one training provider expressed “when the relationship with the line manager is not so good, it is common for the learner to drop out or not complete”. This implies that the mentors become a sought of anchor and guide when things get difficult for a new entrant into the workplace. It’s safe to assume that the relationship of the mentor is akin to how the learner views and experiences the workplace and the organisation. If a learner feels welcomed by the mentor, it is likely they will perceive the organisation as welcoming as well. This view is supported by sentiments of one learner who expressed that they did not feel they could perform as

required in the learnership and had entertained thoughts of dropping out, until they were transferred to another department. Their comment is as below

> *things got so tough with my supervisor, I thought I would just stop. But I was so happy when they sent me to another department and the line manager there was very helpful, and I could see that I can now do the job. (CL)*

The perceptions and sentiments of the learner above are supported by the views of Maclaren & Marshall (1998) that an important component of work-based learning is the reflection that happens between learner and mentor. When a learner receives feedback on their performance and support or pointers on what they can do better, they become motivated to succeed and are open and ripe for learning. Unless the reflection happens, learning does not happen and therefore 'non-learning' occurs resulting in resistance and apathy to learning altogether, (Jarvis, 1994, as cited in Maclaren &Marshall, 2006). This line of thought on the critical role of the mentor to the learnership experience is supported by Boud & Solomon (2001) who offer that the mentor should allow the learner to explore their thoughts and opinions, which lead to new perceptions grounded in an appreciation of new knowledge and therefore learning is completed.

Learners expressed mixed perceptions on their view of mentors. Some felt empowered and others felt disempowered by the relationship they had with mentors. In some instances, the mentor supported the learner beyond the workplace and offered advice and guidance on personal matters. Further to this, the training provider described how they sometimes have to step in and assist students where the mentor-learner relationship appears weak or where the student does not feel comfortable engaging their supervisor on personal matters. These perceptions further underscore the critical need for a mentor even if the mentor is not the supervisor. Granted not every line manager can mentor, it would therefore be prudent to consider alternative ways to provide mentoring. Students need role models to enhance their chances of success at work and an expansive workplace is one that gives them room to flourish, supported by leaders that offer positive feedback and reinforcement (Fuller & Unwin, 2003).

Its understood and substantiated by other studies that supervisors that are unprepared and unwelcoming of learners lead to adverse outcomes for the learners (Hattingh, 2006; HSRC, 2012; Vorwerk, 2014). Students begin to shy away from learning and feel frustrated when

supervisors appear busy and impatient with them (Rickard, 2002). One learner in this study expressed how they felt nervous to ask questions and felt that the supervisor did not trust them to get the job done. It can be assumed that out of this experience the learner can question the value of the learnership to help them get experience and skill if they are not given an enabling environment to try and learn. Unintentionally mentors who do not support learners shoot themselves and the organisation in the foot as they not only miss an opportunity to cultivate talent, but they lose an opportunity to learn as well. This view is supported by Feldmann (2016) as he posits that learning is achieved through participating and engaging socially, and it is a two-way process. Maclaren & Marshall (1998) further expound on this by alluding to the mutual benefits of the mentorship relationship as the two parties are immersed in the learning process with each having a stake in a successful outcome. This gives a sense of purpose, accomplishment, and motivation for both the supervisor and the learner.

Hattingh (2006) further adds that the mentor should be a guiding light, and he further suggests that mentors should be actively involved in the design and implementation of learnership programmes. This view is consistent with the comments of training providers, that the supervisor needs to be adequately prepared for the role of mentor and that ideally, it should not just be the mentor supporting the colleague but other colleagues that interact with the learner. This does imply that it can be overwhelming to expect one supervisor to mentor all the learners assigned to them and it also brings to the fore a solution, in cases where a supervisor might be strong in one area and challenged in other.

It appears to be unrealistic to horde all the learning expectations on the mentor. While it is true that they mirror how the learner experiences the organisation, there is merit in sharing the responsibility with other team members in the department. In the view of the researcher, this actually affords the learner a wider learning landscape as they get exposed to different facets of the department and can lean and get support from other team members. However, there is an acknowledgement that this can become unstructured and pose harm to the learner as oversight is required to ensure there is no undue influence or undesirable circumstances thrust upon the learner.

