



Research Article

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Post-University Training for Jobless Market: The Experiences of Graduates in a Work Experience Programme

Zethembe Mseleku

Faculty of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,
South Africa

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Abstract

South Africa reportedly has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the world. Graduate unemployment parallels the country's overall unemployment rate, with the youth being the most vulnerable group. Hence, work experience programmes are offered to prepare fresh graduates for the labour market. The purpose of this paper is to explore the experiences of graduates in a work experience programme. This paper adopted a qualitative approach to elicit the experiences of graduates regarding the graduate work experience programme. A total of 30 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with graduates sampled from the eThekweni municipality's work experience programme. The results indicate that while graduates participate in a work experience programme to gain skills and work experience needed to secure jobs and for professional registration purposes, they experience numerous challenges in the programme. These challenges include ill-treatment from senior staff members, lack of work resources, and unreasonable workload. It was also evident that graduates were unsatisfied about the work experience programme owing to the poor or lack of mentorship and the irrelevancy of the programme itself. This paper offers important evidence which suggests the need to develop work experience programme policy and monitoring and evaluation systems in order to improve the experiences of graduates in the programme.

Keywords: Education and training, Experiences, Graduates, Labour market, Unemployment

1. Introduction

Graduate unemployment is increasingly recognised as a major socio-economic development problem globally (Longe, 2017; Ponge, 2013). The problem of graduate unemployment has increased alongside the overall unemployment rate over the years. In South Africa, for instance, the aggregate graduate unemployment rate in the year 2021 was 9.3% (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Clearly, the massification of education in South Africa has not been a panacea to the problem of unemployment the country faces. Also, the transition of graduates from higher learning institutions to the labour market has been challenging. Evidently, young graduates are highly vulnerable to unemployment (Yu, 2013). The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) reports 40.3% of unemployed graduates aged up to 24 years, 15.5% aged between 25 and 34 years, and 5.4% aged between 35 and 64 years (Statistics South Africa, 2021). This statistical evidence suggests the need to focus solutions particularly to young unemployed graduates, a group that is vulnerable to other social ills such as crime (Mazorodze, 2020), drugs and

alcohol abuse (Ayllón & Ferreira-Batista, 2018), and HIV/AIDS (DeSilva, Merry, Fischer, Rohrer, Isichei & Cha, 2009).

Among numerous government-supported approaches to the amelioration of unemployment in South Africa, include encouraging youth participation in the informal economy, supporting emerging small enterprises, establishing public works projects, and supporting graduate work experience programmes (Charman, 2016; McCord, 2003; Mabiza, Mahlalela & Mbohwa, 2017). Despite numerous strategies, programmes, and policies implemented by government and other development stakeholders to address unemployment, the problem of unemployment seems to persist (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). Against the backdrop of increasing unemployment in South Africa, young graduates generally grapple with insecure employment prospects.

There is also an increasing recognition of the potential role entrepreneurship can play in economic growth and job creation in South Africa (Mahadea & Kaseeram, 2018). This justifies the need for the South African government to continue promoting and supporting entrepreneurial initiatives, particularly for the youth (Nicolaidis, 2011). The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) (2020) reported a total of 1136 youth owned enterprises that were supported through the NYDA Grant Programme in South Africa between 2019 and 2020. Through the NYDA support, 5013 jobs were created and sustained through entrepreneurship during the same period (NYDA, 2020). However, the extent to which such initiatives benefit graduates remains unclear. Despite the entrepreneurship development regulatory framework, entrepreneurial training and funding support, the youth graduates who venture into entrepreneurship face numerous challenges such as poor training and lack of business start-up resources (Chigunta, 2017). Therefore, South Africa needs to provide more support for entrepreneurship from collaborative partnerships in order to enhance the contribution of entrepreneurship to youth employment.

One of the South African government's responses to unemployment was through increased investment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. This is known as "investment in human capital" as it aims to equip individuals with skills and competences that enhance the employability of human capital (Cedo, 2014; Ellison, 2015; Pirim, 2011). The South African government continues to provide funding to increase access to higher education, particularly for previously disadvantaged groups who could hardly afford higher education (Wangenge-Ouma & Cloete, 2008). While access to higher education has significantly improved over the past three decades, the transition from higher education to the labour market has not been easy for many graduates. This problem is partially attributed to the lack of work experience among new graduates (Mncayi, 2016).

