Introduction

South African economy is experiencing a socio-economic problem that is marked by the high rate of unemployment since the democratic dispensation, especially the Eastern Cape Province. This continued high unemployment rate in Mthatha has given rise to a discussion on the disposition of employer’s perspective on graduates’ employability skills. It regularly and reasonably appeared that graduates have been particularly hard hit by the slowdown less reasonably, however, this contention is often based on the changes which have occurred in youth unemployment rates (O’Higgins, 2001). It is necessary to study topics such as graduate unemployment because considerable resources have been invested in the department of education.

The unemployment rate of Eastern Cape is 37.5 percent (StatsSA, 2019). In a study by Mncayi (2016), it was highlighted that graduates mentioned a deficit of labor market knowledge and a lack of self-confidence as the causes of unemployment. After investigating 20 of South Africa’s largest firms across a range of sectors, (Pauw, Bhorat, Goga, Ncube, & Van de Westhuizen (2006) found that employers considered graduate employability skills such as communication skills of listening and speaking, work related experience and workplace readiness required for the workplace. From the larger number of students such as 100 000 graduating every year from different higher institutions in South Africa, very few percentages of graduates who got jobs after graduating which...
constituted of about sixteen percent. Thirty four percent of graduates are willing to take the jobs that they are offered (Altbeker & Strome, 2013; Adams, Khan, Raeside & White, 2007).

The study highlighted the reflection of a high unemployment rate of graduates in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, with the view of providing the basis for making policies, especially regarding the issue of unemployment of graduates. The design and formulation of this study might suggest the various approaches to try alternative ways of alerting graduates about employer’s expectations on employability skills. It seems like the increasing crisis of graduate unemployment will not change any time soon, the study is aimed at recommending solutions that can be taken in order to impart graduate employability skills and decrease graduate unemployment. The study may create a new forum in which all the stakeholders like the government plays a dominant role and promote private enterprise, form new enterprise, with the purpose of mobilising resources on the goal of solving high unemployment rate among graduates

There are many contradicting views about the expectations, satisfaction and important employability as perceived by employers all over hence the study aims to get the perspectives of employers in Mthatha. Again, most graduates are not sure of employability skills expected by employers. The topic of research is important because it will reveal the views and expectations of employers on important employability skills that are required currently in South African labour market. In this regard, necessary remedial steps may be followed in decreasing graduate unemployment by equipping them with the desired skills.

Against this backdrop, this study aimed to establish the expected skills that the employers want the graduates to possess. The study research question therefore is: What are the most important employability skills employers expect graduates to possess for an entry-level job? Quantitative research approach was utilized to answer the research question of the study. In presenting the findings of the study, this paper begins with an Introduction section, followed by the literature review, theoretical framework and the methodological approach that was followed. The data analysis and empirical finding were thereafter presented, followed by the discussions, conclusion and implications of the study to policy and practice.

Literature Review

Employers views on employability skills that graduates lack

The study conducted on the employer survey on a sample size of 2,411 entities in Slovakia indicated that over one third of employers, employed graduates in the last two years; but most of the employers did not employ graduates. The main findings on the reasons for the refusal of employers to hire graduates included the deficit of relevant practical experience and out of proportion of salary requirements (Janková, 2015). Lisá Hennelová & Newman (2019) found that graduates lack appropriate skills such as passion of working extra hours. Pham & Udoh (2021) complain that graduates lack employability skills and they do not know how to draft curriculum vitae.

Research studies established that there are different perspectives on the quality of employability skills, there is an employer’s view on the quality of competencies and graduate student’s view (Letovancová & Lisá, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Ju, Zhang & Pacha 2012; Naveed, Jabeen & Ullah, 2014; Janková, 2015; Muyako & Seedwell, 2015; Low, Botes, & Dela Rue, 2016). Various common problems of unemployment include the lack of essential employability skills (The Gallup Organization, 2010; Clarke, 2017; Messum, Jackson, Wilkes & Peters, 2017).

Findings of the research in the sector of technical and economical spheres have indicated that employers expect graduates to possess specific technical abilities in the study field and fewer communication skills (Seedwell & Muyako, 2015). The study conducted in the economic and IT industries has revealed that employers in contrast to graduates rate soft skills more necessary in their organizations than the discipline skills such as being punctual, managing time, ethical awareness, communication skills of listening and speaking, when compared to graduates who rate soft skills as important than the skills such as punctuality, managing time, ethical awareness, communication skills of listening and speaking (Naveed et al., 2014).

