LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMMES IN AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

By

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DECLARATION

I, Karmen Naidu, declare that:

Learners' experiences of learnership programmes in an information technology organisation is my own work.

All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

This dissertation has not been previously submitted in full or partial fulfilment of the requirements for an equivalent or higher qualification at any other recognised education institution.

_____ 25 July 2019_____

SIGNATURE **DATE**

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ABSTRACT

LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMMES IN AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

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Learnerships are occupational and vocational education training programmes that have been provided to fast-track acquisition of qualifications for unemployed youth, equipping them with knowledge, skills and experience.

This research is an investigation of learners' experiences of learnership programmes and the factors affecting the retention of the learners. More precisely, the research is about learners' experiences of learnership programmes in an information technology (IT) organisation in South Africa.

The retention rates of learners in learnership programmes have been comparably low in recent years. In order to understand this phenomenon, one had to investigate the factors that affect such retention rates.

This is a study of the lived experiences of learners enrolled in a learnership programmes, conducted to examine their perceptions of a learnership qualification. A qualitative

research approach was used to collect the lived experiences of 16 participants selected from one training provider. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the learners. The data collected was analysed by adopting thematic analysis and findings presented in a narrative form.

The results from both the theoretical framework and the empirical inquiry suggest that competitive remuneration, career advancement possibilities, exciting jobs and opportunity for personal development improve learner retention, whereas the lack of these attributes is seen to entail turnover.

The study was conducted in only one IT organisation and the results cannot, therefore, be generalisable throughout the IT learnership programmes. Future studies should include learners from a sizeable number of organisations and should also consider organisations in other provinces, and not those in Gauteng alone.

Key words: qualitative research; learnerships; retention; training component; work place component; engagement; coaching

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CHAPTER 1. SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

This research is an investigation of the understanding of the experiences of learners enrolled in learnership programmes and the factors affecting the retention of learners. Specifically, the research is about learners' experiences of learnership programmes in an Information Technology (IT) organisation in South Africa. This chapter outlines the background of and motivation for the study, and the problem statement, aims, paradigm perspectives and research design of the study. Thereafter, it presents an outline of how the findings, discussion, conclusions, limitations and recommendations are reported. The chapter concludes with a chapter layout and summary.

1.1.1 Organisations in the 21st century

Organisations in the twenty-first century operate in an environment characterised by uncertainty, volatility, complexity and ambiguity in the form of rapid globalisation, accelerating innovation and growing competition (Geissler & Krys, 2013). In this uncertain environment, business leaders and human resources managers must deal with the intensifying international competition for talent, the impact of not having the right people to lead and to confront business challenges, and with employing below-average candidates just to fill positions (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). The capacity to attract, develop, motivate and retain talent will remain a critical strategic issue for twenty-first century organisations.

The ability of modern organisations to use IT efficiently contributes much to their success. Along with this, the availability and performance of the organisation's IT employees are crucial (Mohlala, Goldman & Goosen, 2012). Most firms are seeking skilled workers with knowledge of technology and problem-solving skills, which can give them a competitive edge. But the skills required to leverage information and communication technology (ICT) remain woefully inadequate in many organisations (Peckham, 2013). The terms IT and

ICT are used interchangeably in this study. The global IT industry market reached $3.6 trillion in 2012, with the U.S. accounting for more than $950 billion of that (CompTIA, 2013). At the same time, fierce competition in the industry extended into an equally determined battle for the most skilled and talented employees.

1.1.2 Talent and retention

In South Africa, the IT industry is faced with a shrinking pool of skilled employees, causing demand for these employees to rise. This places organisations under pressure to devise strategies to retain these employees (Mohlala et al., 2012). The IT service and technical support industry is having difficulty finding skilled talent (Atkinson, 2012). Rapidly changing technologies and the need for IT services that can support escalating business demands are putting extreme pressure on IT service leaders to fill roles with skilled candidates. Their inability to do so can have a negative impact on business.

As South Africa grows to compete in the global ICT sector, it is becoming evident that leaders need to pass on the responsibility to up and coming talent (Wheeler & McKague, 2002). It is the responsibility of leaders in business to build a talent pipeline, through grooming young talent to be ready to interact with global partners. Leaders in the IT industry have realised the need to invest in skills development to be able to transition young unemployed youth into the ever-changing and growing IT world (Du Toit, 2003).

Researchers of talent attraction and retention have used diverse lenses to facilitate the understanding of how organisations encourage individuals to join and remain with them (Cascio, 2014; Celani & Singh, 2011). To find and retain significant talent, IT organisations invest more in human resource staff, processes and technology than the average company in other industries (Bodley, Gur, Morzaria & Muller-Patel, 2008). Recruiting, managing and retaining talent result in a distinctive staffing and cost profile for the typical high-tech company.

Given the scarcity of talent, IT organisations attempt to improve retention by providing excellent reward systems and competitive benefits. According to Bodley et al., (2008), leading IT organisations also encourage continual learning and participation in training and development programmes. The higher costs and increased resources are a sign of greater investment into skills and talent retention by such organisations. It is vital for business strategists and business leaders to recognise the need to invest in skills development for competitive advantage and innovation (O' Higgins, 2001).

1.1.3 Context of the study

Businesses (both small and large) have an integral role to play in the economy of the nation about job creation (Wheeler & McKague, 2002). Many literature sources support the assertion that South African commerce and industry have a dire shortage of appropriate skills and knowledge (Robbins, Odendaal & Roodt, 2003). The government is giving the issue of skills shortages considerable attention. However, skill shortages are still very real in South Africa today (Rasool & Botha, 2011).

The South African labour market is characterised by high unemployment on one hand and skills shortage on the other (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018). The interaction between supply and demand provides the basis for interpreting signals on the nature and extent of skills shortages and mismatches facing South Africa (Bhorat, Powell, Visser, Arends & Reddy, 2016).

The observation that South Africa was not yet equipped with the skills it needs for economic growth, social development and sustainable employment growth precipitated the passing of the Skills Development Act and the Skills Development Levies Act in 1998 and 1999 respectively. These acts created an enabling institutional and regulatory framework for expanding strategic investment in education and training in all economic sectors and culminated in the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) (Rasool & Botha, 2011). The two acts introduced new institutions, learnership programmes and funding policies designed to increase investment in skills development.

Learnerships emphasise training that enables trainees to enter the formal workforce to create a livelihood for themselves (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018). The ICT sector has evolved in the last decade and has become a driving force in the world of work such that organisations are redesigning themselves. Their aim is to move from an efficient workforce to a knowledge workforce (Barkhi, Amiri & James, 2006). More firms are making use of industrial and organisational psychology (IOP) (Cascio & Agunis, 2005). IOP practitioners consider the relationship between employee and organisation and guide them to use their skills to manage and guide the process (De Villiers, 2009).

Organisations in the 21st century need processes to attract, retain, nurture, and take care of emerging talent (Cannon & McGee, 2001). Comey (2004) highlights the need to identify talent to have an effective succession planning process. Organisations are losing critical knowledge and there is a decline in the number of new entrants in the ICT sector (Berzon & Currie, 2006). The implementation of an effective succession plan is twofold in that it shapes the future of an organisation but also contributes to economic growth of South Africa, which is still a young economy. Leadership succession planning is a concern for both small and large organisations.

The South African ICT industry has long acknowledged a shortage of skills and the need for young emerging talent. ICT organisations have over the years supported learnership programmes, realising that they needed to invest and grow skill sets. ICT organisations are looking for a skilled workforce to deliver exemplary service to their clients (Davies & Farquharson, 2004). Despite attempts to rectify the situation, the ICT skills gap in South Africa is increasing (Kirlidog, van der Vyver, Zeeman & Coetzee, 2018).

One of the global challenges facing organisations is that an entire generation of baby boomers in leadership positions will retire in the next decade. The millennial generation will be larger than the baby boom generation. Organisations fear that millennials will be far from replacing the skills, knowledge and expertise of the baby boom generation. The learnership model will allow organisations a window period during the workplace component of the programme to evaluate the millennial generation (Du Toit, 2003).

1.1.4 Learnership programmes

Learnerships provide an opportunity for businesses to contribute to job creation, and to offer a dual experience where theory learnt in the classroom is supplemented by application and practice of skills in a real workplace (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005). Learnerships were designed to bring about change in education and training (Davies & Farquharson, 2004). Learnerships consist of training and a workplace component. Upon successful completion of the programme the learner receives a national certificate from the relevant sector education and training authority (SETA). The learnership model promotes life-long learning. The learnership is a 12-month programme, and it requires constant monitoring to ensure success (Davies & Farquharson, 2004).

The IT industry is a service-oriented environment and is highly reliant on a skilled and motivated workforce to deliver efficient service. IT leaders have realised that they need to partner with registered training providers to be able to offer stimulating and meaningful work environments that attract and sustain talented individuals. The learnership model provides learners an opportunity to complete the workplace component of the learnership programme. This helps organisations to evaluate skills and abilities of learners. It also gives the organisations the opportunity to evaluate potential of learners and attract and retain talent for business (Davies & Farquharson, 2004).

In 2002, the IT organisation (the ICT training provider whose learnership programmes was studied) was approached by the Department of Labour and the Department of Trade and Industry to partner with them to offer one of the first IT learnership programmes in South Africa. The aim of the learnership was to create a platform for job creation through skills development initiatives. The IT organisation's (ICT training provider studied) model for managing learnerships over the years has proven to be an effective way to ensure stakeholder engagement. The IT organisation had a strong record: a 70 percent absorption rate after successful completion of the learnership programme over the years. However, in recent years this percentage has decreased significantly.

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The learnership model's retention rate has fallen in recent years, as noted. The learnership programme currently lacks the ability to retain learners. Many learner's drop-off (discontinue), despite the huge investments (resources, time and energy) in the programme. There are huge monetary investments required of firms involved in learnership. To date, organisations have invested millions in the learnership programmes. IT organisations have also invested heavily in the learnership as it supplies each student with the full kit they need, namely software, support mechanisms and learning content.

On the other hand, it seems most companies are not using the learnership programmes as a tool for talent management, and more specifically, for talent retention. Pop and Barkhuizen (2010) assert that talent retention is an important topic of debate in the ICT sector in South Africa, given the context of a skills shortage, the relative scarcity of specialist employees and the mismatch between the supply from higher education institutions and the demands of the ICT workplace.

The problem is that despite their investments in learnerships (money, staff time, planning, office equipment and so on), employers seem to have little interest in understanding the perceptions and experiences of learners in order to use learnerships to retain talent.

The net cost per learner can be substantial and the actual budget for staff and infrastructure requirements can increase to about R150 000 per year per learner (Pauw, Bhorat, Goga, Ncube & Westhuizen, 2006). The retention rate by the largest companies of qualified learners is between 10% and 30%. The rest go back into the market (HSRC & DPRU, 2012). It is difficult to find evidence that organisations are using learnership programmes as a tool for talent retention. The problem is serious, considering that the costs of having to replace someone with scarce skills are considerable, that is, recruitment costs are usually high. In addition, there are risks that new staff may not perform as expected, despite attempts to follow effective selection processes.

In view of all the investments being made in the learnership programme, and the gradual and continuous fall in the rate of retention, the main research question to be answered is:

What are the learners' experiences of learnership programmes that are contributing to the low retention rates of learners enrolled in the programmes?

1.3 AIMS

The following general and specific aims are formulated.

1.3.1 General aim

The general aim of the study is to explore learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes in order to develop an understanding of retention in the programmes.

1.3.2 Specific aims

The specific aims are divided into literature and empirical aims.

1.3.2.1 Literature aims

The specific aims relating to the literature review are:

- To conceptualise the construct of learnerships in the literature
- To conceptualise the construct of retention and retention factors in the literature; and
- To explore the theoretical relationship between learnerships and retention.

1.3.2.2 Empirical aims

The empirical aims are:

- To explore the experiences and perceptions of learners enrolled in learnership programmes;
- To explore the factors that affect implementation of learnership programmes; and
- To provide recommendations on how learnership programmes could be used as a tool of talent retention in the IT industry.

1.4 THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVES

Paradigms can be patterns, structures, scientific and academic ideas, belief systems and perceptions (Olsen, Ludwick & Dunlop, 1992). A paradigm includes the accepted theories, traditions, approaches, models, frame of reference, body of research and methodologies, and it could be a model or framework for observation and understanding (Creswell, 2014). A paradigm is therefore a basic set of beliefs that guide action.

1.4.1 Disciplinary relationship

This study falls within the disciplinary context of IOP (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). IOP is the branch of psychology concerned with the study of behaviour in work settings and the application of psychology principles to change work behaviour (Riggio, 2013). Behaviour can be explained in terms of psychological theories, constructs and models (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). The knowledge of IOP is developed and applied in various sub-disciplines, one of which is personnel psychology. Personnel psychology is the applied science of measuring and predicting the differences in human behaviour and performance to improve the attainment of organisational and individual goals (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2010). The two main constructs that are the platform of this study are learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes.

Personnel psychology is concerned with the creation, care, and maintenance of a workforce, which includes the recruitment, placement, training, and development of workers; the measurement and evaluation of their performance; and concern with worker productivity and well-being. In short, the goal of personnel psychology is to take care of an organisation's human resources (Riggio, 2013). This is in line with the main constructs of this study, which are learnerships (training and development of workers) and retention of scarce and critical skills.

1.4.2 The theoretical paradigm

The humanistic paradigm is a further boundary around this study. Humanism views the individual as capable of exercising freedom of choice. It rejects reductionism, emphasises the uniqueness of individuals and posits that individuals should determine their own values based on their previous experiences (Van Niekerk, 1996). A central assumption of humanism is that people act with intentionality and values (Huitt, 2001). This study also looks at the reasons why some learners drop out of the learnership.

The humanistic perspective proposes that science should assist individuals to achieve self-determination, by studying them in their natural environments and that human behaviour can be explained by complete understanding of people, which comes through empathy and intuition (Whitley, 2002). A qualitative research approach is commonly used where a humanistic view is adopted (Whitley, 2002). To understand the learners' lived experiences and perceptions, the participants were interacted with in their natural settings by employing a stance of empathy and intuition about their behaviours.

1.4.3 The empirical paradigm

The main philosophical orientations about the world and the nature of research that a researcher can bring to a study are post positivism, constructivism, transformative approach and pragmatism (Creswell, 2014). Scotland (2012) identifies three philosophical orientations as scientific, interpretive, and critical paradigms.

For this study the interpretive paradigm was adopted in understanding the learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes. The three basic assumptions of interpretivism are:

- The social world is constructed and given meaning subjectively by people. Human beings are subjects that have consciousness, or a mind, while human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world, which exists only in relation to human beings;
- The researcher is part of what is observed; and
- Research is driven by interests.

In this study, about interpretivism, the intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings participants have of the learnership programme. Rather than starting with a theory, the researcher inductively developed a theory or pattern of meanings. The interpretivist paradigm is often combined with the constructivism paradigm. It aims to understand people (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The interpretive research paradigm, focusing on understanding, is applicable to this study, as it seeks meaning from individual experiences (Mason, 2002). The interpretive approach is flexible and sensitive to social context and involves viewing individuals and their unique interpretations, meanings and understandings as a primary source of data (Mason, 2002).

This study explores the different learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes and understands how these differences result in the different constructions and meanings that people give to the social world. In this way, the researcher can make sense of how different learners and other people interpret their social world. In this way, the researcher is also able to dig into the processes of subjective interpretation, acknowledging the motivations, interests, intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning-making and the self-understanding of the participants (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Blumberg et al., 2011).

This study relies much on the views of those who were interviewed about their lived experiences and perceptions of the learnership programme and its effect on retention. This study gains an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and concomitant (associated) perceptions of learners. All humans are attempting to make sense of their worlds, and in so doing they continuously interpret, create, give meaning, define, justify and rationalise daily actions. Interpretivism therefore mainly focuses on exploring the complexity of social view to gain understanding (Creswell, 2014).

Ontology is concerned with "What is there?" while epistemology is concerned with the questions "What do you know?" and "How do you know it?" Both act as foundations of our approach to a research question and range from positivist stances (deductive and scientific views – "counting and measuring" quantitative research methods) to interpretivist stances (inductive "deeper truth" reasoning views – observational qualitative research methods) (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007).

Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied and what can be known about it (Terre-Blanche & Durrheim, 2007). It establishes the framework, the "world" or the target of the study (Nel, 2007). Scotland (2012) asserts that ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words what is, and researchers need to take a position regarding their perceptions of how things really are and how things really work. The researcher's ontological position in this study is that of relativism. According to Scotland (2012) relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person.

The interpretive framework adopted by the researcher in this study hold that there is not only one reality, but rather multiple realities that are constructed and that can also be changed by the knower (Laverty, 2003). In addition, Bryman (2001) considers social constructionism (sometimes called constructivism or interpretivist) as an alternative ontological position where social phenomena and their meanings are continually being changed and revised through social interaction, e.g. the researcher's own accounts of the social world, where nothing is definitive as the versions evolve with experience.

This study focuses on the individual experiences and perceptions (Whitley, 2002) of learnership programmes. In other words, in this study, the focus of the ontological interest is placed on the relative lived experiences and perceptions of learners enrolled in learnership programmes in an IT organisation in South Africa.

Epistemology describes the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known, and epistemology is about the information that counts as acceptable knowledge and how it should be acquired and interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Scotland (2012) asserts that epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words, what it means to know.

Once a researcher accepts epistemology, she/he usually adopts methods that are characteristic of that position. With the interpretivist approach adopted in this study, the facts are based on perception rather than objective truth. With this approach, the conclusions are derived from the interpretations of the participants rather than the abstract theories of the researcher. The interpretive epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena (Scotland, 2012).

1.5   RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design usually shows all the key components of the research study such as the samples, data analysis and how they will be incorporated in an attempt to address the research problem (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005).

1.5.1 The research approach

A qualitative approach was used in this study. Qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants' setting; analysing the data inductively, building from to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014). This type of the investigation is used to gain a detailed

understanding of phenomena (Krishnakumar, 2011). Qualitative data are presented in language instead of numbers and are based on flexible and explorative methods (Welman et al., 2005).

A qualitative approach was applied in this study because it is aligned with the philosophical views discussed and is most appropriate for generating the kind of data required in answering the research question. A qualitative approach was also applicable to this study because this is an inquiry to have an in-depth understanding of the learners' experiences of learnership programmes, and such an inquiry requires gathering information by talking directly to the learners and seeing them behave within their context. The researcher was the key instrument in this study and collected the data herself through interviewing the learners. The qualitative approach also allowed the researcher to keep a focus on the meaning the learners held about the learnership programme.

In this study, descriptive research was used. Descriptive research provides an accurate representation of features of an individual, situation, or group. It can be used to uncover the present status of an occurrence, to define the rate of recurrence of the event, and to classify the data obtained. Descriptive research refers to the type of research question, design and data analysis that will be applied to a given topic and is primarily concerned with finding out "what is" about prevailing conditions or situations (Salaria, 2012).

1.5.2 Research strategy

A case study involves the study of a case, or a number of cases, where the case is complex and bounded, studied in its context, with the analysis undertaken seeking to be holistic (Tight, 2017). The case study approach is a research strategy entailing an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2006). The case study research strategy was deployed in this study. The unit of analysis was learners, and semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the learners. The interviews were conducted with those who had accepted the invitation to participate and had signed the consent forms.

1.5.3 Research method

The research method discusses the techniques and procedures of sampling, data collection, recording, data analysis, data quality assurance and reporting.

1.5.3.1 Research setting

The setting for participants who had successfully completed the learnership programme was their place of employment. The researcher obtained permission from the employers to conduct the interviews at their premises. The researcher booked a boardroom to conduct the interviews, to speak privately to the participants. The process of scheduling and undertaking the interviews was enabled by the researcher's familiarity with the geographic location of the target participants in Gauteng.

The setting for participants who did not complete the learnership was a venue that was convenient to both the researcher and the participant. The researcher chose a venue that was conducive to an interview and free from any disruptions.

1.5.3.2 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Gaining entry to a research site and the ethical issues that might arise are elements of the researcher's role. The researcher in this study is an employee of IT organisation under study and participates in the learnership programme as a Manager. However, such participation and experiences of the researcher did not shape the interpretations the researcher made during the study. This was made possible because as a way to minimise bias, it was important for the researcher to adopt an interactive interview approach which allowed gaining insights by probing the interviewees' thoughts, views, feelings and perceptions of the learnership programmes.

It was important to ensure that each participant gave informed consent. Each participant signed a consent form to be a participant in the study. The participants' full names and surnames are not disclosed but coded by using the letters representing the participant first name and surname. This was intended to protect their identity and keep their participation confidential. Permission to record the interviews was also sought from the participants.

In all research studies informed consent is a vital part of the ethical procedure. As stated by Welman et al. (2005), it is necessary to obtain permission from the respondents after they have been duly informed of the purpose of the research study. Informed consent implies that the participant or his or her legal representative understands the nature of the risks that might result, and then decides to participate in the research without being forced, deceived, or coerced into such a decision. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research.

This issue is especially pertinent when interviews are used as a research tool, because the participant makes him or herself known to the researcher or interviewer. In this study, the issue of confidentiality was discussed with each participant. In addition, no names were recorded on any documentation or on the transcribed copy of the interview data, or at any point in the writing up of this research.

1.5.3.3 Sampling

The purposive and convenience sampling method was used to select the participants for this study. Convenience sampling (also known as haphazard sampling or accidental sampling) is a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate are included for the study (Etikan, Abubakar & Alkassim, 2015). The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to

the qualities the participant possesses (Etikan, et al., 2015). It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants.

Purposive and convenience sampling rely on the researcher's experience or previous research to determine the sample for the study. Therefore, participants were selected from those who successfully completed the learnership and those who did not. Those available to participate in the study were conveniently selected. Eight learners who completed the programme and eight who did not were selected. In each case, equal representation of the sexes was envisaged. This study entails an in-depth understanding of learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes. Therefore, learners able to provide rich information of the phenomenon under inquiry were selected.

