

# INVESTIGATING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA'S GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY STRATEGY: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Philip Bulawa\*

Department: Primary Education  
[bulawap@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:bulawap@mopipi.ub.bw)

Elizabeth G. Seeco

Department: Educational Foundations  
[seecog@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:seecog@mopipi.ub.bw)

Keinyatse T. Kgosidialwa

Department: Educational Foundations  
[kgosidialwa@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:kgosidialwa@mopipi.ub.bw)

Nonofo C. Losike-Sedimo

Department: Educational Foundations  
[sedimonc@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:sedimonc@mopipi.ub.bw)  
University of Botswana

## Abstract

The emergence of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s has led to a shift in the manner in which universities and other institutions of higher learning have re-designed their academic programmes. This is consistent with governments' call for higher education institutions to promote entrepreneurial skills required in the world of work. In line with global neoliberal policies, the University of Botswana (UB) has committed itself to academic programmes that prepare learners for the world of work. The policy used to respond to this ideological perspective is the Teaching and Learning Policy, which expresses UB's commitment to graduate employability. One of the aims of the Graduate Employability Strategy is to produce graduates who have entrepreneurship and employability capability transferable to different situations. Guided by the conceptual framework of employability, this qualitative study aims to explore the extent to which UB students perceive themselves to be adequately prepared for employment; and to examine the extent to which the students feel they have acquired knowledge and skills that provide them with opportunities to get employed. The participants in the study were pre-service and in-service students in the Faculty of Education of the University of Botswana, and the study is based on their responses to semi-structured questionnaire.

## 1.0 Introduction

Key to a country's development is citizens' skills that would grow and sustain its economic activities notably in the technical and industrial areas (Moswela & Chiparo, 2015). In Botswana as in other countries, employers demand graduates with competence "in specific discipline knowledge and

have the generic skills to cope with the ever changing work environment” (Moalosi, Oladiran & Uziak, 2012, p. 40). The challenge for tertiary institutions in Botswana is not just the relevance of the curriculum to the country’s economic needs and the skills it imparts to graduates that are required by employers, but also the need for the institutions and industry to maintain strong links to ensure that content of all programmes is relevant to the world of work (Moswela & Chiparo, 2015). The contribution by local institutions such as the University of Botswana is to aid national development by means of improving the quality and quantity of the human resources that are trained at the university (Pheko & Molefhe, 2016).

A strong recommendation to the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Botswana is the need to intensify the structure and content of its courses in order to ensure that a hundred percent of its programmes match the world of work, and that in doing so it is imperative among other things, that “a thorough understanding of the country’s economic activities and new areas of industrial expansion is necessary to achieve this” (Ama, 2008, p. 273).

In line with neoliberal policies on training, there has been call by the World Bank to replace the Millennium Development Goal (MGD) that holds countries accountable for enrolling children into schools with a Millennium Learning Goal (MLG) post-2015 to take into account the measurable learning outcomes that learners achieve. This would “ensure that education is providing young people with the skills that they will need to contribute to economic growth and human development within their countries” (Barrett, 2011, p. 122). Ama (2008) advocates for the need for self-employment of young graduates in Botswana to be encouraged through some incentives to set up their own businesses in order to become employers, and that for this to be achieved the University of Botswana will have to equip graduates with the required skills. As noted by Olssen and Peters (2005), in neoliberalism it is imperative that training creates individuals who are enterprising and are competitive entrepreneurs.

With this increasing demand for knowledgeable and skilled workforce, the government of Botswana has committed itself to ensuring that its people have access to high quality lifelong education and training aimed at producing individuals who are self-reliant, knowledgeable and skilled to be in position to engage in achieving the country’s development goals which include the creation of employment (Baliyan & Baliyan, 2013). Consequently, there has been call on the need for University of Botswana programmes to ensure that employability elements are an integral part of undergraduate programmes (Ama, 2008). The University has therefore committed itself to the provision of facilities, support, and resources needed by students and aimed at producing well-educated and well-trained graduates who would be qualified and able to find employment as indicated in its value statements (Alao, Pilane, Mabote, Setlhare, Mophuting, Semphadile, Odirile, Kgathi, & Mmapatsi, 2009).

## **2.0 Statement of the problem**

Employers are looking for employees who are competent with the ability and capacity to maximise productivity, and therefore demand that their future employees receive qualifications, knowledge, skills and other capabilities that are relevant to the world of work. Many students are aware that they are future employees and that future employers will require from them certain competences they deem relevant to the world of work. The students therefore enter tertiary institutions with hopes and expectations that the programmes offered would prepare them for employability. The aim of the government of Botswana is to ensure that students have access to education that prepares graduates for the labour market, and therefore expects institutions of higher learning to fulfil this mandate. Informed by the national policy on training, the University of Botswana has put together a policy document that guides both learners and their supervisors on graduate employability. It is therefore significant that in this study the views of the learners are sought regarding teaching techniques and initiatives taken by the university to implement the policy on employability. Also important are learners' views regarding prospects of getting employed with the knowledge and skills they shall have acquired at the University of Botswana.

