

# Business Management Programme as a Driver of Graduate Employability: A Critical Analysis of Perceptions of Students at a Selected University

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## Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to establish and critically analyse the perceptions of final year students on the extent to which the business management programme enhances graduate employability in Botswana. Extant literature alludes to the fact that ensuring employability connotes a situation where a graduate of a curriculum is not only able to gain employment but also to maintain that employment. The study used the CareerEDGE model to explain the anatomy of employability as well as to articulate the extent of preparedness for employment that is required for a Business Management student to be able to meet the requirements of the labour market. Using a selected university, a simple random sampling strategy was used to select 92 students to participate in the study. A descriptive research strategy that employed a structured questionnaire for data collection was used. Results of the study showed that studied most of the final year Business Management degree students were of the view that the curriculum enabled them to be employed in two main sectors namely; private sector and public sector specifically in teaching jobs rather than in other sectors such as mining, commerce and agriculture. These results therefore showed that the business management programme is effective as a driver of employability in relevant business sectors, meaning that a relook at the curriculum may be needed for purposes of enhancing it.

**Keywords:** Business management, graduate employability, driver, business sectors, student

## Introduction

Higher education curriculum is viewed by many as the mainstay that drives the economy through its provision of knowledge and skills which are used for productive engagement in the economy (World Bank Group, 2010; Quintini, 2010; & Elizabeth & Clarke, 2009). It is argued that an efficient and effective curriculum such as a business management programme demonstrates ability to transform the knowledge economy and its associated skills into goods and services to enhance graduate employability (World Bank Group, 2010). The critical importance of graduate employability is now demonstrated by the fact that it has become a phenomenal topic of discourse across professional gatherings, in media, commentary reviews, employer surveys, national economic debates, political gatherings, social networks and employee forums focusing particularly on how the issue of youth unemployment can be effectively tackled. Extant literature though shows that for a graduate to be employed and for industry to be able to absorb the large number of graduates being churned out by higher education institutions into the market, first and foremost he or she must possess employability knowledge and skills that meets industry expectations (Garwe, 2013). In the context of Botswana, Statistics Botswana (2017) shows that the national unemployment rate is at 20% and youth unemployment stands at 34%. These figures are considered very high when compared against the global unemployment figure of 6.2%. As a means of complementing government efforts in reducing unemployment in Botswana, it is therefore important that curriculum in higher education institutions is able to empower graduates with the knowledge and skills that make them employable.

## Research questions

The following research questions guide the study:

- How do students view the relevance of the business management programme in universities in meeting market needs?
- What are the views of students towards the business management programme in universities with regards to helping graduates gain early employment?
- How do business management programme(s) in universities help graduates gain employment in their areas of study?
- What are the views of students with regards to whether the business management programme in universities helps graduates to gain employment in sectors related to the qualifications?
- To what extent does the business management programme help students maintain employment in the job market?

## Research hypotheses

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no relationship between the design of the business management programme in universities and the

relevance of the programme in meeting the needs of the market.

- H<sub>02</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme in universities and delayed employment of graduates.
- H<sub>03</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme in universities and failure by graduates to gain employment in their fields of specialization.
- H<sub>04</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme in universities and failure by graduates to gain employment in other sectors related to their areas of specialization.
- H<sub>05</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme in universities and failure by graduates to maintain employment in the job market.

### **The concept of employability**

Wickramasighe & Pereira (2010) add that although there is five decades of research covering employability, the majority of the studies lack quantitative evidence as they are predominantly case studies with findings that cannot be generalized to other contexts mainly because they give prescriptive advice. Student employability is defined as a set of achievements, that is, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make a person or graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in the job (Yorke, 2008). Student employability is also defined as work readiness, that is, possession of skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that enable a person to make productive contributions to organizational objectives (Mason, Williams & Cranmer, 2006). Employment on the other hand means having a job (Garwe, 2013). Student employability is further defined by Kim (2012) as referring to a wide range of attributes and competencies that enable a job seeker to gain and maintain employment hence according to Knight and Yorke (2004), is the capacity to get a job, function in a job and be able to progress within the job or between jobs. Thijssen (2000) defines employability for an individual means a good job in the sense of what type of a job it is and its match for technical ability of the qualification one obtained from their programme of study.