1.5.3.4 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight learners who successfully completed the learnership and eight who did not complete. The justification for this was to explore and obtain a balanced understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes from the perspectives of the participants from the two cohorts. Interview guides were developed to contain a list of questions and topics to be covered during the conversation in an order. The aim of an interview is to develop an understanding of participants in their natural environment (Jarbandhan & Schutte, 2006). This is useful for getting the story behind a participant's experience.

The semi-structured interview guide provided a clear set of instructions for interviewers and provided reliable, comparable qualitative data. The interview guide is attached in Appendix A. Semi-structured interviews contain open-ended questions, and discussions may diverge from the interview guide (Jarbandhan & Schutte, 2006). The semi-structured interviews also allowed interviewees to freely express their views and opinions.

It was also important to consider the criterion of saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) contend that the aim of a study should include what determines when data saturation is achieved, for a small study will reach saturation more rapidly than a larger study and data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible. For this study the number of participants chosen had the best opportunity to reach data saturation. Once that sample was reached the researcher realised that the point of no new data had been reached and stopped to look for additional participants. The semi –structured interview guide was used in the interviews with all the participants and this ensured that the participants were asked the same core questions.

1.5.3.5 Recording the data

All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Permission to record the interviews was sought from the participants.

1.5.3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis entails finding, examining and explaining of recurring traits and themes in word-based data, and determining ways in which they can be used to assist in answering the research questions of the study (Pell Institute, 2016). An inductive thematic analysis technique was used to analyse the qualitative data that was collected from the semi-structured interviews. This is the most suitable approach because the main goal was to provide a description and understanding of answers provided by the interviewees. In other words, this led to the discovering of patterns and developing of overarching themes. The themes were identified inductively.

In inductive thematic analysis, little or no predetermined theory, structure or framework is used to analyse data. Instead the data itself is used to derive the structure of analysis. In an inductive approach, the themes identified are data driven. The process of coding occurs without trying to fit the data into a pre-existing model or frame. The themes are

strongly linked to the data since they emerge from it. The purpose of making use of an inductive thematic analysis of the qualitative semi-structured interview data was to fulfil the research objectives of the study.

Welman et al. (2005) identify key steps in the analysis of qualitative data, as follows:

- Organising and preparing data for analysis including transcribing interviews, typing up field notes, cataloguing all of the visual material, and sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information;
- Reading through all the data to obtain a general sense of the information and reflectingon its overall meaning;
- Validating the accuracy of the information;
- Coding the data;
- Generation of descriptions and themes;
- Advancing on how the descriptions and themes will be presented; and
- Making interpretations of the fidings or results.

The steps proposed by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) were followed. These steps include becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and write up. Braun and Clarke (2006) originally developed a six-steps framework comprising of familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for the themes, reviewing the themes defining and naming themes and producing the report.

1.5.3.7 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

To ensure the quality of data, piloting of the data collection instruments was undertaken. The recorded interviews were transcribed into texts and each participant's transcription was reviewed for correctness before analysis commenced. In qualitative research, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability are the four principles that must

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be factored in to achieve a trustworthy study (Shenton, 2004). Credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability were ensured in this study.

To ensure credibility, each participant was given a choice to take part in the study. No participant was forced into the process. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas and experiences without fear of any possible distortions.

Dependability is synonymous with reliability and it shows that the findings are consistent and can be replicated with comparable subjects in a similar situation (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Inquiry audit was used to achieve this criterion in this study, that is, care was taken to ensure that the research process was logical, traceable, and clearly documented in a reflexive manner by giving a detailed account of the research process.

Transferability refers to the degree to which results of the study can apply to other contexts. It is like external validity. Results of research are said to be transferable only if they fit into different perspectives separate from the actual study context (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To achieve this criterion, there was an extensive description of the phenomenon under study.

Confirmability is the objectivity of the research results. Confirmability establishes that findings are clearly derived from the acquired data and not from researcher bias, inspiration or interest (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). This study made use of an audit trail as a quality measure in data analysis. The audit trail in a way involved the process where the researcher detailed the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed. To avoid any form of bias, the collected data was analysed by the researcher.

Ethical aspects were also considered. Before commencing with the interviews, an introductory letter, a consent form and a copy of the interview guide were handed to each participant. The purpose of the study was explained to all participants in detail, and their permission to conduct the interview was sought. Each participant also signed a consent

form to indicate that they had been consulted with and that they had voluntarily participated in the study.

It was also essential that the participants were protected from any physical and emotional harm. The interviews were conducted within the offices of the company. Due processes were followed, and there was no physical or emotional harm to the participants. All the interviews were conducted in a safe environment. All respondents were reassured of absolute anonymity and confidentiality for taking part in the research study. Their responses were reported using unique code names. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the IT organisation and Unisa (IOP Ethics Review Committee).

1.5.3.8 Reporting

The analysed data was reported into a framework themes and sub-themes. In other words, the emergent codes from the qualitative interviews were categorised into themes and sub-themes. The findings and the academic literature were then integrated into a framework for the discussion of findings. The conclusions and recommendations refocused the aims of the study and key findings regarding each aim.

1.6   CHAPTER LAYOUT

The remaining chapters are presented in the following manner:

Chapter 2: Literature Review. The chapter provides a critical analysis and displays an in-depth understanding of existing knowledge relating to the research topic. The concept of learnerships and IT skills shortage are discussed. Learnerships and retention, including the theoretical relationship between learnerships and retention, are also presented.

Chapter 3: Research Article. This chapter is presented in the form of a research article focusing on the main findings with respect to the learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes in an IT organisation.

Chapter Four: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations. Conclusions and recommendations are presented based on the results of the research. Limitations of the study are also discussed.

1.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 1 the scientific orientation to the research was discussed. This contained the background and motivation, the research problem, aims, the paradigm perspective and the research design. The chapter ended with a layout of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: LEARNERSHIPS IN RELATION TO IT SKILLS SHORTAGE AND RETENTION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, learnerships in relation to the IT skills shortage and retention are discussed. The chapter commences by discussing the concepts of learnerships and learnership programmes, followed by the strategic role learnerships could play, given the global and South African IT skills shortage. The chapter concludes by discussing learnership retention, the relationship between learnerships and retention in the literature, and a summary.

The research reports on a qualitative research approach which explores the value of learnerships through the lived experiences of learners who participated in a learnership programme at an IT organisation in South Africa.

2.2 LEARNERSHIPS

In this section a definition of the learnership construct is provided, followed by a discussion of the characteristics and relevance of learnerships.

2.2.1 Defining learnerships

Horwitz (2013) argues that from an institutional analysis perspective, the post-apartheid state in South Africa in the 1990s and 2000s enacted some of the most progressive legislative measures, including the Labour Relations Act (1995), the Employment Equity Act (EEA) (1998), the Skills Development Act (1998), the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE) (2003) and the Promotion of Equality Act (2000). These measures were intended to redress the legacy of apartheid labour market discrimination and distortions in skills development, access to training and equality of opportunity (Horwitz, 2013).

To address the legacy of inequality, a skills development policy proposed the concept of learnerships as a method of vocational workplace training. This policy was promulgated in the form of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and was legislated in the Skills Development Act (SDA) (97 of 1998), which came into force in 2001 (NSDS, SDA, as cited in Kraak, 2001). The Skills Development Act embodies a strategic, planned approach to link education and training to the changing needs of the economy (Kruss, Wildschut, Rensburg, Visser Hampt & Koodt, 2012). The SDA provides for training and development programmes such as learnerships to afford opportunities to previously excluded workers and previously disadvantaged persons to engage in learning through education and training, which translates into a recognised qualification.

According to the SDA, a learnership is a programme which a SETA may establish if the learnership consists of a structured learning component; the learnership includes practical work experience of a specified nature and duration; the learnership would lead to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority and related to an occupation; and the intended learnership is registered with the Department of Labour in the prescribed manner.

Visser and Kruss (2009) contend that the aim of learnerships was to ensure that they would not be simply a training system for those in the formal sector, but also a system to address the needs of vulnerable groups – women, youth, the unemployed, those in the informal sector – a key social equity concern in South Africa. This seems to suggest a definition of learnerships from a transformational viewpoint.

Others have defined learnerships from a process perspective. For example, the South African Qualifications Authority (as cited in Koyana & Mason 2017) defines a learnership as a structured learning process for gaining theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the workplace, leading to a qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework. Learners participating in a learnership programme must attend classes at a college or training centre to complete classroom-based learning, and they also must complete on-the-job training in a workplace. The workplace experience must be relevant

to the qualification. "Learnership" is mainly a South African term, and it is a combination of formal training and workplace training that culminates in a nationally recognised qualification (De Jager, Hattingh & Hüster, 2002).

Learnerships are intended at all levels of the National Qualification Framework and are not restricted to the intermediate levels, as was the case with apprenticeships (Kraak, 2008). Nor are learnerships restricted to specific age cohorts, as was the case with apprentices where youth over the age of 24 were excluded. Learnerships are "demand-led" – that is, they constitute learning programmes closely aligned to employers' actual skill needs.

Learnerships have been viewed as an innovation in skills development in South Africa and globally. They have been an innovative vehicle in addressing unemployment and shortage of skills across the globe and in South Africa. This is accomplished through providing skills to unemployed youth and increasing their opportunities of gaining employment (Davies & Farquharson, 2004).

Other scholars have corroborated this view. For example, Kraak (2008) notes that learnership innovation lies at the heart of the National Skills Development Strategy, and there are two routes to registration on learnership programmes: training programmes for employed workers, and training programmes for unemployed workers.

Other scholars emphasise the importance of stakeholder collaboration in their definitions of the term "learnership". For Kruss, Wildschut, Rensburg, Visser Hampt and Koodt (2012) learnerships are by definition "stakeholder-rich interventions", which must be implemented in a multidimensional environment consisting of multiple stakeholders and the often-complex interactions between them.

According to Kraak (2001) the success of learnerships depends on co-ordination between various stakeholders, namely government, employers and training providers, while SETAs also play a pivotal role in co-ordinating the process. This seems to suggest that there should a mechanism that enables high level of collaboration between the different stakeholders involved in a learnership programme. This researcher therefore wants to understand the experiences and perceptions of the learners on a learnership programme, as such an understanding will provide a measure of how well the theoretical courses and experiential learning are aligned, and what difference such collaboration makes to the quality of skills and capabilities envisaged in the learnership programme.

Learnerships are formal learning programmes that link theoretical learning with a structured work experience to prepare learners with the skills and knowledge required to successfully complete the learnership programme. Learnerships provide the skills and knowledge required to perform in an occupation and link all the components in such a way as to facilitate the employability of a learner on successful completion of the learnership programme (De Jager et al, 2002). Learnerships are aimed at providing workplace learning in a more structured and systematic form. Formalised learning would be provided by an accredited education and training provider (e.g. a college, university of technology or private provider).

For the purposes of this study, the definition of "learnership" is the one provided in the Skills Development Act and noted above: a learnership is a programme which a SETA may establish if it consists of a structured learning component, practical work experience of a specified nature and duration; leading to a qualification registered by the SAQA and related to an occupation; and the intended learnership is registered with the Department of Labour in the prescribed manner.

The reasons for using this definition are that, firstly, the Skills Development Act is the law providing for training and development programmes such as learnerships to afford opportunities to previously excluded workers or disadvantaged persons to engage in learning through education and training, which translates into a recognised qualification.

Secondly, from a policy perspective, the Skills Development Act promulgated the National Skills Development Strategy, which is meant to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the skills development system, promote a skills development system and architecture that effectively responds to the needs of the labour market, social equity, and so on.

2.2.2 Characteristics of a learnership programme

Davies and Farquharson (2004) view learnership implementation as a transformational tool, as it provides an opportunity for learners to attain an academic qualification together with workplace experience. They note that the intention of a learnership is to assist learners gain skills, knowledge and workplace experience to assist them to become more employable on completion of the learnership programme.

The transformational functions of learnerships are corroborated by other researchers. For example, Visser and Kruss (2009) view the learnership system implemented in 2001 in South Africa as a key component in putting a multi-pronged National Skills Development Strategy into operation. These views suggest a key characteristic of learnerships is that they are expected to foster skills development in the formal economy, as well as assist new (young) entrants into employment. A key feature of the learnership programme as a skills development system in South Africa is that it has been shaped by hard-won consensus between government, organised labour and organised business, facilitated by a series of tripartite structures (Visser & Kruss, 2009).

Davies and Farquharson (2004) assert that learnerships are demand-led and involve partnerships and co-operation between workplace contexts to provide learners with the necessary spectrum of work experience. They cover large enterprises and small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs). Theoretical education and structured workplace experience are integral parts of a learnership. More importantly, a learnership must lead to achievement of a qualification, which is defined by SAQA as a minimum of 120 credits, translating roughly to a 12-month provision period.

There is debate as to whether the priority for the learnership system should be to function as a demand-led formal labour market tool to fill the need for critical and scarce skills, or as an employment-creation mechanism, and whether it is possible to do both effectively (Visser & Kruss, 2009). Visser and Kruss (2009) question whether learnership can fulfil both functions.

Based on a survey of learnerships, Smith, Jennings and Solanki (2005) concluded that learnerships provide important routes for the employed to develop skills and capacities, and for the unemployed to improve employability, but that significant challenges remain to ensure the balance between both target groups, and to strengthen the capacity of SETAs. In contrast, Grawitzky (as cited in Visser & Kruss, 2009) argues that there are weaknesses in the system of upskilling at the intermediate- and high-skills levels, with an overemphasis on skills development at the low-skills end. This could mean there is an imbalance between the skills demands of certain sectors, and the scale and quality of skills development taking place.

Another key characteristic of learnerships is that they rely on complex institutional and structural arrangements, a tripartite agreement between a SETA, training provider, and employer, to provide the theoretical and workplace experience components (Kruss, Wilschut, Janse van Rensburg, Visser, Haupt & Roodt, 2012).

Kruss et al. (2012) note that learnerships are characterised by high proportions of completion and low proportions of drop out. Their survey was longitudinal, tracing a cohort of those who enrolled for a learnership in 2005, the first year of the NSDSII. The subjects were originally surveyed in mid-2007, and then again in mid-2010, the fifth year of the NSDSII. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of those who had first registered for a learnership in the first year, 2005, had completed the qualification by 2007. Only 15% had dropped out, typically after less than six months, and typically because of dissatisfaction with the quality of the training in the workplace or in the theoretical component. A fifth (20%) of the cohort were still busy with longer programmes, and they tended to be enrolled on programmes

at a higher level than their existing qualification, indicating progression up an occupational and career ladder.

When the same cohort was surveyed in 2010, 86% had completed the qualification, and 14% had terminated, suggesting that almost all of those who were still registered in 2007 had completed subsequently. Kruss et al. (2012) assert that these completion rates are very high, and positive, particularly in comparison with the higher education sector, where dropout rates are very high, and completion takes extended periods.

It can be observed that the main characteristics of a learnership programme are:

- Transformational in nature, as it is a tool to assist learners to gain skills, knowledge and workplace experience;
- Covers large, small, medium and micro enterprises;
- Covers theoretical education and structured workplace experience; and
- Leads to an achievement of a recognised qualification.

2.2.3 Relevance of learnership programmes

Vocational education and training that encompass theoretical and practical work-based experience is often regarded as a key solution to assist young people in gaining workplace exposure. This is more applicable to young people who could not further their tertiary education. Learnership programmes align skills to the requirements of jobs (Almeida, Behrman & Rabalino, 2012).

The learnership system since its inception in 2001 was strongly promoted as a means of occupational certification to address high youth unemployment (Kruss et al., 2012). The learnership programmes offers the learner an opportunity to gain workplace learning and this plays an integral role in the development of the learners' skills and competencies. This also assists learners to become more employable and more work ready (Coll & Zegwaard, 2006). The experience gained during the workplace component allows the

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learners to experience organisational culture. It also assists the learner to gain mastery in various areas in the organisation (Ingram, Bruning & Mikawoz, 2009).

By assessing the motivation for learnership enrolment and what the learners expected to gain, Kruss et al. (2012) found that those who were still busy with their programme expected that the learnership would enable them to access employment and improve career opportunities (99%) while a small group expected that the learnership would not enable them to gain employment, because they would not have the required work experience or a qualification recognised by employers.

It can be observed that that the main motivation of enrolling in a learnership programme is to improve skills, gain work experience and a formal qualification. It seems this is particularly important to those who do meet the entrance requirements for institutions of higher learning.

But other strands of literature question the relevance of learnerships, especially about the envisaged national targets versus demand. Kruss et al. (2012) assert that while national enrolment targets for learnerships are typically met, these targets do not match well with firms' demand, or the large-scale need for post-school education and training opportunities at all skills levels for the large national youth cohort. In view of this challenge, there is a need to align firms' demand for skills with learnership interventions.

Some problems have been noted regarding the implementation of learnerships. For example, Kraak (2008) noted that the roll-out of learnerships has been an enormous task from an operational point of view, as they are time-consuming and difficult to implement. According to Grawitzky (as cited in Kraak, 2008) learnership programme design and registration can take anything from two to three years to achieve. Thereafter, the actual curricula must be developed. Accredited training providers must then be obtained. All of this takes a long time and is very resource-intensive, both financially and in terms of expert personnel. Considering this challenge, the way that all stakeholders in a learnership

collaborate with each other should be reconsidered. There is also a need to assess how these stakeholders are co-ordinated.

The enrolment of learners has not automatically resolved the technical skills crisis at the intermediate skills level, because many learnerships are in non-technical fields and at NQF levels far lower than those skills required for artisanal work. These three differing pathways in the production of intermediate skills constitute a highly incoherent and malfunctioning labour market structure for technically skilled labour (Kraak, 2008).

Kraak (2008) argues that two causal factors have given rise to this incoherence in the market for technically skilled labour. These are, firstly, the demise of a structured labour market for apprenticeship and the technical professions and para-professions since the mid-1980s, and secondly, the dual demands placed on learnerships to meet both demand-led training arising from the needs of employers and supply-side training initiatives encouraged by government in support of unemployed youth. In view of this challenge, it seems at policy level a robust evaluation of the learnership system is needed to find out if the it is adequately addressing both demand-side and supply-side needs.

2.2.4 Learners' perceptions of learnership programmes

Kruss et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal survey of learners to ascertain whether the learnership programme developed the skills and capabilities that enabled individuals to access the workplace. They found that most individuals who completed a learnership were positive about the acquisition of "soft" or generic skills such as teamwork and self-confidence. Very few reported that their technical, computer and numeracy skills had been developed. Just over half reported that no qualification was necessary for their current job, and more than a quarter reported no positive employability outcomes at all. This suggests that these qualifications may serve as an indication of employability to employers, rather than a capability for specific skills required in a sectoral labour market (Kruss et al., 2012). Additionally, Kruss et al. (2012) argue that a high proportion of participants see enough value in their learnership to complete the qualification.

There is a dearth of literature with regard to the perceptions of learners on learnership programmes in the IT industry. Studies in other sectors have shown interesting results regarding how learnerships are perceived. Zwane, du Plessis and Slabbert (2017) found various significant differences between skills expected by employers and those presented by learners. They conducted quantitative research by means of a structured questionnaire distributed to 217 employers and 1023 learners on the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) database. Employers expect higher levels of competence than those that learners in the CATHSSETA programme can deliver (Zwane et al., 2017).

The study of the CATHSSETA programme revealed differences in perceptions concerning skills, which raises concern for the future workforce in South Africa and calls for a review of skills attainment, as the expectations of the employers are much higher than learners can deliver. A critical question is whether the same findings will be obtained in the IT industry learnerships.

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of learners enrolled in learnership programmes in the IT industry and it will be interesting to see whether or not the perceptions of the learners' hint at a mismatch between the expectations of learners and employers.

2.3 LEARNERSHIPS AND THE IT SKILLS SHORTAGE

In this section the IT skills shortage is discussed from both a global and South African perspective. The role of learnership programmes as a system to minimise the skills shortage is also discussed.

2.3.1 The IT skills shortage: a global perspective

Schirf and Serapiglia (2017) assert that every year several survey inventories are performed globally throughout the IT industry by trade magazines and research groups that attempt to gauge the current state of the industry as it relates to trends and many of these surveys highlight a global skills shortage and technology skills gap between job expectations and potential employees. The ICT skills shortage is affecting industries globally and international ICT skills shortage, combined with the lower number of ICT graduates graduating from tertiary institutions annually, makes it difficult for businesses to recruit suitably qualified graduates who can immediately make an impact on business process improvements (Calitz, Greyling & Cullen, 2014).

To address the ICT skills shortage, many governments such as China, India and Korea have implemented drastic measures and strategies and in countries such as U.S.A., Canada, Europe, Great Britain and Australia, governments and professional ICT bodies have supported various initiatives to address the worldwide ICT skills shortage (Calitz., et al., 2014).

Skills shortages and competition for scarce skills are common in most countries. For example, an increasing level of labour mobility in high-growth emerging markets such as China, India, South-East Asia, the Emirates and other Middle East emerging markets reflects a massive demand for scarce skills at premium wages (Horwitz, 2013). Bothma (2015) asserts that given the worldwide shortage of skills, some organisations are now outsourcing certain business functions, e.g. their IT infrastructure, computer programming

and systems design, to countries such as India and China, which have already set up the relevant infrastructures and skilled their people.

The importance of skills development in the IT sector is well known, and staff development and retention of talent is an investment. Talent retention is a central theme of discussion in the IT sector. Talent retention is of concern in the IT sector owing to globalisation, the skills shortage and rapidly advancing technology (Oosthuizen, Coetzee & Munro, 2016) and employee turnover has significant costs and negative consequences for organisations. Talent retention in the IT sector is of concern because the global labour market provides increased career opportunities for IT professionals who have strong tendencies to leave their organisations (Munro, Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012, as cited in Oosthuizen, Coetzee & Munro, 2016).

