

Investigation of Unemployment among University graduates in Swakopmund, Namibia

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The employers, graduates, universities and other various industry stakeholders that are interested on the relevance of knowledge, competencies and employable skills that graduates bring to the labour market. For higher education institutions to contribute to human capital development, collaboration with the job industry to enhance the quality of graduates is key.

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Abstract: Unemployment among the graduates is a publicly discussed issue when it comes to innovation and self-job creation of today's graduates amid limited job opportunities in the market. This study sought to identify factors contributing to high unemployment among graduates in Swakopmund. It adopted a quantitative research approach by using a closed-ended questionnaire which was administered to a cluster sample of 10 employers and 45 graduates from IUM, UNAM, and NUST to understand the challenges from the respondents' perspectives. Technology was used to distribute and collect the questionnaires as the study was done during the national COVID-19 restrictions on movements. There are many factors and challenges that affect graduates when searching for jobs in today's competitive market. Among the identified factors are globalization and sourcing trends, the collaboration between industry and tertiary institutions, changing technology and wrong career choice or/and unrealistic expectations by graduates. The study recommends that tertiary institutions need to collaborate with the industry on the content of study programmes, compulsory innovation and entrepreneurship skills for graduates and job attachment programmes. The study implores graduates to focus more on creating jobs and acquiring employable skills to offer a service than targeting high earning jobs. It is therefore imperative that tertiary institutions collaborate with the industry to offer relevant content and contribute to much-needed human capital.

Keywords: Unemployment, University graduates, employment, Swakopmund

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Highly skilled and qualified human capital resources are central to the operations and growth of any organisation in the 21 st century. Tertiary institutions such as universities should strive in their training to produce comprehensive and competent graduates to initiate and innovate on different socioeconomic activities.

Unemployment among the graduates is becoming a challenge in most countries with many local authorities implementing different economic projects for the graduates to thrive but the problem persists. While the survey by the Namibia Labour Force in 2012 provided a worrying figure of 37.8% unemployed graduates in Namibia (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2012), a report by the Swakopmund Municipality Report in 2017 registered unemployment rates among graduates at more than 40%.

Unemployment is one of many contributors to social evils, and if not resolved countries may experience riots, demonstrations and insurgency which can potentially derail the economic activities of any country. Hanapi and Nordin (2014) submit that unemployment can be attributed to insufficient job opportunities or other factors such

as the low quality of graduates pumped into the industry.

Factors of high unemployment

Zahiid (2015) highlights some causes of employment among fresh graduates as lack of employable skills, poor communication, problem-solving skills and self-marketing skills as well as the selective attitude of the type of jobs with high salary demands.

There could be many other reasons why graduates don't find employment or create one such as the mismatch of innovative skills between graduates entering the market and employers' demands or the size of the economy in terms of available employment and open opportunities for new projects. In some countries such as Malaysia, Aina (2017) reports that foreign workers as competitors for the local graduates were about 1.7 million in 2017 which made it difficult for the local graduates to enter the workforce.

Rahmah et al. (2016) emphasize the quality of graduates as a causing factor of unemployment in terms of having the required requisite suitable skills and qualifications for the industry needs. Similarly, Ranjit (2009) lists some of the primary weaknesses of the fresh graduate such as creativity, critical thinking, people's skills and self-confidence. A good academic achievement alone does not guarantee a job in the 21st century if the graduate does not demonstrate any potential to transform the organisation or add value to their operations.

On the other hand, tertiary institutions should either collaborate with the industry to train work ready graduates or produce innovative job creators with some entrepreneurial skills. Asher, Schears, and Miller (2019) echoed similar concerns that education and training play a critical role on graduates securing employment.

The collaboration between educational institutions and the industry is an investment towards training graduates for work preparation (Nasrudin, 2004). It is therefore imperative that educational institutions design authentic assessment activities that are more aligned with industry practices, standards, and approaches.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is noted that these unemployed graduates hardly progress through various stages of the business life cycle. The situation is not only a personal business challenge to the graduates but also the stagnation of their lives has an implication to the vision 2030 goal of the government, which envisages the country to promote the creation of a diversified, open market economy, with a resource-based industrial sector and commercial agriculture, placing great emphasis on skills development.