## **3.0 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions of students regarding implementation of the University of Botswana policy on employability by different academic programmes offered in the Faculty of Education, as well as prospects of getting employed on completion of their programmes.

## **4.0 Research questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- a) What is the extent to which students understand the national policy on employability?
- b) What is the extent to which students understand the UB's graduate employability strategy?
- c) What are students' perceptions on their learning experience and the extent to which programmes equip them with employability skills?
- d) How do students perceive the university's academic programmes for employability?
- e) What is the extent to which learners rate their prospects of getting employed on completion of their study?

## **5.0 Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the body of research on policy on employability and employment. It adds to the understanding of students' perceptions about implementation of the policy in the different programmes offered in the Faculty of Education. Students were given the opportunity to express their views pertaining to their understanding and appreciation of the policy on employability as it affects them, and the extent to which it is appropriate in their programmes of study. That is, the study offers an opportunity for the voices of the students to be heard regarding policies or strategies for employability as well as employment creation.

Student voices could go a long way in informing both national and institutional policies regarding future strategies for employability. This could benefit trainers at the University of Botswana and other tertiary institutions about the extent of the relevance of their programmes for employability. Furthermore, policy makers, implementers and other relevant stakeholders would be informed about the role they should play in education in meeting the goal of achieving a knowledge society as stated in the Tertiary Education Policy, and about creation of employment.

## **6.0 Literature review and conceptual framework**

### **6.1 *Employability and neoliberalism***

This study, which is grounded in the conceptual framework of employability, investigated perceptions of undergraduate students regarding the University of Botswana policy of training students for employability. Employability “rests on the assumption that the economic welfare of individuals and the competitive advantage of nations have to depend on the knowledge, skills and enterprise of the workforce” (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003, p. 107). In neoliberal countries, the role that universities have always undertaken of developing citizens’ knowledge and skills have been rebranded as employability (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). The rebranding realised in neoliberal countries is in response to the increasing demand for workers who are more knowledgeable, with an increase in private investment in human capital (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003). It is therefore expected that universities would carry out their role of ensuring that they produce a workforce that is appropriately trained to fit employees’ needs.

The literature on employability shows that, until the mid-1980s, those who mainly determined graduate employability were academic elites whose role was to develop and deliver the curriculum, and this meant that different academic disciplines had the freedom to develop local notions of employability, not only in terms of education and training of professionals but also the provision of a broad liberal education. In areas of study that include engineering and medicine, the knowledge and competencies that graduates had to attain were traditionally ultimately determined by the professions. Even in more vocational fields, universities had the responsibility to provide technical knowledge and skills which were subject specific, while employers’ responsibility was to apprentice graduates into jobs (Boden & Nedeva, 2010).

This has all changed with the advent of neoliberalism, and as things stand now “the development of employability in graduates has become a significant expectation that governments around the world have, to varying extents, imposed on national education systems” (Knight & Yorke, 2002, p. 261). This has been criticised for dismantling public education and teacher education, and promoting the spread of neo-liberal corporate capitalism (Zeichner, 2010). Further are concerns about neoliberal policies’ effort to transform the occupation of teaching to what has been referred to as new professionalism that accepts the perception that judgement and decisions pertaining to what and how to teach and assess should mainly be made beyond the classroom than to be made by teachers themselves (Hursh, 2005).

Some scholars point to cultural contradictions that have emerged in higher education, and fundamental in this case is the “contradiction of state and market forces in the production, dissemination

and legitimation of knowledge in the so-called knowledge society” (Delanty, 2003, p. 77). To a significant extent, educating students has now become “a mass, global corporate business exhibition almost all of the characteristics associated with making cars or providing financial services” (Boden & Nedeva, 2010, p. 41).

On the one hand, there has also been questions about what it is that constitutes an employable and productive person in view of reports given by employers indicating that university graduates do not have business awareness and are poorly prepared for work (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003). Concern has been expressed about the difficulty encountered in trying to judge whether unemployment is due to inadequate preparation of graduates for the world of work or the saturation of the job market” (Alao, Pilane, Mabote, Setlhare, Mophuting, Semphadile, Odirele, Kgathi & Mmapatsi, 2009, p. 17).

On the other hand, is the perception of proponents of neoliberalism who argue for market reforms as one way of making education more efficient and more effective, hence today teacher education globally has undergone a major transformation (Hursh, 2005; Zeichner, 2010). They further maintain that employability “can be embedded in any academic subject in higher education without compromising core academic freedoms” (Knight & Yorke, 2002, p. 261). It is therefore, from governments’ standpoint, that higher education has become “a stakes game too important to leave to the universities themselves or to traditional peer faculty and governance processes that have dominated higher education for generations” (Alexander, 2000, p. 415). “The recent emphasis on employability reflects the buoyant demand for technical, scientific and professional workers who require lifelong learning, as the proportion of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs continues to decline” (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003, p. 112). In sum, what neo-liberalism has succeeded in doing, “is to subordinate and trivialise education that has no market value” (Lynch, 2006, p. 4).