Employers regard the expected skills for the vacancies which are problem-solving, technical ability and practical abilities. The skills necessary for the interpersonal relationships are effective management of time and caring for customers as the main employability skills that are lacking in job applications. Employers perceived graduates in workplaces having the greatest weaknesses in the spheres of working well with people such as managing time, working well with a team, caring for customers, emotional intelligence, employee motivation; persuasion of others and analytical skills (UKCES, 2016).

According to Letovancová & Lisá (2008) employers perceived graduates seeking for employment to lack customer orientation, the principle of loyalty, ethical awareness and self-reflection. Employers experienced the greatest challenges when recruiting graduates because of the poor job preparation of graduates and inadequate salary requirements. Employers complained that graduates lack basic employability skills expected for the entry-level position in the work organization (Carnevale, Gainer & Meltzer, 1990; Candy & Crebert, 1991; U.S Department of labor, 1991; Cappelli, 1992). The labor market is expecting the higher institutions to produce competent graduates, although there is a continued gap. There are complaints from employers that some graduates lack important skill required to get a job and have a successful career. Institutions of higher learning and Department of Education need to form a working relationship and work closely together to come up with measures that can be used to overcome the deficit of skills shortage and match the university’s supply and market’s (Ranasinghe & Herath, 2011).
ACNielsen Research Services (2000) indicated the employer’s perspective of importance employability skills. Findings of the study indicated the main lacking skills among graduates which are creativity and innovation skills; communications skills; and abilities to solve conflicts. Graduates of engineering and other surveyed courses from both the University and TAFE sectors were measured to be particularly at solving problems and communications skills, interpersonal skills, numeracy and communication skills of which employers consider such skills as important. Graduates from services, hospitality and transportation courses from the TAFE sector were particularly good in computer skills, understanding of the business practice, handling pressure, mathematical and oral communication skills. Faculty of Arts, humanities and social sciences courses or business, administration and economics courses rated as the highest graduates overall either had and these qualifications were likely to be from the university sector (ACNielsen Research Services, 2000).

Charner (1988) reported employers’ reasons for not hiring graduates which includes the low grade average and low levels of academic achievement, an attitudes that is poor, deficit in confidence, lack of objectives; lack of self-motivation, deficit of enthusiasm, lack of drive, lack of leadership abilities; interview preparations, reading and writing skills and mathematical skills.

The perceptions of employers on employability skills that graduates should possess to get employment.

In a highly competitive labor market, skills are often emphasized that university students acquire during their studies, beyond cognitive knowledge and academic proficiency (Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Mason, Gearon & Valkanova, 2006). Employers complain about poor performance by new graduates. The curriculum content includes the skills and knowledge that students need to attain, and higher institution methods fail to empower them to obtain these employability skills. Azmi, Kamin, Noordin & Nasir (2018) found that employers expect graduates to have non-technical skills such as communication skills in English, working with team abilities, crisis management skills, critical thinking, computer skills as well as entrepreneur skills.

Osman, Weerakkody, Hindi & Eldabi (2019) found employers expectation of graduate employability skills for the job market. These skills include communication skills, problem-solving skills, an ability to work well with a team, leadership skills, self-management skills, time management, planning and organizing skills, academic knowledge, negotiation skills, an ability to work well under pressure, commercial awareness and creativity. There is much theoretical learning with little practice (Nyirenda 2012).

Nganga (2014) observed that about fifty percent of graduates produced by East African universities are not ready for the labor market. Tomlinson (2008) stated that student credentials are the most important factor to future employability, as they are advantageous in the labor market, while Samuel, Coombes, Miranda, Melvin, Young and Azarmina (2004) found low levels of computer proficiency among students. It can, therefore, be argued that, for graduates to compete in the job market, a graduate seeking employment need to have the required skills, in addition to an academic qualification.