The skills shortage is the gap between the skills supplied and the demand of the ICT companies (Du Plessis Stanz & Barkhuizen, 2010). With the age divide increasing as new entrants join the workforce, firms have the challenge of creating an innovative environment that will help retain top talent (Du Plessis, Stanz & Barkuizen, 2010).

The term "e-skills" refers to the ability to develop and use ICT to participate adequately in an environment dominated by access to electronically enabled information, and a well-developed ability to synthesise this information into effective and relevant knowledge (Mitrovic, 2010). "E-competence" refers to a demonstrated ability to apply skills (e-skills), knowledge and attitudes to achieve observable results. These skills are in short supply all over the world. For example, Europe's growing shortage of people competent and skilled in ICT is affecting the productivity and competitiveness of large and small organisations. The UK industry alone needs 110 000 new people a year to enter IT careers – far more than the current supply (Europa as cited in Mitrovic, 2010).

2.3.2 The IT skills shortage: A South African perspective

South Africa is adversely affected by a shortage of intermediate and certain high-level skills (Horwitz, 2013). The South African labour market is characterised by high levels of unemployment on one hand and skills shortages on the other (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018). The skills shortage has been consistently identified as the single most important constraint to accelerated and sustainable economic growth in South Africa. Economic analysts and experts have predicted that the government may not be able to achieve the targeted annual economic growth rate of 7% unless there is a remarkable transformation of the skills currently obtainable in the country's labour market (Samuel, Reckson & Thakhathi, 2012). The shrinking pool of IT professionals is widely thought to be attributable to the rapidly advancing technological markets, which have widened the gap between the availability of and demand for IT professionals (Mohlala, Goldman & Goosen, 2012).

The skills problem in South Africa has been noted by other scholars. For example, according to Visser and Kruss (2009), the National Skills Development Strategy II was implemented amid concerns that a skills crisis was becoming a "binding constraint" on development, prompting new government interventions to address skills shortages.

Retaining staff with scarce and critical skills in the IT industry has become a top priority because of skills shortages (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). By investigating empirically: (1) the relationship between employees' satisfaction with organisational retention factors (measured by the retention factors scale) and their organisational commitment (measured by the organisational commitment questionnaire) and (2) whether gender, age, race and tenure groups differ significantly in these variables, Van Dyk and Coetzee (2012) found that the participants' intention to stay with or leave their current company (commitment to the organisation) was a highly significant predictor of their affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.

By employing an interpretive research approach (interviewing team leaders in the IT division of a leading South African bank), Mohlala et al. (2012) found that the retention of IT professionals is a function of both situational challenges (which consist of interplay between industry and organisational challenges) and IT-people-specific challenges.

It is estimated that South Africa experienced a shortage of over 70 000 IT professionals and the supply of ICT graduates is showing a decline (Accenture; Birchwood Declaration, as cited in Mitrovic, 2010). There is a gap in the literature as updated figures are not available.

2.3.3 Investment in skills development

It is imperative, due to the demand for skills and expertise, that organisations attract and retain a strong pipeline of skilled individuals (Pop & Barkhuizen, 2010). It is for this reason that organisations have realised the benefit of investing in learnership programmes. Learnerships allow learners the opportunity to enhance their individual employability potential and to obtain a national certificate on successful completion of the programme.

Learnership programmes give learners the opportunity to gain workplace experience by improving their skills and knowledge from various areas within the organisation (Kanye & Crous, 2007). The workplace experience assists learners in understanding and maximising the experience of working in a live environment. Holtzhausen and Du Toit (2009) argue that the workplace experience assists learners with successful transition into their new roles.

2.4   LEARNERSHIP AND RETENTION

In this section, a discussion of learner retention is provided.

2.4.1 Defining learner retention

Learner retention is an increasing concern for organisations that have invested in learnership programmes. Retention not only has an impact on individual learners but produces a ripple effect on the workforce and the economy. Retention and commitment are emerging as key challenges for organisations (Kreisman, 2002). In this study retention is conceptualised as what motivates the learners to complete the programme and then stay in the organisation, that is, the learners do not drop off.

Literature on the effectiveness and importance of retention of learnerships in South Africa is sparse. The Human Science Research Council (HSRC) has conducted studies on learnerships. It surveyed learners who completed programmes in 2005 and then interviewed them in 2007 and 2010 (Kruss et al., 2012). The research provided substantial feedback from individuals who were exposed to learnerships, but not from those who did not enrol in learnership programmes (Kruss et al., 2012).

The HSRC research highlighted rates of completion of learnerships of 65 percent two years after enrolment with 15 percent dropping out without completion, typically during the first six months of the programme. Ninety percent of the individuals on the programme were in permanent positions. The findings of the HSRC research indicate that those learners who completed the learnership transitioned into employment successfully. According to Visser and Kruss (2009), that employment would differ according to the various learnership programmes offered.

Skills retention has several definitions, and writers' views on the topic differ. Organisations rarely have dedicated teams or departments responsible for retention (Carter, Giber & Goldsmith, 2001). According to Schuler and Jackson (2006) retention involves everything an employer does to encourage qualified and productive employees to continue to work for the organisation. James and Mathew (2012) consider employee retention as process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organisation for the maximum period.

2.4.2 Learnerships and retention as strategic objectives

One of the biggest challenge organisations face today is attracting and retaining skilled staff. What makes this task even more daunting in South Africa is that the country does not have a large pool of skilled people looking for employment. Instead skilled people are leaving and seeking opportunities abroad (Bothma, 2015).

Concerns about student retention and throughput are endemic to higher education and have been the subject of research and policy debates since the massification of higher education in South Africa (Manik, as cited in Bengesai & Paideya, 2018).

Studies mostly in the field of education and academic development indicate consensus that there is low participation in higher education, which is compounded by high attrition and is largely driven by the inequities in education attainment that the country has struggled to address since the advent of democracy (Bengesai & Paideya, 2018). A systematic review of literature on persistence in technical areas such as engineering in the USA found that students drop out because of the classroom and academic climate; grades and conceptual understanding; self-efficacy and self-confidence; high school preparation; career aspirations; and race and gender (Geisinger & Raman, 2013).

Literature is sparse regarding the retention of learners enrolled in learnership programmes, more so on learnerships in the IT industry. Most of the literature on retention strategies is gleaned from the strategies used for the retention of employees in firms. IT professionals have specialised and hard-to-replace skills and strong tendencies to leave their organisations and countries. Understanding the retention factors that will increase their organisational commitment may benefit the organisations that want to retain their valuable talent (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012).

The following subsections present discussions on the retention strategies that are the most common in the literature.

2.4.2.1 Compensation and retention bonus

Compensation includes monetary and non-monetary rewards in return for the work employees do (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). Learners are paid a stipend for the duration of the learnership programme. The stipend is one of the primary motivations for applying for learnerships. The stipend offers the opportunity of security, independence, basic survival, or supplement the learners' salary during the duration of the learnership (Hoyt & Gerdloff, 1999; Goldberg & Hamel, 2018). A retention bonus is paid to learners at the end of the programme and is apart from their monthly stipend.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been found to have negative educational outcomes, which have been attributed to socio-economic status, race, language and the quality of the education system. This finding accentuates the significance of compensation and retention bonus in learnerships. Learnerships are not simply a training system for those in the formal sector, but also, a system to address the needs of vulnerable groups – women, youth, the unemployed, those in the informal sector – a key social equity concern in South Africa (Bengesai & Paideya, 2018).

2.4.2.2 Job characteristics

Employees who are highly skilled and technologically inclined enjoy interesting work that allows them to use their skills and talents. They rebel against tasks that are repetitive, mundane and restrictive use of individual discretion (Kochanshki & Ledford, 2001). Job characteristics here include skill variety and job autonomy because highly specialised knowledge workers prefer jobs in which they can use a variety of skills, and which present challenging assignments and offer job autonomy (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012).

The level of the work content and the design of the technology they are exposed to play an integral part in stability and retention (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby & Herron,1996). When a technologically inclined individual sees their tasks as challenging and allowing for learning, they are more satisfied and tend to be more participative and committed to the organisation than employees who do not have a technical mind-set (Gynn, 1996).

Job autonomy can be described as the degree to which a job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion in managing tasks. It also gives the individual the opportunity to determining the work schedule and the process to be followed so that the deadline is met (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). When there is a high degree of job autonomy individuals display a high sense of loyalty, as they thrive on empowerment (Dubie, 2000). Forward-thinking firms allocate resources to empowering individuals to take responsibility for their actions and decisions. This freedom and independence positively influence commitment to the organisation (Agarwal & Ferrat, 1999).

By deploying a cross-sectional survey design and collecting data at one point in time in a South African medical and IT services company, Van Dyk and Coetzee (2012) found that job characteristics also positively predict participants' affective commitment, reflecting that affective commitment occurs because of job conditions and the expectations that organisations meet.

2.4.2.3 Skill variety

Skill variety offers the individual the opportunity to learn and be exposed to several skills. Individuals are more likely to leave an organisation if they feel that their skills are not used (McEachern, 2001). Individuals are also more likely to leave if their skills do not match the role they are assigned to. Organisations need to address the personal needs of employees to enhance retention. Jobs characterised by a wide range of work, the opportunity to solve challenging problems, opportunities to work with the best people, freedom, flexibility and being able to pursue interesting assignments increase employee retention. These feelings of increased competence, and the meaningfulness of the work, should develop organisational commitment (McEachern, 2001).

2.4.2.4 Engagement

Work-related engagement is especially significant predictor of an employee's intention to leave (Saks, 2006). The concept of work-related engagement has received much attention from academics and firms. Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling experience characterised by vigour, commitment, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) define work engagement as an individual's participation, satisfaction and enthusiasm to work. Work engagement is also defined as an individual's state of mind that incorporates their high levels of energy and fulfilment towards their work (Bakker, Demerouti, Hakanen & Xanthopolou, 2007).

Work-related engagement can be linked to optimistic outcomes for organisations (Park & Gursoy, 2012). It resulted in improved job performance, increased job satisfaction and increased retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). Employee engagement has been positively linked to high performance, increased commitment to the organisation and decreased employee turnover (Bakker et al., 2007). Global and South African studies highlight a strong relationship between work engagement and retention (Du Plooy & Roodt, 2010).

2.4.2.5 Training

Organisations need to enable a challenging and meaningful work environment to influence retention. This should include career pathing for the learner by empowering them to take initiative for their self-development. The organisation needs to expose the learner to as many opportunities and challenges as possible (Govaerts, Kyndt, Dochy & Baert, 2011). Kraimer et al. (2011), cited in Van Dyk & Coetzee (2012), assert that opportunities for training and development support employee growth and development. On the other hand, Maurer and Lippstreu cited in Van Dyk and Coetzee (2012) found that employees with low levels of learning orientation do not respond to development support with greater commitment.

Firms seeking a competitive edge are preparing to operate in a knowledge era. This creates the platform to develop knowledge workers. This process requires time and effort by organisations to formulate solid platforms to encourage utilisation of knowledge and ensure that it remains relevant and sustainable (Lee-Kelley, Blackman & Hurst, 2007).

When learners join an organisation to gain workplace experience, they are eager to gain skills and knowledge for the practical component of the learnership (Skule, 2004). An organisation instils a learning environment when learners join the firm, lays the foundation for a learning organisation (Skule, 2004).

2.4.2.6 Providing learner support

The context of support in the workplace refers to employees feeling valued and appreciated in the work environment. The individuals perceive support, as organisations caring about their wellbeing. This coincidentally improves commitment, increases performance and encourages employees to be more involved (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan & Schwartz, 2002). There is a significant link between the concept of engagement and increased worker performance to business outcomes, higher job

satisfaction levels, increased organisational commitment, increased organisational citizenship behaviour and reduced intention to quit (*ibid*).

Providing support increases productivity and encourages learning within an organisation (Pidd, 2004). Organisations usually identify employees who are not coping and provide support to help motivate them. This assists employees to cope with the changes and adjustments they are experiencing while they transition to their new environments (Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1990).

2.4.2.7 Mentor support

The most common support provided to learners is that given by mentor and supervisor. It is a requirement that a learner be assigned and have access to a mentor and supervisor during the workplace component of the learnership (Smith, Jennings & Solanki, 2005).

The purpose of allocating a mentor is to provide a comprehensive training and learning experience to the learner. Mentors play an integral role in the transition from learner to employee (Berezuik, 2010). Mentors have the task of facilitating the learning process and guide the learner towards professional development and growth (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2005). Research has shown that learners who are allocated to mentors displayed greater satisfaction and more commitment to completing the programme than those not assigned to mentors (Ingram et al., 2009). Berezuik (2010) agrees that learners prove more successful in the workplace if they are guided by a mentor.

Previous research has indicated that mentorship is a significant contributor to the retention of learners on a programme (Mummenthey & Du Preez, 2010). It is important to have a proper mentorship process, as this is integral in the learner gaining employability and in retention (Eigsti, 2009; Henson, 2006; Lo & Ramayah, 2011).

The mentor also gains from the mentoring process (Clamp, 2011). The mentor's benefits include an increase in job satisfaction. The process assists with career advancement, as senior roles will include that of managing people. The learner also brings in a new and innovative perspective in methods of work and helps the mentor in completion of allocated tasks (Cureton, Green & Meakin, 2010).

Mentoring programmes also benefit the organisation. The organisation can now rely on individuals to meet challenges, and productivity and retention are increased (Henson, 2006). The mentorship programme reaffirms the organisation's commitment to hosting young talent. It also provides clear guidelines and direction to the learner. The process also creates a platform for constructive feedback to the learner on progress made, and performance can be measured and evaluated (Kanye & Crous, 2007).

The level of supervision a learner receives is related to learner retention, especially with the number of young people enrolled on programmes (Heathfield, 2009). This generation of millennials is looking for supervision, guidance and support to help them to excel and use their skills and knowledge to gain the experience they require. The results of the studies by Du Plessis, Stanz and Barkhuizen (2010) further affirm that having support from the mentor and the organisation was a substantial indicator of the learners' decision to remain with an organisation.

The complaint of individuals who leave an organisation is the lack of feedback on their progress. Individuals want to have discussions on their performance and want to discuss development plans and successes (Heathfield, 2009). The employees want to feel that their contribution is adding to the growth of the organisation (Heathfield, 2009). A mentor who sees the value of guiding, supporting and directing them through their career journey will benefit from the effort put in (Stanz & Mosoeunyane, 2008).

2.4.2.8 Coaching support

A coach is usually hired on their ability to connect with learners. They need to be trustworthy and to have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of the learner throughout the programme. Mentors also support learners as coaches (Hatting, 2006). A coach should ideally be an external resource and not linked to the hierarchy of the organisation. This will help the learners to converse more freely (Smith et al., 2005).

The relationship between coach and coachee is one that is developing and growing (Latham, Hogan & Ringl, 2008). A coach provides support to the learner and focuses on objectives that meet the learner's development goals. A coaching function has two components. One is the learning and guiding of the learner in meeting assignment deadlines. The second focuses on the psychosocial aspect, which incorporates a sense of ability, clarity of individuality and effectiveness in role expectations (Pinkerton, 2009).

The overall purpose of a coach is to provide guidance to the learner, steering them on a path of personal and professional development. The coach would need to gain the trust and confidence of the learner, thus gaining mutual respect (Janse van Rensburg & Roodt, 2005; Johns, McNamara & Moses, 2012). Thus, the aim of having a coach assigned to a learner is to assist them to become competent in their assigned role at the workplace and to provide guidance and support to assist them in their professional development (Berezuik, 2010).

2.4.4.9 Stakeholder engagement

People support initiatives that they are included in. Getting buy-in before the learnership commences is imperative. One of the successes of the learnership programme is stakeholder engagement. It requires participation and commitment from various stakeholders, who include the training provider, the project management team, line managers, supervisors and mentors at the workplace, and the learners (Davies & Farquharson, 2004).

The challenges in the implementation of the learnership programme do not end once the stakeholders are identified. Steering committee meetings must be scheduled from the on-set of the programme. The role of the steering committee is to review progress made by the learner and discuss mentor and learner feedback and the overall wellbeing of the learner (Koch, Tanderup, Borroughs, Le Roux, Theron & Griifin, 1999).

The benefit of the steering committee meetings is consistent monitoring of the learnership programme throughout its 12-month duration. The monthly meetings will address any problems experienced by the employer or by the learner before it becomes critical (Davies & Farquharson, 2004). The progress made, and outcomes of the steering committee meeting must be documented in a report and distributed to stakeholders (Davies & Farquharson, 2004).

2.5. THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNERSHIPS AND RETENTION

In this section, the relationship between learnerships and retention is discussed through the lenses of related research and pertinent theoretical models.

2.5.1 Global and national challenges of learnerships and retention: a synopsis of existing research

There is little existing research on global and national challenge of learnerships and retention. Much existing research is on retention of students in universities (Pocock, 2012). Low student throughput and high dropout rates are a worldwide concern, with several theoretical explanations and interventions, but with little success in improvement (Manik & Ramrathan, 2015). Pocock (2012) says the problem of student retention and completion continues to trouble academics and administrators in higher education systems worldwide. In financial terms, with a world enrolment of tertiary students of over 150 million in 2007, dropout rates of any significant size mean a substantial loss to the institutions in either state subsidies or private fees. Pocock (2012) notes that in sub-

Saharan Africa, the financial loss is further compounded by the loss of potential skilled workers in developing economies, which slows economic growth.

Statistics are not available in the public domain on the dropout rates in learnerships programmes in South Africa. What is available is the number of learners who were registered, and the number certificated. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2018), during the 2016/17 financial year, a total of 249 680 learners registered for SETA-supported learning programmes, reflecting an 8.0% (18 583) increase from the registrations recorded during the 2015/16 financial year. More than half of registrations were for skills programmes (52.5% or 131 017), followed by learnerships (40.6% or 101 447) and registrations for internships (6.9% or 17 216). A total of 180 998 learners were certificated in SETA-supported learning programmes during the 2016/17 financial year, which was 4.1% (7 180) higher than in the 2015/16 financial year.

Learner retention and dropout rate is an increasing concern for institutions of higher education in South Africa. Retention influences the individual, their families and the organisations and has a ripple effect on the community and economy (Hagedorn, 2006). According to Ramrathan and Pillay (2015), South African research suggests that less than one sixth of students enrolled in undergraduate study complete and graduate from their programme within the minimum period.

According to Ramrathan and Pillay (2015), discourses that have emerged across the world in an attempt to explain student dropout concern include: a race-based socio-political discourse, where the ills of past policies and actions (as in the case of South Africa) are blamed for the lack of infrastructural capacity to prepare students for higher education; a student poverty discourse focusing on lack of capital to support students in higher education while promoting positive discrimination to increase participation of students from low socioeconomic strata (as in the case of India); and an academic discourse of student potential, or lack of it, to engage in higher education. These discourses adopt a student deficit lens and the students are the source of the problem.

Much of the literature on high dropout rates, low throughput and increased time to complete trend relates to public higher education (Angelopulo 2013; Favish 2005; Grossen, Grobler & Lacante 2017; Ramrathan & Pillay 2015; Schertzer & Schertzer 2004) and schools (Kumanda, Abongida & Mafumo 2017;).

There is a plethora of literature that reports leaving rates from universities and other higher education institutions worldwide (Pocock, 2012). Student retention models are complex, because of the number of inter-related variables that affect student retention or dropout (Moodley & Singh, 2015). A key starting point was the longitudinal study, reported by Tinto, which was carried out in the USA in the late 1970s.

2.5.2 Pertinent theoretical models

This section outlines two pertinent theoretical models with respect to student retention.

2.5.3 Tinto's student integration theory

Regarding reasons for leaving higher education institutions, Tinto suggested a conceptual framework that would determine whether an individual left higher-level study or remained in the system. The model is longitudinal and relies on interactions between the individual and the institution. Tinto's popular model explains student retention by focusing on student integration. It is based on three spheres: cultural, social and academic, which have become the bases for many other theories and models (Moodley & Singh, 2015).

The more integrated into the institutional environment one is, the less one is likely to drop out and this interaction can strengthen the students' goals and institutional commitments to maintain persistence – the lack of it can lead to various forms of dropout (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004). Tinto (1993) (as cited in Bengesayi & Paideya, 2018) theorised that students who manage to integrate both academically and socially are more likely to persist and graduate from university. Further, he reasoned that active student engagement was the pillar of student success, which was a matter of how students learn, rather than how

they should be taught. In addition, the extent to which a student can integrate academically depends on his or her pre-university characteristics such as schooling, family background and prior academic achievement. Tinto's student integration model is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Academic preparedness
 	
Individual attributes
	Academic Experience
	
	Grade performance
	Intellectual development
	Student faculty interaction
		Academic integration
		   Goal commitment
		   Program "fit"
			Retention/ Attrition decisions

	Social Experience Peer interaction Extra-curricular activity Informal student/faculty interaction	Social integration Institutional commitment Institutional "fit"	

Figure 2.1   Simplified student integration model (based on Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Adapted from Marshall (2008).

Tinto (1993) further argued that integration into the academic and social communities is critical in determining whether a student will remain in school or not. Tinto's model assumes persistence to be related to how well the individual's motivation and academic ability match the institution's academic and social features (Kumanda et al., 2017).

While these are important variables that affect student retention in higher education, Tinto's model does not include other reasons why students drop out, such as finances, poor academic performance, lack of family or social/emotional encouragement, and difficult personal adjustment (De Witz, Woolsey & Walsh 2009 as cited in Moodley & Singh

2015). According to Zepke, Leach and Pebble (2006) Tinto's theory and models are not without critics and these fall into two broad groups – those who wish to revise and improve Tinto's theories, and those devising new theories. Those revising Tinto's model retain his integrative intent, resulting in an assimilation process, fitting the student into the institution. Those developing new theoretical directions modify this to include adaptation, where institutions change to accommodate diverse students.