In the context of Botswana, the Tertiary Education policy document of 2017 draws attention to two main challenges affecting graduate employability in Botswana, that is, the issue of relevance and quality of programmes. The concept of employability affects individuals and societies at large. The employability concept has been subjected to several academic studies (Sumanasiri et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2011; Finch et al, 2013; Wickramasighe & Perera, 2010; Pool and Sewell, 2007; Knight & Yorke, 2004; de la Harpe et al., 2000). Despite extensive developments and evidence of innovation on the concept to increase graduate employability rates through university curriculum, the whole idea of employability remains complex and problematic without much clarity or complete direction (Rae, 2007). One of the earliest studies on employability was conducted by Robbins (1963) commissioned by the United Kingdom government. Robbins (1963) identified employability as one of the four main objectives of higher education curriculum. This study according to Sumanasiri et al, (2015:19) argued that, “there was a clear relationship between employability of university students and the actual learning activities that they engage in through university degree programs”.

According to Watts (2006) looking at employability in terms of only the immediate employment is problematic and restrictive rather the focus should be on possession of personal attributes which assist graduate to transit into ‘student jobs’. Watts opines that employability should not be time bound alluding to the period a student spends searching after graduation. Cox and King (2006) suggest that employability embodies two aspects namely: transferable skills and subject specific skills. Mason and Cramer (2009) define employability as, “work-readiness, possession of skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable graduates to hit the ground running”. They argue that in science and engineering related disciplines employers seek work experience and evidence of commercial understanding because they expect a ‘short learning curve’ by students of their disciplines. Mason and Cramer (2009) distinguish between ‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘employability’ arguing that ‘fitness for purpose’ is about a student securing employment in the area of their studies. Borrowing from Quintini (2011), they suggest that a ‘mismatch’ occurs whenever a graduate fails to secure employment within their qualifications in which case higher education institutions cannot bear the blame.

Aamodt and Havnes (2008) contend that employability goes further than getting a job but includes growing on the job, progressing on the job and moving to other types of jobs that are more satisfying for an individual. Hennemann and Liefner (2010) and Hatfield (2007) argue that employability is about competences that students have. They view competence as an outcome of skills and knowledge. They further suggest that competence is a taught skill. The authors add that employability is multi-faceted having a number of elements such as individual factors, adaptability and mobility and personal circumstances such as access to resources.

Extant literature further shows many reasons that explain the unemployment of graduates. Among such factors according to Quintini (2011) include the following: (i) types of qualifications and fields of study chosen by students which end up in a qualification mismatch. Quintini (2011) argues that mismatch occurs when graduates end up in jobs for which they are either over- or under- qualified to do because of the lack of jobs in their areas of specialisation; (ii) skills mismatch which occur when skills held by a graduate do not match the

ones required by the job currently in the market; and (iii) labour market paradox whereby expectations are that with the demand for highly skilled graduates by the labour market, graduates will obtain employment yet that is not always the case.

### Theoretical framework

This study was informed and guided by the CAREEDGE model developed by Van Dam (2004).