Rothwell, Herbert and Rothwell (2008) have warned against the tendency by universities to concentrate on classroom teaching and neglect other important skills that can be acquired through practical training. Fallows and Steven (2000) is of the view that employers of graduates would rather recruit graduates who do not only have specific skills and knowledge, but have the ability also to be proactive and respond to problems creatively and autonomously. The traditional undergraduate degree with a focus on cognition and a narrow theoretical framework is not efficient to produce the well-rounded, multi-skilled, flexible and adaptable graduates demanded by businesses (Hodges & Burchell, 2003). Employers expect graduates to have employability skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, leadership skills, analytical skills and creativity skills. According to employers, these are the essential skills for graduates to be able to think, analyse and make decisions for the growth of the company (Lisá, Hennelová & Newman, 2019).

Also, Ar tess, Hooley and Mellor-Bourne (2014) argue that, during the recruitment stage, employers emphasize the value of practical, work-related experience, rather than candidates’ academic certificates. The study of Workplace by Carnevale and Gainer (1989) mentioned the important skills that employers expect which are employability skills in reading and writing, numeracy skills; effective communication traits; an ability to adapt solving-conflict and creative and innovation; developing a self-esteem, career awareness and future planning; interpersonal abilities and ability to work well with a team; negotiation and influential skills and leadership skills. Employers expect graduates to have an ability to work with a team, have a risk management skill and decision-making skills (Al-Shehab, Al-Hashimi, Madbouly, Reyad & Hamdan, 2020)

Conference Board of Canada (2000) outlined the employability skills required in the contemporary workplace which includes Important abilities such as communication abilities, an ability to manage information, mathematical skills, problem solving skills; individual supervision skills such as demonstrating positive viewpoint and conduct, responsiveness, adjustment, and accept recurring learning; and working well with a team in cooperatively working together in task and assignments required in the company. Studies highlighted that communication skills, analytical skills and solve conflicts skills, an ability to work well with a team member, tackle unfamiliar problems, and planning and organizing skills are demanded by employers in the labor market (Borin & Watkins, 1998; GCCA, 1999). Employers expect graduates to have a behaviours that is professional, leadership skills, conflict solving skills, management of the time abilities, communication skills and ability to work well alone and with a team (Tsitskari, Goudas, Tsalouchou & Michalopoulou, 2017).

In a study that covered more than 100 employers, Finch, Halmilton, Riley & Zehna (2013) indicated that employers rated soft skills as the most important expected and academic certificate as the least important employability skill. The bottom line with this employability skills lies on graduates’ readiness to work on a certain position with appropriate skills for effective functioning.
Organizations are continuously recruiting graduates in order to raise their human capital and enable growth and constant innovation and developments in performance (McDermott, Mangan, & O’Connor, 2006). Findings of the study by Dhaliwal & Misra (2020) highlighted those graduates are expected to possess communication skills of speaking and writing, ethical awareness, conflict management, interpersonal skills, self-development, an ability to work well with a team, an attitude that is positive, self-management, customer orientation skills, management of time, computer sciences and an attitude that is professional.

Technical knowledge of graduates is a default factor and ideal skills that make it possible for graduates to get employment. Soft skills are regarded as fundamental employability skills so that graduates can be able to use their technical skills productively and successfully (Nasir, Tariq & Faiz-ur, 2011). Findings of the study on marketing courses mentioned that solving problem skills are important employability skills to prepare students to match the demands of employers in the current labor market (Diamond, Koernig & Iqbal, 2008). Also, Hodges and Burchell (2003) found that employers emphasize the soft skills of graduates, their ability to deal understandably and productively with the demands of the job. Support evidence was supplied that employers view graduates having impractical expectations of their labor industry life and are without interpersonal skills. Findings of the study have mentioned that solving conflict skills, handling tool competency, presentation skills, and ability to work well with a team are the necessary employability skills demanded by employers of graduates (Saad & Majid, 2014). Findings of the study indicated the skills that employers considered as important and expected skills and, in the analyses, these skills identified are effective communication abilities, an ability to read and write skills, statistical skills; passion and devotion skills (Martin, Vileneuve-Smith, Marshall & McKenzie, 2008).