## ***6.2 Neoliberal policies’ influence on Higher Education training programmes***

Universities have become major agents for government investment in human development. Global economic advantages are rapidly emerging in nations where widespread educational investments have become national priorities (Alexander, 2000). Consequently, education policies globally have “been strongly influenced by the new global demand that the education and training offered by higher education institutions should become more responsive to the needs and expectations of industry, of the state, and of society, to ensure economic and social prosperity” (Kruss, 2004, p. 674). With this changing relationship between government and higher education, governments are now putting enormous burden on higher education to play a momentous role in the transformation of “existing low-wage economic structures into high-performance, technology-based economies” (Alexander, 2000, p. 412).

This shows that at the heart of the call by state governments for responsiveness by institutions of higher learning, “lies a proposed new relationship between higher education and the labour market” (Kruss, 2004, p. 677) as now emphasised in different countries (Maharasoia & Hay, 2001; Co & Mitchell, 2006; Nagappan & Subramanian, 2014). Global economic advantages are reported to be rapidly emerging in nations where widespread educational investments have become national priorities. This is an environment in which higher education is now viewed as a vehicle to increase the stock of human capital that enables more effective competition in world markets (Alexander, 2000).

Furthermore, the dominant model of the relationship between higher education and the labour market that underpins “the general education focus of undergraduate qualifications such as BA or BSc, is one of employment with an indirect link to the labour market” (Kruss, 2004, p. 678). That is, when students complete their degrees or diplomas, this represents the end point of formal education and training, and as Kruss (2004) points out, it is assumed that graduates will proceed immediately upon qualifying to the workplace, to a job.

The curriculum in technical education institutions has been described as “a crucial component in imparting knowledge and relevant skills towards developing graduates for immediate employment” (Nagappan & Subramanian, 2014, p. 1485), in line with the view by Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco (2008, p. 166) that, “expertise or competence within a certain field is the key to guaranteeing one’s employability.” According to these scholars employability provides learners “the possibility to survive in the internal and external labour market” (Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco, 2008, p. 167), or as noted by Brown, Hesketh, and Williams (2003), it can offer them relative chance to acquire and maintain different kinds of employment.

A study by Martinez, Mora and Vila (2007) about entrepreneurs, the self-employed and employees amongst young European Higher Education graduates shows European Commission’s commitment to entrepreneurial activity which is construed as underlying the creation of not just wealth but also employment. The study shows that, with the employee culture seen as becoming less dominant, the entrepreneurial culture has to be fostered since entrepreneurship is now regarded to be “the main driving force of economic and social development in an increasingly global environment” (Martinez, Mora & Vila, 2007, p. 99). Drawing on Lüthje and Franke (2003), Martinez, Mora and Vila (2007) point to the relation between entrepreneurs, higher education and young graduates, arguing that the idea of becoming an entrepreneur is proving to be more and more attractive to students. They therefore perceive entrepreneurship as a valuable way they could participate in the labour market without losing their independence.

In the UK a study on the relationship between higher education and employment shows a perception by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, that higher education has as its primary purpose, preparation of students for the world of work. Evidence of government policy is further aimed at enhancing employability for graduates as part of a wider strategy to extend the skill base in the country. In late 1990s the government took the initiative to appoint a Skills Task Force that would advise on the development of a National Skills Agenda, an initiative that implied that the labour force in the UK lacked skills (Harvey, 2000).

Higher education institutions in African countries have not been left behind the global call to re-design the curricula such that their academic programmes prepare learners for employability as economies have been increasingly integrated into the global production process. The underlying principle is the felt need to develop a workforce which satisfies the requirements of global demand to meet international standards and quality in production. Many African countries, especially the beneficiaries of the globalisation process, have therefore, re-oriented their education systems, particularly higher education, to meet both national and global labour market requirements. As an essential indicator of this

process university study programmes have shifted emphasis from traditional subject areas to engineering, management and IT-related areas (Varghese, 2009).

The University of Botswana is not alone in Africa in its quest to train for employability as higher education institutions in its neighbouring countries, South Africa and Zimbabwe are also involved in training of learners for the labour market (Nel & Neale-Shutte, 2013; Mugwisi & Hikwa, 2015). In these countries, as it is the trend globally, the twenty-first century is regarded as a knowledge era and the expectation is that higher education should play a pivotal role as it is considered a key force for modernisation and development (Teferra & Altbach, 2004).

A study conducted by Nel and Neale-Shutte (2013) shows that in South Africa graduate employability is regarded as essential in higher education institutions, and to employers and graduates themselves in respect of the key knowledge, skills and attributes that would enhance graduates' employability. Further study in South Africa reveals a move away from pure knowledge to knowledge which places greater emphasis for application and practices, as well as greater emphasis on economic and social relevance (Maharasoia & Hay, 2001). This is reflected in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which emphasises the promotion of overall improvement in the level of skills of the workers with the aim of, among other things, improving and promoting the prospects of employees' productivity in the workplace and self-employment.

