

Working adults' graduateness in relation to their employability: An exploratory study

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ORIENTATION

Research and practice in the graduateness and employability of new entrants to the world of work has increased in the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States (Rae, 2007) and, more recently, South Africa as a developing country in terms of social policy, the drive for equity and the national skills and unemployment crisis.

The 2009 Labour Force Survey (Department of Labour, 2009) indicates that youth unemployment, particularly the 20-24 year age group, remains the key challenge for transformation of the South African labour market. Another national concern that compounds the issue of unemployment is the global demand for scarce and critical skills. This demand in South Africa can mostly be attributed to an oversupply of unskilled labour and an under-supply of skilled labour.

For an individual worker, his/her graduateness and employability are an indicator of his or her opportunity to acquire and to keep an attractive job in the internal or external labour market. For a society as a whole, graduateness and employability are an indicator of the working population's opportunity to gain full employment, that is, economic health and a low unemployment rate. At company level or from an organisational perspective, employment implies work, that is, all the jobs done by employees in a certain company for compensation. For an employer, individuals' graduateness and employability are an indicator of the opportunity to match supply and demand in a changing organisation.

For generations, lifetime employment with the same working environment or institute was considered the norm, and in larger organisations, a privilege offered to loyal employees. Currently, lifetime employability is emphasised due to organisational needs for flexibility in a changing labour market and a highly competitive and turbulent business environment. The potential of a given organisation to perform optimally in global markets depends on employees' capabilities to develop, cultivate and maintain fundamental qualifications. Job qualifications are continuously changing at an ever-increasing rate, producing new expertise needs and new opportunities for learning.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Given the paucity of research on individuals' graduateness and employability in the South African organisational context, the objective of the research was to explore whether working adults' graduateness are related to their employability.

RESEARCH DESIGN

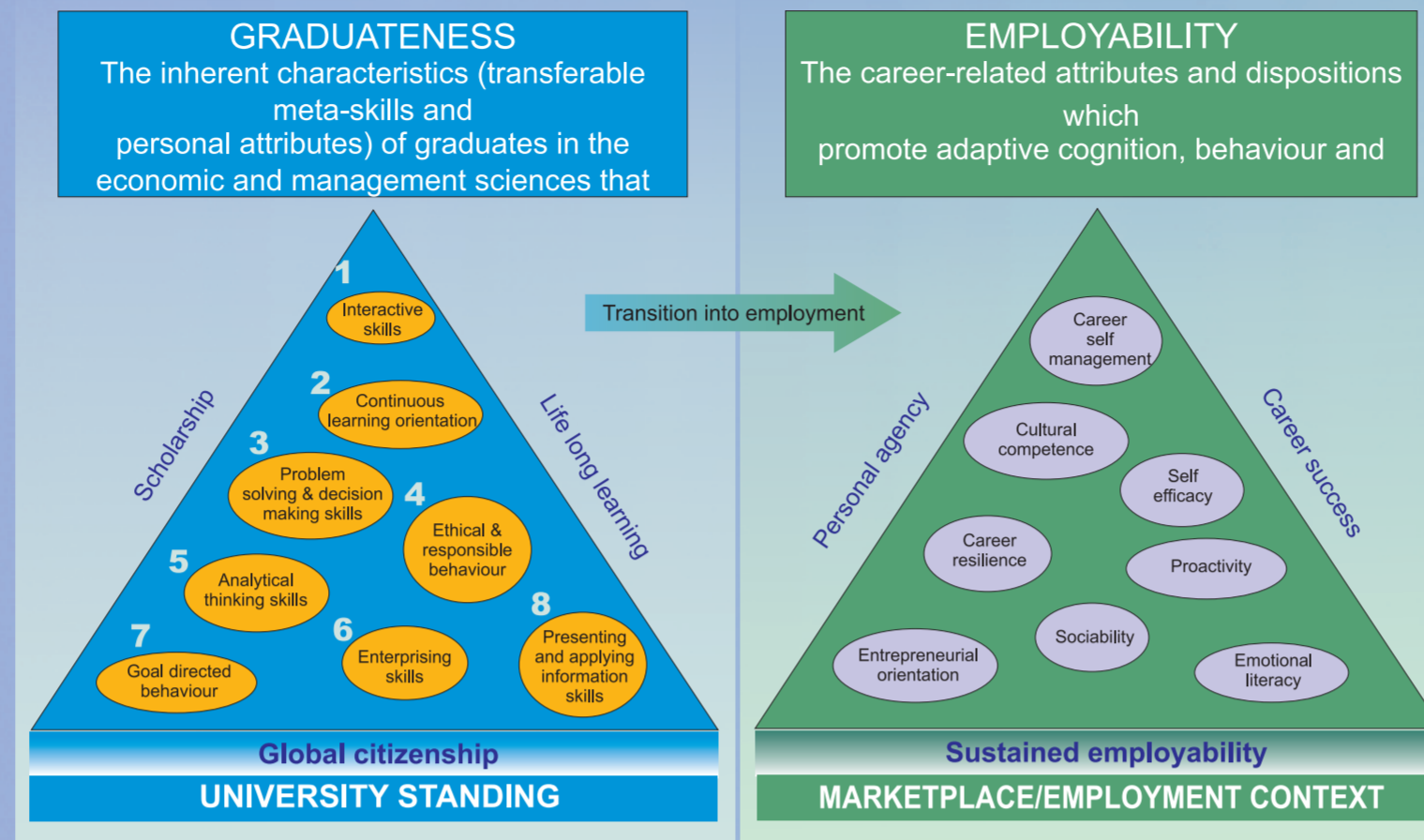
1 A quantitative web-survey approach was followed, collecting primary data