**Theoretical Framework**

The human capital theory is of the view that knowledge, skills and capacities gained from the higher institution of learning improves the productivity of individuals, which then increases job functionality. Education is considered to provide employability skills that are marketable and abilities required in the job market, such that the more the people who are highly educated, the more they will be successful in getting employment in the labor market and get income. The human capital theory is the explanatory theory for the conflict between educational attainment and labor market demands. The assumption of this theory is based on the view that employers can make an objective and rational evaluation of the job-seekers’ employability skills (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964).

This theory assumes that the high unemployment rate is associated with uncertainties such as lack of employability skills. According to this theory, graduates gain skills and knowledge during the period spent in higher institution of learning and the time invested in education and work-related experience gained are indicators of productivity and performance of the job applicant. It also assumes that the more the person is not working the less the human capital the person will have and the person may lose the skills that they already have if they are not working. The longer the duration of unemployment the greater the depreciation or decrease in the expected potential human capital. The study used the human capital theory because the gist of the topic of the study is about the employability skills that graduates need to get employment and the human capital theory explains all the characteristics the graduates got from higher institutions like all the knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, training, and wisdom possessed by individuals which are needed by employers for productivity and reach the goals of the company (Becker, 1964).

Basically, employability skills are considered as the human resources the company needs for the better performance and improved image of the company. The theory itself is about the transition from higher institution to the workplace. Every employer has specific employability skills they are looking for, from their job seekers for a certain post which means the employability skills differ hence the study aims at knowing the expectations and satisfactions of employers on employability skills of graduates.

**Research Methodology**

**Research Approach**

Research methodology includes procedure of how an inquiry should be carried out following a certain method (Schwardt, 2007). This study employed quantitative research methodology and also descriptive research design to ascertain the perspectives, in terms of employers’ dispositions on new graduate’s employability skills. This was with the aim of showing relationship between variables (Van der Merwe, 1996) and ensure objectivity,generalizability and reliability in the analysis (Weinreich, 2009).

**Study population, Sample and Procedure**

As study population is defined as the set of events, people in an area or things targeted by the study and the findings are meant to be passed to (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013), the population of the study reported in this paper include employers of public and private work organizations within the health and education sectors in Mthatha, South Africa. A stratified random sampling procedure was employed to select a sample of 41 organizational representatives (employers) that participated in this study. This procedure ensures a fairly equal representation of variables of the study allows for the researcher to group a population into different cohorts, called strata making sure that each element of the population belongs to only one stratum.

The sample was pre-divided into two equal strata, one for the public sector and the other for the private sector. Health and educational organizations which meet the criteria set in this study were grouped into both sectors. In each and every stratum, random sampling
was done using the simple method, considering the time frame, cost of travelling, movements and waiting period to get attention of the managers within the selected organizations. The stratified random sampling made it easy to select a diverse characteristic of managers including managers of both the private and public sector.

For the study reported in this paper, 41 respondents made up of employers of the public and private sector in the institution of health and education were interviewed. The respondents were divided into 2 strata, one for the public sector and for the private sector. The study targeted institutions within both public and private sector hence the researcher chose department of health and education in Mthatha which would meet the requirements of its availability in both sectors. The researcher decided to use 41 respondents because these are the employers within the scope of the study and the researcher had to do a manageable target considering costs of travelling and the waiting period to get the attention of the employers within these institutions.

**Method of data collection and analysis**

Data was collected using a survey method through a questionnaire technique. An oral permission was granted to the researcher by various organizations, to conduct this study among their organizational representatives or managers. This method allowed the researcher to survey respondents within a limited period by gathering relevant information from individual participants. The survey instrument (questionnaire) was a standardized, structured, close-ended questionnaire that allowed all participants to respond to the same questions. The questionnaire contained basic demographic questions and other sections that have questions designed to probe into the objectives of this study. Except for the demographics, participants responded to the 13 Item Likert scale type in the other sections that seek to elicit information on employers’ expectations on employability skills that graduates should possess at entry level. In the course of data collection, the research purpose was explained to the managers, after asking for their permission to participate before handing out the self-administered questionnaires. The managers did not want any formal application for the permission, as they preferred to willingly respond anonymously. Given that the type of data sought and collected were in quantitative form, various descriptive statistical tools in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyze the data from collected through the questionnaires.

**Ethical considerations**

In the conduct of this study all required ethics protocols were observed and followed. All participants were provided with an Informed Consent Form, which the willingly signed in order to participate. While confidentiality and anonymity was maintained, participants were neither forced nor made to remain as participants in the study when they are no longer interested. Oral permission was granted by respective anonymous participants from various organizations before the study proceeded.

