



An investigation of formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internships as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness: A case study of the work experience and internship program of the KwaZulu-Natal clothing and textile SETA

BY

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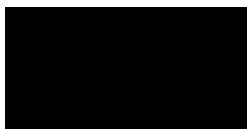
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Abstract

The clothing and textile industry is an important driver of economic growth and development. Moreover, it is a labour-intensive industry. But due to technological advancement, the labour dynamic in the industry is becoming more technology-intensive, thus requiring a skilled workforce from higher education institutions (hereafter HEIs). There exists a gap between graduate skills and the industry skills demand. There is also high unemployment in South Africa. On the other hand, employers are also struggling to find employees with practical knowledge.

Furthermore, there is a challenge in incorporating experiential learning into formal learning to facilitate learners' employability. Thus, graduates find it difficult to integrate easily into a work environment due to a lack of practical skills and knowledge. This study investigates how formal learning at the Durban University of Technology and the SETA internship program can facilitate employability and work readiness. This qualitative study employs inductive thematic analysis to interpret data collected using semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents, including students, interns, lecturers, employers, recruitment agents, and SETA representatives. The findings revealed that the theoretical contents taught in HEIs are adequate. However, HEIs still need to develop curricula that increase practical components, aligning with the needs of the industry to produce quality graduates. Secondly, the findings showed that employers must provide adequate mentoring support for learners in internship programs.

Thirdly, employers and learners are unaware of SETA's roles in facilitating internship placements and funding. Lastly, the findings identified employable skills relevant to the industry. This study recommends that to increase the employability of learners after graduation, there is a need to adopt an effective model through a partnership between HEIs, employers, and government where all stakeholders play active roles that facilitate the integration of experiential learning into formal learning, which helps learners develop relevant specific skills for employability in the industry.

Keywords: clothing and textile, experiential learning, formal learning, higher education, SETA.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

SETA	- Sector Education and Training Authority
DHET	- Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	- Durban University of Technology
ETLD SETA Education and Training Authority	- Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
HEI	- Higher Education Institute
KZN	- Kwa-Zulu Natal
UKZN	- University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
NSDS	- National Skills Development Strategy
CTFL	- Clothing, Textiles, Footwear and Leather
GDP	- Gross Domestic Product
SDA	- Skills Development Act
SDL	- Skills Development Levy
FP&M SETA and Training Authority	- Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Introduction and Background

The increasing globalisation and newer technologies, preparing learners sufficiently for employment after graduation in the clothing and textile industry is a great challenge to higher education in the 21st century (Bennett, 2018). Higher educational institutions (hereafter HEIs) such as universities and colleges battle to keep up with the industry and business that are transforming quickly, new technologies being launched, and expertise skills needs are growing (Howard, 2018). According to Alvarado (2012), graduates become underprepared or improperly ready to enter the work environment if the curricula that prepare learners in HEIs and the job requirements in the labour market do not align. Due to this, HEI and organizations need to concentrate not only on guaranteeing that graduates improve their skills to make them more employable but also on making sure that they keep on learning. However, some challenges have impeded effective collaboration between HEIs and organisations to facilitate the employability of fresh graduates in the labour market.

Formal learning is a type of learning program which takes place within a formally established educational institutions such as schools, higher education institutions, training centres, and among others, the result is normally to obtain a certificate or degree (Devins and Reynolds, 2018). The training department, instructional designer, and/or instructor define the formal learning goals and objectives. With the certificate or degree obtained, graduates can enter the labour market through employment to contribute the knowledge gained to the growth of their organisations and, ultimately, economic growth and development (Bennett, 2018, Bloom et al., 2006). Despite the available graduates, employers have a challenge finding people with the right skills for available jobs (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, Ramdass and Kruger, 2011). Given the dynamics of a changing labour market and some jobs requiring practical experience that can only be acquired in the real world, HEIs may lack the requisite facilities and environment to equip learners with practical experience and necessary skills needed for entry level jobs (Howard, 2018, Bennett, 2018).

