UNDERSTANDING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY: A CASE OF A SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN BOTSWANA

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ABSTRACT: *The issue of graduate employment has generated a lot of debate and has become a phenomenal theme of discourse across professional gatherings, political rallies, media, commentary reviews, national economic debates and social networks. In the context of Botswana, studies also show that the country is currently suffering from the twin challenges of shrinking economy and unemployment with the current national unemployment being pegged at 18% and rising while youth unemployment alone is at 34%. It is against this background that this study has been carried out to examine the employment status of graduates at a selected higher education institution in Botswana. A quantitative approach that employed a structured questionnaire was used in the study to collect data from a sample of 250 graduates who graduated between 2007 and 2014. Convenience sampling strategy was used to select the sample of respondents. Data collected was analysed using SPSS version 21. Results of the study showed that 65.3% of the students who graduated between 2007 and 2014 at the selected higher education institution are employed. The study further showed that graduates felt that some of the reasons for delayed employment had nothing to do with skills mismatch, experience or competition in the market but as a result of other issues. It was also shown in the study that the main method of seeking for employment was through the use of curriculum vitae (CVs).*

KEYWORDS: Employability, Graduate, Soft Skills, Unemployment, Hard Skills

INTRODUCTION

Literature shows that graduate employment and employability are now issues of both national and global concern owing to the ever rising number of unemployed graduates (Aida, Norailis & Rozaini, 2015). The above is confirmed by Samuel, Bassey and Samuel (2012) who argued that the issue of graduate employment is now a phenomenal topic of discourse across professional gatherings, in media, commentary reviews, employer surveys, national economic debates, political gatherings, social networks and employee forums. Many countries are facing economic challenges at the moment and hence according to literature, immense pressure is now being put on higher education to produce quality graduates that can turnaround economies with their specialist knowledge and skills (Adesnia, 2013; Teichler, 2007; Bezuidenhout, 2011; Garwe, 2013).

As a demonstration of the gravity of youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa of which Botswana is a member, the British Council (2015) in their study on graduate employability and whether Africa can survive and solve the job crisis, found that higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled from 2344000 in 2000 to 5228000 in 2010 and the number has been rising owing to the liberalization of the higher education sector in most of the countries. Such a situation according to Garwe (2013) has put a lot of pressure on the labour market to be to absorb the huge numbers of graduates exiting higher education on an annual basis. In the context of Botswana, the economic outlook is not as good as it should be

due to lower commodity prices on the global market especially with regards to diamonds (Statistics Botswana, 2015). As a result of this outlook, industry is not performing well to be able to attract thousands of graduate exiting higher education every year. As of 2015, Statistics Botswana (2015) shows that the national rate of unemployment in Botswana stands at 18% and is rising and this is quite high when compared to the global unemployment rate of 6.2%. On the other hand, Botswana youth unemployment on its own is at a staggering 34% (Statistics Botswana, 2015).

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the employment status of graduates at a selected higher education learning institution in Botswana.

2. To investigate the most frequently used approach for seeking employment by graduates.

3. To identify the reasons for delayed graduate employment.

4. To establish how relevant the training graduates received was, to meeting their employment needs.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant statistical relationship between the type of degree (programme) a graduate obtained from the selected higher education institution and the type of employment they get.

Hypothesis 2: There is significant statistical relationship between the degree obtained from the selected higher education institution and delays in graduate getting employment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of employment and graduate employability are not new yet their meanings continue to be misunderstood and even confused (Garwe, 2013). Graduate employability is defined as a set of achievements, that is, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make a person or graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in the job (Yorke, 2008). Graduate employability is also defined as work readiness, that is, possession of skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that enable a person to make productive contributions to organizational objectives (Mason, Williams & Cranmer, 2006). Employment on the other hand means having a job (Garwe, 2013). Graduate employability is further defined by Kim (2012) as referring to a wide range of attributes and competencies that enable a job seeker to gain and maintain employment hence according to Knight and Yorke (2004), is the capacity to get a job, function in a job and be able to progress within the job or between jobs.

Literature shows that how employability is therefore understood as one that shapes educational aims and practices and define the quality of graduates the market is prepared to absorb into the labour market (British council, 2015). In a narrow perspective, employability can be understood as preparation for a job (is the most common understanding) in which case students are only given knowledge and skills directly related to the job they would wish to pursue (Republic of south Africa, 2011). This understanding has a limitation of leaving out

the soft skills which according to literature, employers are strongly looking for in graduates (Weissemann, 2012; Kim, 2012). Studies have shown that while academic qualifications are essential, in today's highly competitive labour environment, it is attitudes and aptitudes, that is, soft skills, of job seekers which include problem solving, flexibility and adaptability, team work, confidence and integrity, analytical skills and communication skills, that are more important to employers (Kim, 2012; British Council, 2015). In a more expansive or broader perspective, graduate employability can be understood as the non-market traits such as formation of public good values, valuing diversity problem solving, among others, that presents a prospective employee as a productive member of a team (British council, 2015; Kim, 2012).

