Addressing employability challenges: a framework for improving the employability of graduates in Botswana

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ABSTRACT
While Botswana has long invested in education, high unemployment rates among the youth, females and university graduates remain a critical challenge for the country. Despite this challenge, research on the issue is scant and solutions to assist the affected groups to enhance their employability remain scarce and inaccessible. This paper employs a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive approach to investigate Botswana university students’ knowledge of employability skills and attributes. It further assesses whether there are differences between the skills and attributes that students perceive as important versus the ones that have been reported as important by the global labour market. The paper also proposes a framework for ensuring the development of employability skills and attributes by different players in the labour market. The proposed framework recognizes employability as a joint responsibility shared by training institutions, employers, incumbent employees and potential employees. Implications for future research are also discussed.

The shelf-life of knowledge can be very short. In many disciplines what is taught and how it is taught are both stalked by the threat of obsolescence. (McAleese et al., 2013, p. 13)

Regardless of a country’s developmental stage, youth unemployment remains a critical policy issue (Botswana Labour Market Observatory, 2013; The Work Foundation, 2012), forcing policy-makers to search for strategies that will ensure that diverse job-creators are able to create the right quality and quantity of jobs for the youth job seekers. Generally, qualifications, knowledge, skills, personal attributes, as well as other tangible and intangible factors play an important role in individuals’ employability. The same attributes also play a vital role in promoting employment, economic growth and inclusive societies (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2012). In terms of seeking employment, job candidates and potential employees come to the labour market with varying knowledge, competencies and abilities – broadly defined as ‘skills’ – combined with the outcome of individuals’ choices in terms of education, training and work experiences (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2014b).

However, matching job seekers with available vacancies is not an automatic process, and imbalances between the supply and demand for people exist in all economies – and are sometimes inevitable (WEF, 2014b). This gap between the skills required on the job market and those possessed by individuals also raise questions relating to the ability of societies to capitalize on their workforce (WEF, 2014b). This ability of societies to fully utilize and capitalize on their workforce is especially important in developing...
societies like Botswana, where the contribution of all individuals is critical to the country’s general development, growth and sustainability. The skills demand challenges are compounded by the labour market, which is becoming more skill intensive – not only in the private sector but also in parastatals and government sectors – demanding a speedy solution to the employability challenge.

The main objective of the current study was to investigate employability skills awareness by university students in Botswana. For the purpose of the current study, employability refers to the graduate’s potential to gain the skills required to succeed in a graduate-level job placement (adopted from The UK Commission for Employment and Skills [UKCES], 2009 and Yorke, 2005). The second objective of the paper was to propose a framework that could be used to facilitate the development of employability skills and attributes among university students and graduates through strengthening the links between stakeholders in the Botswana labour market.

Generally, it can be said that education significantly increases the chances of being employed (Alao et al., 2009), making universities critical stepping stones to ‘good jobs’ for many young adults across the world (Lowden, Hall, Elliot, & Lewin, 2011). While Botswana has long invested in education, there would seem to be persistent challenges relating to the quality of the country’s labour force. Since 2010, The Global Competitiveness Report has identified a poor work ethic and the lack of an appropriately educated labour force as among the top five constraints to doing business in Botswana. During the six-year period (2010–2015), a poor work ethic in the national labour force has remained the top most problematic factor for doing business in Botswana. In addition, an inadequately educated labour force was ranked second in 2010, third in 2011, third in 2012, fourth in 2013, second in 2014, and fifth in 2015 (WEF, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014a, 2015).

Unemployment in the country remains high, for example, in 2010 it stood at 17.8%. Currently, unemployment is at an alarming rate of 20% (Statistics Botswana: BAIS IV, 2013). A breakdown of the statistics further shows that the youth and female unemployment rates in Botswana have been persistently higher than the national unemployment statistics (BOCCIM, 2012; Motlaleng, 2014). Youth unemployment (the percentage of the total labour force aged between 15 and 24) in Botswana was last measured at 33.90% for the period 2011–2015 (The World Bank, 2013). It is important to highlight that while the World Bank has reported statistics of youth between the ages of 15 and 24, according to the Botswana’s Revised National Youth Policy 2010, in Botswana, youth refers to persons of ages 15–35 years.

