



Enhancement of the Curriculum Quality to Better Meet Labour Market Demands for South African Graduates

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the curriculum quality to better meet labour market demands and increase the employability of graduates in South Africa. The paper used a desktop-based qualitative method by analysing case studies from different institutions, it explores the history of South Africa to gain a deeper understanding of colonisation in the education system and better understand ways to enhance the curriculum quality. Individuals of different ages are motivated to pursue higher learning to meet labor market demands. Labor markets in the 21st century in South Africa required graduates, who could readily contribute to a company's strategic objectives. This puts pressure on higher learning institutions to enhance the quality of the curriculum to make graduates employable. South African institutions were known for their theoretical approach to delivering content versus the need to apply these theories in practice in the workspace. It was therefore important to train students to better put these theories into practice. Rapid changes in technology due to the 4th industrial revolution had also influenced the workspace. This served as a call for graduates to be tech-savvy to better meet the requirements of the labour market. Higher learning institutions needed to continuously update the curriculum to align with the changing requirements of the labour market. To address these issues, higher learning institutions have incorporated short courses, promoted entrepreneurship, and established various organisations in partnership with labour markets to allow for vocational work. These initiatives aim to equip students with practical skills, foster innovation, and ensure graduates are well-prepared for the labour market. The findings of this paper highlight the need to continuously update the curriculum to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. By integrating short courses and entrepreneurial training and building relationships with labour markets, higher education institutions can significantly enhance the employability of their graduates. This study also emphasises the importance of adaptive education strategies to ensure that graduates are well -equipped to stay resilient and apply continuous learning to thrive in the continuously changing work environment, influencing labour market demands, ultimately contributing to economic growth and reducing unemployment in South Africa.

Keywords: Curriculum quality, labour market force, graduates, higher learning and Employability.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Curriculum refers to the academic content and lessons taught in training institutions, including schools and higher learning institutions and a quality curriculum refers to the quality of the content taught which is reflected by a student's ability to comprehend, analyse and apply the content in real-life practice (Ibad, 2024). South African curriculums are greatly influenced by

171



colonisation, and to gain a deeper understanding of it, its history and origin cannot be omitted as it serves as a great foundation for school curriculums (Maluleka, 2021). Labor relations also play a huge role, especially in redressing the injustice of the apartheid system through the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (Motala, 2020). A formal schooling system was established in the early 1800's by missionaries and further taken in 1806 by the British. In 1953, the Bantu Education Act 47 of 1953 which governed the education of Black South Africans was part of the government's system of apartheid which segregated non-whites and perpetuated injustice against these marginalised groups, denying them of their educational rights. After a long and intense fight against the apartheid system, South Africa was declared a democratic country in 1994 (Gloppen, 2019), giving everyone the autonomy to make their own choices and choose their own leader. According to Motala (2020), in 1996, The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 was enacted which had a significant impact in dismantling the disparities created by apartheid education system by promoting equal access to quality education without discrimination.

The changing workspace influenced by the 4th industrial revolution has also altered the working industry, causing a high demand for job-ready graduates by companies. The 4th industrial revolution also known as industry 4.0 refers to the introduction of automation, data exchange and smart technologies in manufacturing and production (Ross, Maynard, 2021). This calls for intervention by training institutions especially higher learning institutions to be more hands on in re-engineering, restructuring and enhancing the curriculum and the methods in which it is delivered, to align it with the standards and requirements of the labour market (Wood, Auhl and McCarthy, 2019). Efforts and intervention by higher learning institutions and research highly contributes to dismantling and healing the scars that came with the apartheid system and could positively influence the employability of graduates by the labour market in South Africa (Römgens, Scoupe and Beusaert, 2020).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Africa uses a theory-based approach to teaching, this approach is of result of the Bantu Education system which segregated black people and deprived non-whites of quality education (Gumede, 2020). This has left an enduring scar in South Africa's education system leading to difficulty in delivering content in a way that reflects true understanding and comprehension of the content learnt by students and struggles to incorporate inclusivity in delivering the curriculum content (Shabangu, 2021).