2.5.4 Swail's student retention framework (1995)

The retention model of Swail (1995:21) has five components – financial aid, recruitment and admissions, curriculum and instruction, academic services, and student services (Moodley & Singh 2015). Each of these pillars is representative of critical service departments in most universities (Bengesayi & Paideya 2018; Swail as cited in Moodley & Singh 2015). Figure 2.2 is a graphic illustration of Swail's student retention framework.
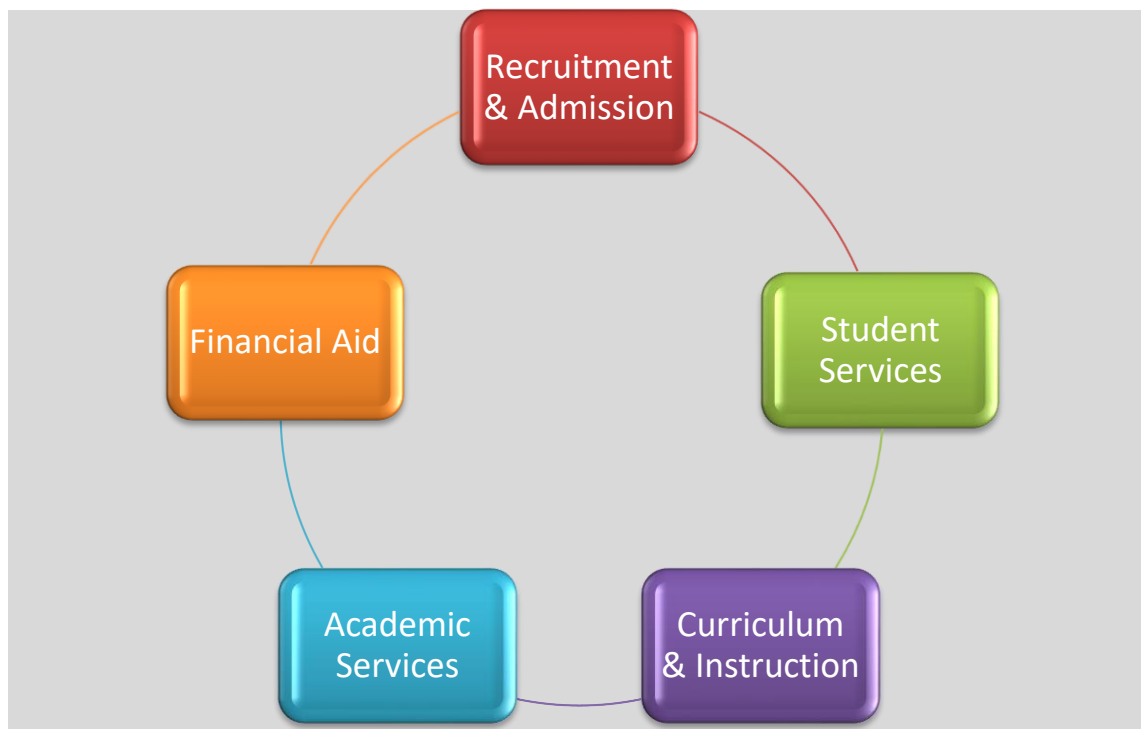
Figure 1.2   Components of the Student Retention Framework (Swail, 1995)

Adapted from Moodley & Singh (2015)

Moodley and Singh (2015a) argue that to improve student retention, especially for students from low-income backgrounds, finances are the most crucial factor. In South Africa, the introduction of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) grant to students was redeveloped in 2012 to increase its efficacy. Regarding recruitment and admissions, institutions must be cognizant of the institution-student fit (Moodley & Singh, 2015b).

The focus of academic services in terms of student retention should be on providing supplementary support to students, in addition to class contact (Moodley & Singh, 2015c). Swail (1995) divides this component into six categories: academic advising, supplementary instruction, tutoring and mentoring, research opportunities, pre-university programming and bridging programmes.

The ongoing development of curricula and teaching and learning practices are two important factors that are fundamental to student retention (Swail, 1995 cited in Moodley & Singh, 2015). In terms of student services, Swail (1995) says the atmosphere and climate (a collective contribution of the practices of administrative staff members, faculty members, support staff and other students) of the university is reflected by how the institution treats and supports students.

While this study is not about testing the relevance of the theories of retention on learnership programmes, it is important to explore how and to what degree the key variables or components in Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration model and Swail's (1995) student retention framework are relevant to the reasons for staying on or dropping out of the programmes.

2.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, learnerships in relation to the IT skills shortage were discussed. The characteristics, relevance and learners' perceptions were discussed. Related literature (world and South African) on IT skills shortages was discussed. The theoretical relationships between learnerships and retention were explored, including the pertinent theoretical models on retention.

In the next chapter, the study is presented in the form of a full journal article.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ARTICLE

In this chapter, my research is presented as a full *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* (*SAJIP*) article.

LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMMES IN AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

ABSTRACT

Orientation –There are many organisations in South Africa that fail to retain learners enrolled in a learnership programme. The study explores the lived experiences of learners to get a better understanding of how organisations can retain learners.

Research purpose – The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of 16 learners enrolled in learnership programmes and also gain insights on factors affecting the retention of the learners.

Motivation for the study – Social change implications include organisational leaders increasing retention rates of learners, enhancing learner motivation and improving relationships. Results may benefit organisations by reducing turnover costs.

Research design, approach and method – This exploratory qualitative study was conducted within the interpretive research paradigm. A purposive sample consisting of semi structured interviews with eight learners who successfully completed and eight learners who did not complete the programme

Main findings – The main findings indicate that the central theme pertaining to learners working in corporate environments are the types of challenges inherent in their work settings.

The main challenges (inhibiting factors) found were the following:

- Inadequate support and guidance from mentors;
- A culture that did not welcome learners;
- Inadequate communication leading to ad hoc allocation of activities;
- No access to essential resources such as computers and laptops;
- Low or non-existent institutional support; and
- An inflexible compensation, reward and recognition system.

Practical or managerial implications – The findings may guide organisations in developing and implementing effective and well-informed policies, strategies and initiatives geared towards the attraction, integration, retention and appropriate support of learners who wish to be employed in professional environments.

Contribution or value-add – This study provides current insight into the plight of learners on a learnership programme at an IT organisation South Africa. Recommendations on how learnership programmes can be used as a tool of talent retention in the IT industry are also provided.

Key words: qualitative research; learnerships; retention; work.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to reflect on an investigation of learnership programmes in an IT organisation by focusing on understanding the opinions, perceptions, experiences and perspectives of learners on a learnership programme, including the factors affecting retention of the learners.

According to Horwitz (2013), skills shortages and competition for scarce skills are not unique to emergent markets and transitional political economies such as South Africa, as an increasing level of labour mobility in high-growth emergent markets such as China, India, South-East Asia, the Emirates and other Middle East emergent markets reflects a massive demand for scarce skills at premium wages. It is widely recognised that the economic success of regional and national economies depends increasingly on education and skills (Green & Owen, 2003).

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, skills shortages in South Africa have been largely considered as among the main constraints to economic growth and employment creation (Shava & Clementine, 2016; Muller, Gumbo, Tholo & Sedupane, 2014; Samuel, Reckson & Thakathi, 2012; Mummenthey & du Preez 2010). The skills problem in South Africa relates not only to high-skill needs but also to intermediate and low-skill needs (Kraak, 2005).

There is growing concern that the widespread introduction and development of IT is being hindered by a growing shortage of manpower with high-level IT skills (Gordon, 1986). Retaining staff with scarce and critical skills in the IT industry has become a top priority because of skills shortages (Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). Overcoming the skills shortages has been a major concern and an issue of debate in South Africa and has also seen many policy interventions being put in place by the South African government. One of these policy interventions has been the establishment of the learnership system.

Learnership programmes consist of a structured learning component and a practical work experience of a specified nature and duration, leading to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority and related to an occupation.

The retention of learners during the learnership programme duration is therefore critical. According to Pocock (2012), the problem of student retention and completion continues to trouble academics and administrators in higher education systems worldwide. In financial terms, with a world enrolment of tertiary students of over 150 million in 2007, dropout rates of any significant size represent a substantial loss to the institutions in either state subsidies or private fees. In sub-Saharan Africa, the financial loss is compounded by the loss of potential skilled workers in developing economies, thus slowing economic growth.

3.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The legacy of apartheid has left South Africa and its companies in dire need of skills, accompanied by rising unemployment levels and shortages of versatile and experienced managers and professionals, who are regarded as skilled labour across the South African economy (Akbar, Vajeth & Wissink, 2016). According to Powell, Reddy and Juan (2016), since 1994 the state has instituted active labour market policies to redress the apartheid skills legacy. The skills planning challenge continues to be how to co-ordinate efforts for the provision of the right skills to support inclusive economic growth, ensuring an alignment is achieved between what is required in the labour market and the supply from the education and training system.

The consensus among government, organised labour and organised business that in order to achieve growth and development, South Africa requires a multi-pronged skills development strategy that targets high, intermediate and low-level skills led to the establishment of learnerships as a new skills development system (Samuel, Reckson & Thakhathi, 2012). According to Davies and Farquharson, (2004), since the Skills Development Act of 1998, the learnership model of workplace training has been espoused

as a creative vehicle for addressing high unemployment rates and a scarce skills shortage. Learnerships are viewed as a key intervention with the dual purpose of increasing employment and solving the incessant skills shortage in South Africa.

Learnerships give organisations the opportunity to evaluate the potential of learners and attract and retain talent for business (Davies & Farquharson, 2004). Learner retention and dropout rates are an increasing concern for many institutions of higher education in South Africa. According to Hagedorn (2006), retention has an impact on the individual, their families and the organisations and has a ripple effect on the community and economy

.

Vast investments (resources, time, energy) are being made by SETAs, training employee, firms and other stakeholders involved in learnership in all sectors in general and in the IT sector. Yet it seems most companies are not utilising the learnership programmes as a tool for talent management, more specifically, talent retention. The problem is that it seems that despite their investments in learnerships there appears to be less effort to understand the perceptions and experiences of the learners to utilise the learnerships as a tool of talent retention.

It is difficult to find evidence that show or suggest that organisations are utilising learnership programmes as a tool for talent retention. The problem is accentuated considering that the costs of having to replace someone with scarce skills are considerable, that is, recruitment costs are usually high. In addition, there is the risk that new staff may not perform as expected, despite attempts to follow effective selection processes.

In view of all the investments being made in the learnership programme and the gradual and continuous fall in the rate of retention, this study is therefore aimed at exploring the value of learnerships through the lived experiences of learners who participated in a learnership programme in an IT organisation in South Africa.

3.3   RESEARCH PURPOSE AND CONTRIBUTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the learners' experiences of learnership programmes in an IT organisation. The qualitative study allowed for the understanding of the learners' experiences of learnership programmes and the factors impacting on the retention of the learners.

Learner retention is an increasing concern for organisations that have invested in learnership programmes. Retention not only has an impact on individual learners but produces a ripple effect on the workforce and the economy. Retention and employee commitment are emerging as key challenges for organisations (Kreisman, 2002).

Other than research conducted by Pop and Barkhuizen (2010) focusing relationship between skills training and retention in a South African ICT company, it seems there has been little research that can easily be obtained in the public domain regarding the effectiveness and importance of retention of learnerships in South Africa. Much of the research tended to focus on ICT skills requirements in South Africa (Lotriet, Matthee & Alexander, 2010) or on effectiveness of SETAs (Davies & Farquharson 2004) or on efficacy and impact of learnerships (Human Sciences Research Council & Development Policy Research Unit, 2012) or reasons for insufficient ICT skills in South Africa (Kirlidog, Vyver, Zeeman & Coetzee, 2018).

Although there are studies on learnerships, for example, learnership relevance and effectiveness (Akbar, Vajeth & Wissink, 2016; Mayer & Altman 2005), effective management (Davies & Farquharson 2004), lessons learnt (Thomas 2013) and role of learnership system (Samuel & Thakhathi, 2012), there is a dearth of research conducted among learners on IT learnership programmes regarding their experiences, perceptions and retention.

This study is intended to contribute to the body of knowledge of learners' experiences of learnership programmes and stimulate debate and/or further research on retention of learners enrolled in learnerships programmes in general, and specifically learners enrolled in learnerships in the South African IT industry. Moreover, the findings of this research may also help organisations implementing learnerships and other stakeholders with possible solutions and recommendations to deal with the issue of retention in learnerships.

3.4   LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a literature review on learnership programmes, learnerships and the IT skills shortage, learnerships and retention and the pertinent theories on retention.

3.4.1 Learnership programmes

Legislative measures were introduced aimed at redressing the legacy of apartheid labour market discrimination and distortions in skills development, access to training and equality of opportunity (Horwitz, 2013). These include the Labour Relations Act (1995), the Employment Equity Act (EEA) (1998), the Skills Development Act (1998), the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE) (2003) and the Promotion of Equality Act.

3.4.1.1 Learnerships: a policy intervention

According to Davies and Farquharson (2004), since the Skills Development Act of 1998, the learnership model of workplace training has been promoted in South Africa as a creative vehicle for addressing high unemployment rates and a scarce skills shortage. Learnerships are administered and managed by SETAs to respond to specific sectoral skills priorities (Samuel, Reckson &Thakhathi 2012; Visser & Kruss 2009).

The Skills Development Act (No 97 of 1998) is viewed as legislation which embodies a strategic, planned approach to link education and training to the changing needs of the economy (Kruss, Wildschut, Rensburg, Visser, Haupt & Roodt, 2012). According to the Skills Development Act, a learnership is a programme which a SETA may establish if the learnership consists of a structured learning component; the learnership includes practical work experience of a specified nature and duration; the learnership would lead to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority and related to an occupation.

The Skills Development Act introduced training and development programmes such as learnerships to afford opportunities to previously excluded workers and previously disadvantaged persons to engage in learning through education and training that leads to a recognised qualification. The Skills Development Act promulgated the National Skills Development Strategy meant to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the skills development system, and make that system respond to the needs of the labour market and social equity. It seems that despite the government's endeavours against unfair discrimination, the paradox of an oversupply of unskilled workers and shortages in certain skilled and professional categories persist.

The learnership system, which was established by the Skills Development Act, Act No. 97 of 1998 (effectively in place since 2000), is a dual vocational-training model (theoretical learning at a training institution with practical on-the-job-training in the workplace) resulting in a recognised national occupational qualification (Mummenthey & du Preez 2010). According to Ngcamu and Teferra (2015), the purpose of the Skills Development Act (SDA) of 1998 (Act 97 of 1998) is to provide an institutional framework to forge and implement national, public and private sector workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce. These workplace strategies should be integrated within the ambit of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) in the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of 1998 (Act 58 1995) to provide learnerships that lead to recognised occupational qualifications.

According to Kraak (2005) learnerships are a new form of apprenticeship that seeks to overcome the limits of the older craft tradition, as they are aimed at providing workplace learning in a more structured and systematic form. The importance of workplace training is widely recognised internationally, as demonstrated by the extensive research of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Davies & Farquharson, 2004).

The key characteristics of learnerships are that the learnerships seek to link structured learning to multiple sites of work experience. Learnership agreements must be drawn up between the employer, the education and training provider and the learner. All this training and practical work experience must culminate in a nationally recognised qualification. Learnerships involve partnerships and co-operation between workplace contexts to provide learners with the necessary spectrum of work experience. These contexts go beyond the large, corporate segment of the economy to include small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) and the voluntary service context. Learnerships aim to integrate theoretical education and skills training in both the learning programme and in the assessment process.

Smith, Jennings and Solanki (2005) posit that by introducing learnerships the government thus intends, on the one hand, to satisfy the skills needs of the ever-increasing service sector within the first economy and, on the other hand, to effectively redress the growing number of South Africans excluded from participating in the labour market, particularly those operating within the second economy.

Apprenticeship-type training was broadened to include all business sectors. The introduction of employer/student and education provider collaborative learnerships followed the formation of sector education and training authorities (SETA) as part of the construction of the post-apartheid system of education and training (Van der Bijl & Taylor, 2016). Unlike apprenticeships, which apply to selected trades, learnerships apply to any occupation (Davies & Farquharson (2004). They go on to assert that learnerships could

also be described as consisting of a set of tools aimed at achieving a set of transformations, which include:

- Addressing problematic features of the South African labour market by aligning education and training initiatives more closely with labour market needs; and
- Building a relationship between structured learning and structured work experience, which equips learners with new kinds of competencies as required by the labour market and for lifelong learning.

Strong national education and training systems in the home country are centripetal forces, enabling local innovation and disincentives the off-shoring of knowledge-intensive activity (Gastrow & Kruss, 2012). While skills development is imperative, recourse to policies concerned with merely large-scale production of skill without due consideration to how those skills can be absorbed into the labour market can be counter-productive, through reducing motivation and debasing the skills.

Learnerships exist in a highly legislated context and tend to be implemented in multiple-stakeholder environments. The combination of these factors provides a project manager with significant challenges in ensuring the effective delivery of a learnership and of its outcomes. Given the challenges of skill shortages in South Africa, learnerships are an imperative. Mayer and Altman (2005a) argue that skills development in South Africa must be aligned to the economic and political imperatives of reducing unemployment and poverty, while fostering growth and international competitiveness.

According to Mayer and Altman (2005b) the legacy of a resource-based economy, overlaid by apartheid policies, has resulted in widespread poverty, inequality and unemployment existing alongside globally competitive industries. Ultimately, learnerships were proposed to be an inclusive and diverse instrument, aimed at all skills levels, at all age groups, and at all sectors, with differentiated functions: a redress function to develop foundational competences at low NQF levels for those who had not completed schooling; a technical and vocational skilling function to develop general and specific competences

at the intermediate-skills levels; and in cooperation with higher education institutions, to develop specialised para-professional and professional competences (Department of Labour, 1999a as cited in Visser & Kruss, 2009). According to Visser and Kruss (2009), this is because the aim was to ensure that learnerships would not be simply a training system for those in the formal sector, but also, a system to address the needs of vulnerable groups – women, youth, the unemployed, those in the informal sector – a key social equity concern in South Africa.

3.4.1.2 Real value of learnerships

According to Kruss et al. (2012) the learnership system since its inception in 2001 was strongly promoted as a means of occupational certification to address high youth unemployment. There is a consensus that to achieve growth and development, South Africa requires a multi-pronged skills development strategy that targets high, intermediate and low-level skills development simultaneously in a differentiated manner (Kraak 2008; Kraak et al., 2009 as cited in Samuel & Thakhathi 2012).

Other strands of literature, however, question the real value of learnerships, especially in terms of the envisaged national targets versus demand. The point of divergence is whether a single intervention mechanism can provide such a multi-pronged strategy on its own, functioning as a demand-led formal labour market tool to fill the need for critical and scarce high-and intermediate-level skills, and simultaneously, as an employment-creation mechanism at the low-and intermediate-skills levels (Fuller & Unwin 2003 as cited in Samuel & Thakhathi, 2012)

By mining a survey database to identify the learning and labour market outcomes of the young unemployed, Visser and Kruss (2009) demonstrate that in practice the learnership system is increasingly prioritising the employment-creation function to meet the needs of vulnerable groups at intermediate- and low-skills levels, which is evident in a focus on skills development for young Africans registered at Level 4 and below. Trends point to a

degree of success of the system at the intermediate-skills level, but to failures at the low-skills level, which may undermine the value of the qualifications and the system.

In addition, Visser and Kruss (2009) raise concern regarding the adequacy of the learnership system to meet the needs of its majority beneficiaries: unemployed people, whose learnership qualifications may not be aligned sufficiently with labour-market demand or may be at too low a level to impart core competences and skills that allow for employment flexibility, which may devalue their labour-market exchange value. The tendency to perceive learnership qualifications as a low-status, low-skills qualifications route for marginalised young people who are unable to access further, and higher education is also of concern (Visser & Kruss 2009).

Problems have also been noted regarding the implementation of learnerships. For example, Kraas (2008) noted that the roll-out of learnerships has been an enormous task from an operational point of view, as they are very time-consuming and difficult to implement. According to Kraak (2008) a learnership programme design and registration can take two to three years to achieve. Thereafter the actual curricula must be developed, accredited training providers must be sourced, and all of this takes a long time and is very resource-intensive, both financially and in terms of expert personnel.

3.4.1.3 *Learners' perceptions of learnership programmes*

Literature regarding experiences associated with learnerships and perceptions of learners of IT learnership programmes in South Africa appears to be sparse. However, studies have been conducted on learnerships in other sectors. For example, in a survey (structured questionnaire) with people who had recently completed a learnership with a SETA (the SETA requested anonymity), Akbar, Vajeth and Wissink (2016) drew the following five key conclusions:

- Firstly, there is consensus that the certificate issued at the end of the training is recognized as valid and will by and large be accepted by employers.

- Secondly, looking at overall value clustered questions, a small number, twenty-one percent on average, of respondents agreed that the learnership training had real value.

- Thirdly, looking at the overall positive experience, only 6.25 percent of respondents feel that their learnership training was a positive experience.

- Fourthly, on average 29.38 percent of respondents believe that good communication, both vertically (between trainers and learners) and laterally (among learners), formed part of the experience.

- Fifthly, only 18.75 percent of the respondents agree that the structure and content of these programs were conducive and inspired future participation in these programs.

- Finally, a large portion (on average 40%) of the respondents agreed that there were other extraneous negative factors associated with the learnership training that impacted the overall value of these programmes.

Some literature is available regarding school leavers perceptions of science and technology. For example, in a study involving semi structured one-to-one interviews with students, and group interviews with employees, designed to explore students' attitude towards science and technology and explain why appropriately qualified school leavers turn to courses in other fields than science and technology, Fuller (1991) finds that there are discouraging factors in the experience of taking science subjects at school. For example, some school leavers felt that science and technology could limit their personal development. Some perceived that science and technology did not allow room for personal autonomy, and in that sense, would be less intellectually stretching than other subjects (Fuller, 1991).