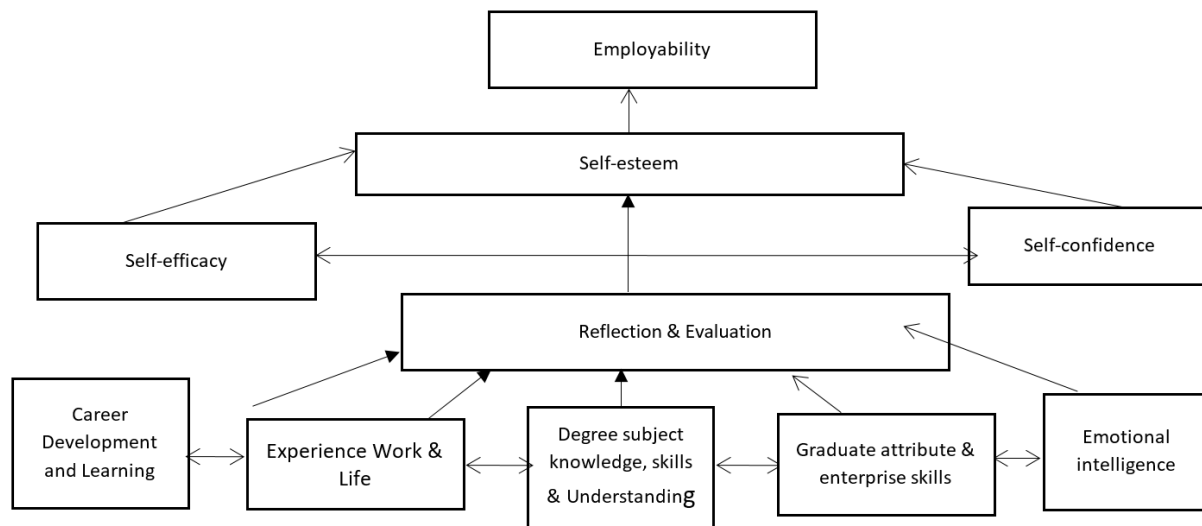


Figure 2.1: CareerEdge model (Van Dam, 2004: 150)

Through the model, Van dam (2004) argues that increasing domain-specific expertise only instead of a broad employability package of skills and knowledge is not enough to guarantee graduate employability. According to the model, it is only through exposing students to opportunities for career development and learning, experiencing work and life, acquiring technical knowledge and skills, acquiring graduate attributes and enterprise skills and acquiring emotional intelligence that graduates will become employable.

Commenting on the CareerEdge model, Wellman (2010) argues that employability is as a result of the relationships and interactions between various elements of knowledge, skills and personal attributes to improve levels of employability. Wellman (2010) further avers that an ‘integrated topology’ that combines micro, macro and meta-competences of graduates as demonstrated by the model is perhaps the sure way of ensuring graduate employability by combining vocational knowledge and technical with general support knowledge. Coppes & Pillmer (2013) also argue that the CareerEdge model shows that the concept and process of employability is not linear as many factors interact both horizontally and vertically in shaping it.

### Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey research strategy that employed a structured questionnaire to collect data on the perceptions of students towards the role of the business management programme in ensuring graduate employability. A sample of 92 final year business management students from the selected university was selected using simple random sampling strategy. The questionnaire was tested for both internal consistency reliability and content validity. Using the Cronbach’s alpha index, reliability test showed  $\alpha = .83$  which indicates high consistency reliability hence the questionnaire was deemed good enough to produce reliable results since a reliability coefficient of less than .7 is considered poor and that above .7 is considered acceptable according to Bougie & Sekaran (2010). With regards to content validity, the questionnaire was subjected to expert opinion and expert opinions were included into the final questionnaire before administration. 92 questionnaires were administered to final year business students at the selected university and 84 were returned giving a return rate of 91.3%. Data collected was analysed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 24. A criterion mean (CM) calculated using Likert scale values as follows:  $(5+4+3+2+1)/5 = 3.0$  where SA=5, A=4, D=2, SDA=1, N=3. From this result, any mean value below the CM is deemed to indicate disagreement while any mean value above 3.1 is deemed to indicate agreement.

## Findings

Table 1: Biographic variables of students

Biographic variable		Number	%
Age	Less than 25 years	27	32
	25 – 30 years	36	43
	31 – 35 years	15	18
	36 – 40 years	4	5
	More than 40 years	2	2
Gender	Male	36	43
	Female	48	57

Results of the study as shown in Table 1 show that most of the students (75%) are 30 years and below in terms of age while a few (25%) are over 30 years of age. This therefore shows that the majority of students at the selected university are relatively young adults.

Results in table 1 also show that most of the students (57%) are females while males are only 47% of the total student population. This shows that in terms of gender, the selected university seems to enroll more of female students than male students.

The next section uses descriptive statistics to analyse the response of final year business students on whether the business management programme will enhance their employability chances after graduation. Table 2 shows the responses.