**Analysis and Findings**

**Socio-demographic distribution of the Participants**

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents who participated in this study, as presented in Table 1. According to the profile, 58.8% of respondents are males, while 41.5% are female. Males are known to have qualities of management, strong skills and are strong while females are regarded as weak and lack management qualities. Marital status shows 43.9% of respondents being married, 36.6% never married; while 19.5% of respondents are separated.

The majority of respondents are married, looking at their experience at management, it seems that they are the managers who have been working for years and should have been married if they are ready and married status is one of the stability measures that employers look for before when recruiting. The respondents did not get married because most of graduates’ workers these days are the career pursuers more that the family pursers. They want to achieve so much before they can be committed to a marriage. Race of respondents indicated 65.9% of Black African respondents, 24.4% of respondents are Colored; 7.3% of respondents are Indians and 2.4% of respondents are Whites. The majority of respondents are of Black African, simple because the study was conducted in Mthatha, Eastern Cape Province where Black people dominate. The minority of respondents are other races like Colored, Indians and Whites because most of them are managers of private entities, and they’re not many private schools and health owned by them in Mthatha.

The sector of employments shows 51.2% of respondents in the public sector and 48.8% of respondents in the private sector. The majority of respondents are employers of the public sector because there are many public health and education work organizations than private work organization in Mthatha; hence the minorities of respondents are employers in the private sector.

The size of the organization shows 80.5% of respondents in less than 50 people and 19.5% of respondents in 50 – 100 people in the organization. The minority of respondents is the 50 – 100 people which represent the number of employees in the organization. There are few organizations that account for more than 50 employees because this can cost them so much salary and wages expense. The majority of respondents who are in the organization with less than 50 people, taking into account that this number is only for the workers, Private schools and health always have few employees, also in public education, there can never be over 30 staff. In primary schools, there are only 8 grades while in high school there are 4 grades so the department cannot hire over 50 staff. The work organization indicates 51.2% of respondents in the department of health and 48.7% of respondents in the department of education.
The majority of respondents are from the department of health because the researcher saw many health institutions in the study area hence, we there is a higher percentage in health.

Table 1: Socio-demographic distribution of respondents

| Attributes               | Categories        | Response N (%) |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Sex of respondents      | Male              | 24 (58.5)      |
|                         | Female            | 17 (41.4)      |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |
| Marital status of respondents | Never Married   | 15 (36.6)      |
|                         | Separated/Divorced| 8 (19.5)       |
|                         | Married           | 18 (43.9)      |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |
| Race of respondents     | White             | 1 (2.4)        |
|                         | Indian/Asian      | 2 (4.9)        |
|                         | Coloured          | 10 (24.4)      |
|                         | Black African     | 28 (68.3)      |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |
| The sector of the organization | Public Sector  | 21 (51.2)      |
|                         | Private Sector    | 20 (48.8)      |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |
| The size of the organization | < 50 people    | 33 (80.5)      |
|                         | 50 – 100 people   | 8 (19.5)       |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |
| Work organization       | Health            | 21 (51.2)      |
|                         | Education         | 20 (48.8)      |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |
| Years of experience     | < 5 years         | 8 (19.5)       |
|                         | 5 – 9 years       | 8 (19.5)       |
|                         | 10 and above years| 25 (61.0)      |
|                         | Total             | 41 (100)       |

The minority of respondents is from the department of education because most of employers in the department of education did not like to participate in the study, reason being that they have been participating in many studies and they are too busy preparing for exams since some of them are teachers themselves. The years of experience show 58.5% for the respondents who are 10 years and above experienced and 19.5% for the respondents whose experience varies between 5 years and 9 years.

The majority of respondents are employers with 10 years and above experience because some started to be the deputy managers for years now they are managers and some were employed for the management position they were never promoted hence there is a higher percentage. The minority of respondents with 5 years to 9 years’ experience who were promoted to the management position because of the experience they have of that institution.