Discussing this theme has revealed that students' perceptions of career growth and obtaining employment are in part influenced by their relationship with their supervisor or mentor. Learning is personal and happens in the immediate context of the learner therefore

their motivation, attitude and self-belief are influenced by the experience they create with the mentor. It has been established that success in the workplace is not just about skills but more and more it's the can-do attitude and self-belief of the learner that enhances their employability in the eyes of the employer.

5.5. Absorption of learners' post completion of the Learnership

Learnerships were instituted to improve the level of skills in the south African economy as well as enhance the employability of the unemployed to tackle high unemployment. Following from this premise it is not surprising that all participants in the study, candidly framed their main expectations from learnerships as to support employment however there was an acknowledgement of the factors on the ground that result in this expectation not being met in its entirety.

From an employer perspective, it is viewed as "an impossible task to expect a 100% absorption rate or even 50% for that matter". This view was elaborated in the context of an operating environment where the company has to manage costs and do what it can to protect the job security of existing employees without shedding jobs, therefore adding onto existing headcount is not always possible. Married to this is the practicality of the organisation "not needing the skills in such high numbers as learners trained" as stated by one employee. This alludes to the point made earlier with regards to the high number of learners being trained out of a social and moral obligation to play a role in skills development, and not necessarily to absorb the skill. In general, less than 10% of learners supported are absorbed by MultiChoice or the hosting company. This is not unique to MultiChoice but a well-documented phenomenon across all industries.

Learners expressed that they participated in a learnership with the hope of getting a job first and foremost. In some instances, the learners view the learnership as a job due to the stipend they receive for the duration of the learnership. It would appear that skills development is a secondary objective for them, as in some instances learners do not bother completing the qualification upon the realisation that they will not get an offer of employment. This is what Breier (2009) referred to as the uncomfortable reality of learners completing their qualifications but struggling to obtain gainful employment, even in the company they were enrolled for work placement. This reality links back to the question of value and as

McGrath et al., (2004) observed, for a learnership to unlock value it needs to lead to absorption, otherwise as one learner stated, “what’s the point?”.

Naturally, learners that had obtained employment, expressed optimistic sentiments on how the learnership had given them an opportunity, which they would not have encountered outside of the learnership. Even those learners that had not yet been offered employment, actually viewed the opportunity to do a learnership as employment, which paints an interesting picture. Learners who do not get absorbed into employment are likely to enroll on another learnership to be able to continue receiving the monthly allowance. This trend is rampant to an extent that some learners have committed fraud to continue enrolling in learnerships and others have become serial learners, because as one training provider stated, “it’s about the stipend, you see”. Even though this is an unintended outcome, learners cannot be penalised for embracing lifelong learning through learnerships until they obtain gainful employment.

Some learners alluded to the skills they had obtained and how they believed that this gave them an edge in the workplace. One learner in particular, was confident they would be able obtain employment in the industry as the learnership had not only meant relevant experience, but it also gave them an opportunity to build networks, which they would leverage to obtain employment. The positive outlook of learners outlined above, is in stark contrast to learners who wait to receive the last stipend and then stop coming to work altogether, without completing all the requirements. The dropouts illustrate that it’s a zero-sum game for them, if they can no longer receive an income they do not see the merit in completing and obtaining the qualification. In essence, without an offer of employment, they do not value the qualification and do not perceive that it can unlock opportunities for them.

In addition, there is a perception among learners that obtaining employment is dependent on the area of study of the learnership. Learnership studies in Data analysis and IT support were perceived to award more opportunities for employment compared to Business Administration or Project Management. Now at this point, it’s important to note that this is not particularly the case when considering that some of the learners absorbed at MultiChoice were studying Business Administration and the employer confirmed that they generally supported learners in fields relevant to the organisation. The findings by Pauw et al., (2009) that organisations do not perceive the academic qualification of learnerships to be appropriate for all job types, seems to give credence to the views of the learners however

Vally & Motala (2014) counters this thought by asserting that employability is in actual fact driven by generic skills and not technical skills. Taking into account the views and findings above, it would appear the issue of absorption is not a simple discussion as there is more at play concerning supply and demand of skills and how this translates into employment.