Statistics SA shows that there is 45,5% unemployment rate among young individuals aged between 15 to 34 years and a national average of 32,9% as of May of 2024 (MacGinty, 2024.). This depicts a mismatch in skills required by the labour market and as a result, leads to dire consequences to livelihoods and the economy including poverty, increased crime rate and slow economic growth (Adely et. al, 2021). It is therefore vital to move away from discussions that only



Speak about issues but delve into actual solutions and ideas that could be pioneered to solve this pending problem. This paper endeavours into different methods to address this problem and enhancement of the curriculum in meeting labor market demand and making South African graduates employable.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to explore the curriculum quality to better meet labour market demands for South African graduates.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are to

- Investigate the challenges in the quality of the curriculum.
- Investigate prospects of labour market demand.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a desktop-based qualitative research methodology. It encompasses of researching, analysing and summarising different book chapters, articles, as well as blogs. It uses a hypothesis-analysis methodology, carefully summarizing the themes into the prioritization tree to find the best solutions to the themes, texts and concepts explored by the researchers (Mayombe, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review of the study is separated into theoretical literature and empirical literature.

Theoretical Literature

This study is based on the Human Capital Theory. The Human capital is a concept used by economists to designate personal attributes considered useful in the production process which encompasses employee knowledge, skills, and education (Goldin, 2024). It is an important factor in development, as an investment into tangible assets which has expanded to personality abilities that make it possible for a person to solve economic and many other problems (Galiakberova, 2019). Research shows that investing in human capital has high economic returns throughout childhood and young adulthood. The high youth unemployment rate in South Africa depicts the mismatch in skills required by the labour market. This shows that investing in human capital ultimately enhancing the curriculum to better align with skills required by the labour market can improve the employability of graduates therefore reducing unemployment, poverty and crime rate and lead to economic growth (Deming, 2022).



Challenges in the current curriculum Bantu education was a policy introduced in 1953 by the system of apartheid to provide poor quality and separated education for black people, enacted under the Bantu Education Act 47 of 1953 (Anderson, 2020). It aimed to prepare black people with a subordinate role in society mostly encompassing of laborers and servants. The policy used Afrikaans as the language of instruction and suppressed black people from using indigenous language. This policy has left a lasting impact in South Africa's educational system and has resulted in poor quality of education in South Africa. This therefore deprived black people of essential skills to thrive in certain industries.

The curricular structure was developed with focus on vocational training more than academic achievement and believed that black people are best suited for manual labour and domestic roles. This structure also used a theoretical approach to teaching which has left an enduring scar in the way content is delivered in South Africa's education system (Luckett, 2025).

The Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 is a legislation in South Africa which aims to develop the skills and knowledge of marginalised individuals to increase employability and economic growth. The Skills development Act has although been implemented to redress the injustices of the Bantu Education system by empowering marginalised groups with the skills and knowledge to thrive in the workspace (Norton, 2022). Industry 4.0 also known as the 4th industrial revolution has had a huge impact in South Africa's need to adapt its curriculum (Oke, Fernandes, 2020). It emerged after covid-19 which, forced most companies to find covid-friendly strategies to stay in business. This resulted in the invention of smart technologies which brought about a lot of job losses and disrupted livelihoods. Industry 4.0 also known as the 4th industrial revolution is the automation and data exchange in manufacturing and operation, which also represents a shift marked by intelligent machines, connected devices and data-driven decisions (Avdoulos, Wilkins, and Boelman, 2020). These changes call for curriculums that are more relevant to the needs of companies. Adjusting to these changes helps workers remain relevant and employable, highlighting the need for tech-savvy graduates. Companies now seek tech-savvy candidates, a shift that has also encouraged flexible work arrangements and better work-life balance (Yagmur, Koksall, 2023).

In the changing workplace, technology is important in making systems more efficient and automating systems to better focus its human resources on meeting strategic objectives rather than performing repetitive tasks (Parry, Battista, 2023). The introduction of scheduled posts on Instagram and the rising number of project management systems like Trello is proof of these automated systems (Obana, 2024). Despite its contribution in replacing people with smart technologies and robots, if graduates equip themselves with technological skills, they open themselves up to big opportunities. The need for graduates to apply continuous learning, stay



resilient and optimistic in adversity, as well as allow themselves to change as labour market demands change stems from this (Li, 2024).

Some important digital tools as a result of covid-19 include video-conferencing tools like zoom, cloud-computing systems like google cloud, e-government services, as well as robotics and automation. If higher-learning institutions implement programs that equip students with the skills to use these technological tools, it would help set them apart (Ilori, and Ajagunna, 2020). Some universities have partnered up with technology companies like Geekulcha. National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa and International Business Machines corporation to better equip students, the University of Limpopo specifically in partnership with National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (Bidandi, Anthony, and Mukong, 2022).

Prospects of Labor Market Demands

Prospects of Labor Market Demands includes trends and changes expected in the job market. Some of the factors include technology, education and training and economic trends. Prospects of labour market demands are not limited to this but other factors.