Research has further indicated that employment among the youth and graduates in Botswana lags behind that of other economies with similar income levels (Dorsey, Basdevant, Kim, & Limi, 2007). This has led to conclusions that because nearly two-thirds of the unemployed in Botswana are under the age of 30, Botswana’s unemployment problem is primarily a youth unemployment problem (United Nations System in Botswana, 2007). The Botswana Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Mr. Kenneth Matambo, has further lamented the fact that there is a mismatch between the supply and demand for labour in Botswana (Republic of Botswana, 2010), one of the factors that has been blamed for the country’s unemployment challenges (Siphambe, 2004).

The United Nations System in Botswana (2007) further asserted that although there are other factors besides education that affect youth unemployment, the level of youth unemployment in the country indicates that education is not sufficiently preparing school leavers for the world of work – whether in terms of skills, attitudes and/or expectations. Botswana has to address these challenges because the high levels of youth unemployment have wider social, psychological and economic implications (The Work Foundation, 2012), as well as political stability implications (Urdal, 2006, 2012).

Botswana’s labour force challenges are also exacerbated by the current trends in the labour market; a market described by Tarique and Schuler (2010) as increasingly global, complex and highly competitive. Globalization and access to information, fast-tracked by platforms such as e-learning, Facebook, Twitter, and many other information communication technologies simultaneously produce other unprecedented changes such as access to information and different views of how work ought to be done. These trends further suggest that regardless of the location, size, sector or industry, organizations of the future are bound to be profoundly different from current organizations, requiring different types of resources (i.e. technological, financial, as well as human).
The employability of graduates in a country like Botswana is important because, generally, the expectation from parents, graduates, educational financiers such as government sponsors and employers is that institutions of higher learning should ensure that there is an alignment between what is learnt at school and what is required by the world of work. For graduates, gaining employability skills and attributes is important because while many employers are prepared to fund training to help employees develop more sophisticated job-related skills, it has been reported that employers are not prepared to help people develop the skills that are regarded as a basic requirement for employment (Martin, Villeneuve-Smith, Marshall, & McKenzie, 2008).

Furthermore, in a developing country like Botswana, many family units are highly dependent on the income of a first-generation university/college graduate, leading to disappointments when their children find it difficult to find employment upon graduation. In Botswana, many students migrate from small rural villages and towns to the larger urban centres to attend university (Pheko, Monteiro, Tlhabano, & Mphele, 2014) and a significant number of these students can be characterized as ‘first-generation’ university/college students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these first-generation university/college students are most likely to graduate without certain employability skills. Compared to their counterparts (i.e. second, or third, or fourth-generation university students) they are likely to lack professional mentors and family level reference points that could assist in developing employability skills and in accessing professional networks that could assist them in being placed in professional attachments and internships. Consequently, Botswana’s tertiary education system ought to see itself as having a key responsibility for meeting the needs of these students who will essentially be expected to perform in an increasingly, diversified, globalized, and knowledge-based labour market (Government of Botswana: Ministry of Education & Skills Development, 2008).

**Literature review**

**Botswana: the context**

When Botswana gained independence in 1966, the country was one of the poorest countries in the world and depended mainly on foreign assistance and cattle farming for economic growth (Barclay, 2008). For example, in 1972, the majority (i.e. 88.6%) of the population employed in the formal sector had only a primary school education or less (Poteete, 2009). It should be noted that while Botswana still shares the problems of poverty, high unemployment and income distribution disparity with other African countries (Siphambe, 2004), the country’s prudent management of its economy and its democratic practices have enabled it to move from being the third poorest country in the world to take its place as an upper middle income country (Beaulier, 2003; Siphambe, 2004).

Furthermore, for years since independence there has been sizeable spending on education and this has resulted in impressive gains as the country has nearly doubled the sub-Saharan African rate of primary and secondary school enrolments (Siphambe, 2004). To date, the government still aspires for the nation to be ‘educated and informed’ through its Vision 2016 by providing basic education to its citizens. This commitment to and appreciation of the value of education is consistently demonstrated by the fact that Ministry of Education and Skills Development continues to enjoy the largest share (i.e. + P7.93 billion or 22.98%) of the country’s recurrent budget. The country also has a Revised National Policy on Education (1994) which presents a comprehensive strategy for education and training intended to assist in meeting the twenty-first-century human resource needs and ensuring that education contributes to the realization of the country’s development goals (Government of Botswana: Ministry of Education & Skills Development, 2008). In particular, the country through its Ministry of Education has formulated policies to ensure that all qualified Batswana aged between 18 and 24 years have access to a quality tertiary education that is responsive to the student’s personal well-being, societal progress, and the country’s economic development (Government of Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2008).