2 Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the survey were obtained from the Research ethics committee of the higher education institution

3 Exploratory factor analyses were conducted to assess the item- and inter consistency scale reliability and construct validity of the two measuring instruments. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), correlational and multiple regression analyses were performed to assess the relationship between the participants' graduateness and employability.

4 The value of adjusted R² was used to interpret the results. In order to counter the probability of a type I error, it was decided to set the significance value at a 95% confidence interval level (p ≤ 0.05). The F-test was used to test whether there was a significant regression between the independent and the dependent variables. r-values larger than 0.30 (medium effect) and R² values larger than 0.13 (medium effect) (Cohen, 1992) were regarded as practically significant. T-tests and Anovas were performed to test for significant differences between race, age and gender groups regarding the measured variables.

CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW



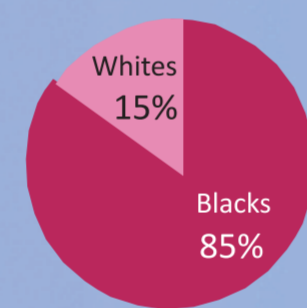
PARTICIPANTS

Population: Higher education distance learning institution: 3000 Final year undergraduate (84%), honours & post graduate diploma level (9%), masters (6%), and doctoral level (1%) students in the economic and management sciences field (9% response rate)

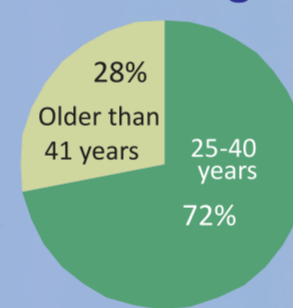
Final sample: n = 272 :

Full time employment (70%); part-time employment (15%); self-employed (5%); Service industry (33%); Managerial staff levels; 68% staff level)

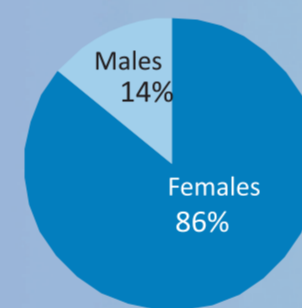
Race



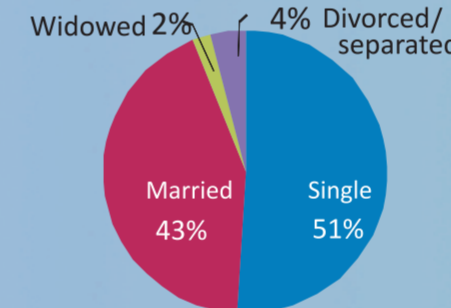
Life stage



Gender



Marital status



MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

Graduateness Scale (Coetsee, 2010)