The importance of non-academic skills in aiding graduates to get employment is also vividly articulated in a study by Samuel et al (2012) which found that besides academic qualifications, employers now look for the presence of non-academic skills such as analytical skills, communication skills, good interpersonal and social skills, team work, motivation, time management, problem solving, among others. Further emphasizing the relevance of non-academic skills in the graduate employment equation, a study by Aida, Norailis and Rozaini (2015) found that diplomas and degree are no longer worth what they used to be in the labour market in enhancing the employment prospects of a graduate, it is now soft skills that matter. The above also confirmed results of a study by Weissmann (2012) which also found that employers are now looking for people possessing both hard skills (professional, technical knowledge and administrative knowledge and skills) as well as soft skills. According to Garwe (2013), while the state of the economy has an influence on the number of graduates who can get employed, it is other factors such as the soft skills that define who gets the job. The above assertion by Garwe (2013) is further highlighted in studies by Archer and Davidson (2008) and Popo and Barckhuizen (2010) who found that factors such as a lack of technical and industry-specific skills, knowledge and abilities or interactive attributes that include communication skills, interpersonal skills, team work, problem solving and self-motivation among others.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the CAREEDGE model. The premise of the model (Figure 1) is that increasing domain-specific expertise only instead of a broad employability package of skills and knowledge is not enough to guarantee graduate employability (Van dam, 2004).The model therefore focuses on providing students with opportunities to: access and develop everything on the lower tier of the model. Reflect on and evaluate their experiences (from lower tie).
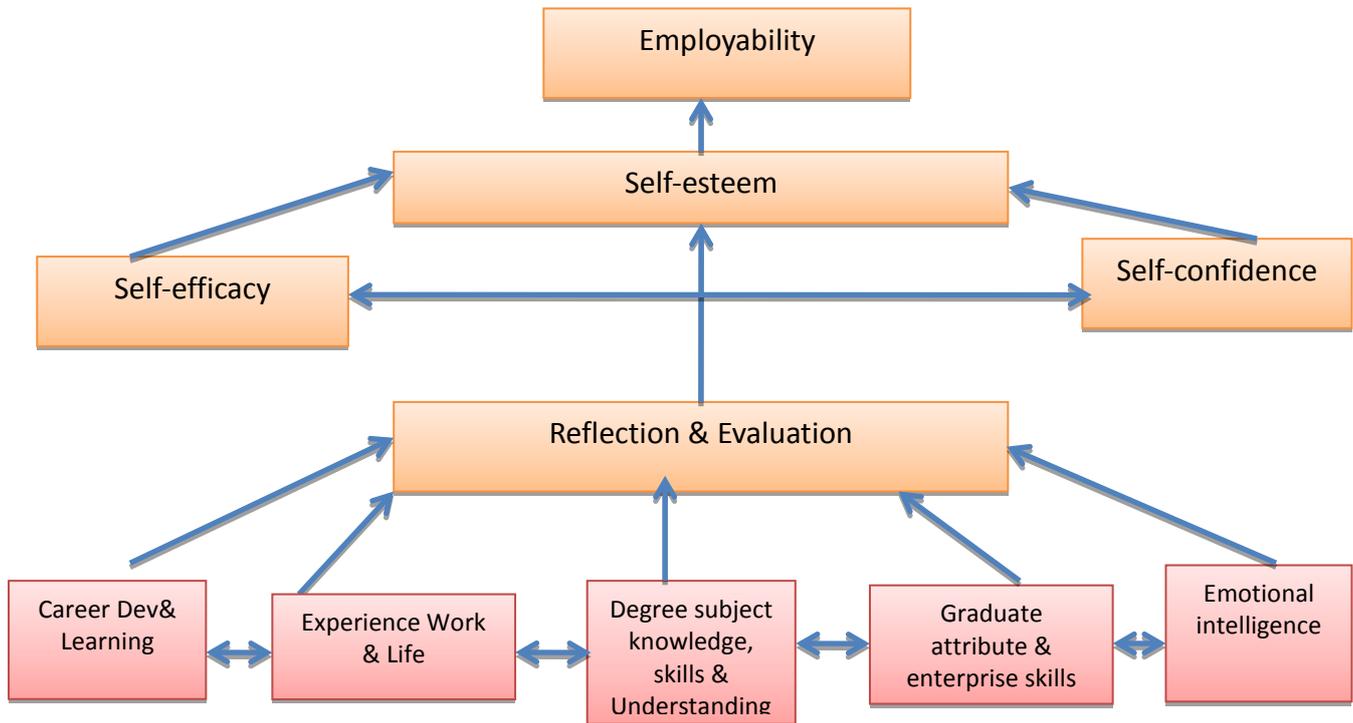
Figure 1: CAREEREDGE Model (Van Dam, 2004)

The above opportunities will result in the development of higher levels of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem and hence higher employability prospects (Knight & Yorke, 2004). One major advantage of the model is that it provides clarity about what needs to be done by HEIs to enhance graduate employability.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study employed a descriptive research design that uses a survey strategy for data collection. A descriptive research is all about describing people who take part in the study so as to provide information about the naturally occurring status, behavior, attitudes or other characteristics of a particular group (Kowalczyk, 2015).

Population and sampling

The population of the study consisted of 250 graduates who graduated in the period 2007 to 2014 at a selected university in Botswana. These graduates were either working, not working or self-employed in different parts of Botswana. Convenience sampling was used to select the 250 graduates based on the fact that they were located in accessible parts of the country where there was network connectivity to be able to reach them by either phone or email. A convenience sample, also called a non-probability or opportunity sample, among other names, is a sample drawn without any underlying probability-based selection method.

Basically a convenience sample is any data that is neither a complete enumeration of all the possible data—a census—nor a careful, scientific sample (Price, 2013).

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria represents the characteristics that people in a population must have in order to be included in the study (Polit & Beck, 2012). In the context of the current study, eligibility criteria were that participants had to:

- be former students of the selected higher education institution

- have gone through the full programme for which they had enrolled or had exited at designed exited points

- have graduated from the selected during the period 2007 - 2014

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. A structured questionnaire is defined as a research instrument based predominantly on closed questions which produce data that can be analyzed quantitatively for patterns and trends (Creswell, 2012). The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (DA) to strongly disagree (SDA) with each of the points assigned a value as follows: SA =5, A=4, N=3, DA=2, SDA=1.