Some felt that students have preconceived notions about science and technology careers, particularly in industries where promotion was inevitably constrained by workplace hierarchies. Early self-employment was unlikely to be a realistic option, the work itself would be challenging enough and there would be inadequate chances to articulate ideas

and views and that science and technology subjects are uniquely demanding academically (Fuller, 1991).

3.4.2 Learnerships and the IT skills shortage

Skills shortages, learnerships and retention theories are discussed in this section. Skills shortages and competition for scarce skills are discussed from a global and South African viewpoint.

3.4.2.1 Global skills shortages

Horwitz (2013) argues that the establishment of countrywide institutes of technology has gone some way in increasing the supply of skilled and professional labour market entrants in other emerging markets such as India and Taiwan. Large-scale science parks with closely linked training institutes have been developed in countries such as Brazil, China, India, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia, as these countries seek to make education and skills development a national competitive advantage and endeavour to reverse the brain drain (Horwitz, 2013). One of the ironies of skill shortages is that they can co-exist with unemployment because of a mismatch in labour supply and labour demand (Pyke, Bertone, Grace & Broadbent, 2007).

Cameron and O'Hanlon-Rose (2011) assert that major labour and skills shortages are being experienced in many nations. The shortages are caused by a complicated interplay of macro and micro forces and cannot be attributed to any one factor. This suggests that the drivers of skills shortages demonstrate the complexity of labour market behaviour. Cameron and O'Hanlon Rose (2011) identify the common causes of skills shortages as:

- A general under-investment in skills development;
- Rapid structural change combined with low levels of overall unemployment;
- A cyclical surge in employment in a part of the economy; and
- Spots of weakness in the training system.

According to Gastrow and Kruss (2012) Denmark and Sweden, for example, have local shortages of specific skills forcing them to look elsewhere in Europe and more recently in Asia. Skills shortages are one of the most talked-of difficulties that British industry currently faces (Fuller, 1991). Gamble, Patrick and Peach (2010) contend that it is widely acknowledged that the world is enduring a skills shortage and this epidemic appears to have a great impact on businesses with sites in developing economies. They argue that there are no shortages of graduates but that there is a shortage of talent. In India, for example, just 25% of graduates are considered employable by large organisations and in China that figure drops to 10%. This suggests that the greatest challenge faced especially by multinational organisations is the attraction and retention of appropriately skilled staff for sites in developing economies.

3.4.2.2 Skills shortages in South Africa

Mateus, Iwu and Allen-Ile (2014) argue that with adequate skills, economic growth will be sustained, and jobs are likely to be created. Consequently, poverty can be reduced and the living conditions of most of the country's population may improve, while the opposite will present many negative consequences. By eliciting the views of educators in high schools in Khayelitsha, Cape Town through a mixed research method, Mateus et al. (2014), found that 77.9 percent agreed that skills shortage exists because of learning structures that should recover from decades of neglect and dysfunction under the apartheid regime. In a study focusing on the descriptive analysis of the causes, challenges and effects of skills deficit on youth employment in South Africa, Shava and Clementine (2016) conclude that the government should create youth development initiatives such as skills development programmes which will educate and empower the economically active group such as the youth and the graduates to earn the technical skills which will enable them to exploit the resources in the country to attain self-sufficiency at the height of unemployment.

The study depicts that skills deficits are a result of poor training and development and a mismatch between available jobs and the unrelated market skills of most graduates. The situation is exacerbated by the general perception of high school learners towards technology. Mateus et al. (2014) argue that the decline in the numbers of school leavers entering science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses worldwide and in South Africa, is linked to negative attitudes towards technology.

This is supported by Horwitz (2013) who asserts that human resource development and education in skills and competencies needed are critical to South Africa's twin challenges of global competitiveness and elimination of unfair discrimination. This implies that several economic sectors need both high- and low-level skills, with the high-level skills mainly being in the information economy and high value-adding occupations. This suggests that a balance should be struck between responses to past discrimination and the clear need for high performance practices. Benjamin (as cited in Horwitz, 2013) argues that in transitional economies, regular and careful management of the transitions between education, training and employment is necessary.

3.4.2.3 Information Technology skills shortages

The deficit of skills in South Africa has forced several ICT companies to be innovative and start their own training academies, to curb the loss of skilled labour and the negative effects it had on organisations.

Most ICT companies in South Africa recruit ICT graduates on their intensive programme of studying, working and mentorship to get them up to speed and able to go into, for example, a large bank and be a productive asset. Such initiatives also help in bridging the skills gap and ultimately contribute to youth empowerment. The initiatives by private organisations in starting their own academies suggest an indictment of IT skills shortages in South Africa and low throughput of ICT graduate from higher institutions and learnership programmes.

Despite various attempts to rectify the situation, the ICT skills gap in South Africa is increasing. According to Kirlidog, Van der Vyver, Zeeman and Coetzee (2016), nominally, ICT enrolments and graduations have shown a slight increase in the last few years. But when compared to overall enrolments and graduations, which have shown decent growth, they have decreased.

By determining the perceptions of randomly chosen students about computer-related disciplines, Kirlidog et al. (2016) concluded that one of the chief reasons for this is the negative and usually ungrounded perceptions of students about the ICT-related professions. They assert that education policy makers in South Africa are aware of the problem in ICT education. Addressing the sources of these negative stereotypes and perceptions, such as parents, friends, educators and the media, will make a significant contribution towards addressing the ICT skills shortage, not only in South Africa, but globally as well.

3.4.3 Learnerships and retention

Davies and Farquharson (2004) identify the use of selection criteria, the identification of appropriate applicants, the involvement of key stakeholders and understanding of the reasons for low participation as the key factors affecting the level of participation and retention in learnerships.

Retention of students is a worldwide issue (Pocock, 2012). Literature on learner retention in learnerships programmes in South Africa appears to be sparse. In other words, there appears to be a dearth of published research on dropout in learnership programmes and more particularly in IT learnership programmes in South Africa, which is why the literature overview refers to research undertaken in universities in South Africa and the rest of the world. Strands of the literature on high dropout rates, low throughput and increased time to complete mostly pertain to public higher education (Angelopulo 2013; Favish 2005; Ramrathan & Pillay 2015; Schertzer & Schertzer 2004) and schools (Kumanda, Abongida & Mafumo 2017; Grossen, Grobler & Lacante 2017).

In the USA, retention of college students is a concern across the nation (Crowe, 2015a). According to Crowe (2015b), retention of college students, also referred to in the literature as persistence, has been a subject of research for many years. Investigators have sought to identify the characteristics and attitudes of students, faculty, and institutions that affect student persistence, as well as what formal programmes, informal experiences and other factors can help retain students.

Different terms used by different researchers or institutions when they refer to student loss. For example, according to Pocock (2012), several terms for leaving university without qualification are used in the literature. One common phrase used in the literature to describe students who leave university without completing a qualification in their chosen initial degree subject is "drop-out". Other common terms are "attrition rate" and "leaving without graduating" to describe students who leave either an institution or higher education in general, and "stop-out" to define those who return after a period. The actual term used does little to distinguish the reasons for leaving, which can be variously linked to both the individual and the institution involved.

To better understand leaving rates in the Faculty of Engineering at the UKZN, Pocock (2012) studied two sets of data. The first was a year-on-year cohort registration analysis, which provided an indication of the overall leaving rate from the university, along with time of leaving (i.e. how many years of study were completed). The second was a population balance across the faculty registrations, which provided a one-year snapshot of student progression and departure. This population balance provided an overall one-year loss rate and allowed identification of students for interviews to determine their reasons for leaving. Pocock (2012) found two major reasons for student loss, which can be classed as financial (48% of the subset) or academic (48% of respondents within the interviews). These factors also reflect perceptions of student departures in the local environment.

By conducting a study at a TVET college in the Western Cape province to identify specific, local-level reasons for academic failure and attrition, Van der Bijl & Lawrence (2016) by applying Tinto's student integration framework, found that some students were overwhelmed by the curriculum content because their prior learning did not equip them adequately. Furthermore, porous support mechanisms and a shortage of finance had contributed to early departures.

In qualitative research undertaken to determine from PGCE (senior phase and FET) dropout students why they dropped out, at what stage they dropped out and what Unisa could have done to prevent them from dropping out, Dreyer (2010) found, inter alia, that time (relating to work and family) is the most important factor that impacts negatively on throughput. Several institutional factors that contribute to dropout were also identified, which makes it easier to plan and undertake retention activities.

Zepke and Leach (2006) view retention as whether a student continues in study until completion and includes those who have successfully completed. It appears that retention is a useful indicator of the internal efficiency or quality of the tertiary education system. Talent retention of employees is also crucial, considering that employees also enrol in learnership programmes. Retention is defined as the effort by employers to retain talented and high-performing employees to achieve organisational objectives (Eramus, Grobler & Niekerk, 2015). Retaining high-performing employees or the "best professional talent" is of great significance to organisations, as it eliminates the recruitment, selection and on-boarding costs that would otherwise be incurred in replacing them.

Yorke (2001) argues that while there is evidence from Australia (McInnis, James & McNaught, 1995) and the UK (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1997; Yorke, 2001) that many school leavers are unprepared or unready for the experience of higher education, the quality of the student experience is one of the key determinants of retention. It appears these are matters over which institutions have considerable control (not full control, since the requirements of some professional and statutory bodies are constraints on institutional autonomy, and students themselves are active contributors to their learning experiences).

Tinto (1993) argues that a sound retention programme should emerge because of a well-constructed educational programme, and not be a gimmicky freestanding initiative. According to Favish (2005a), international retention studies have shown that the quality of student experiences in higher education institutions is one of the key determinants in retention. Favish (2005b) highlights the need to address the kind of knowledge and skills that staff need to design and deliver transformed curricula, while designing and implementing comprehensive integrated learner-centred support strategies to ensure learner success and retention.

3.4.4 Theoretical relationship between learnerships and retention

Tinto's (1975; 1993) student integration theory and Swail's (2004) student retention framework dominate discourses on retention of students. According to Van de Bijl and Lawrence (2018), Tinto's work has been critiqued, but it remains a useful tool for analysing student retention and has been widely applied in analyses of student attrition in South Africa (Koen, 2007; Pather & Chetty, 2015).

Pather and Chetty (2015) assert that Tinto's (1975; 1993) model features three distinctive stages in the process of student departure. In the first stage, students enter university with varying background characteristics (e.g. family background; parental educational level); individual attributes (e.g. age, sex, race, ability) and prior academic experience (e.g. schooling experience, grades). Tinto regards the first stage of his model as a period of separation where the students' pre-entry characteristics have a direct influence on: drop out; initial commitment to the institution; and initial goal of persistence. The second stage in his model is the identifiable integration process. In this stage the students' level of integration into the academic and social systems of higher education is influenced by their initial level of commitment to the institution and the commitment to the goal of graduation at the institution. The third and final stage entails structural and normative integration. Structural integration refers to the explicit standards required by the university (duties, responsibilities, procedures) while normative integration, in contrast, refers to norms and

expectations of the students' identification of normative structures of the academic system that are not officially stated (Pather & Chetty, 2015).

Zepke, Leach and Prebble (2006) contend that Tinto (1993) suggests that students who enrol in tertiary study leave their culture of origin and enter a different academic culture. Students who leave early may not have succeeded in integrating into this new culture. Institutions, therefore, must act to facilitate the transition by helping students to integrate and thereby optimise their retention and success. Karp, Hughes and O'Gara (2010) support this assertion, saying that Tinto posits that students are more likely to remain enrolled in an institution if they become connected to the social and academic life of that institution. Students who become integrated into a college, by developing connections to individuals, participating in clubs, or engaging in academic activities, are more likely to persist than those who remain on the periphery.

Bean in 1980 proposed an alternative model of college persistence. He argued that students leaving college is analogous to employee turnover. According to Bean's student attrition model, "behavioural intentions are shaped by a process whereby beliefs shape attitudes and, attitudes, in turn, shape behavioural intentions" (Salinas & Llanes, 2003).

Moodley and Singh (2015) view the retention model developed by Swail (2004) as a comprehensive framework with five components: financial aid, recruitment and admissions, curriculum and instruction, academic services, and student services.

3.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design usually shows all the key components of the research study such as the samples, data analysis, and how they will be incorporated to address the research problem (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005).

3.5.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was used to conduct the study, as it is dynamic in nature and should maximise the contextualisation of data (Sworn, 2015). Qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants' setting; analysing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014). This type of the investigation is used to gain a detailed understanding of phenomena.

A qualitative research approach allows for the recording and capturing of behaviour and experience. Qualitative research can assist researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences. Qualitative research encourages informants to convey thoughts and feelings that might influence the way they behave, rather than adhering to thoughts determined by the researcher (Aluko, 2006; Marshall, 2008; Sutton & Austin 2015).

An exploratory approach was employed to understand the lived experiences of learners on a learnership programme at an IT organisation. An exploratory method is used when a researcher wants to study a new interest or when the study itself is relatively new (Babbie, 2005).

The research approach in this study included four major steps in accordance with the principles proposed by Creswell (1998). According to Creswell (1998) the first step for the researcher is to put aside preconceived ideas and beliefs on this phenomenon. This is done to minimise bias and judgment. The next step is to study the meanings and perceptions of the participants based on their experience. This enabled the researcher to have a common understanding of the phenomenon in question. The third step is to analyse the facts given by participants. This process includes coding, categorising and seeking to make sense of the essential meaning. The descriptive data allowed the researcher to organise common themes. This led to the description stage, where the researcher describes the phenomenon seen and experienced by the participants.

The study allowed the researcher to observe the processes, adjust to ideas and issues experienced by the participants and contribute to the development of new theories (Creswell, 2013). In this way the researcher could gain an in-depth understanding of the various factors that affect retention of learners, through analysing the resulting rich data from individual participants experiences (Creswell, 2013). The design was best suited to establish the experience of the learners and how it affected their willingness to persevere until they completed the programme.

3.5.2 Research strategy

A researcher needs to choose a research design to guide the undertaking of the study. The case study research strategy was deployed here. The case study approach is a research strategy entailing an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2006). The research strategy provides clear guidance as to the procedures applied to generate empirical data about the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Myers, 2013). The researcher explored the lived work experiences of learners on a learnership programme at an IT organisation.

The unit of analysis was the lived experiences of the learners. Semi structured interviews were undertaken with the learners who accepted the invitation to participate and sign the consent forms. The researcher conducted interviews with eight learners who completed the programme and eight who did not.

3.5.3 Research method

The research method entails the techniques and procedures of sampling, data collection, recording, data analysis, data quality assurance and reporting that researchers propose for their studies (Creswell, 2014). The research method used in this study, which includes the setting of the research, the entrée and establishment of researcher roles, sampling, data collection, recording and analysis of data, strategies to ensure quality data, ethics and reporting, is discussed below.

3.5.3.1 Research setting

Myers (2013) contends that, in qualitative research, the selection of a research setting is important, especially where behaviour that we are interested in is displayed or where people taking part in such behaviour (participants) can be found. The researcher arranged interviews at the learner's workplace as well as the organisation the researcher works at. The learners who participated either live or work in Gauteng.

The IT industry in South Africa is competitive and rapidly changing. The research setting allowed the researcher to capture the participants' perceptions in their environments.

3.5.3.2 *Entrée and establishing researcher roles*

In qualitative research it is customary to regard the researcher as a significant research instrument (Myers, 2013) and to expect them to continuously access their research role. According to Mason (2018), considering that the researcher as a significant research instrument is usually achieved when researchers keeps an open mind and becomes critically aware of their role as a researcher.

The unit of analysis being the phenomena and lived experiences by the learner, it was necessary to approach the companies for authorisation. The researcher also gained entry to the various research settings by contacting learners directly and asking them to be participants in the research.

The researcher gained access to the group of participants. The learners were e-mailed a document in advance with an explanation of the nature, objective and content of the study. An informed consent document was included, which stated that participation in the study was voluntary, and that participants were at liberty to withdraw at any stage.

3.5.3.3 *Sampling*

The sampling method used was purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who meet the specific requirements of the study (Boardman & Ponomariov, 2014). The foundation of qualitative explorations is more on the quality of the sample than the size connected with quantitative methods (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

The researcher selected individuals as they purposefully informed an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon being researched (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher needs to select a sample based on knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature and purpose of the research aim (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher selected learners who were willing and able to talk about their lived experiences on the learnership programme.

The profile of the sample of learners who successfully completed the learnership programme is given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Learners who successfully completed the learnership programme

No.	Pseudonym (Participant Identifier)	Gender	Learnership
	Participant CM1	Male	Systems Support
	Participant GM	Female	Generic Management
	Participant SL	Female	Generic Management
	Participant MM	Female	Generic Management
	Participant ZN	Female	Generic Management
	Participant KM	Female	Systems Support
	Participant SN	Male	Systems Support
	Participant PV	Female	Technical Support

The profile of the sample of learners who did not successfully completed the learnership programme is given in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Learners who did not complete the learnership

No.	Pseudonym (Participant Identifier)	Gender	Learnership
	Participant NS	Male	Technical Support
	Participant CM2	Male	Contact Centre
	Participant SM	Female	Contact Centre
	Participant JR	Male	Contact Centre
	Participant TM	Male	Business Administration
	Participant PR	Female	Systems Support
	Participant TB	Male	Technical Support
	Participant KR	Male	End User Computing

3.5.3.4 Data collection

This study made use of semi structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are integral for obtaining information from participants selected to take part in a study (Creswell, 2013). An interview is a focused conversation between two people, but sometimes more. It is directed by one to get information from the other. The researcher is interested in the context and content of the interview, how the interviewee understands the research discussion and what they want to convey to the interviewer. In the hands of the qualitative researcher the interview takes on a shape of its own (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

This method is the most suitable when reliable accounts of the individual experience of the interviews are sought. It also allows the researcher to go beyond the superficial responses that could be received using another format (Klenke, 2008). The interview had two parts. The first part focused on the learner's demographic data and sharing of their life in the past year. The demographic information includes age, gender and employment status. The second part focused on in-depth questions, which assisted the researcher to get the learners' lived experiences. The learners were encouraged to respond freely and provide information that could enrich the study.

The interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researchers can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world. In studies that rely predominantly on interviewing, the subject is usually a stranger. A good part of the work involves building a relationship, getting to know each other and putting the subject at ease. The researcher is confident of obtaining comparable data by using semi structured interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

3.5.3.5 Recording the data

The researcher used a mobile device to record the interviews and also manually took notes during the interview. Both methods were used simultaneously to enhance the data recording process. The voice recorder enabled the interview to be recorded without the distraction of trying to capture in writing every word spoken (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2006). The manual notes captured detail and behaviour that did not come across verbally. Thereafter, the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher into Microsoft Word to make the data manageable (Maree, 2010).

3.5.3.6 Data analysis

The researcher proceeded to the analysis stage having obtained data from the interviews. Once the data was collected it was analysed and the analysis process proceeded through the identification of themes and specific analyses of statements recorded. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts to find repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2006). The steps advanced by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) were followed. These steps include becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and write up. The aim of the analysis process was to examine the learners' lived experience as reported by them.

3.5.3.7 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Researchers should strive towards optimising the quality of their work. Qualitative researchers contend that there are strategies that can be employed to ensure the trustworthiness of findings. The researcher determined validity based on credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Credibility in qualitative research refers to the ability of others to understand the participant's experiences (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher was responsible for comparing the similarities of the participants to provide analysis for others to understand (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Dependability refers to the stability of findings over time and involves evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study (Anney, 2014).

Confirmability occurred by continually checking the procedures for gathering data while ensuring the analysis did not include researcher biases (Cope, 2014). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers and is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but are clearly derived from the data (Anney, 2014).

Transferability is the extent of use of research results to other groups or settings (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents – it is the interpretive equivalent of generalisability (Anney, 2014). In this study, the researcher provided a detailed description of the enquiry and participants were selected purposively, this facilitates transferability of the inquiry.

3.5.3.8 Ethics

The researcher took several considerations into account before commencing the research. The researcher had to first seek consent from the organisation to conduct the study. The University of South Africa requires all students to submit their research proposals to an Ethics Committee for approval. Prior to the study I completed an application form, with mandatory documentation, and sent it to the university's review board for approval. I obtained written permission from the committee to commence with the study. Please refer to Appendix B.

The researcher then proceeded to shortlist learners who successfully completed and learners who did not complete the learnership programme. The researcher made telephonic contact with each of the learners and a follow-up e-mail was sent confirming the details of the research. The e-mail also contained the process and the consent to participate. A meeting request was sent to each learner, confirming date of interview. Respondents were not subjected to any risk of stress, and their dignity, privacy and the confidentiality of data were respected (McMillan & Schumacher 2010).

The researcher also highlighted to each learner that their participation is totally voluntary, and they can withdraw from the interview at any time. The researcher also assured the learners that their details will be kept confidential and privacy will always be ensured. The researcher also advised the learners that the data collected would be strictly used for research only. The data was stored in a locked cabinet and was also saved in a password-protected computer.

3.5.3.9 Reporting

The analysed data was reported in the form of themes and sub-themes. The findings and the academic literature were then integrated into a framework for discussion of the findings.

3.6   RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the research findings.

3.6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of learners and the factors that influence their retention on a learnership programme. The dropout rate of learners has increased over the years, and it provided a compelling reason to investigate why some learners might choose to drop out of the programme while others continue.

The main themes discerned are related to the empirical aims of this study. These empirical aims are to:

- To explore the experiences and perceptions of learners enrolled in learnership programmes; and
- To explore the factors that affect implementation of learnership programmes

The research findings are therefore presented below under the following headings:

- Learners' lived experiences; and
- Factors that affect implementation.