According to Barnard & Lysenko (2007) the efficacy of learnerships in providing gainful employment for unemployment is questionable. This is substantiated by the large number of young people that have participated in learnership programmes but remain unemployed. Completing a learnership can equip a person with absolute skills that deem them employable, however, they may struggle to obtain employment due to conditions in the labour market. This argument is solidified by Klees (2014) asserting that unemployment is not a consequence of a limited supply of skill but is rooted in structural challenges of capitalism. Klees rather challenges how jobs can be created to combat unemployment, rather than relegating the role of education programmes like learnerships to economics. This is a poignant question that makes us pause and reflect on the expected, perceived, and real outcomes of learnerships.

Learnerships were designed to upskill the labour force and increase their employability. This expectation has not translated into the expected gains due to the low absorption rates. The reality in the case of MultiChoice, is that they draw and require highly skilled labour which in some instances is in areas that are not yet fully developed in the learnership curriculum e.g. scriptwriting, film making and content classification. Some skills simply are not yet being taught in the classroom and might never be, such as creativity (Cultural Strategy Group, 1998).

Field et al., (2010), continue with the argument observing that vocational education is generally targeted at younger people, however, there is generally more trust and a tendency to hire older people who have experience. This effectively increases unemployment among a trained and qualified young population. This is also supported by the fact that companies spend more resources training and upskilling existing employees compared to learners. Its apparent that perceptions of low absorption are founded in reality and one can argue that the flaw is in ‘bad design’ of the learnership programme as it is unrealistic and naïve to expect education to solve deep-seated structural economic problems, such as unemployment.

Jagannathan et al. (2019) and Baatjies et al. (2014), argue that education has been assigned a role to tackle unemployment and this is misguided and corrupts the very nature of Education. Education is not designed to churn out people to feed the demand of labour only, but rather it plays a grander role of producing a capable, aware and well-rounded citizenry that drives social change and promotes social equality (Baatjies et al., 2014). Employability is not taught or learned in the classroom; it is acquired through the self-efficacy of the learner. These arguments, fundamentally turn expectations of employability from learnerships on their head and demand us to critically examine the real drivers behind unemployment. Such an examination is beyond the scope of this paper, however, it suffices to say the figures speak for themselves and any perceptions of obtaining high employment from learnerships are built on hope and dreams of a world that is in equilibrium, where skills supply matches demand and the economy and labour market are perfectly in sync.

At this juncture, our research has come full circle to the state of the labour market today. The effects of apartheid policies on the labour market and the economy cannot be fully addressed by education policies such as learnerships. There is a high degree of believing the impossible and it's important for research to continue unearthing the stark realities that surround us regarding unemployment. As surmised by Feldman (2016) we do not as yet have a universal way of ascertaining that workplace learning enhances employability. Training needs to happen in conjunction with job creation across all levels of the economy as a starting point to address unemployment.

5.6. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter discussed and analysed the perceptions of research participants in the implementation of learnerships at MultiChoice. In summary, the discussions above reveal the complexities and multiple realities associated with learnerships. It is evident that learnerships are not a wasted effort as there is skills development, however, the point of departure is the role of learnerships in addressing unemployment and to some extent career growth.

The aim of analysing the perceptions of the various stakeholders was to enhance understanding of learnerships as a tool for skills development and tackling unemployment, especially among the youth. One of the challenges experienced during data collection and analysis was sifting through large amounts of transcript data for information relevant to the

research questions and purpose. Unemployment and skills development are such an emotive subject that participants shared a great deal of information. It was important to keep circling back to the focus and purpose of the study and resist getting lost in the passion of the subject.

Linked to the challenge above was distilling the patterns emerging from data and identifying themes that told a cohesive story on the perceptions of learnership implementation at MultiChoice. This was particularly important as training providers work with multiple organisations and it was key to avoid general remarks and to also make note when a comment was made about the industry in general. The researcher performed cross-analysis of the responses from the different stakeholders and there were no significant incidences of dissent in perceptions based on demographic factors such as age, gender and educational background of the learners. This meant the demographic data collected had no bearing on the analysis and interpretation of findings.