Before being administered, the questionnaire was subjected to reliability and validity testing. Using the Cronbach Alpha test, the questionnaire was tested for internal consistency reliability. The α was calculated and was found to be equal to .074 hence the questionnaire was considered reliable enough for the study. With regards to validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert opinion for content validity and recommendations from the experts were factored into the final questionnaire. Of the 250 questionnaires administered, 197 were returned giving a return rate of 78.8%.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to present and analyse results. SPSS version 21 was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics were used first followed by non-parametric test of Chi-square to test whether there was significant variability in the level of agreement or disagreement on the given statements which described employment trends of graduates from 2007 to 2014. Hypotheses were tested one after the other according to research study variables. The hypotheses were tested at 5% significance level which was more sensitive than 10% to enhance its power test (5% level of significance indicates less chance of results being due to statistical error and chance when compared to the 10%).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SECTION A: Descriptive statistics
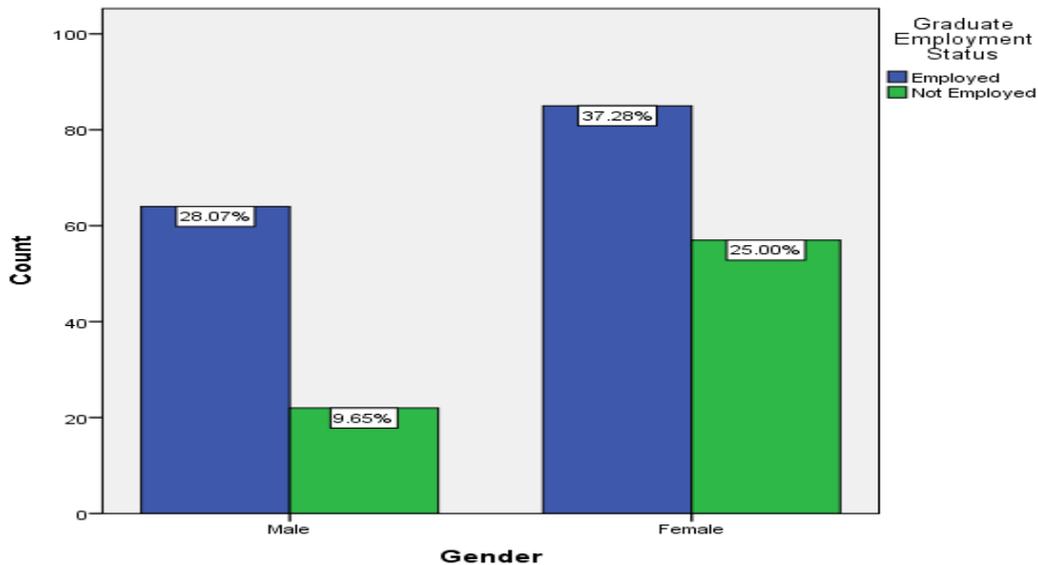
Graduate employment status

Figure 1.1: Graduate employment status * Gender

Figure 1.1 shows that 65.3% of the students who graduated between 2007 and 2013 are employed while 34.7% are not employed. The above statistics shows that most of the graduates of the 2010-2013 period are employed. When looking at Figure 4 in terms of gender, more female graduates are employed (37.3%) when compared to male graduates (28.1%) and also more female graduates are not employed (25%) when compared to male graduates (9.6%). Such a high percentage of employed graduates imply that the institution employs a combination of both hard and soft skills during the education of the graduates. The use of soft skills that include communication skills, problems solving skills analytical skills, interpersonal skills and team work among others, as part of training of graduates has been viewed in literature as important (Kim, 2012; Garwe, 2013; British Council, 2015). Authorities such as Weissmann (2012) indicated that employers are now looking for people possessing both hard skills (professional, technical knowledge and administrative knowledge and skills) as well as soft skills. The above is confirmed by Garwe (2013), who in her study found that while the state of the economy had an influence on the number of graduates who can get employed, it is other factors such as the soft skills that define who gets the job.
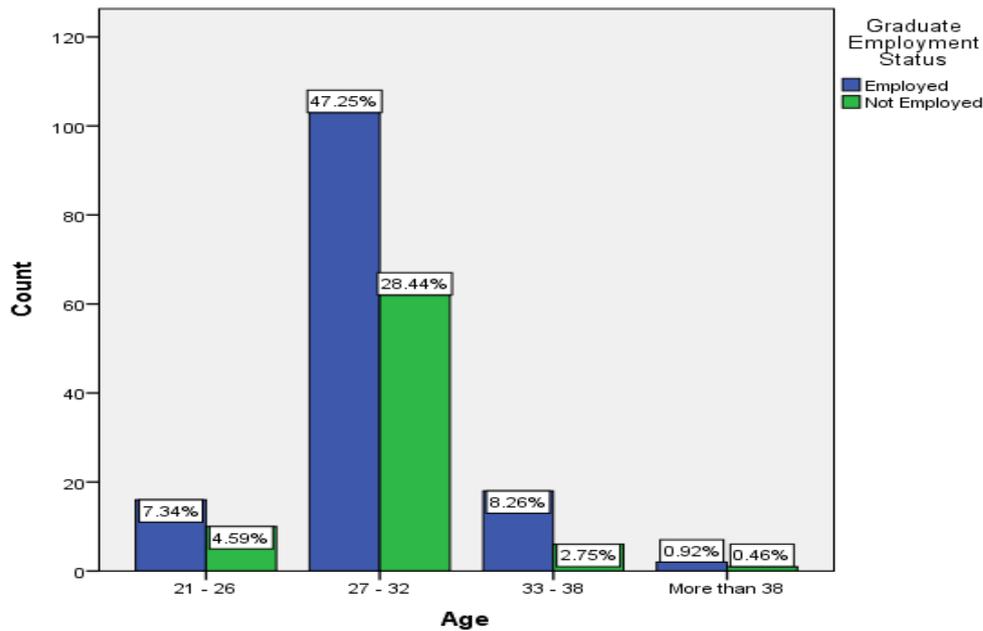
Figure 1.2: Graduate employment status * Age