Evidence in the literature indicates that Technikons in South Africa are attracting more students than ever before, as the technikon sector is seen as having a "better reputation for links to the world of work, business and industry and the provision of learnership programmes" (Author, date, p. 141). In other words, the popularity of Technikons arises from the belief that they contribute more to the employability of students than the universities. As pointed out by Co and Mitchell (2006), there is an urgent need for young people in South Africa to be trained and educated in the field of entrepreneurship, with the hope that, this would encourage them to become job-creators instead of job-seekers once they leave the educational system.

In a tracer study conducted in Zimbabwe, Mugwisi and Hikwa (2015) recognise the positive response by the University of Zimbabwe to the development needs of the country and the vital role it has played in the development of human capital. The university's commitment to the development of the human resource manifests itself in the Faculty of Communication and Information Science mission "to contribute towards the economic and social advancement of humanity through the provision of knowledge-based solutions to national, regional and global challenges" (Mugwisi & Hikwa, 2015, p. 174). One way in which the Faculty is committed to its mission is by means of "exercising excellence in teaching and learning in order to produce innovative and entrepreneurial graduates" (ibid. p. 174).

According to Garwe (2014), universities in Zimbabwe have taken initiatives to introduce new innovative degree programmes aimed at addressing gaps that exist in the labour market. Furthermore, most universities are reported to have enhanced their curricula with a focus on entrepreneurship and technopreneurship. Initiatives by universities include students' work related learning for up to a period of

one year in their curricula, with employers, graduates and other stakeholders indicating that they valued work-based learning as an effective approach that promoted the employability of graduates.

### **6.3 Implications for higher education in Botswana**

Consistent with neo-liberal policies in higher education, the government of Botswana's position regarding programmes which may be offered in higher institutions of learning and specifically at the University of Botswana could undoubtedly be regarded as a contradiction between internal and external governances. That is, the norms and values of external governance have become more and more significant, consequently shaping regimes of internal governance such that one could argue that the autonomy associated with the idea of academic self-governance has been eroded (Delanty, 2003). Students mainly "learn from teachers who use a curriculum required by either the state or national curriculum..." (Hursh, 2005, p. 3).

The situation in Botswana, like other developing societies such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, is influenced by skills demand challenges that are compounded by the labour market, which has become more skill intensive in the private, parastatal and public sectors, a situation that requires immediate solution to the employability challenge (Pheko & Molefhe, 2016). As a result, there is tremendous pressure on tertiary institutions to design a curriculum that would ensure that learners construct understandings of the subject matter as well as build work related skills while still studying. The idea of curriculum redesign is that this could "increase the chances for the employment and for the employer savings on in house training efforts and resources" (Nagappan & Subramanian, 2014, p. 1481).

In Botswana, the government through its parastatal, Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), (2017) has also taken the initiative to step up its influence on academic programmes offered by the University of Botswana. The establishment of HRDC as an advisory and supervisory body represents government's commitment to ensuring that the economy moves from resource driven to knowledge based (HRDC, 2017). For instance, in the academic year 2015/2016, the government, with the advice of HRDC discontinued sponsorship of students wishing to pursue certain programmes of their choice arguing that they were surplus to the labour market. Students who had been admitted for such programmes were compelled, not out of their own choice, to re-apply for alternative ones considered by the government to be more relevant to the job market. In line with Zeichner (2010), what is emerging is government's pressure on the University of Botswana to among others things, have as one of its major policies, the transformation of its education system such that the production of workers for the economy is its primary mandate.

Based on the views of graduates from the Faculty of Social Sciences at UB, Ama (2008) emphasises the need to ensure that in the event that there is a mismatch between what is learnt at school and what is required by the world of work, universities should ensure that this is reduced to the barest minimum. He suggests that for this to be accomplished, universities have an obligation to review how they would interact externally with employers, employer organisations, and other agencies, to ensure that employability elements are explicit parts of undergraduate programmes. As maintained by Thijssen, Van der Heijden and Rocco (2008, p. 168), "employability is important in the light of future employment opportunities."



Another example in Botswana is that of Botho College, which has developed an internship programme with the expectation that the curriculum for computing would give its graduates an opportunity to undertake internships to expose themselves to the industry requirements (Nagappan & Subramanian, 2014). In a study about Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP), Odora (2011, p. 89) argues that “knowing the specific needs of the employers is critical to producing quality students, whether degree graduates or simply to upgrade employees, so that they can perform to the employer’s satisfaction and fit the employer’s long-term goals.”

## **7.0 Research methodology**

The study is qualitative in its approach and data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire (O’Cathain & Thomas, 2004) from Faculty of Education students at the University of Botswana. This qualitative study is “context-specific with the researcher’s role being one of inclusion in the situation” (Patton, 2005, p. 14). The participants were selected through a purposive sampling strategy designed to enhance understandings of selected individuals or groups’ experience(s) (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Purposive sampling was found sufficient for this study as the researchers believed it provided maximum insight and understanding of what they were studying (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). As further indicated by Ary et al. (2010), researchers used their experience and knowledge to select a sample of participants that they believed could provide the relevant information regarding the topic. The study population was 101, comprising 74 students studying for their Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), 16 in-service Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) (Educational Management), six B.Ed. (Counselling) and five Bachelor of Nursing Science (BNS) students. The PGDE students hold a Bachelor’s Degree in other faculties other than Faculty of Education, and were training to become teachers.