One of the main strategies that have been identified to bridge skills gap is work-based learning. In addition to formal learning, learners can also acquire knowledge informally through the workplace (Devins and Reynolds, 2018). The workplace environment is

considered a place of diversity and a platform for human intellectual capital development (Devins and Reynolds, 2018, Kolb, 2014). It has always been considered an important setting in which learning can take place, known as experiential learning (Kolb, 2014).

Experiential learning entails work-based learning occurring at the workplace. It is often informal learning, involving learning things without realising the learning process (Karunaratne and Perera, 2019). In tackling the skills gap challenge, incorporating experiential learning into formal learning in the form of internships in the higher education system may increase the employability of learners after graduation (Bennett, 2018). An internship is a new learnership system aimed at providing workplace experience for learners during their undergraduate years in HEIs (Ozek, 2018). An employer offers the workplace experience, giving learners and graduates exposure to the workplace environment relating to their field of study. Internship can be for a short period of a week, or as long as 12 months. Internships can either be paid or voluntary (Mary, 2015).

The introduction of the Skills Development Act of 1998 after the apartheid era in South Africa, the interest in workplace learning for learners has intensified in recent years. Internships offers an alternative mode for employment, skills development, and work readiness, they have also been adopted as a key feature of the clothing and textile industry as it requires a skilled workforce (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, Kruss et al., 2014). The clothing and textile industry is service-oriented. It provides various services to different clients for fabrics, apparel, and garments with a skilled and unskilled workforce (Readh, 2019, Emenheiser, 1981). The clothing and textile industry is one of the fastest growing in the world, with a huge domestic and increasing export market arising from a growing population, fast fashion, and rising income level (ILO, 2019). It is also an important sector of the economy for any country in the long run as it provides a sustainable source of earnings, foreign investments, stable growth, and developments (Manenzhe, 2018).

This industry is responsible for manufacturing production, including employment generation, and trade in many developing countries (Manenzhe, 2018, Vlok, 2006). In South Africa, the clothing and textile industry contributes 13.7% percent of the total manufacturing output to the GDP with an average growth of 3.6% percent when other

sectors experience negative growth (FP&M SETA, 2017). In addition, the clothing and textile industry accounts for 2.1% of total employment in South Africa, and 24 percent for the manufacturing sector (FP&M SETA, 2017). However, the South African clothing and textile industry's productivity and export has declined since 2003 due to competition from cheap imports, contributing to an increased unemployment rate (Manenzhe, 2018, Boucher, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic, which affected global trade, has also affected importing inputs for clothing and textile products into South Africa, thus causing the demand and supply gap (Boucher, 2020, Allais et al., 2021). For this reason, there are plans to revive the industry where retailers source locally made clothing and textile products (Boucher, 2020).

The clothing and textile industry trend towards multi-skills with new technological advancements and innovative approaches creates new skills that affect demand for entry-level skills (Howard, 2018, Kamaul et al., 2013, ILO, 2019). Accordingly, the lack of a skilled workforce can affect the growth of the clothing and textile industry. Globalisation and technological shifts therefore require innovative solutions to the employability and work readiness of graduates in South Africa.

One of the interventions by the government to increase the employability of learners after graduation was the introduction of The Skills Development Act (SDA) (97 of 1998) (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). The Act was introduced to promote and develop work-related skills in South Africa (Kruss et al., 2014). Prior to this era, the traditional vocational training for skilled workers was mainly through apprenticeships (Allais et al., 2021). In the 1980s, apprenticeships regulated the training of artisans (Rensburg et al., 2012).

For an apprentice to acquire adequate technical skill, they would be required under an apprenticeship contract to complete series of technical and trade courses at a technical college. After which, the apprentice undergoes a trade test assessment, to become a qualified artisan (Rensburg et al., 2012). However, the apprenticeship system was flawed due to a decline in the number of trained apprentices, and in the lack of work-learning opportunities in organisations and the elimination of a tax incentive scheme, motivating employers to take apprentices (Allais et al., 2021). Thus, apprenticeships were not successful to meet the needs of the labour market in South Africa. The present skills demand and supply labour market environment

necessitates the need for higher education and work experience programs that focus on the strategic skills and occupations needed in clothing and textile industry.