Figure 1.2 shows that the most employed age group of the graduates is the 27-32 years age group while the least employed age group is also the same age group. This statistics is in line with the age demographics of the institution where most of the students are aged between 20 and 30 years.
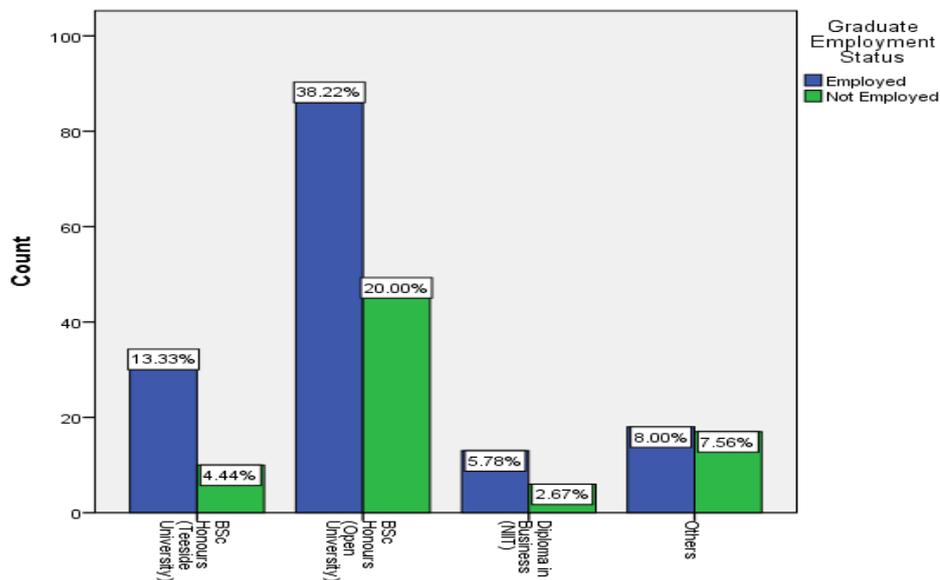

Figure 1.3: Graduate employment status * Degree programme

Figure 1.3 shows that across programmes offered between 2010 and 2014, there are more graduates employed (65.3%) than not employed (34.7%). Programme-wise, BSc (Hons) computing graduates from Open University Computing programme had more numbers employed (38.2%) and also not employed (20%) when compared to other programmes offered at the time. Diploma in Business graduates are the least employed (5.78%). The

above statistics confirm results of earlier studies where it was shown that there is a link between a degree a student pursues and employment prospects. A study by the British council (2014) confirmed this result. Another study by the British Council (2015) found that field of study is affected by demand side factors; these are not 'natural' but shaped by a discourse of 'scarce skills'. This especially affects the humanities and social sciences. The study further showed that on the other hand accounting, business and commerce students and engineering students (especially those on state or company sponsored bursaries who are guaranteed a job on graduating) perceive positive employment prospects due to the demand for graduates with their qualifications. As a result, the study demonstrated that some fields of study appear to be more employable than others –the subject knowledge is in greater demand and students and academics indicate that particular technical skills and subject fields are paramount in enhancing employment outcomes (British council, 2015).
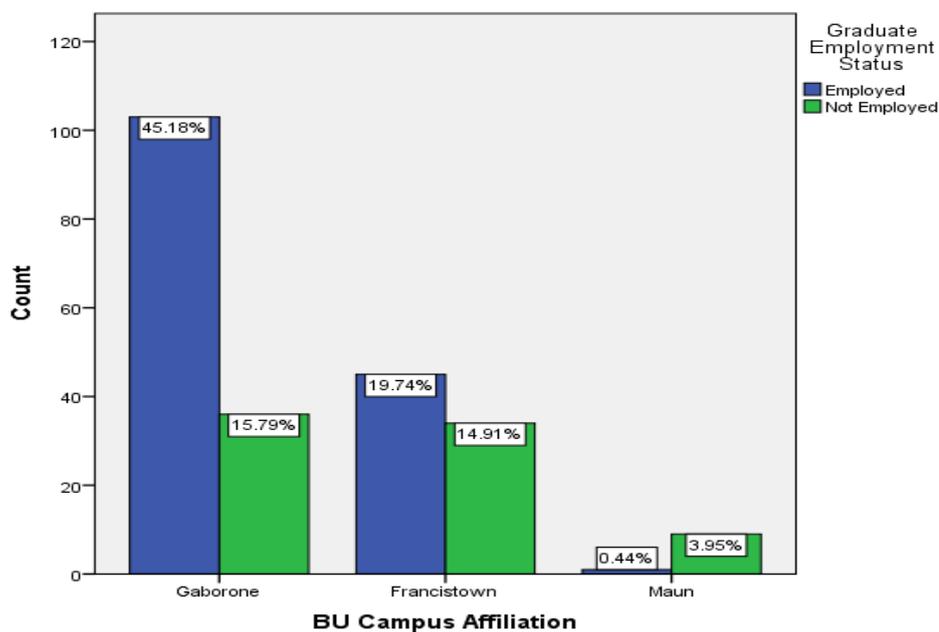