3.6.2 Learners' lived experiences

The first empirical aim of this study is to explore the learners' experiences of learnership programmes. The identified themes, sub-themes and participants' direct quotes discussed in this section are premised on the qualitative analysis of the data. The data from both groups have been analysed collectively and the main themes will emanate from the data analysis.

3.6.2.1 Theoretical classroom experience

The researcher received positive and constructive feedback from both groups (learners who completed the learnership programme and learners who did not complete). The learners felt that the training provider was organised and well prepared throughout the process. The training provider was also responsible for the recruitment, selection, assessment and on-boarding process. The training provider also assisted with interview preparation for client interviews. They offered positive comment with regards to everyone's attitude at the training provider to them as learners. The team at the training provider was helpful and everyone displayed a positive attitude. They were made to feel very welcome.

There were also positive comments related to the theoretical content of the programmes. Learners related to the methods of teaching and interaction with the facilitators. The facilitators used various approaches to enhance the learning. The facilitators also set up presentations for each learner. The learners were hesitant at first, but easily adapted. Both sets of learners (those who completed and those who dropped out) admitted that the presentation skills assisted them to build their confidence and ability to communicate at the workplace. This also enhanced their understanding of real-life situations. Learners from both groups were enthusiastic about the recently acquired knowledge and skills.

Table 3.3 shows the main theme of theoretical classroom experience and the corresponding sub-themes that emerged.

Table 3.3

Theoretical classroom experience and sub-themes

Main theme	Sub-themes
Theoretical classroom experience	On-boarding and Induction Facilitator preparedness Curriculum and courseware Classroom experience

a. On-boarding and induction

The participants (learners who completed the programme and learners who did not complete) specifically commented that the on-boarding and induction helped to lessen their fears and anxiety. The programme provided them with a guideline of what to expect for the next year. The programme helped them feel welcome with the positive reception of the team at the training provider. Table 3.4 shows the quotes from the learners.

Table 3.4

On-boarding and induction: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
On-boarding and Induction	**Participant CM1:** 'Environment at training provider had everything a learner would need and the response from staff at training provider was always professional' **Participant ZN**: 'Training provider made us feel welcome unlike other companies that I am aware of. This cannot be found in any books' **Participant MM**: 'The on-boarding, orientation and induction helped me to gain a better perspective on the corporate environment'

a. Facilitator preparedness

The learners who completed the programme and those who did not complete both felt cared for by the training provider. They felt that the training provider had respect for them, and, further, was approachable both in and out of the classroom. Generally, learners who participated in the programme gained rich experience filled with opportunity and connections with other learners and facilitators. These conclusions corroborate the importance of choosing caring, supportive training institutions that have experienced and learned facilitators who are willing to challenge students. Table 3.5 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding facilitator preparedness.

Table 3.5

Facilitator preparedness: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Facilitator preparedness	**Participant CM1**: 'The facilitator was good and was supportive' **Participant CM2**: 'The facilitator provided 90% of the information'

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
	Participant ZN: 'I had great support from the facilitator. He brought work to life and the facilitator would make us understand areas that the class was finding difficult to comprehend'
	Participant GM: 'Facilitator also who assisted us whenever we need the assistance'
	Participant GM: 'Facilitator would advise on how to face and overcome the challenges that we come across'
	Participant – MM: 'The facilitator also gave me support
	Participant PV: 'We did get a lot of support from the facilitators'
	Participant SN: Facilitator was very supportive, we even had a group where we would discuss things that we are struggling with'
	Participant CM2: 'Facilitator was always asking probing questions whenever he saw a problem'
	Participant SM: 'The facilitator as well was so supportive pushing us to complete our Portfolio of Evidence (POE)
	Participant NS: 'I enjoyed being in class and the facilitator was very informative

b. Curriculum and courseware

Participants' remarks were positive regarding this theme regarding curriculum and courseware. Most of the learners, whether they completed the programme or dropped out, felt that the curriculum was relevant and well structured. They also highlighted that the training provider personnel were always well prepared. Learners responded positively to the theoretical content of the programme. The content enhanced their problem-solving and decision-making skills. Learners were enthusiastic about their newly acquired

knowledge and skills. Table 3.6 illustrates the participants' direct quotes with respect to curriculum and courseware.

Table 3.6

Curriculum and courseware: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Curriculum and courseware	**Participant MM:** 'The theory and learning phase was sufficient, and the theory phase also assisted me in understanding what to expect at work.
	Participant SL: 'The first 4 months of the learnership during the theory phase I got to learn about the workplace, professionalism, dress code, attendance and time management'
	Participant PV: 'Training provider did a lot because we had weekly if not monthly interactions with the facilitator just to find out how we are how we were coping with the work'

a. Classroom experience

The classroom experience was well received by both sets of learners (that is the learners who completed the programme and those who dropped out). The learners commented that the training provider was prepared, and facilities were well equipped. The environment was conducive to learning. The consensus of the learners was that it motivated them to do well, because people are expecting something from them, and they were selected for this programme and the expectation was that one should be devoted to performing well and complete the learnership. Table 3.7 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding classroom experience.

Table 3.7

Classroom experience: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Classroom experience	**Participant CM1**: '…. felt that the support was enough, I was given feedback on my progress and the programme helped me prepare for challenges'
	Participant GM: 'Classroom experience gave me knowledge on how to conduct ourselves in the workplace'
	Participant MM: 'The role playing, and presentations helped me with gaining my confidence'
	Participant JR: 'it was good place to be in while learning'
	Participant NS: 'it was a great experience because you go back to school for four months, refreshes your mind also get that educational experience again and **'**the staff employed by the training provider is very passionate about people and in helping others'
	Participant ZN: 'I liked connecting to people and being able to relate to people and having that with my facilitators and being able to connect with the training provider I was associated with it just made the transition better for me. That way I didn't feel like just another learner'
	Participant SL: **'**There were a lot of things that I learnt which I applied whilst I was at the workplace'
	Participant PV: **'**The camaraderie amongst us learners were amazing. I mean it wasn't just that you knew people, you had a connection to somebody from the very start.

3.6.2.2 Practical workplace experience

Learnership programmes have a theoretical and a practical component. The classroom experience only provides theoretical learning, and this is not adequate for a learner to gain skills, knowledge and experience to enhance their employability. The success of the learnership programme is the practical component acquired at the workplace. The employers form an integral part of the training and development in providing the experience to learners. The employers ensure that the workplace is conducive to a learning environment and paves the way for the learners to gain workplace experience. The learners are assigned to a skilled and experienced individual at the workplace who will impart the knowledge to the learner.

The workplace experience is an integral part of the learnership. It is imperative that the learners are given an opportunity to gain workplace experience and can apply the knowledge learnt whilst on training. Table 3.8 shows the main theme of workplace experience and the sub-themes that were discerned.

Table 3.8

Practical workplace experience and sub-themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Practical workplace experience	On-boarding and Induction at the workplace
	Mentor and Supervisor support
	Depth of knowledge gained
	Access to workplace infrastructure

The learners' perception of their workplace experience offered opposing views and insights. Some had positive workplace experience and others did not. The negative experiences were recorded mostly from those who dropped off the programme. Regarding the learners who had a positive workplace experience, their designated supervisors seemed to influence their jobs, and ultimately retention, in many ways. Some learners highlighted the importance of the support they get from their supervisor, in terms of the latter providing direct feedback, and being responsible for the overall consistency and flow of the workplace experience. Many also felt that the supervisor helped them in difficult situations. Many learners emphasised the importance of the supervisor listening to their requests and being fair when assigning tasks.

a.   On-boarding and induction at the workplace

Participants, mostly those who completed the programme, commented about the programme helping them to lessen their fears and anxiety. The on-boarding and induction provided a general perception about the programme. Most participants agreed that the programme helped reduce the fear and anxiety of the length and duration of the programme. They were made to feel welcome and the positive interaction with the staff at the workplace released the fear and tension. Table 3.9 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding workplace on-boarding and induction.

Table 3.9

Workplace on-boarding and induction: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
On-boarding and Induction at the workplace	**Participant CM1** – 'Induction provided clearly defined goals, the reporting structure clearly defined'
	Participant MM – 'I was given a lot of online training as well as face-to-face training, it helped me to understand my job role better'
	Participant PR – "The work environment that is where you saw you were on your own'
	Participant SN – 'I got a lot of support from my teammates and colleagues which motivated me not to drop out the programme'

b.   Mentor and supervisor support

It is considered best practice to allocate a mentor to every learner on the programme. This goes beyond basic orientation and allows the mentor to journey along with the learner. The transfer of skills and knowledge is more effective with a mentoring process. The consensus from the participants was that the mentors were available. In most instances, the mentors could provide guidance and support through engagement with the learner. Table 3.10 illustrates the participants' direct quotes regarding mentor and supervisor support at the workplace.

Table 3.10

Mentor and supervisor support: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Mentor and Supervisor support	**Participant CM**: 'Mentor was receptive to questions and did not get tired of questions and the mentor encouraged us to do more research'
	Participant ZN: 'Managers gave feedback on my performance and advice'
	Participant GM: 'Mentors who are able to guide us on how to do the work, …the mentors we're always available even if they're busy they would tell me to schedule a meeting and they will discuss whatever I wanted to ask during the meeting'
	Participant KM: 'My mentor was involved in my journey and she participated in things that I needed'

c.   Depth of knowledge gained

The learners, mostly those who completed the programme, regarded the depth of knowledge gained as important factors that contributed to their success. The knowledge gained helped direct the learners and prevented them from deviating from the objective of the programme. The learners could obtain the knowledge to assist them to perform effectively at the workplace. The corresponding participants' direct quotes with respect to depth of knowledge gained at the workplace are shown in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11

Depth of knowledge gained: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Depth of knowledge gained	**Participant CM1**: 'The exposure to different departments resulted in me getting out of his comfort zone'
	Participant ZN: 'The learnership impact on people's personal lives positively and has a positive impact on their lives, the programme is seen to help people grow'
	Participant KM: '…. encountered different things and working on various applications'
	Participant PV: 'Everyday it's a learning curve'
	Participant PR: "…. motivated me in learning something new that I've never done. … everyone is talking about technology because it is an everyday life. You learn every day you get skills every day and I needed to better myself'

d.   Access to workplace infrastructure

A huge element of the workplace experience is access to infrastructure. The learners need access to tools to complete required tasks effectively. Table 3.12 shows the participants' direct quotes about the accessibility of infrastructure in the workplace.

Table 3.12

Access to workplace infrastructure: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Access to workplace infrastructure	**Participant CM1**: 'access to tools and infrastructure took a while, it 'took a while to create my profile and obtaining laptop, I had limited access to software and hardware, and I felt the client was not prepared'
	Participant ZN: 'I felt that the organisation was not ready for me, took 3 weeks to get my laptop working, …took two weeks to know what I am doing or what I am supposed to know, the company knew that we were coming to work but was not prepared, …'took up to 6 months to find our feet, setup and start and this left me with very little time to prove myself ourselves with the other learners because IT industry is complicated'
	Participant MM – 'gave me everything that I needed in terms of resources and materials I knew I was working with the right people'

The workplace component of this learnership received the most critical responses from the learners, particularly those who did not complete the programme. The responses from most of the learners suggest weaknesses in the programme and perhaps significant contributing reasons for learners dropping out.

Most of the learners who dropped out felt that were treated as a bother to the employer. The learners spent most of their time in an unstructured environment and would be allocated tasks on an ad hoc basis. Some indicated that they spent most of the days without guidance or supervision. They would sit for most of the day with no instructions and did not know what was expected of them.

These learners expressed a sense of disappointment about their experience. They regarded the process as an opportunity to gain workplace experience. They also wanted to apply the knowledge to the practical experience at the workplace. The learners were aware of the role that the employer plays in this process. The negative sentiment was shared only by the learners who dropped off the programme. They dropped off the programme feeling unwelcome and experienced a sense of burden to the employer.

3.6.2.3 Lifestyle experiences

Two sub-themes, relating to learners' lifestyle experiences, improvement of lifestyle and personal goals, emerged. The emergence of these two sub-themes indicates that learners seek overall value from their job.

Living standards are enhanced when learners can enhance their employment status. By gaining employment, learners can earn a salary and can afford an improved standard of living. This further implies that learners can afford to purchase goods and services which ensure a comfortable life. The sub-themes that emerged from the main theme of lifestyle experiences are shown in Table 3.13.

Table 3.13

Lifestyle experiences and identified sub-themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Lifestyle experiences	Improvement of lifestyle
	Personal goals

a. Improvement of lifestyle

The responses were relatively positive for the group of learners who successfully completed the programme. The lifestyle of most of these learners improved, as they were able gain to employment and earn a salary after completing the programme. These learners said they focused on the content of the programme and considered the exposure as important for their self-realisation. The knowledge gained left them feeling empowered and better equipped to deal with all aspects of their work. Table 3.14 shows the participants' direct quotes with respect to lifestyle improvement.

Table 3.14

Improvement of lifestyle: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Improvement of lifestyle	**Participant ZN**: "It was a defining moment for me and other learners I believe that for me it just had to work, I bought a house at the age of 21'. I felt buying a home was more important than a car and I still support my family back home'
	Participant MM: "The learnership has made a positive impact in my life. I would recommend the learnership because I believe it is a good path to take'
	Participant SN: '…. financially because before I could not even buy myself airtime, since I've got the placement, I'm able to rent my own place and take care of myself'

a. Personal goals

People generally enter a learning programme to improve their future wellbeing. These expectations are even more elevated when learners expect a qualification in the form of a certificate. The learners perceive that the skills gained would enhance their ability to gain employment and consequently contribute to their personal goals. Most of those who completed the programme were of the view that the programme provided that vehicle in terms of attaining their personal goals. Their experiences during the programme were beneficial to them in achieving their personal goals. Table 3.15 shows the participants' direct quotes about their personal goals.

Table 3.15

Personal goals: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Personal goals	**Participant CM1**: 'the motivating factor was that his passion was there, …learnership helped him gain experience in business acumen and how business operates, learnership helped him gain exposure to software, …my confidence grew and helped me on how to approach customers'
	Participant ZN – 'it was the small skills that made the difference although the company could not give me that but the learnership did'
	Participant **GM: "**Joining this programme was not about saving money for my fees but also for me to grow, for me to have a specific qualification, …. it's difficult for youngsters to get a job with only a matric'
	Participant GM – 'The certificate that if have obtained on the learnership was another reason that pushed me to complete the program for me to be better qualified, …had an impact on my life because today I am where I am because of the learnership'

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
	Participant KM: 'What matters is the finishing line, … 'it was important to me to finish the program and I have no regrets'
	Participant PV: 'When I start something, I want to finish it off even though it can come with whatever challenges, … 'it did impact my life in a positive way when I got into this learnership I was recently retrenched, and I was miserable'
	Participant SN – 'I'm a bit shy and reserved and the learnership has helped me'
	Participant SM: 'I was an introvert before so meeting different people, different characters made me learn to accommodate other characters now it made me an extrovert'

3.6.2.4 Learner expectation experiences

Intrinsic value and benefits of the job and succeeding were a gratifying aspect and benefit of the job. In general, many instructors felt that creating experiences for oneself and others was one of the main benefits of the job. This theme considered the overall perception of the learners about their expectations being met and how they perceive the learnership programme and if it benefited them personally. The sub-themes that were identified from the main theme of learner expectation experiences are shown in Table 3.16.

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Table 3.16

Learner expectation experiences and identified sub-themes

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Learner expectation experiences	Gaining experience
	Pathway to future employability
	Pathway for certification/recognised qualification
	Level of knowledge gained

a.   Gaining experience

Most participants who completed the programme indicated that they gained valuable experience. Their expectations were met in this regard. Table 3.17 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding gaining experience.

Table 3.17

Gain experience: Participants'' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Gaining experience	**Participant CM1**: 'Managers encouraged him to accept rejection from clients, …learnership is a good programme as it empowers you to study and grow your brand'
	Participant ZM: 'The learnership helped because it covered most of the things that I am doing now'
	Participant GM – "Learnership has changed my Mind and how I do thing, it was more than just a learnership. It was a job for me'
	Participant JR – 'it has impacted my life, physically the overall customer service, learning and getting the knowledge and writing assessment

b.   *Pathway to future employability*

This question required that the learners offer their perceptions on the impact of attending and completing a learnership programme and on their employability. It is hoped that obtaining a qualification through a learnership will give the learner an opportunity to find employment quicker than if they had not obtained the qualification. The participants' direct quotes are shown in Table 3.18.

Table 3.18

Pathway to future employability: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Pathway to future employability	**Participant CM1**: 'Gained experience and learnership prepared me for my field, learnership prepares you for the workplace'
	Participant GM: 'Learnership has helped me a lot because sometimes when something's happened, I just think of those examples and think of how we dealt with them in class and then try and apply that in the workplace'
	Participant KM: "…changed my life for better, I wanted client to renew my contract and that is why I had to make it work'

c.   *Pathway for certification or recognised qualification*

There was a consensus among participants that the learnership programme is a key pathway for certification and/or recognised qualification. The participants' direct quotes regarding pathway for recognised qualification are exhibited in Table 3.19.

Table 3.19

Pathway for recognised qualification: Participants direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants Direct Quotes
Pathway for certification/ recognised qualification	**Participant ZN**: 'The learnership helps you get the knowledge first' **Participant GM** – 'Skills that I got from the learnership and from the workplace, even if you cannot study after school, I do recommend a learnership because it's not about money, you get to get the experience and you get the qualification as well' **Participant PV**: "Certificate it will help me in the future' **Participant SN**: 'My motivation and my success were the determination in getting the qualification'

d.   Level of knowledge gained

Most learners who completed the programme were of the view that in terms of their expectations, the level of knowledge they gained on the programme was satisfactory. Table 3.20 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding level of knowledge gained.

Table 3.20

Level of knowledge gained: Participants direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes.
Level of knowledge gained	**Participant ZN**: 'I believe if you come on a learnership it does not give you a role it creates an opportunity for you to show yourself that you can excel' **Participant GM**: 'it has changed how I think, how I do things and to think

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes.
	for the future all the time'
	Participant MM: '…. starting the program boosted my confidence, without the learnership I wouldn't have been able to do my job'
	Participant PV - had a lot of positive influence in my life. I never thought of myself as an IT person but through the learnership I got to understand. I was fascinated and ended up loving it and I'm still doing it now, at my age the thought getting a job would be difficult but with the learnership it helped me to grow first as a person'

3.6.3 Factors that affect implementation (enabling factors)

The second empirical aim of this study is to explore the factors that affect implementation of learnership programmes. The identified themes, sub-themes and participants direct quotes discussed in this section are premised on the analysis of the qualitative data. Two categories have been identified:

- Enabling learnership programme implementation factors; and
- Factors inhibiting learnership programme implementation

For the enabling learnership programme implementation factors category, the discussion of the findings is premised on the following main themes:

- Individual factors;
- Institutional factors; and
- Level of communication and engagement

The framework of these themes and sub-themes is presented in Figure 3.1
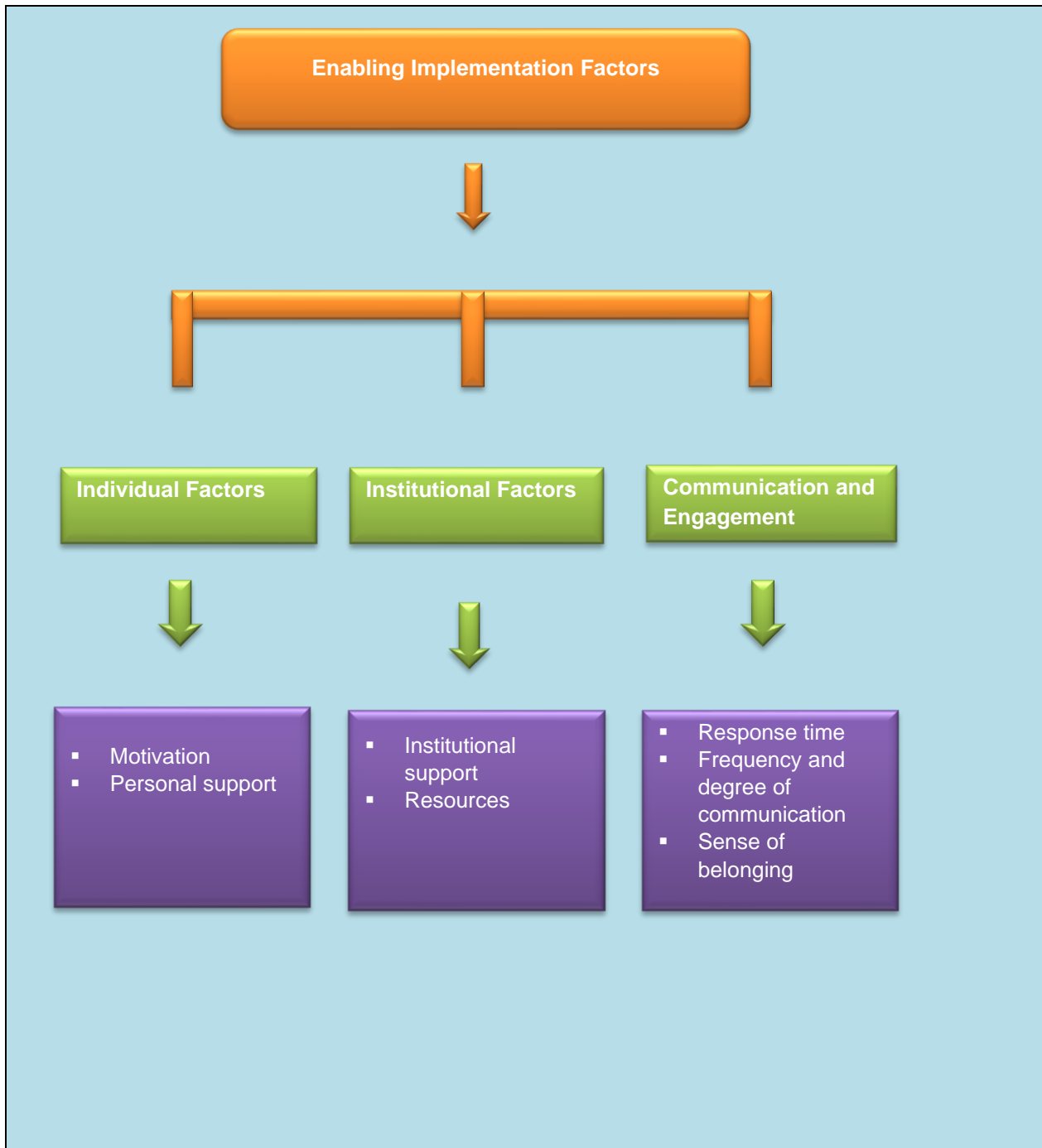
Figure 3.1   Framework for analysis (enabling implementation factors)

3.6.3.1 Individual factors

In this regard, the individual factors relate to the learners' factors that could have played an important role in the decision to persist in the programme or to drop out.

a. Motivation

In the context of this study the individual motivation factors that the participants provided were akin to the reasons why they enrolled on the learnerships programme and why they dropped off. It is worth mentioning that the main reasons or motivation factors which led to the participants enrolling were similar, irrespective of if the participant would later stay (persist) or drop from the learnership programme. Table 3.21 shows the discerned theme, sub-theme and the related selected direct quotes obtained from the participants during the interviews.