Namibia like any other country across the globe faces dramatic challenges in ensuring that new graduates are recruited in the job market after graduating from universities. A report by the Swakopmund Municipality (2017) shows that more than 40% of the university graduates are unemployed. The report further reveals that lack of employment among the graduates seems to be one of the leading causes of theft and crimes which have dominated the town. It is against this background that the study examined the factors influencing the unemployment of graduates in Swakopmund in order to propose some recommendations for all the stakeholders involved.

The study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What factors are contributing to high unemployment rates among graduates in Swakopmund?
2. What challenges do graduates encounter when searching for employment?
3. What recommendations can be put in place to improve the unemployment rates of graduates in Swakopmund?

These questions were addressed using the methods as discussed in the following section below.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study adopted a quantitative research approach or strategy, which utilized a survey research design to answer questions about graduates' and employers' opinions on the topic of unemployment in Swakopmund. A survey collects responses from respondents about a particular phenomenon, it provides information that serve as a basis for the researchers to interpret, discuss the findings and make conclusions (Kothari, 2004). In this case, data was collected from a cluster sample of 45 unemployed graduates and 30 employers in the town of Swakopmund by using a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire. A likert-scale questionnaire with a 5-point frequency scale and descriptors ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used.

The collected data was analysed in the numerical form by using a "narrow angle lens" which could be more readily interpreted focussing on the factor of unemployment (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In this context, a descriptive analysis was employed to describe, show and summarize data in a meaningful way. The collected data was presented graphically and in frequency table form to make it easy for measures of frequencies. The results were used to explain and discuss the findings on different variables such as challenges faced by graduates and the relevance of tertiary education in the industry among others.

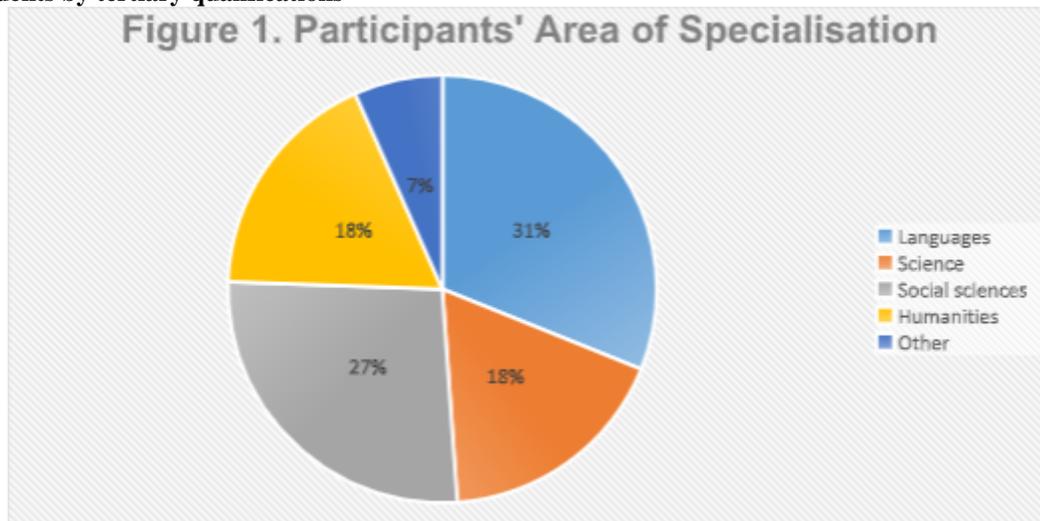
Informed consent for voluntary participation was sought from both the graduates and employers in Swakopmund for ethical purposes before the questionnaire could be completed. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and provided detailed instructions to complete the questionnaire which was collected at different strategic points in Swakopmund or electronically sent back to the researcher. The study was carried out during COVID-19 restrictions hence youth forum groups, WhatsApp groups (churches, community etc.) and emails were used to distribute and collect the completed questionnaires, which were also available in hard copies at strategic points in Swakopmund.