Figure 1.4: Graduate employment status * Campus affiliation

Figure 1.4 shows that most of the employed graduates (45.25) are from the Gaborone campus followed by the Francistown campus (19.7%) and lastly Maun campus (0.4%). Gaborone campus has also the highest number of unemployed graduates (15.8%) followed by Francistown campus (14.9%) and lastly Maun campus with 4% of unemployed graduates. Overall there are more employed graduates (69.3%) across campuses than the unemployed (30.7%). Results of this study confirm results of earlier studies which showed that where a graduate did his/her education has a direct influence on the employment aspirations and chances of being employed. A study by the British Council (2015) in universities in South Africa found that students who did their education at top universities or at the campuses of such top universities such as Wits, University of Free State and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University had higher confidence of and were quick at getting employment than those from lower end universities such as University of Venda.
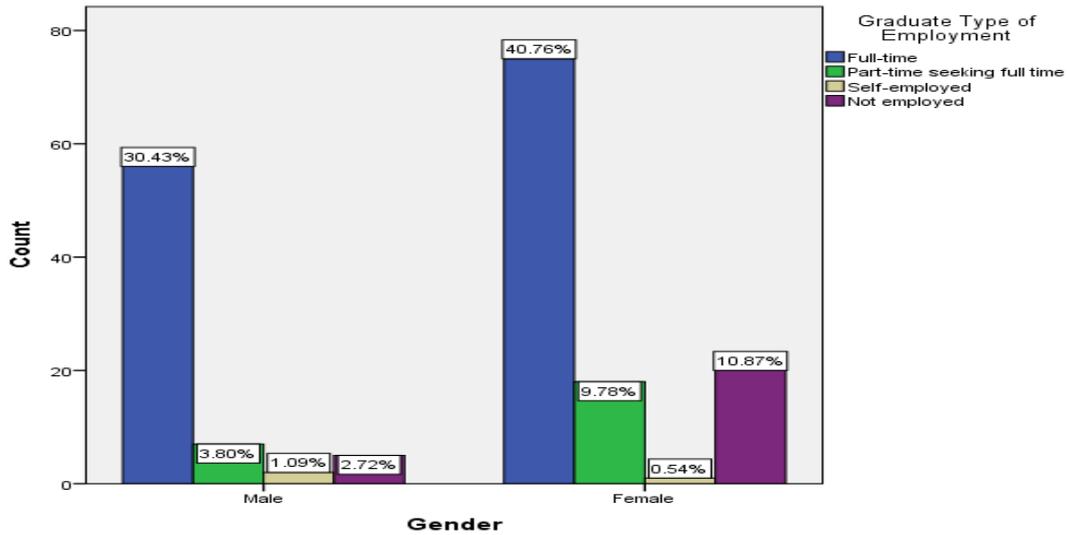
Graduate employment type

Figure 2.1: Graduate employment type * Gender

Figure 2.1 shows that of all the 71.1% of the graduates at the selected higher education institution who were employed full-time, 40.76% were female and 30.43% were male graduates. The above results on full-time employment of graduates matches results of an earlier study by Bolaane, Chuma, Toteng and Molwane (2010) that showed the percentage of full-time employed graduates from a vocational higher education institution being 71.9%. On the other hand, of the 13.5% of graduates employed part-time, 9.78% were female and 3.8% were male. These numbers show that overall, the selected higher education institution churns out more female graduates who get absorbed into employment than male graduates. However on self employment, results show that only male graduates (1.6%) were self-employed while there were no female graduates interested in self employment. Lack of interest by graduates in self-employment is also confirmed in an earlier study by Ama (2008) who found that only 0.4% of graduates at a certain higher education institutions were self-employed.
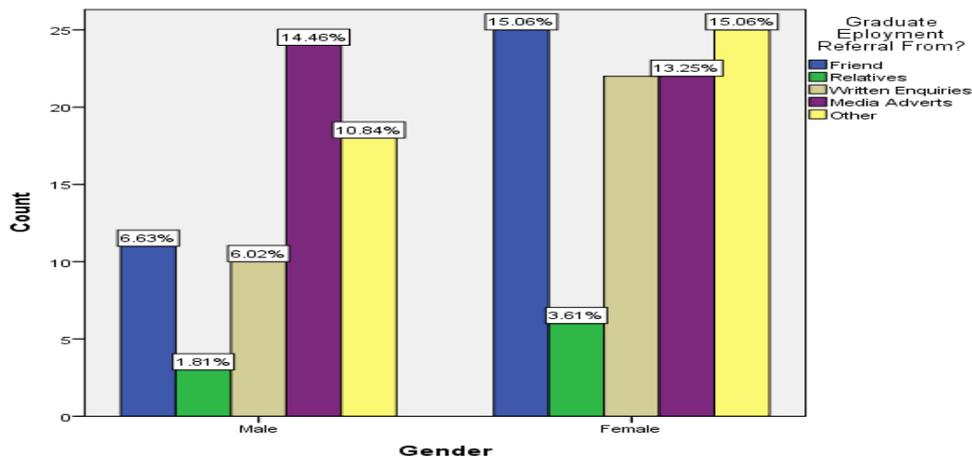
Graduate Employment Referrals