The B.Ed. (Educational Management) students were in-service school managers comprising School Heads, Deputy School Heads and Heads of Department studying to upgrade their qualification to degree level, while those pursuing the counselling nursing programmes were pre-service students studying for an undergraduate degree. The students responded to questions that solicited for their perceptions regarding the relevance of their programme and their perceptions on their employability when they graduate. The students were also to provide among others their viewpoints in relation to the knowledge and skills they acquired while studying at the UB and how much they knew about Graduate Employability Strategy.

## **8.0 Findings and discussion**

Findings on participant perceptions are discussed under different themes that include student awareness of government policy on graduate employability, student awareness of the University of Botswana’s employability strategy, student views on whether UB programmes increase chances of being employed, student perceptions regarding relevance of knowledge and skill to the world of employment, student expectations regarding preparedness for employment and whether the lack of employment of UB graduates is due to lack of jobs or lack of skills among graduates.

### 8.1 Student awareness of government policy on graduate employability

The findings reflect participant perceptions about the policy on graduate employability. Participants in the study differed on whether or not they were aware of government policy on graduate employability. Generally, most participants had a common understanding of what employability means, defining it mainly in terms of the development of programmes such that they match knowledge and skills required by the employer. For others it is “training for employment” or “training to get a job.” Participant understanding was in accord with the notion raised in the literature that expertise or competence within a particular field would be vital to ensuring one’s employability (Thijssen, Van der Heijden & Rocco, 2008). The views of the participants are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participant views regarding awareness of government policy on graduate employability**

Participants’ views	PGDE responses	BEd (Management) responses	BEd (Counselling) responses	BNS	Total no of participants
Aware of existence of government policy on graduate employability	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	1 (16.6%)	0	5 (5%)
Not aware of government’s policy on graduate employability	53 (72%)	12 (75%)	5(83%)	4(80%)	74 (73%)
Point of view not known	17 (23%)	4 (25%)	1 (17%)	1(20%)	23 (22.7%)
<b>Total percentage</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>100%</b>

The data revealed that in all four categories of participants, a combined small minority (5%) of PGDE, B.Ed. (Educational Management), B.Ed. (Counselling), and BNS indicated that they were aware of government policy on graduate employability in Botswana. One of the participants who revealed that she was aware of government employability policy believed that, “it equips graduates with skills and knowledge of a specific job and gain experience.” Another one stated that she had read it, but was concerned that there was “a lot of exploitation of graduates in the name of getting more skills and experience.”

The majority (73%) reported that they were not aware of such a policy, and amongst them was one participant who rhetorically asked: “Do they even have it?” Generally there is evidence from the findings that through other avenues such as the public media, participants became aware of government expectation of institutions on higher learning to equip their students with knowledge and skills that match those required by the employer (Knight & Yorke, 2002). There was a significant minority (23%) who did not have any viewpoint on this issue.

### 8.2 Students' awareness of the University of Botswana's employability strategy

Out of a total of 74 PGDE participants, 70 (95%) revealed that they were not aware of the existence of any University of Botswana's employability strategy, with only four (5%) revealing that they knew about the strategy. None of the 16 in-service B.Ed. (Educational Management), 4 B.Ed. (Counselling), and 2 BNS students had knowledge of the strategy document. However, comments of the only 4 PGDE participants who stated that they knew about the strategy did not seem to suggest that they knew much about this policy, or if they did, they did not seem to have read it. The following comments are reflective of participants' ignorance of the existence of the university strategy on employability. One of the participants stated: "Teaching assistance–demonstrator;" "Research assistance." Similarly, another one indicated: "Yes, I know of Career and Counselling and a club called ALSEC." Other notable comments, namely: "high GPA"; "competency;" and "there are career fairs"; "guidance and counselling unit" were further evidence of participants' uncertainty about the policy.

### 8.3 Views on whether UB programmes increase chances of being employed

In Botswana the rate at which graduate unemployment has been rising is a cause for concern to the nation, hence it was important to find out from participants whether or not they believed that the university academic programmes increased their chances of getting employed. In other words, this was to find out if participants were satisfied that the university was appropriately training them such that they would be confident to fit employers' needs (Boden & Nedeva, 2010). An overwhelming majority 94% of all participants as reflected in Table 2 were satisfied that the programmes increased their chances of finding jobs, against 6% who disagreed that chances of getting employed were enhanced.