As with case study research, caution needs to be exercised in the use of the research findings. To begin with, this case study is based on MultiChoice and therefore findings cannot be generalised to other companies or the industry at large. Related to this the sample size was small comprising of 16 participants, therefore the views and perceptions of the participants do not represent the views of all learners, employers, experts and training providers involved in learnership implementation.

It is noted that there is a potential bias in conducting qualitative research as the researcher is the research instrument. To counter potential bias, the researcher made a note to record and critically reflect on the data emanating from the study. In addition, as the researcher is not in any way involved in learnership implementation it was not difficult to be objective in analysing data collected from the research process.

In conducting this study, a few areas emerged that are worth considering in the pursuit of further research on learnerships. The first area is the perception of learnerships as substandard or inferior to university education. This emanated from the fact that learners expressed learnerships as a fallback or alternative to preferred college or university studies and instances in literature were cited that supported the view that vocational education is viewed as a taking a substage to university education. It is worth exploring the cause of such

perceptions and to determine if indeed there is such a perception and the effect it has on learnership implementation.

The second area of further research is to look at if indeed learnerships are designed to support employability. This is premised on the data emerging from this research and other research that confirms that they are not very effective in supporting employability. Further research on learnership design and delivery in relation to the job creation factors, can go a long way in enhancing the role learnerships play in tackling unemployment.

CHAPTER 6 : CONCLUSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Introduction

The purpose of the case study was to understand learner and employer perspectives of learnership implementation at MultiChoice. In addition, the views of experts and training providers involved in implementation were sought to provide a greater understanding to the case. This study emerged as a result of the continued low conversion rate experienced by learnership programmes and the varied perceptions from stakeholders on how learnerships are implemented. Learnerships were instituted as a policy instrument to address national challenges of a low skills base and high unemployment, especially among the youth. This study was designed as a case study and used qualitative methods of data collection through interviews to enhance our understanding of how learnerships are implemented. The conclusions of the study are based on the themes that emerged from the research questions posed on perceptions of employers and learners on learnership implementation, which focused on the following

i. How learnerships contributed to skills development needs of the organisation
ii. How learnerships support career development of existing employees
iii. How learnerships facilitated learners to obtain and retain employment

The conclusions, therefore, cover the four themes that emerged from data collected: (a) embarking on a learnership (b) applying theory to practice (c) the role of the mentor and (d) absorption of learners into employment post-completion.

This chapter discusses conclusions based on the key findings along the four themes, followed by the recommendations and final reflections of the researcher on the study.

Embarking on a Learnership

The study found that learners enroll in a learnership programme for various reasons but a common grounding reason was that they found themselves unable to get into college or university after completing their studies or found themselves unemployed. This leads us to conclude that the context and situation of the learner prior to enrolling onto a learnership is what drives them to participate in the learnership, and not necessarily that they perceive learnerships to help them obtain employment. This is further supported by the fact that the vetting of learners is not always thorough therefore learners who should not be on the programme end up on the programme, confirming that in some instances learnerships are

viewed by learners as something to keep unemployed youth busy until something they really want comes along. In addition, existing employees that completed a learnership did not always see remarkable improvement in their career trajectory, which seems to support the view that learnerships do not directly support career growth. This study also found that employers and learners found the onboarding process to be quite seamless and efficient suggesting that there has been progress made by the training providers in improving administrative aspects of learnerships. Previous studies on learnerships had concluded that inefficiencies by training providers affected implementation however this study demonstrates that there has been improvement in that regard.