Table 3.21

Individual motivating factors: participants' direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Selected Direct Quotes
Motivation	**Participant GM:** I completed matric in 2014, Tried to apply at UJ and was unsuccessful, NFAS did not approve funding, hence I applied for a learnership"
	Participant MM: "Life after my tertiary qualification was hectic and finding a job was difficult".
	Participant TM: "I was motivated by the previous learners that were here and they were doing well with the qualifications that you gave them. I knew about it from a friend then I made a research"

Sub-Theme	Selected Direct Quotes
	Participant PR: "I had a cousin who attended at IT organisation (ICT training provider). He kept on pushing me to apply for it every time when I'm around him he would tell me interesting things".

Participant SM: "I'm going to be honest with you what made me join is that organisation is big. I know when I'm from here every company would want to hire me because the organisation is a very big company. Another reason was unemployment because at the time that I joined the learnership I was not employed". |

It can be observed that the main motivation factors related to the participants' circumstances before enrolling on the programme included the following:

- Duration out of employment;
- Potential of employment provided by the learnership programme;
- Need to gain experience leading to a greater chance of future employment;
- Chance to get additional qualification; and
- Peers who had undergone through the same programme deemed to have a better life.

b. Personal support

Personal support in this context relates to support received by the learner from peers, friends, family and other learners during both the structured learning component and practical work experience. The role played by peers, especially at the start of the programme, was very important in adjusting to the new environment. The support received from family members was equally important for both groups of learners, that is, those who successfully completed and those who dropped out. The support was evident at application stage as well. Table 3.22 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding personal support.

Table 3.22

Personal support: participants direct quotes

Sub-Theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Personal support	

3.6.3.2 Institutional factors

The institutional factors in this regard refers to those organisational inherent factors that would have facilitated or enhanced the implementation of the learnership programme and contributed to positive lived experiences and increased the propensity of the learners to persist in the programme until completion.

a. Institutional support

The institutional support can be viewed from the perspective of the organisation providing the structural learning component (IT organisation, that is, the ICT training provider) and the organisation providing the practical work experience. All the participants, irrespective of whether they persisted or dropped from the programme, believed they received

adequate support from the IT organisation (ICT training provider). In this regard the institutional support was an enabler of the learnership programme. The participants' direct quotes are presented in Table 3.23.

Table 3.23

Institutional support at the structured learning place: participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants Direct Quotes
Institutional support	**Participant SL:** The first 4 months of the learnership during the theory phase I had a good facilitator who was supportive and gave guidance when needed.
	Participant MM: "I felt the support given during the theory and learning phase was sufficient and the theory phase also assisted her in understanding what to expect at work".
	Participant ZN: "I had great support from the facilitator. He brought work to life, there was limited time on the programme but in the end it worked out well".
	Participant SN: "The facilitator was very supportive and the group discussions were helpful as problems and queries were discussed".
	Participant SM: "I received a lot of guidance and support as well especially when we were still in training because, I think the reason why we received so much support it's because they did not want us to drop out"
	Participant JR: From the training I would say you provided all the information that was required. Basically, it was good place to be in while learning".
	Participant KR: Yes, absolutely in terms of the program I've learnt and gained some experience in the end user field.

Sub-theme	Participants Direct Quotes
	Participant NS: "With the learnership experience, they gave me support and it was perfect".
	Participant TM: I did get enough support from the learnership side.

About the organisations that provided the practical work component, several participants who completed the programme indicated that they received adequate support from the workplace. In this regard, it appears adequate institutional support contributed to the persistence of the learners on the programme with the outcome of completing the learnership. Table 3.24 shows the participants' direct quotes regarding the adequate institutional support received.

Table 3.24

Institutional support (adequate support): participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Institutional support (adequate support)	**Participant SL:** 'During the practical phase I was assigned to a mentor/Manager who was supportive and motivated'
	Participant MM: 'During the workplace I received support and team ethics were prevalent'
	Participant JR: 'Also at the workplace I would say it was great because I have gained a lot of experience there".
	Participant KR: 'Yes, absolutely in terms of the work environment and how the work environment structure is'
	Participant TB: 'The facilitator was there to guide us and to assist us wherever we needed assistance, so I would say that training provider they supported us'

*b.	Resources*

Resources are a key component of any programme. Both sets of participants (those who completed and those who did not) indicated that the resources that were made available enabled the implementation of the learnership. Participants indicated that adequate resources were made available at training provider, that is, the organisation that provided the structured learning component of the learnership. Table 3.25 shows some direct quotes from the participants with respect to the adequacy of the resources.

Table 3.25

Resources (adequate): participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Resources (adequate)	**Participant MM:** 'I was given the necessary resources and materials'
	Participant TM: 'They did give me enough support if you look at it at the learnership point of view they provided us with necessary resources'

3.6.3.3 Communication and engagement

Communication is key as a way of engagement between different stakeholders in any programme.

a. Response and feedback

Most participants who successfully completed the learnership were of the view that adequate communication was provided to them, both at training provider and the organisation of practical work experience. Table 3.26 presents some of the participants' direct quotes regarding resources at both the structured learning place and the workplace.

Table 3.26

Adequacy of response and feedback: participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Response and feedback (adequate)	**Participant KM:** 'The support and communication given by the facilitator was good and the Facilitator provided 90% of the information' **Participant PV**: 'Training provider did a lot, there were weekly and monthly meetings, the schedule at the IT organisation (ICT training provider) was on track and communication was good. The facilitator also checked on our well-being'
Response and feedback (adequate)	**Participant KM:** 'Communication was great as I reported to a previous Manager who has since resigned, and I received constant feedback' **Participant SN**: 'I learnt a lot from my previous mentor who resigned and there was great communication with the team and himself' **Participant ZN:** 'Managers gave us feedback and advised if you come on a learnership it does not give you a role, it creates an opportunity for you to excel' **Participant CM1**: 'I consider that the support was enough as I was given feedback on my progress. The communication process was effective'

3.6.4 Factors that affect implementation (inhibiting factors)

In this section, the factors that inhibited the learnership programme implementation are provided. Figure 3.2 illustrates the analysis framework regarding this category of factors inhibiting learnership programme implementation.
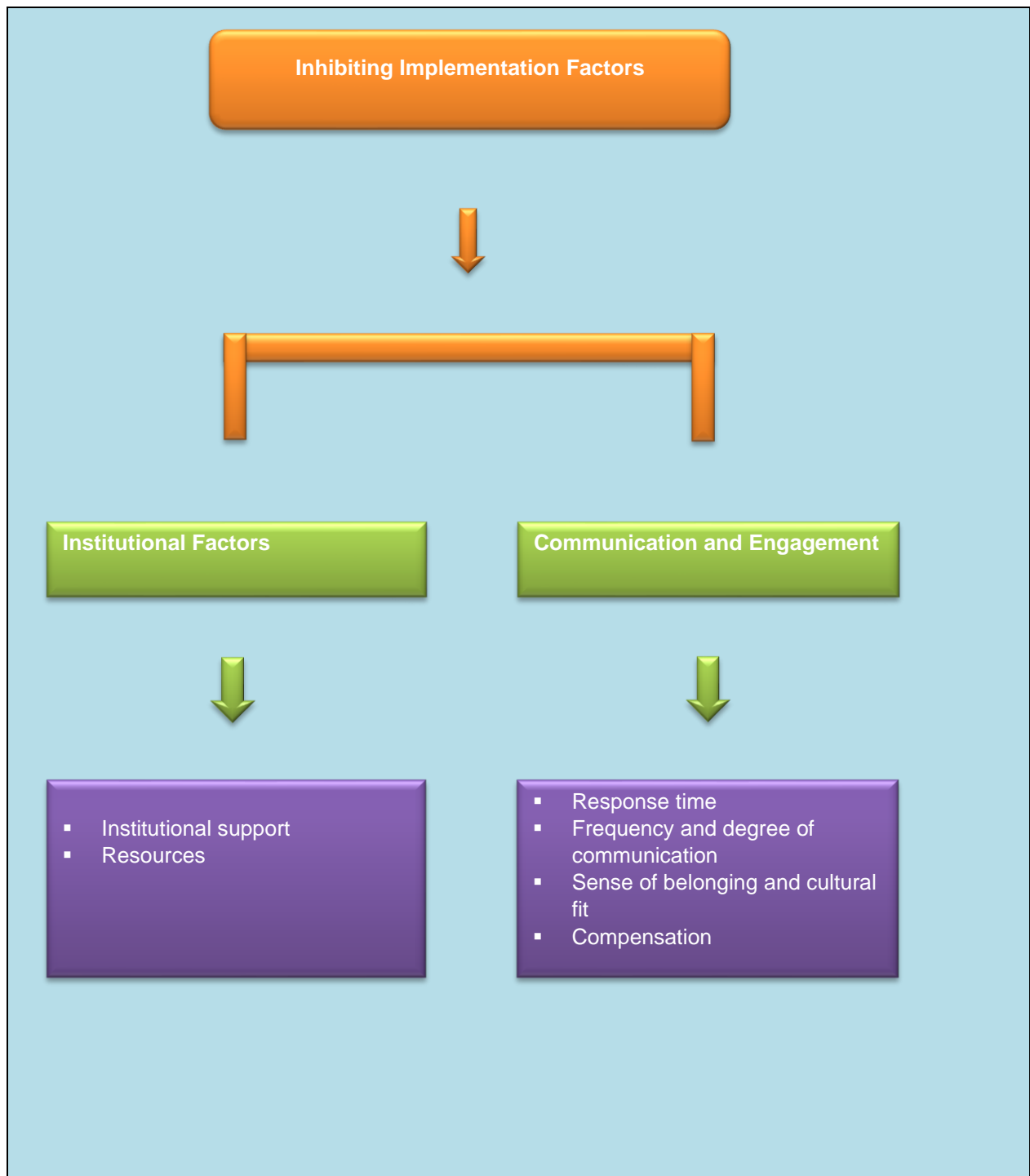
Figure 3.2   Analysis framework (inhibiting factors)

3.6.4.1 Institutional factors

Institutional factors are the antecedents to ineffective learnership programme implementation, and subsequently increased likelihood of learner drop-pout.

a. Institutional support

The lack of adequate support by organisations that provided the workplace practical experience was an inhibiting factor. According to most of the participants who did not complete the programme, the level of support they received at the workplace was inadequate.

The lack of support at the workplace acted as an antecedent or precursor to leaving with respect to those who later dropped from the learnership programme without completing it. In this respect the perceived lack of support acted as an inhibiting factor to the implementation of the learnerships programme. The participants' direct quotes are provided in Table 3.27.

Table 3.27

Institutional support (inadequate): Participants direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Institutional support (inadequate)	**Participant ZM:** 'The problem arose after the 4 months and the transition to the workplace was difficult and I felt that the organisation was not ready for us. The company knew that they were coming to work but was not prepared. It took up to 6 months to setup and this left me with very little time to prove myself'
	Participant SM: 'When we go to the workplace things were different, we did not receive support that much because much time we communicated through e-mails. They wouldn't come back to you and say I spoke to this person and said they were going to fix the problem. At the workplace it was totally different we didn't receive any support'
	Participant NS: 'When it comes to the support and guidance I would say when I was placed at the organisation, you could stay a week without going to site, there was not much pressure. I felt like they're kind of exploiting us because the training provider pays them for us as learners, we had a limited amount of access to things'
	Participant PR: 'The training was difficult, and coming to the work place it was also a bit challenging as a new person and being given a task to do on your own was a bit scary because people would expect that you know everything'

b. Resources

Some participants felt that the level of resources available to them was not adequate, and this affected their progress in the learnership programme. One participant proffered that he dropped out because he was not accorded access to resources at the workplace. Table 3.28 illustrates some of the responses of the participants in the form of direct quotes.

Table 3.28

Resources at the training and workplace (inadequate): Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Selected Direct Quotes
Resources (inadequate)	**Participant PV:** 'There was not enough time to complete assignments, class time was inadequate, and I also had to work night shifts and transport was a problem. **Participant GM:** 'The completion of the POE was a challenge, it was a short period of time to complete'
Resources (inadequate)	**Participant CM**: 'The environment at the client took longer for him to get access to the tools and support and the infrastructure took a while and create his profile and obtaining a desktop and laptop took time as the client was not prepared. I had limited access to software and hardware' **Participant NS:** 'we had a limited amount of access to things for example the internet access to research on things and the logged tickets so that we could go and fix the problems, that is a reason why I dropped out' **Participant TM: '**Some of the challenges I encountered was getting transport on time because sometimes busses were on strike and sometimes the taxis were also on strike'

3.6.4.2 Communication *and engagement*

The lack of adequate communication and engagement, mostly at some of organisations that provided workplace experience, contributed to the learners dropping out.

a. *Response and feedback*

The participants who felt that the level of communication and engagement was not adequate were mostly those who dropped out. Most singled that such inadequacy was experienced at the organisations that provided the practical work experience. The direct quotes of the participants are provided in Table 3.29.

Table 3.29

Response and feedback (inadequate): Participants direct quotes

Sub-theme	Selected Direct Quotes
Response and feedback (Inadequate at structured learning place)	**Participant PR:** 'When we left the training, we were told that the co-ordinators were going to come and check on us, so about 3 to 4 months the workplace co-ordinator did not meet with me. Where else the other learners were checked upon so to me it felt like I was side lined'
Response and feedback (Inadequate at workplace)	**Participant PV**: 'At the workplace people were afraid of the learners as they felt that their jobs were going to be taken away, we had to fight for everything'
	Participant NT: 'Some members of the team were not willing to teach me some other staff, so I was limited to some of the information I need to develop my skills, especially when we were doing group work'

Sub-theme	Selected Direct Quotes
	Participant PR: 'The communication was not good sometimes; the mentor would not talk to me especially when I was moved from where I was to another place. The communication was bad'
	Participant NS: 'I feel like where I was there wasn't much communication it was just our time sheet the supervisor signed that's pretty much it. He didn't say this is what you be doing they just said since you guys are here you will be shadowing the seniors that's it no other communication from them'
	Participant SM: 'She would promise to have meetings with us, but since we were at the workplace she never came, we only communicated via e-mails and she would reply after a day or two. The promises that you make when dealing with the learners they must be able to keep the promises or rather communicate if the promises won't be filled and make them understand'

b. Sense of belonging and cultural fit

A lack of sense of belonging can signify a lack of adequate communication and engagement. Most of the learners who dropped out singled this inhibiting factor about the organisations that provided them with the practical work experience. Table 3.30 presents the participants' direct quotes attesting to the experiences of the participants during the duration of the learnership programme.

Table 3.30

Lack of sense of belonging and cultural fit: participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
Sense of belonging and cultural fit (structured learning place)	**Participant SM:** 'During the training session I felt a bit lost and felt like I did not belong because call Centre was a whole different thing for me and I found it difficult'
Sense of belonging and cultural fit (workplace)	**Participant SN: '**I feel I was seen as a product of the learnership and not seen as an employee'
	Participant ZN: 'At the organisation I did not feel I belong immediately; it took me a while'
	Participant CM1: 'The environment at the client took longer for me to get access to the tools and support. I felt that the client was not prepared'
	Participant GM: 'Being at the workplace was a challenge, I had to learn to adjust as the client had given me lots of work to be completed in a short period of time'
	Participant CM2: 'While I was in training yes, but not at work, I was trying to fit in the whole time'
	Participant PR: 'In the workplace there were times where we get shouted and some meetings were separated from the learners'
	Participant NS: 'There was not much training or actions to make us feel like we belong we had to shadow the seniors. We felt undermined and if you are always undermined then what is the point of shadowing a person'

Sub-theme	Participants' Direct Quotes
	Participant CM2: 'Let's say you have an idea, or you can see that you can fix the problem. The culture in the workplace did not allow that, because I was on a learnership, my voice was not heard. We did not have the opportunity to voice our opinions'

c. *Compensation, reward and recognition*

Most learners who dropped out indicated that the level of compensation, reward and recognition was inadequate and did not meet their expectations. They believed the stipend they received was inadequate. Some said the stipend of R2100 was their only source of income, and it was difficult to pay for their rent, food, transport and so on.

According to the learners, the perceived low stipend contributed to their dropping out of the programme. Others said they were promised incentives and other forms of compensation but nothing materialised, and no communication was made regarding the unmet promises. Table 3.31 presents the direct quotes of the participants.

Table 3.31

Inadequate compensation and recognition: Participants' direct quotes

Sub-theme	Participants Direct Quotes
Compensation, reward and recognition (structured learning place*)*	**Participant CM1**: The stipend was not enough

Sub-theme	Participants Direct Quotes
Compensation, reward and recognition (workplace)	**Participant JR**: 'The only bad things that we encountered were the false assessment saying that we will get an increase and we didn't. Ok maybe in the future, because we come from different family backgrounds try to increase the stipend because that would keep your learners and they won't be dropping out, …. we always had meetings about the stipend'
	Participant SM: I said it is not fair for me because I stipend was low, so I sacrificed and used Putco bus. We were always asking about the incentives, I was one of the top learners in my learnership the month that I was supposed to get my incentive I did not, I was top 3 in the whole call Centre but I did not get my incentives'
	Participant CM2: Maybe after 6 months or so, the stipend could have been increased by a small percentage, say 10 or 25%. There was an incentive programme, but I don't recall anyone getting it in the company'

3.7   DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore learners' experiences of learnership programmes in an information technology organisation. I now present a discussion of the findings and align them to the aim of the study.

3.7.1 Exploring lived experiences and perceptions of learners

Participants were asked to describe their experiences and the motivational factors that made them continue the programme. Being involved in different divisions with the organisation was a unique factor that one cannot get outside the learning environment. A majority of the respondents indicated that the importance of having guidance and peer counselling for first year was essential to high retention rate.

Communication. All participants discussed the need for learners to be able to communicate, engage and or be engaged with all relevant key stakeholders within an organisation. Post-secondary education in South Africa includes academic, vocational education and technical training, learnerships, internships and skills development programmes and one of the biggest impediments of higher educational attainment in South Africa, is the low levels of progression of learners within the further education and training (Statistics South Africa, 2017). In other words, some learners drop out of their learning programmes. Learning institutions' integration and engagement strategies aimed at learner retention should utilise retention activities designed to increase interaction and communication with learners (Leeds, Campbell, Baker, Ali, Brawley, & Crisp, 2013).

Learner engagement is important in the learner's progress and success (Allen & Seaman, 2008). It is suggested that learner integration and engagement encourages learner's motivation, sense of belonging, introduces a positive perception about the course and less likelihood of withdrawing from the course (Leeds et al., 2013).

Compensation and financial support were also widely discussed as retention strategies by the participants. Sturman, Shao and Katz (2012) also identified compensation as a motivator for learners and their findings correlated with this researcher's findings that compensation is related to turnover. By undertaking a study at a TVET college in the Western Cape province to identify specific, local-level reasons for academic failure and attrition, Van der Bijl & Lawrence (2018) by applying Tinto's student integration framework, found students who received funding assistance in the form of a state bursary were appreciative of the funding and felt this had been the college's way of supporting them and expressed gratitude for the Student Support System. The study also found out that most of the students who left before completing the programme did so because of financial constraints.

Feedback. All the learners discussed the need for leaders to provide meaningful feedback to them. All these strategies allow learners to understand the expectations of the leader and the organisation. The leader can also provide feedback on learners' strengths,

weaknesses and performance. Leaders allowing subordinates to give their opinion on how the leader was treating and managing them was appreciated. Learners require more feedback than previous generations due to growing up in an educational system where teachers provided more feedback to ensure they understood the information (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Moodley and Singh (2015) argue that institutional factors such as quality of interactions with quality of interactions with academic and administrative staff and feedback processes also influence withdrawals or attrition of students.

Training. A few of the participants discussed the value of proper training. Benefits such as on-the-job training help learners invest in their skills and allow them to use those skills to provide opportunities to advance within the organisation, Proper training is beneficial because it assists learners in their motivation which is the most important ingredient for successful integration in the ICT sector (Khoza & Manik, 2015). During interviews, most respondents expressed their high regard for the work experience afforded to them. Learnerships do seem to facilitate the transition into jobs and those who complete a learnership are more likely to be in employment directly after completion than those who do not enrol in learnerships (Rankin, Roberts & Schöer, 2014).

3.7.2 Factors that affect implementation of learnership programmes

The implementation of learnership programmes has seen enthusiasm and an increase in vocational education in South Africa. The concept of bringing training and development through education to the workplace must be effectively and efficiently implemented in the sectors where education and training have been severely lacking.