**Table 2: Perceptions about whether or not academic programmes increased students' chances of getting employed**

Participants' views	PGDE responses	B.Ed. (Management) responses	B.Ed. (Counselling) responses	BNS responses	Total no of participants
The programme increased students' chances of being employed.	70 (95%)	16 (100%)	5 (83%)	4 (80%)	95 (94%)
The programme does not increase students' chances of being employed.	4 (5%)	0	1 (17%)	1 (20%)	6 (6%)
Participants' views not stated.	0	0	0	0	1 (0%)

Participants in the PGDE programme made statements to justify why they thought their programmes prepared them well to be able to be employed. One participant stated: "I stand a good chance

of getting a job, because I've learnt more things about employment, e.g. teamwork and service delivery," while another one maintained: "Yes, the programme has prepared me well, because without it I can't be employed as a teacher." Further comments such as: "Yes, because now I have the required skills needed for teaching;" "Yes, most organisations are looking for post-graduate personnel;" "It is a post-grad qualification and will boost my CV;" and "Because I will be specialising in Biology, so to teach it will be an added advantage" were made in acknowledgement of the programmes' value addition. The participants here seem positive that they satisfy employers' demand for graduates with competence in specific discipline knowledge and that they possess the generic skills needed to be able to cope with the changing work environment (Moalosi, Oladiran & Uziak, 2012).

An insignificant minority did not agree with sentiments expressed above. Some of their responses included: "No, there are a lot of unemployed teachers outside already;" "No because there are so many graduates with the same qualification and they're unemployed;" "No because my programme is overcrowded, many previous graduates before me are still unemployed." The views of these participants could be reflective of either their failure to distinguish between employability and being employed or their concern that while graduates are employable, many of them remain unemployed.

The BNS participants also had positive views about their chances of getting employed on completion of their programme. Their comments suggested that they were almost assured of jobs since their chances of getting employed are not necessarily dependent on whether or not their programme had adequately prepared them for employability. They attributed this situation to the acute shortage of nurses in Botswana which rendered nurses highly marketable as reflected in the following comments. "There is a lot of shortage of nurses in this country and even outside." "Nursing is still marketable." "As a nurse I believe I'm well prepared from UB to meet the standards of being employed, and besides, nurses are in very high demand anywhere."

In comparison to nursing students, those in counselling who felt they stood a chance of getting a job were mainly hopeful of getting a job rather than being assured that they would get a job. For instance, in their statements they used such words or phrases as "I *think I can* work in many fields...;" "...I have ... knowledge... *which can be applied*..." or "I *can* be employed..." as reflected in the following statements: "Counselling gives me chance, I think I can work in many fields now;" "Yes because I've a lot of knowledge in educational psychology which can be applied in schools;" and, "Yes, as a counsellor I can be employed in my major and minor programmes." The two counselling participants who were of the view that they stood no chance of getting employed pointed out: "No, because I'm not employable with my degree"; and "Counselling is not really recognised in Botswana." The views of these two participants and those in other programmes who held similar perceptions point to a mismatch between academic programmes and what is required by the employers (Ama, 2008), and seem to support the notion that employability should be embedded in academic courses in higher education (Knight & Yorke, 2002).

Possibly influenced by in-service students, the B.Ed. (Educational Management) participants also expressed that on completion of their study they will go back to their jobs. For instance, one of the participants pointed out: "Yes, staff development is my favourite course. I feel that if I concentrate on it I can make it in as far as professional development of my staff is concerned. I have much interest in staff

development and have a lot of knowledge and skill.” Similarly, another participant commented: “I have acquired and developed in my employment skills and knowledge. I’ll definitely make a better school head.” There were other positive statements such as: “It has increased my management skills and ways of dealing with organisational behaviour. I’ll definitely be a better performer;” and, “I’m more competent and confident that I can effectively lead and manage people.”

### ***8.5 Relevance of knowledge and skill to the world of employment***

It was important to find out from participants whether or not the knowledge and skills they acquired were of relevance to the world of work, including employability in areas outside their own specialisation. A majority (86%) PGDE participants felt that these competencies were relevant, and that with such knowledge and skills they were confident they would even get employment in areas outside their own specialisation of training. There were five (7%) participants who were in disagreement, while another five (7%) had no position.

A combined nine (82%) of the B.Ed. (Counselling) and BNS were satisfied with the relevance of the knowledge and skills to the world of work, and that they were ready to work not only in their own areas of specialisation, but also in others other than theirs. The views of the participants suggested that the design of the curriculum is such that learners at the University of Botswana are able to construct understandings of the subject matter as well as build work related skills while still studying (Nagappan & Subramanian, 2014). All in-service B.Ed. (Educational Management) participants were content that they had acquired knowledge and skills that were relevant to their work, and that they were well prepared to work even outside their day-to-day management of schools.

### ***8.6 Students’ expectations regarding preparedness for employability***

Related to participants’ perceptions regarding relevance of knowledge and skills to the world of work, were their views on the extent to which they were prepared for employment. This was in view of the acute shortage of skilled workforce in different areas in Botswana as noted in the literature on employability (Temtime & Mmereki, 2010). The majority of PGDE participants were positive about the training they were getting, with 66 (89%) indicating that the university was preparing them adequately for employability, while only 5 participants did not think they were being adequately trained for employability. Three others expressed no viewpoint.