Technology is the application of scientific knowledge and tools to create products and solve problems. Due to the 4th industrial revolution, smart technologies have greatly impacted job roles and calls for graduates to align themselves with these changes. Gaining computer skills is therefore vital to stay adept with these changes to effectively perform their duties. This change has also led to a need for cybersecurity experts, IT specialist, data scientists and other roles. Graduates can therefore increase their employability by aligning themselves with the emerging industries.

Education and training is the process through which individuals acquire and gain knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for personal and professional development. Higher learning institutions play a huge role here as they are the primary providers of education and training. By aligning the curriculum with job market demands, they can make their graduates more employable. This can be done through constantly exploring emerging roles and soft skills needed in the job-market and focusing job-readiness programs towards addressing those needs.

Economic Trends are vital in job markets as they influence the success and decline of certain industries. Economic trends are economic indicators over time that reflect the economic condition and performance of an economy. This includes inflation, consumer spending and the employment rate. When economies expand, it leads to growth and increased investment in specific industries and when there is a downturn, it leads to decline in certain industries and even increased unemployment. These trends will influence how many individuals will industry be able to take which is dependent on the most important needs of the company. This increases competition among employees as the top performing employees are selected during economic



downturns. It therefore vital for graduates and employees to remain at the top of the pyramid in the companies and stay adept with skills and knowledge of the dynamic work environment.

Moving from theory-based approach to practical-based approach

According to Gumede (2020), South African institutions are known for using a theory-based approach to teaching rather than a practical approach mostly preferred by labour markets. A theory-based approach focuses on the analysis, interpretation and discussion of ideas and theories, which involves reading, discussions and lecturers, assessed through examinations, written assignments and tests (Zhao, 2022). Whereas a practical-approach focuses on skills-application, hands-on work and real-world practice which is assessed through learnerships, internships, projects and actual fieldwork (Crutchley, 2023).

The changing work environment calls for job-ready students who can easily integrate with the organisation and perform as early as possible. In most cases, a graduate is most likely to be called for an interview if they include words like, “increase productivity, contribute to company’s strategic objectives, team player, continuous learner, tech savvy critical thinker,” in their curriculum vitae (Thornhill-Miller, et. al, 2023). The need for experienced and job ready graduates has seemingly increased because of the growing demands of labour forces and their need to meet strategic objectives and goals on time (Abdullah, Humaidi and Shahrom, 2020). Therefore, strategies must be formulated by higher learning institutions in South Africa to plan and implement a more practical-based curriculum for graduates to better meet these requirements.

This does not call for the elimination of theoretical approaches, but suggests a strategic integration of practical-based approaches and effectively focus the theories to better enhance the learning experience of learners, as well as make sure that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of the labour market to stay relevant in the dynamic work environment.

The burning question is, how do we then move from theory-based to practical? This transition can be costly and demanding but it is completely worth it as it could prove to have significant contribution to South Africa’s economy (Jonathan, Laik, 2024). This can be achieved through the implementation of more practical teaching styles, as well as the partnership between higher learning institutions and labour markets (Petersen, et. al, 2023).

Higher learning means any type of education post-secondary school and usually afforded a higher certificate, degree or diploma at the end of the course study (Moxom, Noonan, 2020). Higher learning institutions in South Africa are divided into four categories which encompass of Technical Vocational Education and Training, University, University of Technology and Private institutions (Essop, 2020). Some faculties in South Africa including agriculture, geology, and engineering have evolved to a more practical approach to teaching (Mokhothu, 2022). These efforts are significant in making graduates more employable, therefore should be reinforced.



Mining company would likely take graduate who pursued geology at a college as compared to university, this is because colleges are more practical in their teaching methodology, making their graduates job ready (Vercheba, Makarov, 2023). If this method is implemented in all higher learning institutions, South Africa's education system could produce job-ready graduates who can comprehend, analyse and implement transferred knowledge into the real world (Pitan, Christopher, 2024). A kinaesthetic learning method could therefore be emphasised to achieve this.

Kinaesthetic learners learn by performing tasks and putting work into practice rather than writing and reading (Oladele, 2024). The importance of practical-based teaching could prove to be vital in including learners who conform to more kinaesthetic learning styles since not everyone that can read, can apply knowledge into practice, and not everyone that can apply knowledge into practice can read (Barton, Garvis, 2023). It is important to note that other learning styles like the auditory and visual learning style have equal importance, especially in promoting inclusive curriculums (Lim, 2020).

For courses like Human Resource Management, the curriculum could focus on teaching students to create salary packages, report writing and implementation of total quality management systems, as well as assess them on their ability to create and implement the acquired knowledge. Institutions can further make this practical by partnering up with human resource management departments in the school and create practical projects that require students to build and implement human resource management systems.