Table 2: Perceptions of final year business students on employment status

Factor	Statement	Mean	SD
Employment status	I expect to be employed after graduation	3.6	1.110
Employment type	I will be employed in a full-time job	3.9	.923
	I will be employed in a part-time job	3.1	1.301
	I will be self-employed	1.6	.815
Reasons for delayed employment	Increased competition in the market	4.2	1.227
	Lack of work experience	3.3	1.205
	Qualification not relevant to market needs	1.8	1.211
	Other	3.8	1.002
Employment sector expectation	Agriculture	2.6	.910
	Commerce	3.5	.842
	Teaching	3.2	1.005
	Government departments	2.0	1.118
	Other	3.2	.901
Employment fit	Employed in field of qualification	2.1	1.001

CM = 3.0; N=84

Results in Table 2 show that there is general agreement among the final year business management students (M=3.6; SD=1.110) that they will be able to get employed after graduation, a result which seems to confirm the perceived relevance of the business management programme. With regards to the type of employment, the final year business management students views are that they will be able to get after graduation, results from Table 2 show that the students believe that they will mostly be engaged in full-time jobs (M= 3.9; SD = .923) while others feel the programme will help them to get part-time employment (M=3.1; SD=1.301) and very few of the students believe they will be self-employed (M=1.6; SD=.815). With regards to the sector in which most final year business management students feel the programme will help them get employed, results in Table 2 show that they will mostly be employed in commerce (M=3.5; SD=.842), teaching (M=3.2; SD=1.005), and in other sectors (M=3.2; SD=.901). Very few of the students believe that the business management programme will help them get employment in government offices (M=2.0; SD=1.118) and agriculture (M=2.6; M=.910). On whether the final year business management students will get employed into jobs that fit with their qualifications, most students did not believe that the business management programme will help them get employed into jobs that are relevant to their qualifications (M=2.1; SD=1.001). With regards to reasons why there may be delays in the final year business management students gaining employment after graduation, there is general agreement among the students that the main reasons for the delay will be hyper-competition in the job market (M=4.2; SD=1.227) followed by other reasons not stated in this study (M=3.8; SD=1.002) and lack of experience (M=3.3; SD=1.205). It also emerged from the results in Table 2 that the relevance of the business management programme (M=1.8; SD=1.211) will not be a reason why the students may be delayed in getting employment hence again shows that the students believe that the programme is relevant enough for the market.

To further investigate the perception of students towards the role of the business management programme at the selected university in ensuring graduate employability, hypothesis testing using One-Way ANOVA was performed. Tested in the hypotheses include students' perceptions on whether the business management programme helps students gain early employment, is relevant to market needs, helps students gain employment in related sectors, helps students gain employment relevant to their qualifications, and helps them maintain employment once they get employed.

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no relationship between the design of the business management programme at the selected university and the relevance of the programme in meeting the needs of the market.

Table 3: Design of the business management programme and its relevance to the market

CHI-SQUARE TESTS			
	Value	df	Assumption Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.685 <sup>a</sup>	12	.008
Likelihood Ratio	6.274	12	.902
Linear-by-Linear Association	.251	1	.617
N of Valid Cases	84		

The calculated P-Value in Table 3 above shows that  $P < 0.05$  which is statistically significant, hence the hypothesis the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that the design of the business management programme at the selected university has an influence on the relevance of the programme in meeting the needs of the market. This is further confirmation of results in Table 2 that shows that students believe that the business management programme is relevant in meeting the needs of the market.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme at the selected university and delayed employment of graduates.

Table 4: The business management programme and delayed employment

CHI-SQUARE TESTS			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.908 <sup>a</sup>	9	.073
Likelihood Ratio	10.106	9	.342
Linear-by-Linear Association	.070	1	.791
N of Valid Cases	84		

The calculated P-Value in Table 4 above shows that  $P > 0.05$  which is not statistically significant, hence the hypothesis the null hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no relationship between the business management programme at the selected university and delays graduates will get when looking for employment. Such delays therefore could be due to other factors other than the business management qualification. This also confirms earlier results in Table 2 which showed that the business management programme is not a major factor in delaying students to be employed.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme at the selected university and failure by graduates to gain employment in the field of specialization.

Table 5: Business management programme and employment in field of study

CHI-SQUARE TESTS			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.993 <sup>a</sup>	10	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	27.789	10	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.598	1	.010
N of Valid Cases	83		

The calculated P-Value in Table 5 above shows that  $P < 0.05$  which is statistically significant, hence the hypothesis the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that the business management programme at the selected university has an influence on the employment of graduates in their field of study. This is further confirmation of results in Table 2 that shows that students believe that the business management programme is relevant in meeting the needs of the market and hence will enable them to get employment in their field of study.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no relationship between the business management programme at the university and failure by graduates to gain employment in sectors related to their areas of specialization.