Depending on performance at secondary school and the choice of programme of study, the vast
majority of students who qualify to go to either tertiary institutions or vocational training centres are provided with loans, grants and/or sponsorship by the Botswana government.

In addition, the country, in recognizing the current and future economic demands for human resources and skills, established the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) in 1999. The TEC was later upgraded to the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), which has a broader mandate; namely, to … “provide for policy advice on all matters of National Human Resource Development … [and] co-ordinate and promote the implementation of the National Human Resource Development Strategy” (HRDC, 2015). Between 2003 and 2010, the country also established the Botswana Labour Market Observatory (LMO), which is mandated to coordinate and harmonize labour market data (Botswana Labor Market Observatory, 2013).

In terms of the characteristics of the labour market, Botswana is similar to other Southern Africa’s labour markets as it consists of segments such as rural and urban, formal and informal and public and private (Ncube, 2008). According to Botswana’s National Human Resource Development Strategy of 2009, the structure of the labour force in Botswana has also changed considerably from an agricultural sector-led to a formal sector-led labour market. Specifically, by 2008, 47.2% of the Botswana’s labour force had jobs in the formal sector – with the fastest growing sectors being finance, business services, manufacturing, trade, transport and communications, and government (Republic of Botswana: Ministry of Education & Skills Development, 2009). These changes necessitate research to inform human resources development strategies and prevent skills mismatch. Despite this need for research, Siphambe (2003) has long warned that training institutions run the risk of training graduates that are not appropriate for the labour market because institutions do not conduct tracer studies of their graduates. To date, research in this area remains scarce. In one study investigating the university graduates’ transition from higher education to employment, Ama (2008) revealed that on average, graduates made at least thirteen contacts before getting their first employment. The findings from the study further revealed that graduates had to wait a minimum of 4.6 months before getting their first employment. The findings from the study further revealed that graduates had to wait on the average 4.6 months before getting their first employment. The study further revealed that 73% of the graduates found themselves in jobs that matched their level of education. However, this research focused on one faculty, and was conducted in 2008.

Despite lack of empirical research investigating Botswana’s labour market, the existing policies and institutions, such as Ministry of Education policies, the Botswana Labour Market Observatory and the Botswana Human Resource Development Council, tempt one to assume that the country would have adequately facilitated the employability of tertiary institutions graduates. However, despite the country’s investment in education and good education policies, the country’s high economic ratings and high literacy rate (Maruatuna, 2011), high unemployment rates among females, the youth and university graduates in Botswana remain a concern.

**Understanding employability**

Employability has been defined as an individual’s ability to gain and maintain initial employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment if necessary, and/or generally secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Similarly, Yorke (2005) defines employability as a graduate’s potential for obtaining and succeeding in a graduate-level job placement. Others have defined employability skills as ‘the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job’ (The UK Commission for Employment and Skills [UKCES], 2009). The extant literature generally refers to the concept of employability, but recently many policy-makers have used the term as shorthand for the individual’s employability skills and attributes (McQuaid, Green, & Danson, 2005). Employability landscape is complex, particularly because it may be influenced by individual factors (e.g. employability skills and attributes), personal circumstances (e.g. household circumstances: McQuaid et al., 2005), internal labour market within the organization, external factors (e.g. demand factors and general labour-market factors: McQuaid et al., 2005; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Hillage & Pollard, 1998), as well as by the organization’s career management practices (Juhdi, Pa’Wan, Othman, & Moksin, 2010).
Employability has an important influence on any career, thus, investigation into the employability of graduates has gained the attention of researchers, individual graduates, institutions of higher learning and employers. To this end, concern for graduates' readiness for the world of work has led to research interest in the concepts of graduate employability (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Martin et al., 2008; McQuaid et al., 2005; Yorke, 2005; Yorke & Knight, 2006). The concept of employability should therefore be understood as a complex mosaic (Forrier & Sels, 2003) – involving the employed, the unemployed, current employees, future employees, governments, employers (both current and future), sponsors and the general labour market.