Figure 3.1: Referrals for BU graduate employment * Gender

Figure 3.1 shows that 27.8% of the graduates used the media for employment search, 21.7% used friends, 5.4% used relatives, 19.2% used written enquiries, and 25.9% used other means for job search. The above therefore means that the most common means graduates used for job search was the media. In terms of gender, Figure 11 shows that for job search, while female graduates used more of friends (15.1%) and other means (15.1%), male graduates used mostly media (14.5%). The least method used by both male (1.9%) and female (3.6%) graduates for job search was the use of relatives.
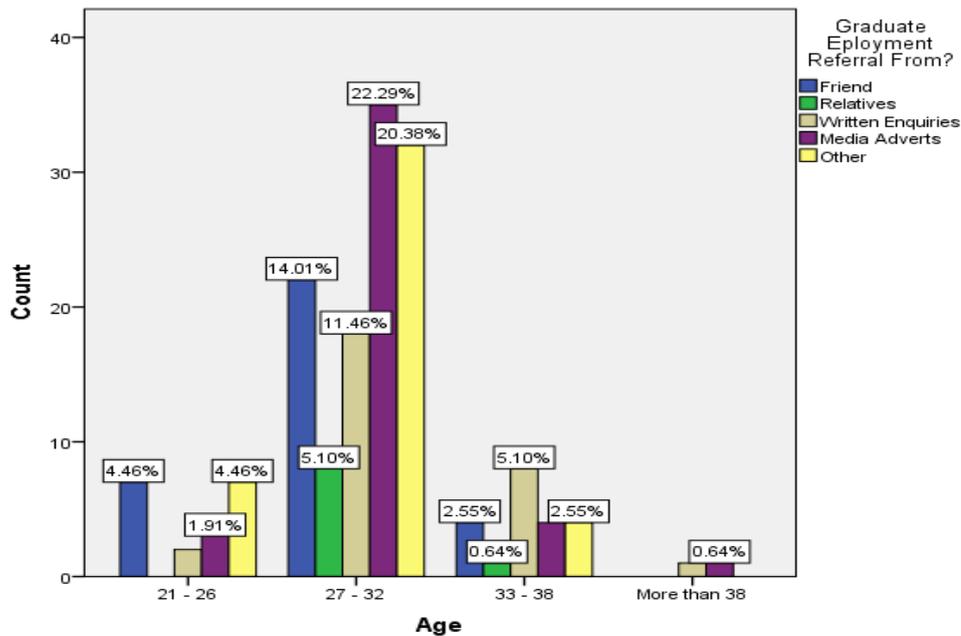

Figure 2: Referrals for graduate employment * Age

Figure 12 shows that the 21-26 years used more of other (4.5%) and friends (4.5%) for job search, the 27-32 years age groups of graduates used mostly media adverts (22.3%) and other (20.4%) while the 33-38 years age group mostly used written enquiries (5.1%). The more than 38 years age group preferred to use both written enquiries and media adverts equally (0.6%). The above statistics shows that media adverts and other are generally the most preferred means of job search by all the age groups with friends and written enquiries coming in here and there.
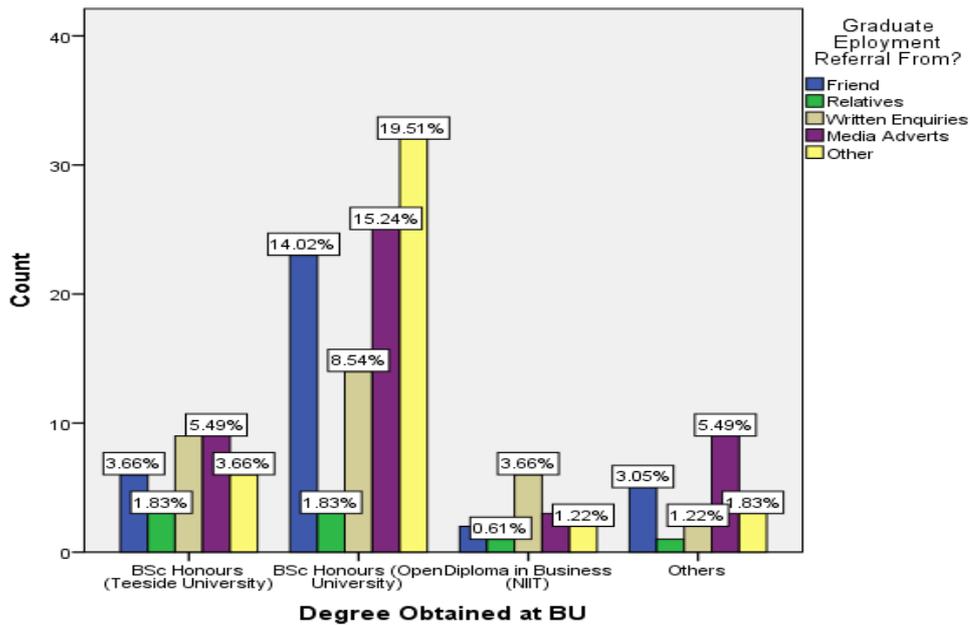
Figure 3: Referrals for BU graduate employment * degree programme

Figure 13 shows that across programmes, there were more graduates (26.2%) used other means than any of media, friends, relatives and written enquiries with the BSc (Hons) Computing Open University graduates (19.5%) mostly using this referral source. The second most used referral source across degree programmes was media adverts (23.2%) with mostly graduates from the BSc (Hons) Open University (14%) mostly using this referral source. The least used referral source across degree programmes was relatives (4.9%).
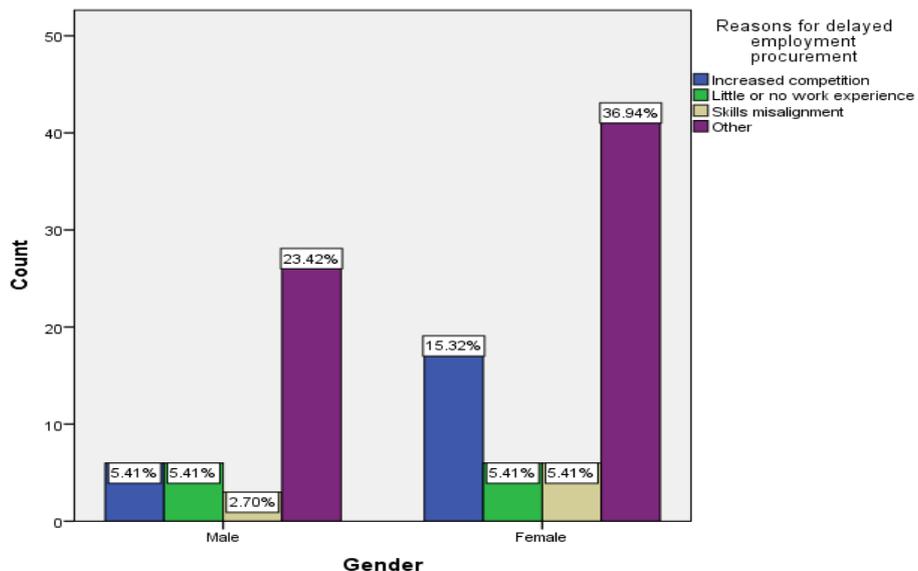
Reasons for graduate delayed employment