Manager’s expectations on employability skills that graduates should possess for entry-level

This section presents the expectations of managers on employability skills that graduates should have to be employable. The varieties of skills are listed and the respondents were asked to rate the employability skills expectation from not expected, rarely expected; expected and mostly expected. The respondents’ different views are presented in Table 2. The majority (68.3%) of managers that responded to this study mostly expect graduates to have communication skills of verbal, listening and speaking for entry-level job. It is therefore an important skill that employers target when they are recruiting.

The expectation of employers on leadership skills that graduates should possess revealed over fifty-one percent of respondents who expect graduates to have leadership skills, while 41.45% agree that it is mostly expected; 2.4% of respondents responded that graduates are not expected to have leadership skills; 4.9% of respondents responded that leadership skill is rarely expected from graduates. Even though more respondents point to the importance of this skill, it is however a skill that comes with some years of experience. The minority respondents are aware that graduates with no work experiences cannot be expected to have leadership skills because they were never in the leadership position or any position in the workplace.

On interpersonal skills, 51.2% of respondents expect graduates to have interpersonal skills, while 43.9% of respondents mostly expect the same from them. Respondents who rarely expect graduates to have interpersonal skills constituted by 4.9%. Majority of respondents mostly expect graduates to have interpersonal skills because workers are required to be able to socialize and interact
with other staff and be able to work with others. The minority of respondents rarely expect graduates to have interpersonal skills because it is not such an expected required employability skill in their organization.

The expectation of managers on the ability of graduates to work well with a team shows 31.7% respondents who just expect graduates to be able to work well with a team, while 68.3% of respondents mostly expects graduates to work well with a team. Problem-solving skills shows 39.0% of respondents who mostly expect graduates to have the skills of solving problems and 61.0% of respondents expect problem-solving skills from graduates. For Computer skills, 51.2% of managers mostly expect graduates to have such skills and 48.8% expect graduates to have computer skills. This shows that a majority of respondents mostly expect graduates to have computer skills while the minority also agreeing with the majority expects graduates to have computer skills.

**Table 2: Managers’ expectations on graduate employability skills at entry-level**

| Items                                                                 | Not expected | Rarely expected | Expected | Mostly Expected | Total |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-------|
| Graduates should have communication skills of listening and speaking | 13 (31.7)    | 2 (4.9)         | 28 (68.3)| 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have leadership skills                              | 21 (51.2)    | 17 (41.5)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have interpersonal skills                           | 21 (51.2)    | 18 (43.9)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should be able to work well with a team                    | 13 (31.7)    | 28 (68.3)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have problem solving skills                         | 16 (39.0)    | 25 (61.0)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have computer literacy skills                       | 16 (48.8)    | 21 (51.2)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have presentation skills                            | 16 (39.0)    | 25 (61.0)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have quantitative skills                            | 16 (39.0)    | 25 (61.0)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have quantitative skills                            | 2 (4.9)      | 4 (9.8)         | 13 (31.7)| 22 (53.7)       | 41 (100) |
| Graduates should have creativity and innovation skills               | 20 (48.8)    | 21 (51.2)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have planning and organizing skills                 | 14 (34.1)    | 27 (65.9)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have reading and writing skills                     | 6 (14.6)     | 35 (85.4)       |          | 41 (100)        |
| Graduates should have ethical awareness                              | 15 (36.6)    | 26 (63.4)       |          | 41 (100)        |

Respondents who mostly expect graduates to have presentation skills constitutes 60%, while 39.0% of respondents have just expectation. In the workplace, presentations are likely to occur so the graduate seeking employment should be able to deliver information to audience in a way that the audience could understand and employers need such graduates. With regard to the expectation of managers on quantitative skills, 7.3% of respondents who rarely expect graduates to have quantitative skills while 53.7% of respondents expect graduates to have quantitative skills. Over thirty percent of respondents mostly expect graduates to have quantitative skills. Similarly, while 4.9% of respondents do not expect graduates to have research skills, 9.8% of respondents rarely expect graduates to have research skills. On the other hand, 31.7% of respondents expect such skill from graduates and 53.7% of respondents mostly expect graduates to have research skills. The majority of respondents mostly expect graduates to have research skills. The minority of respondents rarely expects and not expects graduates to have research skills because they feel that they can engage external researchers’ consultants if there is a matter to be researched.