Partnership between higher learning institutions and labour markets can also be a great start. Labor markets are job markets, or rather institutions where workers exchange their skills in return for a wage or compensation (MacKay, et. al, 2024). Being in a working environment could help students to gain understanding in labour market demands and help them align themselves with the changing requirements of the workspace (Billett, 2020). Partnerships with labour markets could give students the opportunity to gain practical experience during school holidays and a long-term relationship with labour markets should be maintained (Hazelkorn, 2020). Universities can establish departments, human resource management and budgets allocated to these departments to manage, monitor and sustain such stakeholder relationships.

Implementing inclusive and adaptive curriculums

An inclusive curriculum system is one that takes consideration of different learning needs of students and creates content, strategies and teaching methods that are inclusive to all learners (El-Sabagh, 2021). In the 21st century, it is also vital to recognise adaptive curriculum systems as systems put in place to ensure that curriculums continuously align with the changing labour market demands.



Inclusive curriculums that address the different learning needs of students are based on the 3 learning styles called the Auditory learning style, the kinaesthetic learning style, and the visual learning style (Emma, 2024).

Auditory learners learn through listening (Nurhasanah, Suryaman, 2022). Creative methods have been established over the years through the creation of audiobooks where learners can listen to the content of the textbooks. These can be found in apps like Sora, Apple books, Google play audio books, as well as Audible by Amazon (Guachi Caiza, 2024). Visual learners learn through the use of illustrations, demonstrations and graphics (Manavalamamuni, 2021). They can easily envision imagery and seek a more practical illustration of the content. Platforms like YouTube are a cheaper way of accessing these types of methods (Pires, Masanet, and Scolari, 2021).

Kinaesthetic learners learn by doing. These are projects-based learners that prefer the actual performance of tasks. This is a practical or experimental approach to learning and can better ensure actual accumulation of experience in the workspace in comparison to theoretical approach (Oladele, 2024). Emerging technologies also put emphasis on data-driven solutions. This uses cookies and algorithms to predict what consumers might want in the future. These tools can significantly contribute to research if used lawfully and without abusing the rights of consumers specifically the right to privacy (Rosário, Dias, 2023). Research is a process that aims to discover new information, discover insights and confirm existing knowledge. It plays a huge role in implementing adaptive curriculum systems, especially when integrated with data-driven methods. Adaptive curriculum systems refer to systems put in place to continuously adapt with changes in the job market (Bozhkov, et. al, 2024). Through the use of algorithms and cookies, future needs could be predicted and help graduates stay adept with changes that might come (Rosário, Dias, 2023).

Research can also be simplified through global access afforded by technological innovations. This allows researchers to conduct online research and reach a wider audience. Global access also brings opportunities in freelancing, selling of digital products and e-commerce, positively contributing to the economic state of South Africa (Okunleye, 2024).

Making South African graduates employable

Being employable means having the required skills demanded by the labour market and in return, suitable to be paid for the skills offered (Lauder, Mayhew, 2020). Companies are looking for individuals that can strategically contribute to its company's objectives (Behle, 2020). An educational qualification is therefore not enough and the need to assess the candidates' skills and competencies to help it reach its objectives on time is required (Oxenham, 2024). Some of the top skills required by labour markets include technological proficiency, critical thinking and problem-solving, adaptability and flexibility, leadership and management skills, cross-cultural competence, and leadership and management skills (Joynes, Rossignoli and Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019). If graduates do not meet these requirements, they will not be able to perform according to



required standards, have decreased chances of succeeding and progressing in their careers, face challenges in adjusting with changing labour market demands, as well as have decreased success rate in getting a job. The implication of unemployment is severe and cannot be taken for granted (Feng, Lagakos, and Rauch, 2024). According to Recher (2020), unemployment has a huge influence on crime rate and poverty. Higher learning institutions must therefore understand the significant role it plays in making graduates employable and reducing the bad outcomes that come with unemployment. They must also understand that the education system was created to make individuals employable which has a direct relationship with economic growth in South Africa (Odhiambo, 2021). Some strategies that could be implemented to make graduates employable includes, entrepreneurship, short courses, job readiness programs and government interventions.

Entrepreneurship is a process of starting and creating a new business (Diandra, Azmy, 2020). A person with an entrepreneurial mindset is confident, goal-driven, innovative and creative as well as resilient and are likely to be employed (Li, Kakhai, and Somjai, 2025). Higher institutions must therefore include entrepreneurship modules to better equip students with entrepreneurial skills. This will not only help them to become employable, but promote independency, innovation and creation of job opportunities (Ibrahim, Adeniyi, 2024). Higher learning institutions could establish entrepreneurship hubs and support student organisations.