**Employability implications for job candidates and employees**

For job candidates and employees, enhancing employability increases the value of employees in both the current and future places of employment (De Grip, Van Loo, Sanders, & Roa, 1999). For this group, employability has an important influence on the individual's livelihood and prospects for the future. It also has implications for their careers – whether at the beginning stage, during the building stage, or in the final stage (Charner, 1988). This suggests that potential and current employees have a clear responsibility in the development of their employability (Martin et al., 2008). Furthermore, for many students across the world, the reality is that while many of them enter institutions of higher learning in the present, they become job candidates for companies in the future. This makes it important for the current students to clearly understand what future employers will require from them so that they proactively compliment their formal education with their own parallel individual self-development plans.

**Employability implications for the employers**

For current and future organizations (i.e. employers), the environment in which business operates has made finding and managing talent a complex, turbulent and a mammoth task (Cheese, Thomas, & Craig, 2008). In addition, while employees are searching for opportunities for self-development, employers are looking for competent employees with the ability to minimize the organization's training costs (Juhdi et al., 2010) and maximize its productivity. This makes it important for employers to consistently and persistently ensure that their future employees are being imparted with the right qualifications, knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes that are critical for them. Hogg (2014) advises that to ensure that organizations will have access to the skills and capabilities that they need from their employees in the future, they need to be proactive and responsive in their talent management strategies and approaches.

**Implications for institutions of higher learning**

For institutions of higher learning (i.e. employee and knowledge generators), it has become apparent that the knowledge-based economy has changed the relationship between educational credentials and their returns in labour market (Fallows & Steven, 2000) with a new model of 'employability' assuming a direct link between higher education and the labour market (Kruss, 2004). While a shared responsibility between the multiple stakeholders in the employability mix is acknowledged, institutions of higher learning are generally viewed as critical stakeholders since they are: (1) a direct bridge to the world of work; (2) fundamental for talent identification (e.g. through selecting students for appropriate programmes and courses); and (3) instrumental for talent development (through the specific training and development programmes). Therefore, the educational providers are commonly blamed for creating the 'unemployable graduate', and thus are expected to respond to this new employability imperative. Some have even suggested that the institutions may need to transform their curricula and pedagogies in the service of employability (McGrath, 2009). In particular, institutions of higher learning are expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of world society by equipping future talent/employees with requisite competencies (Rieckmann, 2012), creating new knowledge, and ensuring that the new
knowledge developed can be applied in economic activities (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2004). Given the current employability challenges, it is easy to agree that they should alter the curricula to close the gap and ensure that their products and the knowledge created benefit the individual, prospective employers and the broader economy.

**Employability skills**

It is difficult to create one universally relevant definition or list of employability skills. Nonetheless, many scholars have studied the qualities, characteristics, skills and knowledge that constitute employability, both in general and specifically for graduates, and have identified a list of skills that should be regarded as the basic employability skills. Such studies have generally revealed that employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees, as well as an ability to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes, commonly referred to as employability skills (Lowden et al., 2011). Kay & Greenhill (2011) found that employers are placing a premium on graduates' writing skills, mathematical skills, problem-solving skills and attitudes, while Lowden et al. (2011) identify teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving and managerial abilities as important in this regard. Nair, Patil, and Mertova (2009) identified communication, problem-solving, leadership, decision-making, emotional intelligence, social ethics skills, and the ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds as skills important for employability.

Based on a comprehensive study, Martin et al. (2008) identified 14 employability skills. They analysed these skills by order of priority and importance, as well as by what employers cited as ‘deal-breakers’. The following is a list of skills (ranked by priority and importance) that employers in Martin et al.'s (2008) study viewed as important and expected to see fully developed in job candidates: communication [1], literacy [2], numeracy [3], enthusiasm/commitment [4], team-working [5], timekeeping [6], problem-solving business awareness [7], general information technology (IT) [8], personal presentation [9], customer care [10], business awareness [11], enterprising [12], vocational job-specific [13], and advanced vocational job-specific [14].