Applying of Theory to Practice

A key finding under this theme is that the learnership curriculum is aligned to the skills needs of the organisation for the most part. However, by the very nature of the operations of MultiChoice, it is not feasible to expect perfect alignment due to rapid technological change which means the curriculum cannot always keep up. In addition, a healthy disconnect is to be expected as knowledge is created and deeper learning happens when there is a gap to be closed between what is learnt in the classroom and what is required in the workplace. Another key finding is that the largest gap between theory and practice, is on the soft skills which in essence cannot be taught, but are acquired or mimicked by association. It was also interesting to note that at times there is no relation between the area of study of the learner and the department in which they are placed. This suggests that learnerships are not always in line with the skills needs of MultiChoice as sometimes the organisation has a moral and social obligation to support learners. This support can in some cases happen in fields of study and learner numbers that are not aligned to the skills needs of Multichoice. It is the conclusion of this paper that the application of theory to practice needs a healthy tension to support active learning by the learner as well as the organisation. In addition, learnerships supported by MultiChoice are aligned to the skills needs of MultiChoice to some extent.

The Role of the Mentor

Mentorship emerged as core to the workplace experience, as the learner perceives the organisation and their experience of the work placement through the lens of their relationship with the mentor. This was a key finding as prospects for career growth and obtaining employment post completion were inferred to be influenced by the relationship learners had with their mentors. Supervisors double up as mentors and some tension exists in this as it poses a stretch on the role of the supervisor, in addition, the personality and aptitude of the

supervisor determines the type of mentoring delivered to the learner. Mentors are critical to the learnership experience. How learners grow and learn on the job is influenced by the relationship they have with their mentors. In addition, it's important to note that even post the learnership the mentor can be supportive in the career journey of the learner. It was also interesting to note that there does not seem to be a structured process of equipping the mentors to ensure they are ready for the role. This study found that the skills acquired and prospects for career growth can be influenced by the mentor.

Absorption of Learners Post Completion

A key finding of this study, which is consistent with findings from prior studies on learnerships, is that the absorption of learners into employment is low. About 10% of learners supported are offered employment by MultiChoice, and it should be noted that this rate of absorption is not unique to MultiChoice, but an industry-wide phenomenon. Paramount reason for the low absorption rate being that the number of learners supported exceed available vacancies in the company. Coupled with this a good number of learners are sponsored by MultiChoice and then placed in a host organisation for their work placement. The reasons for lack of absorption simply stated, is limited vacancies. It is noted that the field of study of the learnership is usually aligned to the skills development needs of the organisation, however, more can be done by the organisations to further strengthen the talent pool and pipeline of learnerships. This brings to the fore the central and recurring question of whether learnerships are designed and positioned to tackle unemployment. Training alone will not tackle unemployment as it needs to be accompanied by aggressive efforts of creating jobs. learnerships have been positioned to address a problem that is not fundamentally an educational problem. Education serves the role of deepening and expanding knowledge and preparing well-rounded citizens that can tap into job opportunities as well as create jobs. It is our view that high expectations of absorption of learners and reduction of unemployment through learnerships will continue to fall short. Education efforts need to be supported with a very robust job creation strategy to address unemployment in a sustainable manner.

Recommendations

Drawing from the findings, analysis and conclusions of this study the researcher offers some recommendations. The recommendations presented are geared towards how learnerships can be designed to achieve enhanced educational outcomes and some policy actions that can be considered in designing strategies for tackling unemployment.

Enhancing the Design of Learnerships

Learnerships should be streamlined to specific fields of study that are quite narrow and intentionally feed into a career path with available and growing job opportunities. An ecosystem approach is required that aligns types of learners supported, with the organisations' talent pipeline needs. This will ensure there is a high degree of 'guaranteeing' a job at the completion of the learnership. For existing employees, learnerships need to be linked to the individuals' performance development plan and a growth plan mapped out which holds the learner and employer accountable for progress.

Quotas need to be introduced for the number of learners organisations can support in certain fields of study, especially those seen as general subjects that are not aligned to critical skills needs such as business administration learnerships. This will assist in reducing a large number of learners with generalist qualifications in industries such as ICT that require more technical and specialist skills.

The mentorship component of the learnership programme needs to be enhanced and focus is required in preparing supervisors to adequately mentor learners. Organisations supporting learnerships need to train and prepare supervisors on how to mentor. In addition, adequate tracking mechanisms need to be put in place to assure that there is a standard of mentorship that all supervisors adhere to.