The following participant comments represented their positive views pertaining to how they were being prepared for employability. “I’ve been well prepared. I’m now knowledgeable in how to teach students. I’ve the relevant teaching strategies, and understand theories of teaching and learning;” or “Our programme is specialised or specific for teaching of teachers. Our lecturers are doing very well in preparing us to teach.” These comments represented their sentiments. Other notable views such as “Yes, I’m well prepared because the knowledge I’ve accumulated covers more areas on teaching;” and “I’m impressed with the way we are being trained; I’ll be educated, informed and skilled when I graduate” are further reflective of the positive views of participants regarding the training provided at the University of Botswana. These views resonate with the assumption that when students complete their degrees or diplomas—i.e. when they have reached the end point of formal education and training—they will immediately get jobs (Kruss, 2004).

The five (7%) participants who disagreed also made comments indicating why they did not hold the view that there was adequate preparedness for employability. One participant argued: “There is too much group work but when someone is at work I’ll have to deliver content alone, but this is not catered for.” Another one stated: “No I’m not adequately prepared. I’m training to be a teacher hence I expected to be involved in peer education more often, and this doesn’t happen.” There was a participant who expressed concern that he was “not that much educated and informed.” He further revealed; “I’ve acquired skills but not what is necessary to prepare me for the world of work.” These participants, as noted by Ama (2008), pointed to concern about a mismatch between what is learnt at school and what is required by the world of work, suggesting the university has failed in its responsibility to ensure that this gap is reduced to the barest minimum.

All 16 B.Ed (Educational Management) in-service participants considered themselves adequately prepared for employability, and that they would therefore be better managers on completion of their B.Ed. in-service programme. One participant who expressed her satisfaction with a particular course that had exposed her to practical work that she was required to undertake in schools stated; “Yes, because the experiential learning really exposed us and made us aware of a number of things about the schools and their management.” Similarly, another one pointed out: “Yes, I’m well prepared because I’m also taught staff development which is my duty to see to it that staff members are developed when I’m back in the field.” There was also a participant who expressed satisfaction about courses they were taking outside their own departments as illustrated in the following statement. “I’ve done electives and optional courses. They are offered in different departments and can allow me to diverse to other areas.”

Other expressions of evidence of participant satisfaction with their preparedness for employability include: “I’m highly equipped with management skills and computer skills;” “Yes, transformation leadership skills acquired have made me a new leader in management;” and “Some aspects I’ve learnt seem to be the ones that I can use to change the school results from poor to excellent.” Overall, participants expressed a great deal of confidence in the relevance of training they were being offered at the University of Botswana as further reflected in the following statements. “I’m now a well educated and informed manager, I’m a different School Head, the mistakes that I made while in the field will never recur;” and “I’ll be in a position to discuss issues at my workplace confidently with all stakeholders.” The positive views of the students about their programmes reiterate the assumption raised in the literature about the need for learners to build work related skills while still studying (Nagappan & Subramanian, 2014) to be able to perform to employers’ satisfaction and fit in their long-term goals (Odora, 2011)).

Those on the BNS and B.Ed. (Counselling) were also content that the manner in which they were being trained prepared them for employment, with one participant stating; “Yes, we are well trained to be effective nurses;” while another maintained; “Our programme has prepared us very well for the counselling responsibility waiting for us after we complete our programme.” There were however, two participants who were satisfied with the extent to which they were being trained, but bemoaned the lack of job opportunities. One of them revealed: “I think those who are responsible for our training are doing a good job. The problem is that even with the relevant knowledge and skills we have acquired, jobs may not be readily available.” A similar comment by another participant indicated that “training at the university is of high quality,” and that she was confident of doing her “job effectively in any company or institution”

that would employ her. However, the participant was concerned about what she called “limited job availability in Botswana.”

### ***8.7 Student perception about graduate unemployment***

Botswana, like other less developed countries is faced with the high rate of youth unemployment (Siphambe, 2003; Joseph, 2013), including those graduating with degrees from the University of Botswana and other tertiary institutions. It was therefore important that participant views pertaining to graduate unemployment in Botswana be sought, that is, whether graduate unemployment is due to lack of jobs or lack of skills amongst graduates. There has been debate regarding whether or not unemployment is due to inadequate preparation of graduates for the world of work or the saturation of the job market (Alao, Pilane, Mabote, Setlhare, Mophuting, Semphadile, Odirile, Kgathi, & Mmapatsi, 2009).

The views of the PGDE participants were mixed, with 38 (51%) of them indicating that graduate unemployment was mainly due lack of job opportunities in Botswana. For instance, on the one hand one participant argued that “lack of jobs in Botswana causes lack of employment.” Similarly, another one argued that there was “lack of job availability in general,” and that the government was failing graduates. Furthermore, another participant maintained that the problem was “lack of jobs” and that “university graduates have loads of skills.” On the other hand, 15 (20%) were of the view that graduates lacked skills that were required by employees. Most of them argued that most of what students did at university was theory which had very little relevance to what the employer needed. Comments such as “lack practical experience;” “no practical work that is required by job market;” and “university graduates are exposed to the theory part than the practical” reflect the general view of participants falling within this category. Participants’ perceptions here resonate with Pheko and Molefhe (2016) who argue that since the labour market has become more skill intensive it was imperative to redesign the curriculum to be skills based as an immediate solution to the employability challenge.