Martin et al. (2008) further analysed the same skills according to what the employers cited as deal-breakers, that is, qualities or behaviour the absence of which would actively prevent a candidate from being employed in the respective organization. The following order resulted: literacy [1], communication [2], enthusiasm/commitment [3], numeracy [4], timekeeping [5], personal presentation [6], team-working [7], general information technology (IT) [8], customer care [9], problem-solving [10], vocational job-specific [11], advanced vocational job-specific [12], business awareness [13], and enterprising [14].

In analysing both lists, it is justified to conclude that the employers identified communication, literacy skills, numeracy skills, enthusiasm and commitment skills as very important and ‘deal breakers’ since the four skills appear in the top four on both lists. The design of Martin et al.’s (2008), resultant list of skills, and the justification of the skills outlined are comprehensive and the identified skills could be applicable to Botswana labour market. Accordingly, the design of the first section of this paper was informed by the 14 employability skills identified by Martin et al. (2008).

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants in the current study comprised 83 students enrolled in two Psychology courses at the University of Botswana (n = 83; 49 females and 34 males). The participants ranged between 19 and 30 years of age. The sample consisted of 12 first-year students, 21 second-year students, 24 third-year students and 26 fourth-year students. Fifty-two students came from the Faculty of Social Sciences, 13 from the Faculty of Humanities, seven from the Faculty of Education, eight from the Faculty of Business and three students from the Faculty of Science.
**Procedure**

The study used qualitative, exploratory and descriptive approaches which employed an online interview format. Firstly, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from participation at any point during the study. They were also informed that the study was aimed at identifying the skills and attributes that they perceive as important for employment. Specifically, the students were asked to respond to the following question: List and justify at least five characteristics that you think university graduates should possess in order to be viewed as employable by employers. Employability was defined to them as a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and characteristics that a graduate requires in order to be able to obtain and succeed in a graduate-level job placement. To limit exposure to skills knowledge bias, a decision was made not to expose the students to the various information and research available on employability skills prior to collecting the data. The participants were also asked the following two questions: (1) Do you perceive yourself as possessing employability skills? and (2) What do you think could be done to ensure that you later become employable.

**Data analysis**

Analysis of the data obtained in response to the first question involved using concept mapping to guide the generation, classification and interpretation of the relationships among the students’ narratives, as suggested by Trochim (1989). Trochim presents concept mapping as a type of structured conceptualization which can be used to develop a conceptual framework, as well as to guide evaluation and planning – and it was chosen as most suitable for the current study. Typical steps described by Trochim are as follows: (1) selection of participants; (2) development of focus for the conceptualization; (3) statement generation; (4) structuring of statements; (5) the representation of statements in the form of a concept map (here, multidimensional scaling or cluster analysis could be used); (6) the interpretation of maps; and (7) the utilization of maps. In the current study, similar steps were taken and Microsoft Visio was used to create the visual representations of the clusters of competencies that were identified as belonging together. Figure 1 presents the outcome of the process that was undertaken to analyse the data provided by students.

![Figure 1](image-url). Employability skills identified by university students in Botswana.
Specifically, two researchers were involved in separately analysing the identified competencies and in grouping related competencies together. It was agreed prior to data analysis that Martin et al.’s (2008) 14 employability skills would be represented by a shaded circle labelled with a skill and numbered according to Martin et al.’s (2008) prioritization (see Figure 1). Therefore, the word inside the circle represents Martin et al.’s (2008) employability skill, while the number represents the position of the skills in line with Martin et al.’s (2008) order of priority and importance. All other competencies identified by the students and matched with Martin et al.’s (2008) 14 employability skills are presented in smaller bubbles around the shaded circle to form a cluster. Another number in both the shaded and non-shaded bubbles (in parenthesis) represents the number of participants that identified the skill and/or attribute as important for employability. It is important to highlight that while some students used associated descriptive words, others used the specific words used in Martin et al.’s (2008) study.

After separately matching the descriptors provided by the students against the ones suggested by Martin et al. (2008), the two researchers sat together and agreed on the final matching – as represented in Figure 1. Results from the data analysis were used to assess whether the students’ identified competencies matched Martin et al.’s (2008) 14 employability skills as ordered by importance and priority.