Learnership programmes must be used as an instrument for training and educating the workforce and should be sustained well into the future. The skills deficit in South Africa necessitates a consistent renewal and rejuvenation of policy, as pilot programmes categorise problem areas, and best practice prescribes adaptation of new enhanced approaches and procedures.

3.7.2.1 Enabling factors

The research findings indicated that a number of factors enabled the implementation of the learnership programme. The participants (those who completed and those who dropped out) indicated that they had positive experiences at the training provider regarding institutional support, resources, communication, engagement and guidance. Regarding the workplace organisations, most learners who completed the programme also indicated that the institutional factors (institutional support, resources) and communication and engagement (response time, frequency and degree of communication, conducive environment engendering or prompting a sense of belonging) also contributed to their staying on the programme until completion.

These findings therefore imply that the success of learnerships depends on employers contributing in a more meaningful and committed way to learnership implementation. Incentives are offered to employers for taking learners into their employ, while learners offer their loyalty to the organisation that has made the effort to train them.

Learnership programmes have been implemented as part of a national strategy to address the urgent need to skill South Africa's poorly equipped workforce. Learnership programmes have been regarded as an ideal solution as they includes learning programmes for all occupational types and levels, and make a distinctive effort to include previously disadvantaged learners, giving them direction to education and training.

Of primary importance to learnership programme success is the ability to match learners' potential to learn and their motivation to learn, which will ensure that a proper match is made between the learner and the learnership programme. The experiences of learners in the classroom and workplace should be well planned and executed. Learners should have full knowledge of the programme that they enter, and meaningful orientation and induction should be offered. If this is not done, retention rates of learners will remain low. Without structured and meaningful recruitment, selection and orientation, learners will attend learnership programmes for the sake of attending and there will be no gain of

knowledge, skills and experience. A real requirement exists for learners to be fully knowledgeable to enter the workplace, as the need for skilled workers is ever increasing.

These empirical findings are constant with the literature findings. For example, Gibb (2011) contends that for a learnership to be successful the programme should fit into a larger cultural drive of learning, developing and sharing skills and there needs to be buy-in from other members of staff – people who are able to play a mentorship role to these youngsters. Mentors need to be informed up front exactly what is required of them and how much is involved in the role. There is also need for continued investment in teaching and training in order to fill the ICT skills gap and there is also need for coordination and planning coupled with an urgent need to move plans from discussion to execution (Schofield, 2018). The success of the learnership implementation process is guided by the legislative backing created to regulate the scheme amongst the role players, namely the learner, the SETAs, the training provider and the employer (Maririmba, 2016).

3.7.2.2   Inhibiting factors

According to most of the participants who did not complete the programme, the lack of adequate support, restricted access or no access to resources, poor communication and engagement encountered at the organisations that provided the workplace practical experience were inhibiting factors. These factors were precursors to ineffective learnership programme implementation and contributed to the learners dropping out.

These inhibiting factors in learnership implementation largely stem from administrative dysfunction. Most participants depicted various levels of non-commitment to the learnership programmes by most of the workplace organisations. Role players at the implementation phase often have problems of funding, resources and clear guidelines. Issues cited as problems relate to learners not being paid a higher stipend, learners not having access to tools to perform their tasks, organisations not being ready for them, lack of communication with mentors, and learners not matched to an integrated workplace programme.

Learners are challenged by a low stipend and some find it difficult to afford food and transport during their training and some learners question the long hours they work during their practical training and felt a few employers might misuse the learnership to obtain cheap labour (Fibre, Processing and Manufacturing SETA, 2014). A critical concern for many learnership graduates is the fact that they have not received their certificates on completion, even as much as three years later and employers are challenged by slow and inefficient communication from SETAs as well as by slow grant disbursement (Fibre, Processing and Manufacturing SETA) All these issues give rise to concerns regarding the legitimacy of programmes offered to learners.

Learners are also often not fully aware of their responsibilities when joining a learnership programme. Clear communication will ensure that learners complete the learnership and reduce the high turnover rate. Mummenthey & du Preez, (2010) argue that most companies demonstrate lack of understanding of learnerships and what they entail in terms of implementation.

In terms of the overall learnership system, according to Marock (2010), there are also significant system challenges related to the institutions that have been established to steer and fund skills development activities and in particular these challenges relates to the performance of SETAs and the extent to which these structures are able to ensure that the training that takes place is consistent with both sector and national priorities as well as that of the National Skills Fund. Marock (2010) contends that a review of documentation suggests that the SETAs have been given additional responsibilities – often outside of their sphere of influence or capacity – in successive versions of the National Skills Development Strategy. There has also been an ongoing lack of clarity about the SETAs primary beneficiary focus – employed, unemployed, pre-employed.

Poor corporate governance (SETA Board responsibility) has undermined the strategic focus as well as the management and operational effectiveness of SETAs, administrative systems and procedures are not standardised across all SETAs, making it difficult to effectively govern institutions and to leverage synergies between SETAs and the

multiplicity of Human Resources, financial and information gathering/data and reporting systems means that there are no unified standards to which institutions can be held accountable (Marock, 2010). Some companies are taking part in the learnership programme, but they are really fully prepared for training and they see the learnerships as an opportunity to obtain the subsidy from the SETAs (Mukora, Visser, Roodt, Arends, Molefe & Letseka, 2008).

3.7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher presented comprehensively the findings of the semi structured interviews conducted learners in order to establish their perceptions and experiences of factors relating to their retention and throughput or success. According to the findings, compensation has a strong and significant relation to organisational commitment. One must take into consideration the need to provide learners with benefits that are more comprehensive, higher compensation, increasing opportunities, and a different style of leadership to retain them.

The relation between supervisor support and affective commitment is strongly significant. Supervisor support provides individuals with the chance to make a difference on the job, try out new skills, exercise discretion and receive feedback on their performance. This is supported by Paré, Tremblay and Lalonde (2001) who demonstrated that high technology employees are particularly sensitive to recognition, which has been shown to have a direct effect on affective commitment. Supervisor support makes high technology employees feel important and responsible in that they can use their innovation and skill to the advantage of the organisation. This is a major intrinsic motivation for individuals.

The implementation of these strategies can also help an organisation improve, since the organisation is made up of many units or employees and the improvement of its leaders and staff may result in the betterment of the entire organisation.

Organisations should have a process for encouraging, planning and investing in the high technology employees' professional development. Organisational investment in employees was associated with higher levels of employee affective commitment to the organisation. This process will indicate that management is committed to establishing a long-term relationship with employees. These educational investments could make employees more committed to their profession. Without it, there might be reduced organisational commitment, or employees could be more attractive to headhunters, both of which could lead to reduced retention. These development opportunities should be essential to the organisation. Organisations should view such investments as their social responsibility to build a better South Africa.

3.7.4 Limitations to the study

The findings in this study are limited to the single IT organisation from which the data was collected therefore generalisation cannot occur from the results.

3.7.5 Recommendations

It is of paramount importance to prevent learner dropout, owing to the high costs involved. Low retention rates cannot be attributed to one factor only. The findings of the study highlight the importance of understanding the complex interaction of a multitude of factors that contribute to learner retention and success. In future research, I recommend researchers conduct different types of studies to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon. Organisations and their leaders should pay attention to the results and consider assessing the methods they use to retain their learners. Leaders must evaluate and manage generational differences using strategies that will allow them to utilise all members of the organisation, especially learners (Hendricks & Cope, 2012).

The most important predictor of success and retention in the first year is learner involvement. For learners to be retained and achieve success, it is imperative for management and academia to interface with learners on this level. Developmental

advising has the greatest impact, through supporting challenging learners to take advantage of learning opportunities outside their formal classes and to use the human and programmatic resources to promote development of their talents and broaden cultural awareness.

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

In this chapter, conclusions and recommendations are provided. These are premised on the findings of the study. The limitations, which outline the methodological and executional problems of the study, are also provided.

4.1   CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to gain understanding of the learners' experiences of learnership programmes in an IT organisation in South Africa, and the factors affecting the retention of the learners. Firstly, the conclusions drawn from the reviewed literature are provided, followed by conclusions drawn from the empirical study.

4.1.1   Conclusions from the reviewed literature

The literature review had three aims.

4.1.1.1   *Conceptualise the construct of learnerships in the literature*

The first aim was to conceptualise the construct of learnerships in the literature. South Africa's skills shortages have required a renewed approach in addressing skills constraints and improving opportunities for employment. As one of government's flagship programmes to address the problem of the skills shortage and maximise employability of citizens, a learnership programme was introduced as an intervention that combines vocational education and training in order to establish a link between structured learning and workplace experience. The overall goal is obtaining a formal registered qualification with the South African National Qualification Framework. According to the Skills Development Act, 97 of 1998, a learnership is a programme which a SETA may establish if the learnership consists of a structured learning component; the learnership includes practical work experience of a specified nature and duration; the learnership would lead to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority and related to an

occupation; and the intended learnership is registered with the Department of Labour in the prescribed manner.

Government has put in place institutions such as SETAs and SAQA to ensure that the programme is well guided. In addition, a supporting legislative framework, such as the Skills Development Act, Skills Development Strategy, and Skills Development Levies Act, has been put in place to support government's vision of building skills through initiatives such as learnerships. This research could be significant in understanding the appropriate strategies to retain learners after completion of the learnership programme. According to O'Connor and Raile (2015) organisations and business leaders must take into consideration the need to provide learners with benefits that are more comprehensive, higher compensation, increasing opportunities, and a different style of leadership to retain them.

4.1.1.2 *Conceptualise the construct of retention and retention factors in the literature*

The second aim of the literature review was to conceptualise the construct of retention and retention factors. Several organisations in South Africa invest in learnership programmes and a number of stakeholders are involved in a learnership programme. This is the main reason why learner retention has become an area of increasing concern, as retention not only has an impact on individual learners but produces a ripple effect on the workforce and the economy.

Retention is a function of the nature of individuals who enter education institutions, the character of their interactional involvements within the institution following entry, and the external forces which sometimes impact on their behaviour within the institution (Kumanda, et al.,2017). Overall, the literature supports the view that a variety of factors affect student retention: academic fit, student-institution values congruence, student-faculty values congruence, academic advising, institution social opportunities–all of which ultimately have an impact on satisfaction institutional commitment and student retention (Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004).

Most of the literature on retention is on retention of employees in organisations and retention of students in institutions of higher learning. Literature is sparse regarding the retention of learners enrolled in learnership programmes, more so enrolled in learnerships in the IT industry. For example, literature is available on attempts made to prevent student dropout in South African higher education institutions. According to Mzindle (2015) these interventions include student-centred learning, identifying students at risk, providing academic support to students and defining graduate attributes in teaching and learning, to try and avert the situation; but the problem persists.

4.1.1.3 Explore the theoretical relationship between learnerships and retention

The third aim of the literature review was to explore the theoretical relationship between learnerships and retention. As already noted, literature on the theoretical relationships between learnerships programmes and retention is sparse. However, literature exists on high dropout rates, low throughput and increased time to complete in public higher education (Ramrathan & Pillay 2015; Angelopulo 2015; Favish 2005; Schertzer & Schertzer 2004) and schools (Kumanda, Abongida & Mafumo 2017; Grossen, Grobler & Lacante 2017).

The primary models for student retention in institutions of learning are grounded in the works of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student integration model and Swail's (1995) student retention framework. Tinto's model focuses on student integration and has three spheres: cultural, social and academic. Tinto's (1993) model emphasises academic integration and social integration, which depend on input variables of the student, the family environment and the institution. Swail's (1995) model has five components: financial aid, recruitment and admissions, curriculum and instruction, academic services, and student services.

According to the Skills Development Act (97 of 1998) a learnership is a programme which a SETA may establish if it consists of a structured learning component, practical work experience of a specified nature and duration; leads to a qualification registered by the SAQA and related to an occupation; and the intended learnership is registered with the

Department of Labour in the prescribed manner. While the primary models for student retention may help to explain retention of learners during the structured learning component of a learnership, it is not clear to what extent these models can be applied to explain learner retention during the practical work experience component of a learnership.

4.1.2 Conclusions drawn from the empirical study

The conclusions drawn from the empirical study and based on the empirical aims are discussed in this section.

4.1.2.1 *Explore the learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes*

The first empirical aim was to explore the learners' experiences and perceptions of learnership programmes. Irrespective of whether they persisted or dropped out, the learners felt that the training provider provided a conducive environment, which enhanced their experiences of the structured learning component of the learnership. It can be concluded that the training provider, which was also responsible for the recruitment, selection, assessment and on-boarding process, was able to provide an environment that provided positive experiences to the learners. The on-boarding and induction phase helped to allay the learners' fears and anxiety, as guidelines of what to expect were provided. It can be concluded that the preparedness of the training provider resulted in positive learning experiences for the learners.

The lack of preparedness on the side of most of the organisations that provided the practical work experience component of the learnership resulted in undesirable experiences and perceptions for learners. The negative experiences were recorded mainly by those who dropped out. It can be concluded that these negative experiences suggest weaknesses in the learnership programme. The aggregation of these factors contributes to learners dropping out of the learnership programme.

From this study, it was evident that learners had different experiences their integration into the learnership programme. The experiences influenced the retention rate. The learners' experiences determined the formation of perceptions learners experienced while on the programme.

Most learners who enrol on a learnership programme have expectations in terms of experiences and learning environment. Thus, it is important for the organisations put in place strategies that will help them achieve their expectations. The support of organisations and business leaders is also essential in ensuring high retention rates.

It is important for training providers to engage all stakeholders, including learners, in creating programmes that will address the expressed and unexpressed needs of learners. This allows for initiation in a new environment where they feel positive about everything. Therefore, they look forward to completing the learnership programme. Such strategies must rely on scientific facts expressed in various research findings. This will help organisations to implement programmes that meet the needs of the learners and institutionalise them to become committed to successfully completing the programme.

It is also important that all training institution personnel and hosting organisations are trained to deal with learners as way of making their initial experiences worthwhile. The institutions also need to be energetic in getting involved in the social and academic lives of the learners as well as be sensitive to their needs. This will help them to address the most important needs first. While incorporating the new learners in the learning system, the strategies implemented must focus on building trust between learners and the administration. The quality of education also needs to be high and learners must be given advice on the selection of courses. Centralising academic services with a view to creating a community of support will create the perception among learners of equality of education standards across the education sector.

4.1.2.2 Explore the factors that affect implementation of learnership programmes

The second empirical aim was to explore the factors that affect implementation of learnership programmes.

Several factors were identified as either enabling or inhibiting the implementation of the learnership programme. The enabling factors included Individual factors (self-motivation, family, friends and peers support), institutional factors (institutional support, resources) and level of communication and engagement (timeous feedback, timeous engagement). These factors created favourable experiences. These favourable experiences were mostly at the training provider.

At the other end of the spectrum, inhibiting factors were experienced by most learners particularly those who dropped out. The lack of adequate support by some organisations that provided the workplace practical experience was an inhibiting factor. Most participants felt that the level of resources availed to them was not adequate and this affected their progress in the programme. The lack of adequate communication and engagements, mostly at some organisations providing the practical workplace experience, contributed to learners dropping out of the learnership programme. Most of the learners who dropped out indicated that the level of compensation, reward and recognition was inadequate and did not meet their expectations. A combination of all these inhibiting factors created unpleasant experiences for the learners, resulting in them dropping out of the programme.

It can be concluded that in a learnership programme, the ability and willingness of the training provider (provider of structured learning component) and organisations that provide practical work experience to create an enabling environment resulting in enjoyable experiences and positive perceptions is critical for learner retention. The learners' levels of integration into the learnership programme, which in turn is determined by the level of commitment to their own goals, influences the learners' decision to stay or drop out. Financial aid plays a critical part in learner retention, and so is how learners are recruited

and inducted into the programme. A supportive architecture, for example mentoring, supervision and guidelines, is also crucial.

4.1.2.3 *Provide recommendations*

The third empirical aim is to provide recommendations on how learnership programmes can be used as a tool of talent retention in the IT industry. This is addressed in section 4.3.

4.2   LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted in only one institution and the results cannot, therefore, be generalisable throughout the IT learnerships programmes. Future studies should include learners from a sizeable number of organisations and should also consider organisations in other provinces, not Gauteng alone.

4.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

Leaders can also provide individual growth that could produce organisational improvements through targeted training, respect, feedback, culture, and communication. All these strategies and methods could provide knowledge to business leaders and increase learner retention (Durocher, Bujaki & Brouard, 2016). Learners want to work in an environment where they feel valued, respected, and compensated well. This improves retention. Learner generation of employees will grow until they make up approximately 25% of the workforce (Murphy, 2012).

It is recommended that:

- Organisations should take into consideration, create, and maintain strategies and methods that can retain learners. Leaders must assess and manage generational differences as strategies that will utilise all members of the organisation, especially learners (Hendricks & Cope, 2012).

- From this study, it was evident that learners have different experiences in their integration in the learning environment. The experiences influence the retention rate and later absorption rates. The experience determines the formation of perceptions that learners finally have about being on a learnership programme.

- Another finding from the literature review was that academic coaching and advice are not fully utilised in the programmes that seek to address the problem of low retention rates among learners. It is therefore recommended that learnership programmes should emphasise academic coaching and proper communication between learners and their facilitators to help in establishing a rapport between them during the initial months of enrolment.

- Further research is also recommended in order to establish the extent to which the current programmes have succeeded in taking advantage of academic coaching and proper communication between learners and their facilitators; with a view of helping in establishing such rapport.

- Coaching and mentoring are based on natural skills that all people possess and can be nurtured and developed to support learning processes (Strong & Vorwerk, 2001). Sound coaching creates the link between structured learning and workplace experience (Strong & Vorwerk, 2001). Duncan (2004) points out that workplace mentors are critical to the success of any workplace learning. The mentors manage the learners during workplace training, convey knowledge of organisational routines and managerial systems, and identify opportunities for learning. The mentor's primary focus is developing the learner comprehensively by using day-to-day working experiences. Jacklin (2003) confirms this aspect and stresses the need to have trained persons in place before embarking on learnership implementation.

- Interpersonal relationships with reliable alliances are highly significant in contributing to retention and success of the learners. These included learner support overall, in the form of group support or peer help, study groups, student counsellors, rehabilitation support, trusting relationships with family members, role models and academic staff. From the feedback received from learners one may conclude with confidence that learnership programmes contribute to the growing of talent. However, not all learners are equally satisfied. In order to optimise the perception of the learners not satisfied it is therefore recommended that appropriate measures are put in place, for example providing additional support to these learners.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Chapter 4 conclusions and recommendations were provided, based on the findings of the research, and limitations were also discussed.

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APPENDIX A: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

VOLUNTARY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEARNERSHIP CANDIDATES

Thank you for affording me your time to participate in this interview.

We need your opinions to understand the effectiveness and your personal experience on the learnership programme.

Although we would like you to record your experiences you can at any time withdraw or cancel the interview.

What you say in this questionnaire will remain private and confidential. The researcher endeavours to ensure that you will not be traced back to your opinions.

SECTION A: GENERAL BIOLOGICAL DETAILS

Please X the applicable box

1. What is your current job title?

| |
| |

2. Your gender group

Male		Female	

3. Your age group.

18 – 20 years		21- 25 years		26 – 30 years		31 – 35 years	

4. Your ethnic group.

Black		Indian		Coloured	

5. Your highest educational qualification.

Matric		Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Other	

1. What motivated you to apply for a learnership programme?
2. What degree of support and guidance did the organisation offer you during the learnership programme?
3. What obstacles would you say limited you whilst learnership programmes?
4. What were the motivating factors that assisted you whilst on the learnership programme?
5. Has your job performance improved as a result of being on a learnership?
6. Did you feel a sense of belonging whilst on training and during workplace experience?
7. Has the learnership had an impact on your life and how? What did you hope to gain from this Learnership Programme?

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNISA | university of south africa

UNISA CEMS/IOP RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

23 July 2018

Dear Karmenie Naidu,

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)
ERC Reference # : 2018_CEMS/IOP_008
Name : Karmenie Naidu
Student #: 06403832
Staff #: N/A

Decision: Ethics Approval from
20 July 2018 to 20 July 2021

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs Karmenie Naidu
Address: PO Box 181097, Dalbridge, 4014
E-mail address, telephone: karmen.naidu@vodamail.co.za, +27 83
7775050

Supervisor (s): Mr Aden Flotman
E-mail address, telephone: flotma@unisa.ac.za, (012) 429-4879

Learner's experiences on a learnership programme in an Information technology
organisation.

Qualification: Post graduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa CEMS/IOP Research
Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for
Three years.

*The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the CEMS/IOP Research Ethics Review*
Committee on the 20th July 2018 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics
and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision
was approved on 20th July 2018.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and
   principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is
   relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Unisa
   CEMS/IOP Research Ethics Review Committee.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (20th July 2021). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2018_CEMS/IOP_008** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature
Chair of IOP ERC
E-mail: vnieka2@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429-8231

Executive Dean : CEMS
E-mail: mogaimt@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429-4805

URERC 25.04.17 - Decision template (V2) - Approve

APPENDIX C: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

Certificate of Editing
R.J. Thompson
Editing and proofreading of theses and manuscripts

23 January 2019
6 Banton Road, Robertsham, Johannesburg, 2091
E-mail: rjthompson84@hotmail.com
richardt@regenesys.co.za
Cell. 082-890-5264

To whom it may concern:

This is to certify that I, Richard James Thompson, identity number 630722 5095 085, am employed as a language editor by Regenesys Business School, 4 Pybus Road, Sandton.

In my spare time, I do private language-editing work.

In that capacity I have edited the text of Ms Karmen Naidu's UNISA M. Com. dissertation, "Learners' Experiences of Learnership Programmes in an Information Technology Organisation."

The dissertation conforms to the requirements of the American Psychological Association (APA) style guide.

If there are any queries, please contact me at the above address or phone number.

Yours faithfully

R. J. Thompson

Richard Thompson