Figure 4.1: Reasons for delayed employment of graduates * gender

Figure 4.1 shows that the reasons which contributed in graduates delaying in getting employed were increased competition (28.8%), little or no work experience (10.8%), skills mismatch (8.1%), and other (52.3%). The above statics therefore shows that the major reason for failure of BU graduates to gain early employment was neither as a result of skills mismatch, increased completion nor lack of work experience but due to other reasons that may need to be investigated. When considering employment by gender, Figure 4.1 shows that the major reason why both male and female graduates failed to get early employment was due other reasons other than skill mismatch, lack of experience and completion. Increased completion affected females (15.3%) more than males (5.1%) while lack of experience affected them equally (5.4%). Female graduates were also affected by skills mismatch (5.4) when compared to male graduates (2.7%). The above results confirm results of earlier studies. These results refute some findings of studies such as one by Ama (2008) on the transition of graduates from higher education to employment that found that of all the employed graduates in a higher education institution, there were more male graduates than female. Another study by Bolaane, Chuma, Toteng and Molwane (2010) who in their tracer study on the employment outcomes of vocational training graduates found that there were more male than female employed.
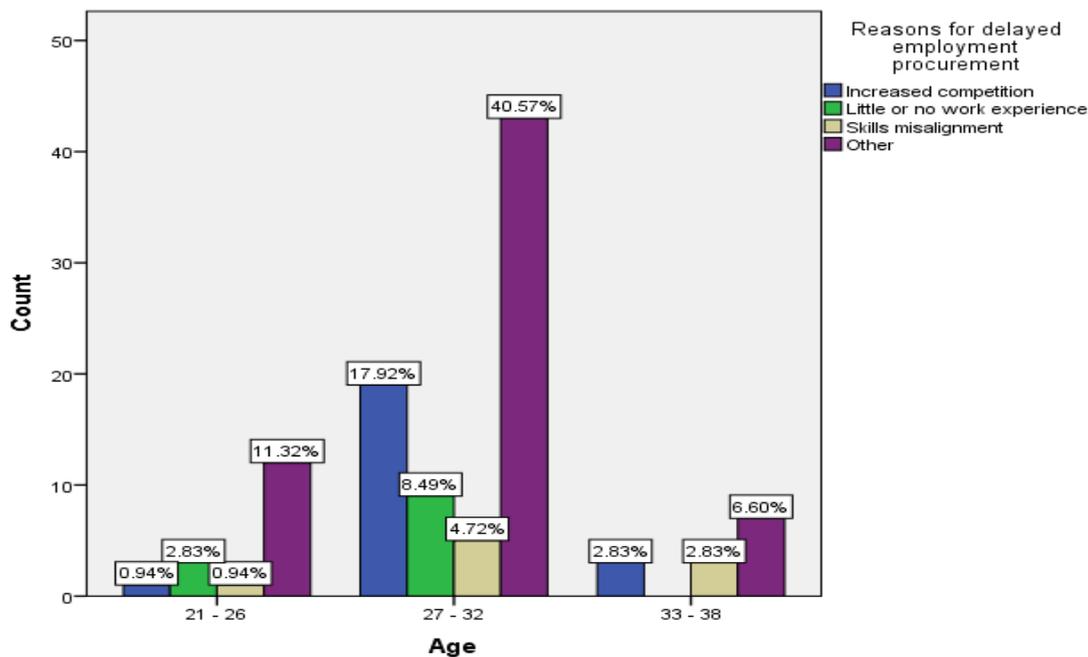

Figure 4.2: Reasons for delayed employment of graduates * Age

Figure 4.2 shows that around 61% of graduates believe that the major reason why it took them long to get employed was other reasons rather than skills mismatch, lack of experience or increased competition. 11.3% of the 21-26 years, 40.6% of the 27-32 years and 6.6% of the 33-38 years age groups indicated the above. At the same time the 21-26 years age group believed that increased competition and skills mismatch had no serious influence on them taking long to get employed. The 27-32 and also the 33-38 years age groups believed skills mismatch had no direct influence on the delays they faced in getting employed. These results demonstrate that across ages, graduates from the selected higher education institution received training not only in the technical issues (professional knowledge and skills) and also in the soft skills required by industry to ensure there was no skill mismatch. Studies have