Enactus promotes entrepreneurship among students in South African universities giving them access to funding, training and a network. Such initiatives encourage students to be more active and help support their entrepreneurship journeys.

Another famous program is the Abey Baley Travel Bursary that affords South African students who are active in their communities the opportunity to visit the United Kingdoms. Its objectives are to promote leadership development through open debates that encourages respect for other people's viewpoints, as well as encourage cross-cultural interactions. This initiative promotes community engagements which will help graduates get practical experience through enrolling with community enrichment programs, as well as enhance their ability to work with different cultures (Steinke, 2024).

Short courses are short learning programs that range from three to 6 months which serve as groundwork for higher learning certificates. It also keeps graduate's adept as their careers advance and require extra knowledge. They help with gaining insights into different industries, enhance one's curriculum vitae and it is a fast way of gaining quality skills (Mikulecky, 2021). Most higher learning institutions including the University of Pretoria, and the University of Cape Town is known have started to introduce short learning programs at affordable prices. The University of South Africa is vastly known for these short-learning programs (Maphalala, Adigun, 2021). Higher-learning institutions should host and implement initiatives that expose



students to such information. Information and updates on such opportunities could be shared via student emails.

Job-readiness programs are initiatives designed to equip individuals with skills and knowledge significant in making them employable. Job-readiness programs are important in providing graduates with skills to thrive in the workspace. They usually train students on how to draft resumes, cover letters, provide interview preparation programs, as well as give them access to mentorship and training opportunities (Janeke, 2021). If higher learning institutions invest in job-readiness departments within institutions as well as ensure that students are aware of such services, it could have a huge influence in the employability of their graduates.

Government is the system by which a state or community is governed, and it is responsible for making laws and ensuring that people in the nation are treated fairly by those laws. Its roles in making such initiatives a success should not be ignored (Post, Rosenblum, 2021). Governments have a huge responsibility of making sure that its citizens are employed, that the economy is growing and most importantly, allocating funds to higher learning institutions (Moyo & McKenna, 2021). Establishing policies that support higher learning institutions initiatives to improve the quality of the curriculum, as well as ensure that its graduates are employable is important. Funding and infrastructure are the biggest challenge for implementing initiatives that empower graduates, if such factors are considered when allocating funds, it would be impactful in achieving this (Kamara, M'Briwa and Sesay, 2024). The relationship between curriculum quality and employability of graduates is therefore vital as it ensures that graduates have the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the dynamic workspace. Higher learning institutions play a significant role in this and through the implementation of job-readiness and entrepreneurship programmes, higher learning institutions can ensure that graduates are adept with required soft skills as well as technical knowledge demanded by the job market.

FINDINGS

The key findings in this paper includes the influence of the Bantu education Act on South Africa's theory-based curriculum. The Bantu education Act suppressed non-whites and provided them with less quality education. This Bantu education system was based on theory-based approaches in delivering content. The findings also emphasise how the education system in South Africa has changed after it was declared a democratic country in 1994. The influence of the 4th industrial revolution and covid-19 has also greatly influenced the job market demand, requiring graduates to be more tech-savvy and to consistently adapt with the changing labor market demands. An adaptive curriculum system was also found to be important especially in promoting quality education. The role of governments, higher learning institutions, entrepreneurship hubs and job-readiness programs were also emphasised.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the quality of the curriculum to better meet labour market demands and make graduates employable, higher learning institutions should partner up with labour markets, government policies must support interventions aimed at equipping graduates with the necessary skills and competencies to be more employable, higher learning institutions must promote entrepreneurship and support student entrepreneurs, more support should be given to student organisations that promote job-readiness, entrepreneurship hubs should be developed within institutions volunteering with the institution should be implemented, different learning styles must be integrated to promote inclusive learning, and graduates must constantly align themselves with the changing labour market demand through the completion of short courses.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, enhancing the curriculum quality could be significant in meeting labor market demands and making South African graduates employable. This paper concludes that inclusive and adaptive curriculum systems, moving from theory-based to practical based approaches, introduction of entrepreneurship hubs and job-readiness programs, as well as continuous learning through short courses could greatly enhance the curriculum quality to meet labor market demands and make South African graduates more employable. The intervention and support of government institutions will better help government institutions in successfully building, implementing, and sustaining these initiatives.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important in identifying the root problem of the poor quality of the curriculum in South Africa and closes the gap in literature by providing insight on the use of inclusive and adaptive curriculums through the use of emerging research tools, to stay adept with requirements in the job market.

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