Presentation of the expectation of managers on creativity and innovation employability skills shows that over fifty-one percent of graduates are mostly expected to have creativity and innovation skills and 48.8% of respondents are expected. All respondents agree that graduates are expected to have creativity and innovation skills. All Managers are looking for graduates who are creative and innovative who will bring some creativity and innovation in their workplaces. Managers’ expectation on planning and organizing skills is backed by nearly sixty-seven of respondents that mostly expect graduates to have planning and organizing skills and 34.1% of them who just expect such skills from the graduates.

All respondents though, expect graduates to have planning and organizing skills. Employers expect graduates who will be able to plan and organize agendas that need to be implemented in their organization. With regard to the manager’s expectation on reading and writing skills that graduates should have, the study indicated that 85.4% of respondents mostly expect graduates to have reading
and writing skills. All respondents expect graduates to have reading and writing skills which are vital skill for entry. No manager can employ graduates who cannot read and write. For ethical awareness, 36.6% of respondents simply expect respondents to be ethically aware and conscious, while 63.4% of them mostly expect graduates to have ethical awareness. Conclusively, all respondents expect graduates to have ethical awareness and professional because in the workplace they are supposed to behave in a certain way that is in line with the ethics.

Discussion

The employability skills that the employers were rating are communication skills of listening and speaking, leadership skills; interpersonal skills and an ability to work well with a team, problem solving skills, computer skills, presentation skills, quantitative skills, research skills, creative and innovative skills, planning and organizing skills; reading and writing skill and ethical awareness as the employability skill that the job seeking graduates should possess for entry level. The study ranked the participants’ expectation from not expected to mostly expect. Unexpectedly, all the 13 skills need areas were needed by the employers, though at different levels of affirmation. In all the skills, a majority of the managers indicated that they either expected or mostly expected such skills for graduates. Based on most expected, reading and writing, communication, team work, planning/organizing, ethical awareness, problem solving and presentation were the most recommended by the employers, in order of importance. Surprisingly, the employers mostly expect least from the young graduates in terms of quantitative skill and leadership capabilities.

While all managers expect graduates to have reading and writing skills which are vital skill for entry, this skill as the findings suggests is mostly needed by a majority of the participants. No manager can employ graduates who cannot read and write. Even though, reading and writing are part of communication skill but they are of a different kind and mostly separated from the verbal and listening skills. This apparently is because of the value that is bestowed in the writing skill for many centuries, as it is the main vehicle for record keeping, among others. Similarly, the study revealed that all employers of both private and private sector in both departments of health and education expects graduates to have communication skills for entry level. This is a skill that allows for effective communication among employees and employers and is necessary in all work organizations. Previous research in the technically and economically oriented sectors have indicated that employers expected graduates to have fewer communication of listening and speaking and more specific technical skills in the study field (Seedwell & Muyako, 2015). A research conducted in economic and IT sectors has shown that employers ranked generic employability skills as more important than discipline-specific skills such as punctuality, management of time, responsibility and communication skills (Naveed et al., 2014).

Coincidentally, the literature and the findings of study highlighted in consonance that the expected employability skills such as a communication skills of listening and speaking, an ability to analyze and solve conflicts, an ability to work well with a team, an ability to solve unusual problems, and planning and organizing skills needed in the labor market Borin and Watkins, (1998), GCCA, (1999) in Levin and Tempone (2002). These are the exact employability skills rated expected by employers in the study.

Being a team player was revealed as a very vital skill that the managers cherish in graduates. All respondents expect and mostly expect graduates to be able to work well with a team. Supporting this, the literature has revealed that an ability to work well with a team is one of the expected employability skill (Phekoa & Molefhe, 2017). Team work brings may bring less out of the individual worker but on the other hand it benefits and brings best result for the overall company or organization. This follows the Africa maxim that says: ‘if you want to go fast, you go alone but if want to go far you better go as a team.’