shown that some of the major reasons there is delayed employment of graduates are that students lack employability skills, there will be skills mismatch and that the industry due to depressed economies, cannot create enough jobs for new graduates entering the labour market (British Council, 2014, 2015; Kim, 2012; Garwe, 2013). The importance of graduates having skills that match industry requirements in order not to delay getting employment is further articulated in a number of other studies that showed that factors such as a lack of technical and industry- specific skills, knowledge and interactive attributes such as effective communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving skills among others are some of the major reasons why graduates fail to get early employment (Archer & Davidson, 2008; Pop & Barkhuizen, 2010).
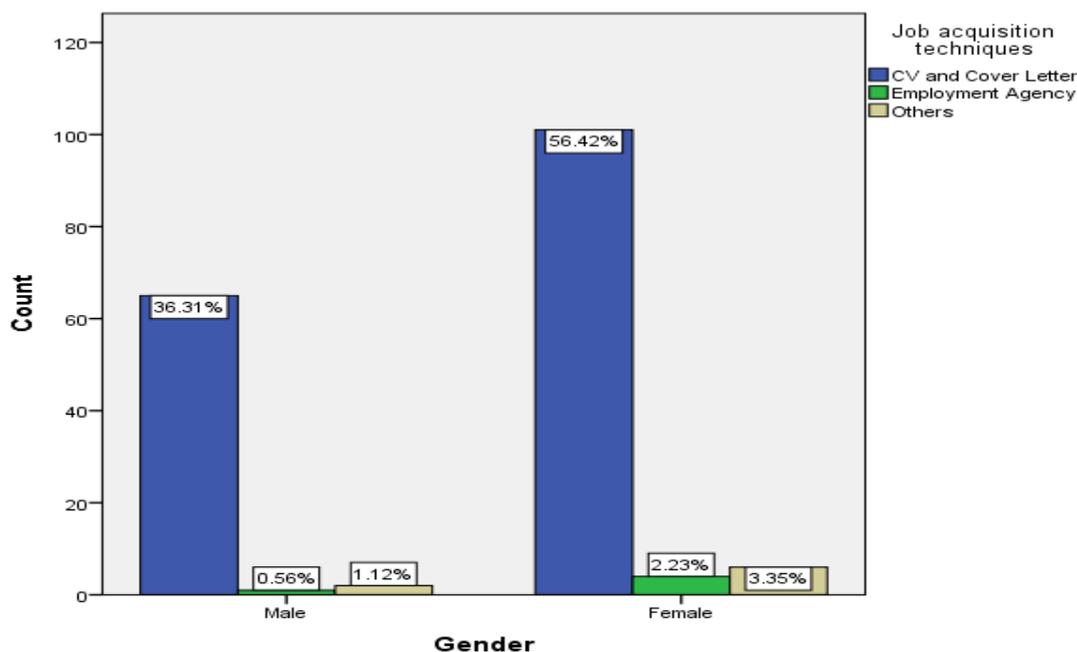
Graduates job search techniques

Figure 5.1: Job search techniques * Gender

Figure 5.1 shows that 92.7% of the graduates used curriculum vitae CVs and cover letters for searching for employment while 2.9% used employment agencies and 4.4% used other means. This means that the most common job acquisition technique used by graduates was use of CVs and cover letters. Analysis by gender shows that both male and female graduates mostly use CVs and cover letters with more females (56.4%) using them when compared to male graduates (36.3%). The least used technique is employment agencies with only 0.6% of male graduates using them and 2.2% of female graduates also using them. Results of this study dovetail with results of earlier studies that show that across the gender divide, the CV is the most popular job search technique graduates use when searching for employment (Bezuuidenhout, 2011; British Council, 2014, 2015).

SECTION B: Inferential Statistics

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant statistical relationship between the type of degree (programme) a graduate obtained from the selected higher education institution and the type of employment they get.

Table 1: Degree Obtained at the selected institution * Type of Employment

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.685[a]	12	.878
Likelihood Ratio	6.274	12	.902
Linear-by-Linear Association	.251	1	.617
N of Valid Cases	165		

The calculated P-Value on Table 1 shows that P > 0.05 which is not statistically significant, hence the hypothesis that there is a significant statistical relationship between the type of qualification a graduate obtained from the institution and the type of employment they got was accepted. This result confirmed the earlier result on Figure 2.1 which showed that most graduates (71.1%) are mostly employed in full-time jobs. This shows that most of graduates from the selected university had benefited from the type of education given in terms of the development of both hard and soft skills needed by industry as cited in researches by Kim (2012), Garwe, 2013; Adesnia, 2013).

Hypothesis 2: There is significant statistical relationship between the degree obtained from the selected higher education institution and delays in graduate getting employment.

Table 2: Degree Obtained at selected institution * Delayed employment procurement

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.908[a]	9	.032
Likelihood Ratio	10.106	9	.342
Linear-by-Linear Association	.070	1	.791
N of Valid Cases	182		

The calculated P-Value on Table 8 shows that P < 0.05 which is statistically significant, hence the hypothesis that there is a significant statistical relationship between the type of qualification a graduate obtained from selected institution and the delays in graduate getting employment was rejected. This means that the degree which graduates get from the selected institution does not affect chances of graduates getting early employment. This result confirms results of earlier studies that show that it is no longer the academic qualification that has a say on who does or who does not get employed, it is the soft skills. Studies by

Weissmann (2012), Adesnia (2013), Bezuinhut (2011) among others, showed that graduates are more likely to gain early employment and stay in the job if they possess skills, knowledge, attitudes and aptitudes that enable them to make graduates to make productive contributions to the achievement of organizational objectives.

CONCLUSION

The study provided useful insight into the employment status of graduates from a selected higher education institution in Botswana, from which a number of conclusions can be drawn. The first conclusion that is drawn from the results is that the institution churned out a sizable number of graduates into the market between 2007 and 2014. The second conclusion is that there are more employed male graduates than female graduates but of those employed, there are more female graduates in full-time employment than male graduates. The third conclusion is that graduates seem to prefer applying for employment using CVs than any other employment search tools. The fourth conclusion is that it was established that there is a strong relationship between the campus at which a graduate completed his/her education and employment prospects.

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