Lastly, the vetting process needs to be stringent, with checks and balances put in place to verify that only learners that meet the minimum criteria enroll in the programme. In addition, the entry criteria needs to be enhanced by focusing on trainability aspects such as resilience, problem-solving, role play, and simulation to increase the chances of success for learners entering the workplace.

Policy Recommendations

The policy discourse on employability in relation to learnerships needs to actively take into account the lack lustre performance of learnerships in addressing youth unemployment. There needs to be an intentional process of directing efforts towards sustained job creation and relieve pressure on skills development programmes to solve unemployment.

The value of educational programmes such as learnerships needs to be defined in the context of the social, cultural and political aspects, emphasizing the role of a knowledgeable and skilled citizen in nation-building. This needs to be accompanied by a robust formal education component in the learnership programme that is rooted in strong academic principles. This will begin to uplift vocational training from being perceived as an inferior cousin of university education. Related to this, the success measures of skills development programmes such as learnerships needs to transcend beyond numerical targets of people trained and absorbed to linking with broader societal progress of an uplifted and capable citizenry.

Researcher Reflections

Learning is creation, not consumption. Knowledge is not something a learner absorbs, but something a learner creates. – George Couros

In concluding this study, the researcher wants to take pause and reflect on the journey this research has taken. In as much as the researcher set out to answer specific questions on learnership implementation, the process has been enlightening and rewarding for the researcher to learn and uncover new insights on the complex and ambitious facets of learnerships as a skills development initiative. It is a deep and sincere hope that the information presented in this paper has added to the discourse and understanding of learnership implementation by mirroring some of the experiences and perceptions of learners, employers, and implementors.

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Appendices -Interview Guides

Annexure 1. – Interview Schedules

Interview Schedule A – Experts

Learner and employer perspectives on Learnership Implementation at MultiChoice

Biographical data (FILL IN AT END)

Interviewee name/pseudo:
Interviewer:
Location:
Date:
Interview length: 45 min

Introductory Remarks

I am a Masters Student at the Wits School of Governance (WSG) conducting a study on Learner and employer perspectives on learnership Implementation with a focus on Multichoice which falls under the Media Information Communications and Telecommunications Sector (MICT). The study is based on the premise that learnerships are implemented as a tool to address scarce skills shortages and unemployment. However, the country is still plagued by lack of relevant skills and unemployment and this study seeks to understand your experiences and views on the implementation of learnerships to build a deeper understanding of how learnerships are implemented. I would like to obtain your perceptions on learnership implementation.

Please take note that this process is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time if you do not feel comfortable. The interview remains confidential and a pseudo-name of your choice can be used. The information will only be used for purposes of this study only and later will be destroyed. I also need to record this conversation in order to be able to transcribe it and do a general analysis along with other interviews at a later stage. Do I have your informed consent for us to proceed?

Opening

A. (Establish Rapport) My name is _____ and as explained, I am interviewing various stakeholder involved in learnership implementation. Tell me what position do you hold and what does your role entail?

B. (Purpose) I would like to ask you some questions as an expert to obtain your views and opinions on learnership implementation?

C. (Motivation) I hope to use this information to better understand your perspectives on the topic.

D. (Timeline) The interview should take about 45 minutes.

Main Questions

1. What is your role and in answering the question may you please elaborate on how you are involved in learnership implementation?

2. Can you share your views about learnerships? **(PROBING)**

    a. Probe: What are your perceptions on their role in the skills development context?
    b. Probe: what influences their perceptions? (Their views on the role of learnerships?)

3. What in your view are the key challenges faced by the MICT sector in relation to the skills development needs of the economy? **(PROBING)**
    a. Probe: “Why?”

4. In what ways does the learnership qualification prepare young people for the workplace?
    a. Probe: “Are there any skills or capabilities you find missing?”

5. In your view, what facilitates and what constrains learnership implementation?

6. Based on your experience, what do you think key stakeholders need to do or improve in learnership implementation?
    a. Probe: Employers, training providers, SETAs, learners?

Closing

Do you have any questions on anything we discussed or anything that took place during the interview?

Are there any responses you would like to further elaborate upon?

Thank you for taking time to have this interview.