- Self-rated, multi-factorial measure which contains **69 items** and **nine sub-scales** which measure the graduateness skills and attributes on the eight facet subscales, and the one higher education institution standing facet subscale:
 - (1) interactive skills (16 items);
 - (2) problem-solving and decision making skills (8 items);
 - (3) continuous learning orientation (7 items);
 - (4) enterprising skills (9 items);
 - (5) skills in presenting and applying information

Employability Attributes Scale (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetsee, 2010)

- Self-rated, multi-factorial measure which contains **56 items** and **eight sub-scales** which measure the eight employability attributes on the eight facet subscales:
 - (1) career self-management (11 items, 0.88),
 - (2) cultural competence (5 items, 0.89),
 - (3) self-efficacy (6 items, 0.83),
 - (4) career resilience (6 items, 0.75),
 - (5) sociability (7 items, 0.81),
 - (6) entrepreneurial orientation (7 items, 0.80),

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

CORE RESULTS: Significant relationship between Graduateness and Employability

GRADUATENESS	EMPLOYABILITY
1 Interactive skills	Significant negative perception of demand for university's graduates by employers
2 Continuous learning orientation	Significant positive predictor of overall employability
3 Problem solving/decision making skills	Significant positive perception of demand for university's graduates by employers Significant positive predictor of career resilience and sociability
4 Ethical / responsible behaviour	Significant positive predictor of career self-management, career resilience, entrepreneurial orientation, & proactivity
5 Analytical thinking skills	Significant positive predictor of career self-management, cultural competence, sociability, and emotional literacy
6 Enterprising skills	Significant positive predictor of self-efficacy, career resilience, sociability, entrepreneurial orientation, and proactivity
7 Goal-directed behaviour	Significant negative predictor of cultural competence, sociability, and career resilience
8 Presenting and applying information skills	Significant relationship, but not a significant predictor of employability

CORE RESULTS

GRADUATENESS

Significant differences between current level of academic study, race, and gender groups

Current level of academic study
Undergraduate final years (H)
Masters & Doctoral (L)

Race groups
Indians (H)
Africans (L)

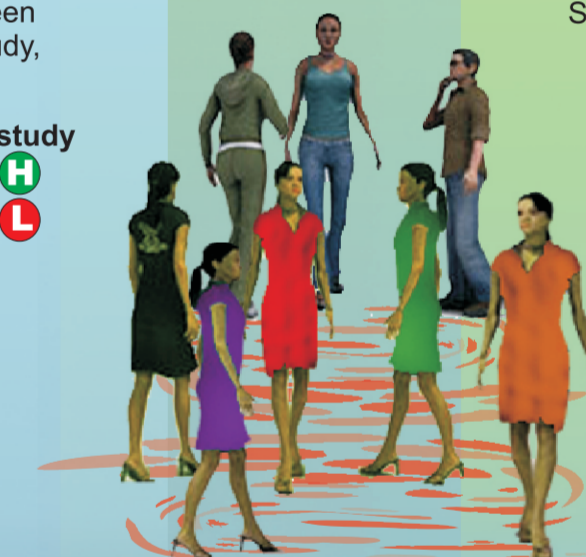
Gender groups
Females (H)
Males (L)

EMPLOYABILITY

Significant differences between race and gender groups

Race groups
Indians (H)
Africans (L)

Gender groups
Females (H)
Males (L)



CONCLUSIONS

Practical implications: individuals' employability are significantly related to their graduateness and vice versa. The cognitive skills and affective attributes measured by the two instruments should be considered in learning design efforts (both in the workplace skills development context and in the higher education context). Employers and higher education educators should collaborate on the cognitive and affective meta-competencies required by individuals to ensure the sustainable employability of graduates.

Limitations: Exploratory research design; small sample size- results not generalisable to other occupational groups and sectors; no causations- only relationships investigated

Recommendations: Future research efforts should replicate the study to enable confirmatory factor analyses for the two instruments. Benchmarking should be done by comparing the results of various universities and employers.

Originality/value added: First known empirical study on graduateness and employability in SA higher education context, using self-developed instruments developed for SA context. Provides a generic skills and attributes framework that can be utilised by skills development facilitators and educators in the design of learning programmes. Emphasises the importance of developing higher education students' (working adults') graduateness in order to enhance their employability.



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