Findings

Figure 1 presents the employability competencies as identified by the students matched against the 14 employability skills identified by Martin et al. (2008). The number in parenthesis represents the position of the skill in Martin et al.’s (2008) study. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the skills and attributes that were perceived by the highest majority of students as important for employability included the following: advanced vocational job-specific skills [14], enthusiasm/commitment [4], vocational job-seeking [13], personal presentation [9]. The next set of competencies that were perceived as important for employability included problem-solving [7], enterprising [12], and team-working [5]. Another set of competencies that were perceived as important for employability included business awareness [11], timekeeping [6], and communication [1]. The participants did not identify the following skills by Martin et al. (2008) as important for employability: customer care [10], general information technology (IT) [8], numeracy [3], and literacy [2].

In answering the second question (i.e. whether they perceived themselves as possessing employability skills), students revealed some scepticism regarding their employability skills. The majority of them referred to newspaper reports suggesting that University of Botswana graduates were not employable, while others mentioned the personal experiences of their family members and friends who could not find formal employment for more than three years after graduating from the university. In answering the third question (i.e. what they thought could be done to ensure that they later became employable), the students insisted that the university and employers should detail to them what they are required to do to be more employable. Furthermore, almost all of the students mentioned that they should be given opportunities to do voluntary work, part-time jobs, job attachments and/or internships prior to graduating from university.

Another unintended but important finding was derived from the existing desk research on the Botswana labour market. Despite ample information being provided by international organizations such as the ILO, the World Bank Group, World Economic Forum, and local organizations such as the Botswana Human Resources Development Council, the Botswana Qualifications Authority and various government ministries, it was observed that the available information is challenging in that the format used seems to be high-level and geared to policy-makers, employers and educators. This might mean that majority of students and graduates could not benefit from the available information and data on employability – limiting their chances and perceived need for self-development.

Discussions and the way forward

The findings presented in Figure 1 indicate that while students might be aware of the general employability skills, they may not be aware of the most important employability skills that are critical for their
entrance into and performance in the labour market. In particular, the top five skills mentioned by students are rated the last five skills as per the order on priority and importance derived from Martin et al.'s (2008) study. Apart from commitment and enthusiasm, the top three most important employability skills (i.e. numeracy [3], literacy [2] and communication [1]) were not identified as important by the students in the current study. The lack of mention of general information technology (IT) was the most surprising since students are expected to interface with general IT through such platforms as e-learning, Facebook, Skype, Twitter and LinkedIn on a daily basis.

It is also important to highlight the fact that none of the students identified numeracy and literacy as important for employability. Steen (1990) explains that numeracy is to mathematicians what literacy is to language and that each represents a distinctive means of communication, description and representation, and both are indispensable to civilized life. According to Parsons and Bynner (1997, 2005), poor numeracy reduces employment opportunities and may generally result in people being employed in jobs that are low skilled, poorly paid and have few training and promotion opportunities. Zevenbergen and Zevenbergen (2004) explored the perceptions of both young and older people who were engaged in work practices and revealed that numeracy was an important variable when discerning differences between older and younger people, with older people seeing numbers as more important than younger people.

These findings may explain why research has shown that university graduates in Botswana do not possess the important basic skills required by employers because acquiring employability skills and attributes may first mean acknowledging their importance. For students to be able to identify some of the skills and attributes listed by Martin et al. (2008) as critical for their employment, some collaboration between the students, educators and employers is required. Generally, from the findings it can be inferred that University of Botswana students are able to identify the skills and attributes that are important for employability and this is a good start in ensuring that students are able to match the skills and their personalized developmental strategies with the needs of the job market in addition to the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and study programmes, as suggested by Weligamage (2009).

The second question of the study (i.e. if students perceived themselves as possessing employability skills) revealed some scepticism regarding their perceptions of their employability. There are many views regarding the inability of the labour market to absorb graduates and other job seekers. While part of the problem could be inadequate skills on the part of graduates, the causes of the problem are multifaceted. At a recently held Jobs Summit in Gaborone, Botswana, economists in Botswana generally blamed the rising unemployment on a combination of factors such as slow and jobless economic growth, the inability of the country to diversify its economy, an educational system that does not produce the right products, mismatches between education and needs in the labour market, and a deficient demand for labour (Botswana Jobs Summit, 2015).