Interview Schedule B – Employers (Employees responsible for implementing)

Learner and employer perspectives on Learnership Implementation at MultiChoice

Biographical data (FILL IN AT END)

Interviewee name/pseudo:
Interviewer:
Location:
Date:
Interview length: 1 hr.

Introductory Remarks

I am a Masters Student at the Wits School of Governance (WSG) conducting a study on Learner and employer perspectives on learnership Implementation with a focus on Multichoice which falls under the Media Information Communications and Telecommunications Sector (MICT). The study is based on the premise that learnerships are implemented as a tool to address scarce skills shortages and unemployment. However, the country is still plagued by lack of relevant skills and unemployment and this study seeks to understand your experiences and views on the implementation of learnerships to build a deeper understanding of how learnerships are implemented. I would like to obtain your perceptions on learnership implementation.

Please take note that this process is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time if you do not feel comfortable. The interview remains confidential and a pseudo-name of your choice can be used. The information will only be used for purposes of this study only and later will be destroyed. I also need to record this conversation in order to be able to transcribe it and do a general analysis along with other interviews at a later stage. Do I have your informed consent for us to proceed?

Opening

A. (Establish Rapport) My name is _____ and as explained, I am interviewing various stakeholder involved in learnership implementation. Tell me what position do you hold and what does your role entail?

B. (Purpose) I would like to ask you some questions as an employer involved in implementation of learnerships at Multichoice to obtain your views and opinions on learnership implementation.

C. (Motivation) I hope to use this information to better understand your perspectives on the topic.

D. (Timeline) The interview should take about 60 minutes.

Main Questions

1. What is your role in the implementation of learnerships?
2. How is workplace experiential learning implemented at Multichoice?
    a. What are the key processes and activities in implementation
    b. Which areas do you find challenging in learnership implementation
3. What are the key skills shortages or critical skills in your organisation?
    a. How important is skills development for your organisation?
4. In what ways does the learnership qualification prepare young people with the right kind of skills for the workplace?
    a. Are there any skills or capabilities you find missing?
5. In your view, what facilitates and what constrains the development of skills and capabilities that will equip young people for a transition into the labour market?
6. How does your company keep up with cutting edge technology/latest legislative requirements in your sector?
    a. How does this feed into the workplace experiential learning you offer?
7. How do you interact with SETAs and training providers and any other agencies in terms of the design of the learning programmes you implement?
8. How well does the theoretical component offered by training providers match your needs in terms of preparing the participants for the workplace?
9. In your view, are learners committed to learning more than what is required of them?
    a. What do you think learners struggle with the most?
10. Based on your expectation and in your opinion as an employer, what skills do you expect learners to have upon commencement of the learnership and why? Which ones were lacking that you expected them to have

11. Is there any form of quality assurance on how you implement experiential learning internally, or externally by SETAs?
    a. How is this quality assurance done?
12. In your view how can learnerships be improved? Is there anything that you think your organization could do to improve the learnership implementation?

Closing

Do you have any questions on anything we discussed or anything that took place during the interview?

Are there any responses you would like to further elaborate upon?

Thank you for taking time to have this interview

Interview Schedule C – Learners (Past and current)

Learner and employer perspectives on Learnership Implementation at MultiChoice

Biographical data (FILL IN AT END)

Interviewee name/pseudo:
Interviewer:
Location:
Date:
Interview length: 60 minutes

Introductory Remarks

I am a Masters Student at the Wits School of Governance (WSG) conducting a study on Learner and employer perspectives on learnership Implementation with a focus on Multichoice which falls under the Media Information Communications and Telecommunications Sector (MICT). The study is based on the premise that learnerships are implemented as a tool to address scarce skills shortages and unemployment. However, the country is still plagued by lack of relevant skills and unemployment and this study seeks to understand your experiences and views on the implementation of learnerships to build a deeper understanding of how learnerships are implemented. I would like to obtain your perceptions on learnership implementation.

Please take note that this process is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time if you do not feel comfortable. The interview remains confidential and a pseudo-name of your choice can be used. The information will only be used for purposes of this study only and later will be destroyed.