Hence, graduate internship programmes, for instance, are increasingly recognised for their role to provide graduates with work experience needed to access employment (Jackling & Natoli, 2015). Work experience programmes such as internships are implemented to provide post-university training in preparing graduates for the labour market. However, the effectiveness of work experience programmes in preparing graduates for employment remain controversial. While this paper highlights the role of the graduate work experience programme on employability of graduates and its potential contribution towards employment of graduates, its main purpose is to explore the experiences of graduates in a graduate work experience programme. This paper is organised as follows: The following section presents the existing relevant literature while problematising graduate unemployment. This section is then followed by a detailed discussion of the methodological approach adopted to execute this research. Thereafter, the results are presented thematically. The last section covers the critical discussion of key results, conclusion, and recommendations.

2. Unemployment Problem

Unemployment is a major socio-economic problem in many countries, such as Nigeria, where unemployment has been found to impede economic development (Nwankwo & Ifejiolor, 2014). A similar study conducted in the Western Balkans found a positive correlation between unemployment and retardation in the country's economic growth where one percentage increase in the

unemployment rate directly reduced a country's gross domestic product by 0.5% (Kukaj, 2018). Therefore, unemployment impedes the economic development of nations. Prolonged unemployment also results in major mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety among individuals (Breslin & Mustard, 2003; Mokona, Yohannes & Ayano, 2020; Pharr, Moonie & Bungum, 2012). For instance, unemployed participants were likely to experience mental health issues and to delay seeking healthcare because of unaffordable healthcare services (Pharr et al., 2012). Some studies indicate that unemployed youth generally respond to unemployment through engaging in crime, alcohol, and drug abuse (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Grönqvist, 2011; Melchior, Chollet, Elidemir, Galéra & Younès, 2015). Therefore, while unemployment undermines economic growth and development of nations, it also has negative psychological and social consequences on individuals.

3. Youth Unemployment

The scientific research evidence confirms that young people, including those with higher education qualifications, mainly bear the brunt of unemployment in many countries (Pastore, 2018). Focusing on the youth is particularly important as the rate of unemployment is high among young people residing in low-income and high-income countries in comparison with older people (Curtain, 2004; Natrass, 2002). Additionally, addressing youth unemployment is fundamental to development because young people are considered the drivers of the country's socio-economic and political development (Nganwa, Assefa & Mbaka, 2015). Therefore, the level of their engagement and productivity in the economy largely determines the socio-economic and political development of their countries (Nganwa et al., 2015). In Ethiopia, for instance, young people are likely to be underemployed as they often do dangerous, low quality and low-paying jobs (Denu, Tekeste & Van Der Deijl, 2005). While the growing population is youthful, lack of work experience, lack of job search and preparation skills, and the lack of career guidance in schools are some of the reasons that account for youth unemployment in many countries, including South Africa (Cloete, 2015). Therefore, youth unemployment is a pressing development problem that requires new research evidence-based interventions.

4. Graduate Unemployment

According to Nunez & Livanos (2010), the massive expansion in higher education has resulted in graduates being produced without prior plans to absorb them. Graduate unemployment has largely been attributed to higher education expansion, a phenomenon not unique to South Africa. Furthermore, Wu (2011) partially attributed graduate unemployment to discrepancies between competencies provided by higher learning institutions and the requirements of the labour market. The inability of graduates to secure employment also indicates their lack of readiness. Therefore, it is imperative that graduates leave higher education institutions with the relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes, and commercial understanding in order to make productive contributions to organisational objectives soon after finding employment (Mason et al., 2009). In a study conducted by Hanapi & Nordin (2014), employers reported that new graduate employees generally lacked employability skills and often failed to perform their work-related duties. Research conducted by Nwankwo et al. (2013) discovered that most graduates from science, engineering, health, and commerce had skills demanded in the labour market compared to those from humanities, social sciences, and arts studies. Consequently, graduates from humanities, social sciences, and arts studies struggle to secure employment due to the problem of skills mismatch.

5. Graduate Work Experience Programmes and Employability

Work experience, which is developed through practical work in the workplace environment, is an important factor which determines employability (Helyer & Lee, 2014; Irwin, Nordmann & Simms,

2019). According to Helyer & Lee (2014), most graduates struggle to secure their first jobs owing to the lack of work experience. Hence, work experience has become an important determinant of employability and higher learning institutions are looking for approaches to address the lack of work experience problem among graduates (Helyer & Lee, 2014). Research shows that people with work experience are likely to find employment immediately compared with those without work experience. In this regard, the less experienced graduates must look for job advertisements, complete application forms, write psychometric tests in some cases, attend interviews, and write a formal assessment before a permanent job is offered (Luan, 2012 cited in Moleke, 2010).