Table 6: The business management programme and employment in field of study

CHI-SQUARE TESTS			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.335 <sup>a</sup>	12	.060
Likelihood Ratio	23.727	12	.022
Linear-by-Linear Association	.076	1	.783
N of Valid Cases	84		

The calculated P-Value in Table 6 above shows that  $P > 0.05$  which is not statistically significant, hence the



hypothesis the null hypothesis is accepted. It is therefore concluded that there is no relationship between the business management programme at the selected university and failure by graduates of the programme to get employed in their fields of specialisation. This is further confirmation of results in Table 2 that shows that students believe that the business management programme is relevant in meeting the needs of the market.

$H_{05}$ : There is no relationship between the business management programme in universities and failure by graduates to maintain employment in the job market.

Table 7: The business management programme and graduates being able to maintain employment

CHI-SQUARE TESTS			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.052 <sup>a</sup>	13	.004
Likelihood Ratio	3.140	13	.370
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.965	1	.085
N of Valid Cases	83		

The calculated P-Value in Table 7 above shows that  $P < 0.05$  which is statistically significant, hence the hypothesis the null hypothesis is rejected. It is therefore concluded that there is a relationship between the business management programme at the selected university and the ability of graduates to maintain employment after getting employed. This is further confirmation of results in Table 2 that shows that students believe that the business management programme is relevant in meeting the needs of the market.

### Discussion of findings

Results of the study show that the business management programme is a driver for employability for business management graduates. Most students believed that the current business management programme is relevant to market needs, enables them to get employed in sectors relevant to their qualifications, enables them to get jobs that match their qualifications and does not lead in delaying their getting employed. Such results point to a well-designed programme. Extant literature and past studies allude to the fact that the goodness of a programme is observed from it being relevant in meeting the needs of both the market and the graduates by providing students with employability skills as articulated in the CareerEdge model (Van dam, 2004). It is shown from the results that the business management programmes meets both needs hence qualifies to be a driver of employability. According to Garwe (2013), for a graduate to be employed and for industry to be able to absorb the large number of graduates being churned out by higher education institutions into the market, first and foremost the education system through its curriculum should provide graduates with employability knowledge and skills that meet industry expectations. This is also supported by the World Bank Group (2010) that argues that an efficient and effective curriculum such as a business management programme should demonstrate ability to transform the knowledge economy and its associated skills into goods and services to enhance graduate employability.

Kim (2012) in his study concurs that for a curriculum such as the business management programme to be a driver for employability, it should lead to the development of a wide range of attributes and competencies that enable a job seeker, that is, a graduate, to gain and maintain employment. For the business management programme to be referred to as relevant in meeting needs of both the student and the market it should provide the graduate with a multiplicity of both hard and soft skills so as to be able to productively function in the world of employment. The above is confirmed by Knight and Yorke (2004) who argued that the capacity to get a job, function in a job and be able to progress within the job or between jobs is what we call employability and hence a good curriculum should be able to promote knowledge and skills that ensure students have this capacity. This is why Wellman (2010) argues that employability is a result of the relationships and interactions between various elements of knowledge, skills and personal attributes to improve levels of employability.

Hennemann and Liefner (2010) and Hatfield (2007) argue about the ability of a programme such as the business management programme to enhance graduate employability from the angle of competences. They argued that for a programme such as the business management programme to be a driver of employability, it should develop critical competences in the students because employability is multi-faceted and has a number of elements such as individual factors, adaptability and mobility and personal circumstances such as access to resources that act as enablers of employability. The above therefore may call for a paradigm shift in the pedagogy used to communicate knowledge from the programme to students to ensure that students receive well rounded knowledge and skills to enable them to successfully function in the world of employment.

### Conclusion

Based on the above results, it can be concluded that students have a positive perception of the business management programme as a driver of employability. It is concluded that the business management programme is relevant to the needs of both the students and the market hence will help in enabling graduates either get and maintain employment. It is also concluded that the business management programme helps students to get employed in jobs relevant to their qualifications and in sectors aligned to their qualifications. Based on the views

of the students it is therefore concluded that overall, students from the business management programme have high potential of getting employed and if employed, maintaining the employment.

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