The aim was to understand the causes of unemployment among graduates in Swakopmund from 45 graduates' and 10 employers' perspectives in order to make recommendations for all industry stakeholders. The findings are discussed in the next section.

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The unemployed graduate respondents studied at the three universities in Namibia namely: University of Namibia (UNAM), Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and International University of Management (IUM). The gender of the respondents constituted 24 females and 21 males whereby 38 of these were younger than 40 years old. The gender of the respondents is in line with the statistics provided by the Namibia National Planning Commission (2013) report that females are more as compared to their male counterparts.

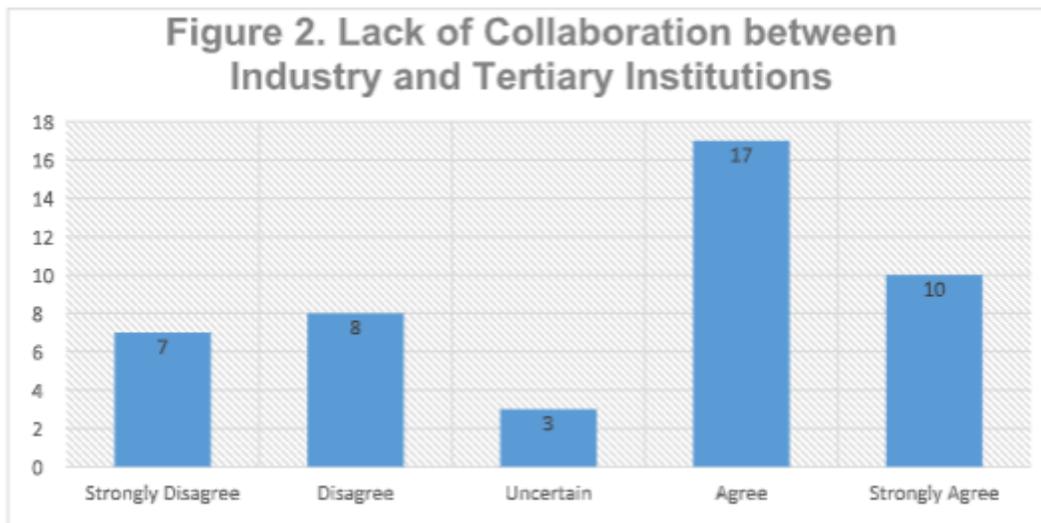
Respondents by tertiary qualifications



Looking at the areas of specialization for the respondents, one can argue that the market is saturated or the graduates' services are not needed in the town industry.

Cranny, Smith, and Stone (2018) posit that graduates need to undertake a possibility study to see if their study programmes are on demand or marketable. It is also feasible that graduates get innovative to be self starters upon completion of their tertiary education. Besides employers in education and government ministries; the majority of employers that responded to questionnaires were in the manufacturing, textile, logistics, and tourism & hospitality industry. The main findings from both the unemployed graduates and employers are summarized below in line with the three main objectives for the study.