Work experience programmes, such as internships, are increasingly recognised for their role in graduate employability (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). While the term internship has been widely defined, its common definition can be drawn from the literature. Internship is commonly defined as a work experience opportunity, paid moderately or unpaid, in which the interns gain relevant practical experience that facilitates their employability, and which enables students to learn through work (Chu, 2020). The study conducted by Qenani, MacDougall & Sexton (2014), for instance, discovered that those students who gained work experience through internships or other relevant work placements programmes were likely to possess employability traits. Correspondingly, a study that unpacked the value of international work experience found that work experience is correlated with improved employability prospects, professional development, and career success (Andresen et al., 2021). While the internship provider's perspective indicated the important role of the internship in developing employability skills, some interns were found to lack work readiness owing to the lack of problem solving and communication skills among others (Jackling & Natoli, 2015). In a study that examined the effectiveness of post-graduate internships in Italy, it was found that interns generally do not receive adequate training and supervision and are often treated as outsiders (Arcidiacono, 2015). It was also found that interns are often excluded from meetings, events, or corporate training; they also lack access to resources which are often reserved for permanent staff members. This leads to discomfort of interns and thus weakening their commitment and their capacity to learn (Arcidiacono, 2015). Among others, these are some challenges that undermines the mandate of internships.

6. Methodology

This section presents the methodological approach, including research design and methods, adopted to execute this study.

6.1 Participants

This study draws from the experiences of graduates who participated in a two-year graduate work experience programme. The programme is offered by eThekweni Municipal Academy (EMA), a skills development department of eThekweni Municipality, which is a Durban-based metropolitan found in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. The population sample was therefore drawn from the graduates who participated in the programme in order to gain work experience deemed necessary to secure full-time employment. Most of the participants were recently graduated from South African universities but inexperienced and unemployed. Selecting participants from the graduate work experience of eThekweni was considered ideal because this is one of the largest graduate work experience programmes offered in South Africa. Also, the municipality offers a two-year programme and participants have completed at least one year of the programme and thus well-positioned to share their experiences. A total of thirty graduates who were in their second year of the work experience programme were selected to share their experiences through a purposive sampling technique.

6.2 *Semi-structured interviews*

This study is qualitative in nature as it elicited in-depth insights regarding the experiences of graduates in a graduate work experience programme. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual graduates. Thirty semi-structured interviews were deemed suitable for this qualitative study as they offer in-depth description of an individual's lived experiences as understood by Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole (1995). Accordingly, this data collection method was useful to elicit data for this study aimed at generating the lived experiences of graduates in a graduate work experience programme. After obtaining the gate-keepers permission and information about the programme from EMA, the researcher visited various departments within the municipality to purposefully select participants. Only graduates who are in the second year of the programme were selected to participate in the study. Following the departments visits, the researcher then requested meetings with potential participants. All interviews were conducted one-on-one face-to-face at participants' preferred locations such as in their workplace's office or boardroom, parks, etcetera. Interviews were recorded using the audio recorder given the consent of participants. All interviews lasted between thirty minutes and sixty minutes. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences through open-ended questions. All ethical issues relating to participation in the study were discussed before interviews and all participants signed the informed consent form. This study complied with research ethics requirements and was found ethically sound by the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee with protocol reference number: HSS/1307/017D.

6.3 *Data analysis*

Data were analysed through thematic content analysis. According to Bless et al. (1995), thematic content analysis enables the researcher to interpret in-depth qualitative data as it focuses on the actual content and information. Since all interviews were audio recorded, the process of transcription was undertaken where audios were transcribed into written texts. All interview transcripts were thereafter compiled into word documents, which were then imported to NVivo 12 data analysis software for thematic content analysis. Several steps of thematic content analysis were followed to analyse data. These steps were: First, to transcribe all the audio-recorded interviews to written text. Secondly, to carefully read the transcriptions to get broader understanding of the meaning embedded in the collected data. Thirdly, the NVivo software was used to conduct preliminary coding of data and to create nodes. Fourthly, the participants' responses were categorised into new codes. And lastly, the codes were defined before the coding process was executed.