Eight (11%) PGDE participants argued that the problem was a combination of both lack of jobs and lack of skills. One commented: “Yes, there is shortage of jobs but lacking the skills makes it even harder to find employment.” Other notable views such as: “There are no jobs, but again young people do not have skills and they are not innovative or inspired to develop their own businesses;” and “Lack of jobs but partly skill too because the BA programmes are not specialised therefore resulting in graduates not finding jobs” are reflective of the perceptions of these participants. The remaining 13 (18%) participants either did not indicate any view or were irrelevant.

The B.Ed. (Educational Management) participants were also divided, with 8 (50%) indicating unavailability of jobs as the main challenge and 5 (31%) putting the blame on lack of appropriate skills. The views of those who blamed unavailability of jobs are represented by comments such as “It’s due to lack of jobs in my country;” “It’s due to lack of jobs, graduates have adequate skills;” and “Lack of relevant jobs. Graduates are overflowing with skills, but there are no jobs to put them in practice.” In comparison to their PGDE counterparts, the B.Ed. (Educational Management) who felt it was lack of skills which were to blame made similar statements such as, “lack of skills because the university teaches theory not practical courses;” “lack of proper skill audit thus producing graduate not needed in the market.” One participant argued that “the University of Botswana compared to colleges offers theory

rather than practical.” The views of these participants seem to echo the view that tertiary institutions have an obligation to give their graduates an opportunity to undertake internships to expose themselves to the industry requirements (Garwe, 2014; Nagappan’s & Subramanian, 2014).

There were other participants who also put the blame on lack of skill application, to promote graduates’ ability to create their own jobs. This is related to the call for governments to ensure that its citizens have access to high quality education and training that would produce self-reliant individuals with knowledge and skill that would enable them to create employment (Baliyan & Baliyan, 2013). One of the participants maintained that graduates lacked “skill application because they were not taught how to use the skills and knowledge learnt to create own opportunities.” Still other participants reiterated this. For example one referred to “lack of business skills for self-employment or job creation;” while another one stated; “There is lack of knowledge on how to create job for yourself and for others. The skills are there but not utilised.” The participants’ views can be said to be in line with initiatives by tertiary institutions in South Africa to train and educate young people in the field of entrepreneurship, with the expectation that once they graduate they would have the capacity and motivation to become job-creators (Co & Mitchell, 2006).

Some divergent views were also reflected in the views of four B.Ed. (Counselling) and three BNS comments, that graduates lacked skills required in the job market. One participant pointed out: “It’s due to lack of skills, they are not employable, they do not have skills that are needed in the job;” while another one argued: “University of Botswana students do not have skills, they have theory which is easy to forget. Exposure to working environments will help us gain more skills.” These participants hold a view by Odora (2011) that it is important for trainers to know the specific needs of the employers in order to produce quality students, whether degree graduates or simply to upgrade employees, for them to stand a chance of fitting in the employer’s long-term goals.

Only one participant was of the view that lack of jobs was the main problem. The views of 4 other participants who blamed both lack of skills and jobs are reflected in the following statements made by two of them: “Both skills and lack of jobs are to blame. Some companies believe University of Botswana graduates are less skilled, therefore positions are filled by graduates from other institutions, they are believed to be better than us at this university.” Similarly, is the perception that it is “both lack of jobs and skills, but mainly lack of jobs.”

## **9.0 Conclusions**

A range of perceptions emerged from the findings of this study, with the majority of students revealing their ignorance of both government and university policies on employability. Some of those who claimed that they were aware of the two policies seemed not to have read them. Nevertheless, there was evidence that in spite of the general unawareness of the policies, participants harboured expectations that the University of Botswana was mandated to train them for the labour market. Generally, most participants were content with university programmes for employability and that they were being adequately prepared for work.



Further emerging from the findings was the perception that one cannot attribute graduate unemployment only to lack of skills but that a combination of factors, including mainly the fact that job creation in Botswana has proved to be a major challenge. In addition, some participants argued for programmes that focus on preparation of students to create jobs and not just to learn specifically to become job-seekers.

Based on the practical experience of the students emerging from the research findings, the University of Botswana has made tremendous progress in terms of its effort to comply with neoliberal policies that promote training graduates for employability. Such compliance is a clear indication of the institution's adherence to the government of Botswana's call for higher learning institutions to make maximum commitment to train graduates for the labour market.

It has however emerged from the findings that many students may not be aware of the existence of the university's policies, including that of employability. Effort should therefore be made to run comprehensive orientation programmes aimed at raising student awareness about its policy documents. With most participants having indicated that they are in favour of the university policy for employability, it is recommended that, as a way of raising student awareness, the University should among other things, infuse in its programmes of teaching and learning different policies directly affecting students, such as its strategy on employability. For this to be accomplished, the University should not only interact with the student population and staff, but also externally with other stakeholders such as employers, employer organisations and other notable agencies so as to ensure that elements of employability are explicitly integrated into undergraduate programmes. Further, any initiatives regarding policies on employability should involve student input for the purpose of ownership.

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