I also need to record this conversation in order to be able to transcribe it and do a general analysis along with other interviews at a later stage. Do I have your informed consent for us to proceed?

Opening

A. (Establish Rapport) My name is _____ and as explained, I am interviewing various stakeholder involved in learnership implementation. Tell me what position do you hold and what does your role entail?

B. (Purpose) I would like to ask you some questions as a learner that has is currently on a learnership programme with Multichoice to obtain your views and opinions on learnership implementation.

C. (Motivation) I hope to use this information to better understand your perspectives on the topic.

D. (Timeline) The interview should take about 60 minutes.

Main Questions

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

What is your age category?	18 - 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 and older

What Gender are you?	Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to Say

What is the highest educational qualification that you have obtained?	NQF Level
Honours / Master's degree	7
First Degree / Higher Diploma	6
Diploma / Occupational certificate	5
Matric / N3	4
Std 9 / Gr11 / N2	3
Std 8 / Gr10 / N1	2
ABET 4 / Std 7 / Gr9	1
ABET 3 / Std 5 / Gr7	0
ABET 2 / Std 3 / Gr5	0
ABET 1 / Std 1 / Gr3	0
No Schooling	

Learnership details:

What is the name of the learnership you attended /attending?	
What is the level of the learnership?	
How long will this learnership take to complete?	
Employment details	
What is your current job title?	
Have you had any previous work experience? If yes, please list the types of job functions / roles you have /had.	
Where did you get your previous work experiences?	
State the total number of years of work experience.	

1. If you think about the time before you started the learnership, how would you describe your situation?

2. Can you think about why you wanted to participate in this particular learnership programme?.

Getting onto the Learnership

3. When you think back to before you started the course, how did you know or how did you hear the term learnership?

4. How did you hear about the learnership?

5. Before a person starts a training or employment programme, they have certain expectations. Can you please tell us what your expectations are/were of the learnership.

6. Thinking back to the process when you applied for enrolment onto the learnership, describe what you faced in applying? What stood out for you?

Starting the Learnership Programme

7. Once you were selected and started the learnership programme, how was your onboarding process onto the programme? Into the organization?

8. What resources and/or support are available at your learnership in the workplace? Are there any resources that you feel are missing?

9. May you please give me examples of some of the practical training you receive in the work place in this learnership? What aspects would you improve?

10. Do you have a mentor or supervisor? If yes what are your views on what is working? What aspects do you think can be improved? What are your expectations or needs from the mentor or supervisor?

11. How do you use the theory you have learnt at the workplace? Which aspects of theory would you enhance to support your learning?

12. In what ways do you think the learnership contributes to your productivity?

13. What was the most enjoyable part of the learnership experience and what was the toughest or most difficult part of the experience?

14. When you think back to the expectations that you had before joining the learnership and consider your situation now – do you think that the learnership programme has been able to meet your expectations and how?

Future Plans

15. Once you have complete the learnership what are your career plans for the future?

Current Employees that completed a learnership

Questions 16-22 are only for learners that have completed the learnership

16. Having recently completed the learnership programme how do you perceive that the qualification and experience you obtained from the learnership has impacted on your life / standard of living today/career?

17. Do you feel that the learnership was suited to your personal interest and capabilities? If yes why, if no why? (in other words you felt that you were over or under qualified for the learnership)

18. Has the learnership qualification allowed you to get promoted at your place of work? Please explain.

19. Would you say you have been able to apply new skills from the learnership into your current job? Please explain how you have been able / unable to do this (in other words – has it made your life at work easier / are you better able to cope or do your job?)

20. Have you been able to leave the job you were in at the time prior to completing your learnership and are now working in a job which you consider to be better than the previous one (in any way tangible and intangible)? In other words, has the learnership experience / qualification made you more employable? Explain how you think the learnership programme enabled you to do this

21. Have you applied to enrol for another learnership since completing this one /Would you consider applying for another learnership and why?

22. On the whole do you consider that the learnership qualification has or has not benefited you personally and why?

Closing

Do you have any questions on anything we discussed or anything that took place during the interview?

Are there any responses you would like to further elaborate upon?

Thank you for taking time to have this interview