7. **Results**

The thematic content data analysis resulted in a few themes regarding post-university training, which is in a form of work experience programme and the experiences of graduate interns in a work experience programme. These themes are the perceived importance of post-university training offered through work experience programme, the experiences and challenges of graduates, and the perceptions of graduates regarding the work experience programme. The interpretation of results is presented thematically in the sub-sections below.

7.1 *The importance of post-university training*

Firstly, the researcher wanted to understand what motivates graduates to participate in a work experience programme which provides graduate training and preparation for the job market. Graduates were therefore asked about their motives to participate in a work experience programme. It is evident that most graduates partake in the programme to gain work experience. For instance,

one graduate stated that:

“The primary goal as I applied for the internship was to get the relevant work experience. Remember, I went to school in order to get a job, and in order for me to get that job, I will need to have relevant experience. I understand that it is not easy to get a job when you do not have experience, and I must go through the work experience programme which is mainly to prepare me for a job. Although I would prefer a permanent job after school, I admitted that I may not get that job without experience, hence I applied for this internship to get experience” (Participant No. 8, Graduate).

While graduates might have other reasons to participate in the work experience programme, the purpose to gain work experience was reported as a principal goal as also reflected in the following remarks:

“I took the internship programme because I need work experience, particularly as there is nothing on my CV in terms of work experience. The main aim for me to join this programme was just to get experience, and I believe this will help me advance in my career and be able to make my CV attractive to most employers” (Participant No. 9, Graduate).

Based on the participants’ insights, work experience is very important for one to secure employment. For graduates who have just completed their qualifications and are looking for first employment, the work experience programme therefore provides the work experience opportunities which they need to secure employment.

It was also evident that the work experience programme does not only provide work experience to graduates, but it is a training platform which offers numerous skills. These skills are also important to new graduates who are looking to break into the competitive labour market. When asked, most graduates indicated that the work experience programme contributes to skills development. It was stated by one graduate that:

“I have gained interpersonal skills as I interact with different stakeholders and leadership skills because I was tasked to take over the project that is in Cottonlands (Ndwedwe). There was a team that was working under that project. They were communicating with me in most cases, and every message that transpires from that project, I had to convey that message to the Programme Manager, and I had to take lead whenever I got there; so, I was able to develop leadership skills through that” (Participant No. 4, Graduate).

Other participants stated that they gain numerous skills through participation in the work experience programme. These skills include communication skills, administration skills, and interpersonal skills among others. Accordingly, one participant had the following remarks:

“I gain communication skills because I communicate with different stakeholders in most cases. So far, I think this is the only skill I have even though I feel I should be getting more than just communication skill through the internship” (Participant No. 3, Graduate).

Therefore, the work experience programme provides graduates with work experience and opportunities for skills development. In addition to work experience and general skills development emanating from the programme, it was also discovered that some graduates participate in the programme for the purpose of professional registration. For instance, some participants indicated that they needed the programme to register with professional boards as indicated below:

“Another benefit is that we get certificates for that we are registered as Internal Auditors with the board. So, by the end of the programme, I will be recognised as a professional auditor” (Participant No. 12, Graduate).

“The most crucial benefit is the registration with the professional body so that you become a

professional Internal Auditor” (Participant No. 13, Graduate).

Therefore, as evident from the participants’ remarks, the work experience programme provides post-university training to graduates. The programme is important to provide graduates with work experience deemed necessary to secure employment, and it also contributes to skills development. Also, given its role on work experience and skills development, the programme is important to some graduates who require professional registration.

7.2 The experiences and challenges of graduates

While graduates admitted that the internship provides work experience and skills development opportunities, they reported diverse experiences and challenges associated with participation in the work experience programme. When asked about the work experience programme related challenges, graduates reported mistreatment from colleagues, senior staff members and by their mentors. For instance, one graduate expressed the following:

“The major problem I face as an intern is the fact that the staff do not treat us equally, and sometimes they treat us badly. They do not treat us like normal staff members; they can make you feel small and incapable. Some staff members simply do not believe in our potential and the roles we play in the municipality; sometimes it feels as if I am good for nothing. That feeling is very discouraging even to wake up and go to work” (Participant No. 8, Graduate).

As indicated by the participant above, being disrespected in the work environment has a psychological impact on graduates. Consequently, this can negatively affect the work productivity of graduates. Similarly, it was also reported that:

“The major problem is that as an intern sometimes you are being undermined by co-workers or people you are working with. As I said earlier, we work with cleaners who are permanent and on contract. So, to them, what they know is that my supervisor is their manager, and I am just her assistant” (Participant No. 6, Graduate).