The findings in the current study indicate that students primarily attributed the current unemployment status of graduates to skills mismatch. This may indicate some lack of confidence and low self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to find and compete in the Botswana labour market. Self-efficacy is an individual’s self-evaluation of their capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce certain goals or attainments (Bandura, 1977). Bandura explains that self-efficacy varies by level, strength and generality and it influences the choices, efforts and persistence of human behaviour in the attainment of goals. To understand the root cause of the employability challenge, it is therefore important for researchers in Botswana to dissect the unemployment data and accurately inform students and various players in the labour market on the specific causes and types of unemployment in the Botswana labour market.

The last question of the study required students to articulate what was needed to be done to promote employability skills among them. In answering this question, some of the students mentioned that the university and employers should detail to them what they are required to do to be more employable while majority mentioned that they should be given opportunities to do voluntary work, part-time jobs, job attachments and internships – prior to graduating. It is important to note that these responses could have been influenced by students' general knowledge and current debates in the media regarding the
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The Government’s Graduate Internship Programme has been designed to assign graduates from various academic fields to access attachment and internships in government and private sector organizations (Department of National Internship Programme, n.d.). Furthermore, most programmes in the social sciences do not require students to complete internships or attachments before graduating from the university, and this could have influenced their suggestions regarding internships and attachments. Nonetheless, this is a great awareness because internships have been found to reinforce students’ technical skills, improve analytical skills, improve one’s awareness of the need to be adaptable and creative (Coco, 2000) as well as enhance the graduate’s chances to receive full-time job offers and higher starting salaries upon graduation (Gault, Leach, & Duey, 2010).

To address the current employability challenges, responsible stakeholders need to design a system that will enable all stakeholders to: have an accurate understanding of the employability challenges and needs, access employability information, and develop the right employability skills among employees – hence the proposed integrated framework (see Figure 2). Another motivation for the proposed framework was the observation from the desk research that while there is available information and research from international organizations and local organizations about the employment and unemployment situation in Botswana, the nature and the type of available information have not been designed to be understood and accessed by an average student.

**Integrated framework for developing employability skills among university students**

In a bid to address the above-mentioned challenges, the Employee–Educator–Employer–Employability (4E) Framework was conceptualized and proposed as a framework that could assist educators, policy-makers and human capital management professionals, students, graduates, across different industries and organizations to: (1) understand their role in the labour market, and (2) collectively formulate holistic, integrated and systematic strategies for enhancing employability. Experts have also suggested that an effective and efficient labour market can only thrive if multiple stakeholders systematically work together to ensure

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**Figure 2.** Educator–Employee–Employer–Employability (4E) framework.
a balance between the supply and the demand sides of the labour market (ILO, 2012). Accordingly, the proposed framework is premised on the idea that talent identification, development and management of employability should be shared by existing players in the labour market (i.e. employees [current, future, or potential]; educators [i.e. specifically, institutions of higher learning] and employers [i.e. private organizations, government and parastatals]). The framework further recognizes that the government is an employer, a policy-maker and a regulator. A new added function is the proposed Employability Readiness Platform which will allow stakeholders in the Botswana labour market to identify and develop interrelated processes, policies and procedures that will enable the easy development of employability skills and attributes as well as access of information by students and graduates.

**Employability Readiness Platform**

As noted above, one challenge observed from desk research is that the nature and format of information available seemed to be geared towards and accessible to policy-makers, employers and educators. The framework therefore proposes a new component (i.e. the Employability Readiness Platform), which is intended to function as an independent platform for identifying, projecting and disseminating employability information in the country. To address the weakness in the availability of data and information for all players in the labour market, including current and future employees, the platform could assist in ensuring user-friendliness and accessibility of employability information by all the stakeholders including the students and the general workforce.

Given the existing initiatives and programmes in the country it is recommended that this platform could be an online platform housed under functions such as the Human Resource Development Council, or the Botswana Labour Market Observatory, since the two bodies already have similar mandates and are already engaged in facilitating a relationship between the demand and the supply sides of the labour market in the country. The platform could be designed in a way that allows all the players to collectively contribute as well as access the information provided.

**The role of employers and policy-makers**

The model positions and highlights employers as the strategic players in the labour market as they are positioned to identify the critical knowledge, skills and abilities needed for effective performance in their industries and sectors. They are critical in ensuring that human capital being developed will help them meet their future strategic plans and objectives.