Organizing and planning ability remained among the most important skills that graduates should possess in order to secure a job at an entry level. Generally, employers expect graduates who will be able to adapt and work well in the place, be confident communicators, be able to think critically, solve conflicts that arises in the workplace and be able to adapt to the workplace transformations, as had previously shown in Harvey et al. (2001). While it seems simplistic to regard organizing and planning ability and skill as an important skill, yet it is obvious that this skill is needed in all aspects of organizational production and services processes. Unarguably, the reality that most employers expect graduates who will be able to plan and organize agendas that need to be implemented in their organization is not fiction. The study also substantiated the importance of sense of ethics and ethical behavior as one of the skills that employers desire in young graduates, as more managers perceive it as an attribute that is mostly expected. Ethical awareness and high sense of morality is the cornerstone of honesty and fair play, which are important ingredients in organizational sustainability. High moral standard and ethical awareness is connected with both presentation and problem solving skills in organizations. The analysis shows that problem solving is expected from all these work organizations. This finding corroborates extant literature that problem solving skill is a unique employability skill considered as fundamental for gaining employment. This skill is associated with abilities to resolve conflict, plan of action, and an ability to work well with a team (Phekoa & Molefhe, 2017).

Research skill was deemed next in importance, as it is a skilled mostly required of graduates, according to a half of the mangers who responded to this study. Research skill is a vital skill for every organization because some matters need to be investigated before an intervention or implemented ensues. Hence, managers need their employees to have such skill. Closely related to research skill is the computer literacy and quantitative skills. All respondents agree that computer literacy is expected because reason being that we are living in a 21st revolution where everything is done on a computer and this is a vital requirement for entry in the workplace.
Samuel et al. (2004) found that low levels of computer proficiency among students. It can, therefore, be argued that to compete in the labor market, a graduate needs to have the required skills, in addition to an academic qualification. Although quantitative skill is not mostly needed like other skills, however, it is an important skill that employers need in the modern world. Martin et al. (2008) highlighted the skills that employers labeled as employability skills which the absence of them can hinder employment, from their analysis numeric skills is also mentioned as a deal-breaker skill. The minority of employers rarely expects graduates to have quantitative skills because there are not much of calculations in their work organizations.

Expectedly, the findings of this study indicated the low importance that employers placed in leadership skills among graduates. Although this does not mean that leadership skills is not a skill that is desired. Realistically, it is among the skills that are developed through years of experience in the work place, which may not be visibly identified in graduates at the job entry point. Basically, the findings concluded that every graduate is expected to have leadership traits and qualities. Findings indicated that graduates are expected to have interpersonal skills although very few employers do not expect such skill from graduates. The findings of the study mentioned the employability skills expected by employers which are also outlined as expected employability skills by Conference Board of Canada (2000), these expected employability skills outlined are an effective communication skill, numeracy skills, and problem-solving skills, flexibility; an ability to adapt, and accept continuous learning; and an ability to work well with a team.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are a variety of skills that qualify to be categorized as employability skills, according to the findings of this study. While this study confirmed the relative importance of the investigated skills, it further provided an important pointer regarding their degree of need or what was investigated as the level of expectation that the employers placed on each of the skills. The findings of the study shows that in South African context, reading and writing, communication, team work, planning/organizing, ethical awareness, problem solving and presentation were the most recommended by the employers, in order of importance. Surprisingly, the employers mostly expect least from the young graduates in terms of quantitative skill and leadership capabilities. Notwithstanding the relative ratings, the above mentioned skills are expected by employers in both public and private sector in the department of health and education. A graduate seeking a job in the mentioned organizations should have these employability skills for entry level, or prepare to have them. While these findings corroborate what exists in the literature, it provides a new dimension with regard to priority skills need by employers in South African labor marker.

Implications to Policy and Practice

A gap has been found by this study regarding the non-interaction between the academic institutions and the industry. It is not enough that the employers keep their expectations about graduates to themselves. There should be some steps in closing this gap through the following:

i. Managers of Work organizations and higher institutions should form a partnership and a close relationship so that they can assist one another in building the employability skills of students in training. This would benefit both parties because universities can be updated on the current employability skills expected by employers, while employers will be getting the graduates with employability skills that are expected.

ii. All the qualifications offered in the institution of higher learning should be accompanied by a compulsory practical training or what is regarded as internship and Work Integrated Learning program.

iii. Employers should provide some feedback to the job seeking graduates who are unable to make it through the interviews, specifically in cases where skills deficit is a cause for concern.

iv. Work organizations should constantly update universities regarding the variety of employability skills expected of a graduate.

v. In return higher educational institutions should regularly keep abreast with current and required graduate skills in the industry.

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