The ill-treatment was not the only challenge experienced by graduates in the work environment. Lack of resources was also reported by some graduates as a major challenge which undermines the work itself. In this regard, one graduate stated that the lack of resources is the major challenge:

“The most pressing challenge is the lack of work resources such as laptops. You know sometimes we are required to go outside and meet clients only to find that you must write down everything and come back to the office to type it because there is no laptop that you can take with you to the client. It is time-consuming. We are 16, and we used to have only 2 laptops, and when you are outstation, you spend the entire day outside the office, and it is difficult to work when you do not have a laptop and where everything is done manually. As a result, work or some projects are being delayed because of the lack of resources, specifically laptops” (Participant No. 14, Graduate).

Without resources needed to perform duties related to the work experience programme, most graduates would be unable to meet their mentor’s expectations and learn. Accordingly, some graduates expressed concerns regarding the workload. For instance, one graduate felt that the work of permanent staff members was unfairly allocated to graduates:

“The first challenge is that when you are an intern, you become a PA for everyone. I do not know whether this is because we are desperate for work or what, but everyone just gives their work to interns. It is like being abused, given too much work beyond our job description, and then at the end they take credit. For example, we write articles for all events, but we do not get acknowledgement, only the name of the manager who did not even attend the event will appear in the article. Another challenge is with the

salary, it is too small. Anyway, it is not about money, it is about experience" (Participant No. 17, Graduate).

Therefore, mistreatment by colleagues, lack of access to work resources and unreasonable workload were reported as the main experiences and challenges of graduates. These experiences and challenges become a stumbling block for the learning of graduates through the work experience programme.

7.3 Perceptions about the work experience programme

Graduates were also asked to reflect on their experiences and share their perceptions regarding the graduate work experience programme. While most graduates acknowledge the role of the programme in skills development, for example, most graduates found the programme irrelevant to their qualifications or study fields. When asked to reflect on the programme, the graduate shared the following remarks:

"I applied for this programme so that I would get experience in the relevant field. However, the thing is that I am not getting the experience that I need. So, I am still looking for an internship programme that will give me relevant work experience" (Participant No. 23, Graduate).

Additionally, the participant indicated that:

"As much as I am happy with my roles, I feel like it is not that much that we do; I do not see the progress in our work as to where it is really going. It feels like what I am doing is just useless. When I started the programme, I hoped that I would be working like an Auditor in terms of evidence verification because my qualification is related to Auditing, but when I arrived here, I realised that what I was doing was not Auditing" (Participant No. 23, Graduate).

Just like many other graduates, participant number 23 assessed the programme negatively in terms of relevancy. The programme seemingly did not meet the expectations of graduates as they felt that it provided irrelevant skills and experience which would not help them to secure employment. The similar concern was expressed by other graduates interviewed as follows:

"The main challenge is that there are gaps between the theory we are exposed to in the university and work practice which we found in the work environment. The skills and experience I am getting here are not in line with my university qualifications" (Participant No. 23, Graduate).

Furthermore, participant number 18 felt that the programme only provides administrative skills and does not relate to knowledge gained through higher education. When interviewed, the graduate stated that:

"The programme partially gives me some administrative skills, but the skills and experience I am getting is not enough. The work we do is not that intensive; it is only administrative, something which we are not qualified to do. What I studied is totally different to what I do in the programme" (Participant No. 23, Graduate).

As evident in the participants' remarks, the graduate work experience programme provides some level of skills and work experience, but it was perceived irrelevant, consequently, less valuable by graduates.

One of the factors that undermines the quality or value of work experience programme, based on the perspectives of graduates, is poor mentorship. Most graduates expressed the problem of either poor mentorship or lack of mentorship. For instance, some graduates did not have mentors as stated below:

“There should be more support. I need a mentor; maybe if I had a mentor, I would improve on productivity. There is no guidance I am receiving. If I had a mentor, I would have a direction on my work” (Participant No. 01, Graduate).

New graduates in a work experience programme generally get mentor allocation for guidance in the work environment. Without mentorship, graduates may not benefit from the programme. Accordingly, participant number 11 expressed the following:

“I think the management must take the responsibility. For instance, they can have meetings with managers or mentors for interns. They must be informed on how to treat graduates and be aware that graduates are here to work, not to do copies for their mentors. They must know that we are also professionals, and we must be treated as such. Some seem not interested in working with graduates, and this should be voluntary. Therefore, mentors should be assessed on their willingness to work with graduates” (Participant No. 11, Graduate).