**The role of educators**

While ‘few would expect a candidate who has recently left school, college or full-time training to be a “finished article” in all areas of their personal or professional development … there may be some areas where complete development would simply be expected’ (Martin et al., 2008, p. 19). This means that the world of basic, secondary and tertiary education might need to change drastically from looking at the current requirements of the employers and the economy to looking at the projected future needs of employers and the broad economy. The framework therefore takes into consideration the fact that institutions of higher learning are direct feeders of employers and challenges them to review their curricula to meet the needs of the labour market. Accordingly, the proposed framework basically suggests that employers and policy-makers need to improve partnerships with institutions of higher learning through the Employability Readiness Platform to ensure that both critical players remain proactive in generating employability information and co-planning for organizations’ evolving current and future staffing needs. As the students in this study suggested, this arrangement could also be achieved through internships, opportunities for voluntary work, attachments, and even carefully designed job shadowing and mentorship programmes for students before they graduate.

**The role of students and employees**

The framework recognizes students and workers as influential and active participants in this market. With the right systems in place, they are capable of creating new knowledge, solving current
societal challenges and becoming job-creators in their own right. For students these objectives could be achieved both prior to and after graduation.

**Limitations and future recommendations**

While the current study could be helpful in assessing whether students in Botswana institutions of higher learning understand the skills and attributes that are considered employability skills, the main limitation of the current study is that the findings' generalizability is limited because of the design of the study. Another related limitation of the study is that because of lack of data, the employability skills (Martin et al., 2008) used as a reference point were not based on Botswana data. While it is reasonable to assume that organizations' skills requirements might be global because of the general design and nature of organizations, it is still worthwhile to conduct a study that investigates and outlines employability skills specific to the Botswana labour market.

In the light of these limitations, it is recognized that to arrive at a holistic and realistic description of the factors affecting individuals' journeys in the labour market in Botswana, a full range of personal and external factors impacting on the employability of workers and job seekers should be investigated, as suggested by McQuaid et al. (2005), in the Botswana context. Future studies could therefore investigate employability skills requirements of different industries and sectors with a view to drawing up a sector, industry or firm-level employability index as proposed by De Grip, Van Loo, and Sanders (2004). Follow-up studies could also be aimed at investigating whether university students in Botswana actually possess Botswana-generated employability skills.

Other researchers could also design studies that investigate the full range of offerings of specific study programmes in terms of qualifications, knowledge, skills and attitudes vis-à-vis what is required by the job market. Other studies could produce detailed breakdowns and taxonomies of the skills and attributes required to promote graduate employability (e.g. core skills, key skills, transferable skills, essential skills and enterprise skills, as suggested by Lowden et al. [2011]). It is also recommended that future studies also investigate the systems, policies and processes that are used in the employability mix to establish how the employability environment can be made more conducive for both current and future employees.

**Conclusions**

The economic developments and organizational developments mentioned throughout this paper have had a profound effect on the way careers develop (De Grip, Van Loo, Sanders, & ROA, 1999; Hirschi, 2012), forcing future job seekers and job-creators to be adaptable and innovative in meeting the employability demands. The first part of the paper emphasized the individual focus (i.e. assessing whether future employees understand the employability skills required of them). The Employee–Educator–Employer–Employability (4E) Framework was thereafter proposed to assist educators, policy-makers and human capital management professionals, across different industries and organizations, to formulate holistic, integrated and systematic strategies for ensuring the employability of the current and future workforce. It is believed that this framework will strengthen the links between educators and employers by sharing approaches, knowledge and experiences that governments, employers, workers and international organizations have suggested.

It is also acknowledged that by recognizing the importance of the employability of its graduates, Botswana has joined different countries in the world which are trying to create closer synergies between the needs and purposes of their education training systems and local and international labour markets (Bolaane, Chuma, Toteng, & Molwane, 2010). Current trends suggest an increasing shift towards the demand-led provision of education – with the voice of the employer having increasing importance (Martin et al., 2008). Accordingly, local universities such as the University of Botswana have to recognize the need to aid national development by improving the quality and quantity of the human resources that go through the institution, as outlined in its prospectus/calendar.
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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