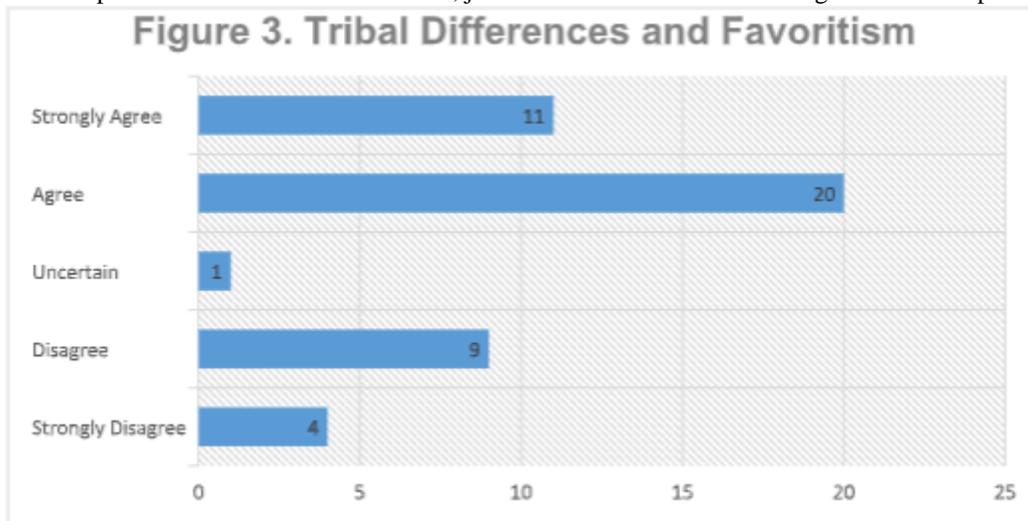
Factors influencing unemployment of graduates in Swakopmund Unemployment among graduates in Swakopmund is characterised by a number of factors. The study revealed that globalisation and sourcing trends, favouritism and lack of collaboration between the job industry and tertiary institutions are some of the causes of unemployment. Tertiary institutions ought to train students and add value to the needed human capital but the training should be done within the confines of the industry needs. Hossain et al. (2018) elucidate that mismatches of needed skills between graduates and employers' demand can be a titanic factor in finding employment for entry-level graduates.



These findings corroborate with the findings of Anyon (2014) that tertiary education has become a central means by which young adults equip themselves for working life – or working adults refresh their skills. In other words, Universities should produce job-ready graduates for the industry through collaboration.

Furthermore, it should be noted that securing a job does not only depend on a paper qualification but also personal background and a number of traits related to the job.

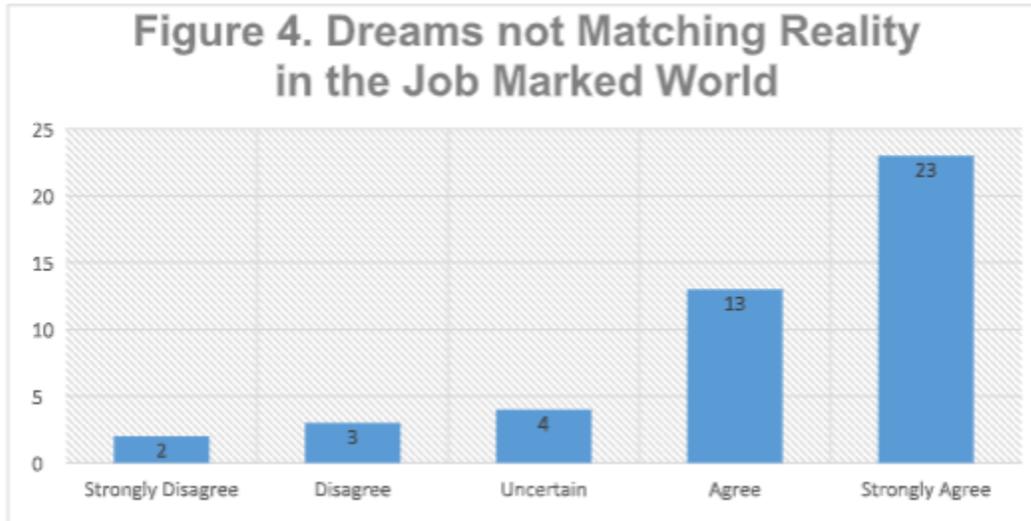
Morley (2001) expound that there is always a certain role of race, gender and socioeconomic condition in hiring an applicant. That means if graduates are not exposed or well conversant with the market realities due to their personal background, one gets more disadvantaged if they never got an opportunity to do job attachments during their tertiary studies. The findings on figure 3 harmonize with the findings of Bond and Sales (2011) who stated that in many nations with multiple tribes and cultural differences; jobs are awarded based on tribal grounds and nepotism.