It was further alluded that:

“The skills development unit must be more hands on what is happening to graduates, what they are doing and if they are happy with the work they do and if their mentors are supportive to them. Mentors and managers should also support interns, guide them with their work and ensure that they have work to do because at the end interns must get some experience, work skills and knowledge” (Participant No. 11, Graduate).

The ill-treatment of graduates by their mentors was reported to be somehow related to the lack of training for mentors as expressed by one participant:

“Some mentors just do not care; some did not even welcome us. I think they should be provided with training so that they learn how to provide proper guidance to graduates. I can just say that some mentors do not support us because you can have work that you do not understand how to address, yet the mentor is nowhere to be found. In other cases, you find that a mentor does not give you work to do, and you end up sitting at your desk doing nothing. There must be way to improve the mentorship of graduates. All mentors must be willing to help graduates to learn” (Participant No. 11, Graduate).

Based on the perceptions of graduates regarding the work experience programme, it is therefore evident that graduates are not satisfied with mentorship which is considered poor if not non-existent. The irrelevancy of the programme was reported as a key concern by most graduates.

8. Discussion

The premise of post-university training through work experience programme is that graduates may require hands-on work exposure as a key to access full-time employment in a competitive labour market. Accordingly, graduates interviewed in this small qualitative study provided a rationale for their participation in the work experience programme. The perspectives of graduates indicate the perceived importance or benefits of post-university training through the work experience programme. The perceived importance of the work experience programme was classified into three categories: the contribution to work experience, the contribution to skills development, and the contribution to registration with professional bodies. Therefore, while most graduates pursued the work experience programme primarily to gain work experience, some pursued the programme hoping to develop employability skills and to meet the requirements for professional registration. The existing literature suggests that work experience programmes, such as internships, provide work experience (Chu, 2020; Jackson & Wilton, 2017) and employability skills (Irwin et al., 2019). Thus, the graduates' quest for a work experience programme is justifiable considering this literature evidence. However, the important question borders on whether the work experience programme addresses the needs of graduates and if it is adequate and relevant.

While graduates reported the importance of work experience in general, their participation in the programme is characterised by several challenges. The ill-treatment of graduates by colleagues and senior staff members, including mentors, was reported as the main challenge. While ill-treatment of graduates is common in the work experience programmes, such as internships, as evident in the previous research (Arcidiacono, 2015), this current study further discovered that it has a negative impact on work productivity. Under such conditions, graduates also reported inability to learn through work. Lack of resources such as laptops were also reported as a challenge undermining the work of graduates, their commitment to work and the ability to fully benefit from the work experience programme. Furthermore, graduates reported concerns over the workload allocation. It transpired that the work of permanent staff members was pushed to graduates. In graduates' perspectives, this was a form of exploitation particularly considering poor monetary compensation. This evidence may justify why some graduates are not work-ready after completing the internship programme as evident in the study conducted by Jackling & Natoli (2015). Unsurprisingly, the graduates in this study assessed the work experience programme negatively. It was cited that the programme mainly provided administrative skills and thus offered irrelevant skills and experience which is inadequate to help graduates to secure jobs. This problem is partially attributed to poor mentorship. The challenges associated with work experience programmes discovered in this research are not unique to this study context. In Italy, for instance, Arcidiacono (2015) found that internships were ineffective owing to inadequate training and poor supervision. This current study found that poor mentorship of graduates is associated with the lack of training of mentors and lack of monitoring of the programme itself.

9. Conclusion

This paper has presented unemployment as a major socio-economic problem in South Africa. Youth unemployment, particularly among graduates, is devastating. Post-university training through work experience programmes, such as internship programmes, is reportedly part of the solution to address graduate unemployment. While the work experience programme is perceived necessary for work experience, skills development, and for the purposes of professional registration, graduates who participated in the programme had challenges to overcome. These challenges include ill-treatment by colleagues, lack of resources and unfair workload. Hence, graduates therefore assessed the programme negatively. Drawing from the analysis of perspectives, it appears that the programme provides irrelevant skills and irrelevant work experience partially owing to poor mentorship and lack of training of mentors. This paper therefore recommends for the development of the work experience programme policy and monitoring and evaluation systems in order to improve the experiences of graduates in the programme. While this paper provides important insights on work experience programmes in relation to graduates' employability, its results cannot be generalized. This is the limitation of this small qualitative study. Therefore, a wider study on a relevant topic is recommended for further research.

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