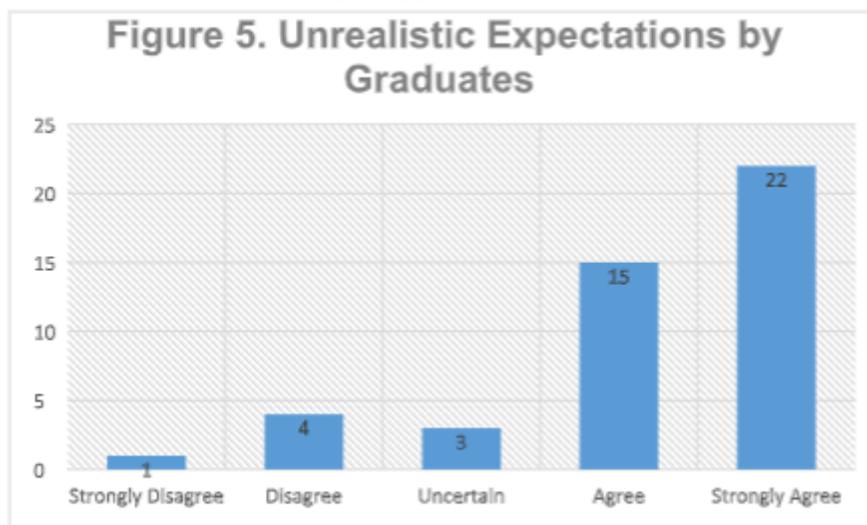
Additionally, the study established that changing technology trends also contributes to low employment opportunities for the graduates. External market changes such as the current new normal that was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can potentially affect employment opportunities. Due to harsh economic factors and changes in the business environment, many companies might only employ graduates who have the potential to resuscitate their business operations by adding values. It is therefore of paramount importance that graduates possess employability skills, good communication skills and innovative ideas which are not limited to using technology and problem-solving skills.

Challenges facing graduates when searching for employment The study revealed that unrealistic dreams and expectations that are not matching the reality in the job market are some of the challenges faced by the graduates when seeking employment. The findings on the bar graph below uphold the findings of Bond and Sales (2011) who

stated that discord in the graduates' dreams and the job market reality creates a feeling of anger in the life of a new graduate. Every graduate dreams big about their pursued professions but what they face in the job market differs from their expectations hence many of them tend to quit their jobs and end up jobless. The job attachment and career fairs while pursuing studies might resolve the issue of unrealistic dreams and reality mismatch among graduates.



Similarly, the study found that graduates are too selective on the job offers while they lack needed experience. The study further reported that most of the graduates looking for employment lack basic job experience which serves as pre-requisite soft skills for many positions. By implication, the industry is forced to spend resources to retrain the graduate on basic skills which could be acquired during internship programmes. The findings on figure 5 below validate the findings of Omeke and Onah (2015) who indicated that new graduates face the challenges of unrealistic expectations in their search for jobs after graduation. In many instances, graduates do not want to start from a lower level, which should serve them well in terms of gaining job experience.



V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research study was confined to Swakopmund town and conducted during the COVID-19 restrictions on movements. As such, the results are only applicable to the small number of respondents that took part in the study which may not qualify for generalization to other town settings. Due to technological shortcomings, the study employed a quantitative approach which did not allow participants to explain different situations in detail. While the instrument used was lengthy, not all the collected data and discussions were included in this article but the main findings as established.

VI. CONCLUSION

The representativeness of all three universities in Namibia and different employers is a strong point for the inclusiveness of the collected data. The study only focussed on factors influencing unemployment among graduates but it is recommended that future research may explore variables critical towards job creation and innovation among graduates. Taking everything into account, the findings of the study reveal that graduates are affected by several challenges in their search for employment.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of collected data, the study recommends that all training institutions collaborate with all industry stakeholders towards the training of a strong and relevant human capital. The following points were established.

- Universities to periodically collaborate with the industry in the curriculum formulation for high content relevance.
- Job attachments and/or work-intergrated learning to be part of all study programmes for the graduates to acquire relevant job basic skills. All job industries and employers should be mandated to train a certain number of students during their studies.
- More career fairs and entrepreneurship project exhibitions for the students to understand the realities in the industry. Graduates should be innovative and be ready to serve the country in all political regions.
- All local authorities to design and have strategies aimed at creating job creation and opportunities.
- Besides the various degree curriculum content, universities should offer entrepreneurial short course for all graduates to promote the culture of job creation.

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