The concept of work experience and internship is central to the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) launched in 2001 to increase the quantity and quality of skills in the various industry of the South African economy (Rensburg et al., 2012). This led to the enactment of various legislations to address the skills shortage in South Africa (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). One of the legislations is the establishment of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to bridge the gap between education and labour market. The aim was to produce enough skills in each South African sector that have been recognised as critical in line with the Skills Development Act of 1998 (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, Rensburg et al., 2012).

There are twenty-one SETAs in South African, and each SETA represents different sectors. Each SETA in different sector compiles a Sector Skills Plan detailing the critical and scarce skills needed. The Clothing, Textile, Footwear, and Leather (CTFL) SETA is the relevant training authority for the Clothing and Textile industry. The Skills Development Act of 1998 encourages firms to partner with SETA and other public and private training providers to promote experiential learning programs through internships to reduce the skills gap (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, Rensburg et al., 2012).

The SETA's effectiveness is highly uneven in addressing the skills shortage, lacks credibility, and is unpopular among industry employers (Morris and Reed, 2008; Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). There is also reduced enrolment in the tertiary institutions for the clothing and textile programs (Morris and Reed, 2008, FP&M SETA, 2017). In this context, many firms either train their unskilled staff to fill higher job positions or import skills from abroad. The National Certificate programs in clothing and textiles are offered at a lower level by public and private education and training institutions within the Further Education and Training band. They are, however, underutilised due to inadequate resources and the perception of poor-quality training (FP&M SETA, 2017). This places the industry at a disadvantage.

Formal tertiary institutions' support to produce graduates for the clothing and textile industry are limited in South Africa (Morris and Reed, 2008). There are over 25 public universities in South Africa. Only five tertiary institutions have the clothing and textile

industry support, while SETA supports three formal tertiary institutions such as the Durban University of Technology, Cape Peninsula University of Technology and University of Johannesburg (Morris and Reed, 2008, Akwasi and Apindi, 2022).

The graduates of Clothing Management Diploma Qualifications are expected to display competence in applying knowledge in wide range of varying work activities related with their career within the clothing and related industries. This includes clothing product development, clothing production, and clothing retail (FP&M SETA, 2017). Due to a limited number of HEIs with clothing and textile programs, there is bound to be shortage of graduates for this industry and causing a skills shortage in the industry. This may affect the survival of the clothing and textile industry. Furthermore, the clothing and textile programs that are delivered at HEIs are faced with budget cutbacks, and curricula that have not kept pace with technology, leading to inferior training. There is a gap in the formal learning institutions to fill the relevant skilled gap needed in the dynamic and changing clothing and textile industry. One can posit that despite different interventions by government and HEIs to address the needs of organizations, the integration of experiential learning into formal learning to facilitate learners' employability remains a challenge.

1.2. Problem Statement

The clothing and textile industry is but part of the mainstream changes in the 21st century as a result of globalisation, innovation and technological advancements, which has revolutionised the industry from labour-intensive to technology-intensive that requires skilled workforce (Ramdass and Kruger, 2011). This study focuses on this industry with its peculiar dynamics. While the transformation through skills is happening, there is a concern about whether the higher education institutional programs adequately prepare learners for employability and work-readiness in the clothing and textile industry.

The higher education and training institutions have various clothing and textile programs to bridge the industry's skills requirements. However, it seems that there is a gap between graduate skills and industry skills demands. Digitisation of the clothing and textile industry is occurring rapidly across design and development (Stewart, 2021). Additionally, data analytics, planning and forecasting skills are increasingly in demand in this sector. Provision for training of these digital skills is needed now as the industry becomes more customer-connected and digitally savvy. Most graduates want to be designers, but development is where the need is. Graduates do not understand the development role or opportunities. According to Weaver (2011), spreadsheets are a major part of the clothing and textile industry and basic excel training in all the courses will be beneficial to graduates.

Furthermore, students who later become graduates are only exposed to the practical component after obtaining their qualifications. This becomes difficult for the students/graduates to integrate easily into a work environment that is highly technical because of lack of practical skills and knowledge in the field. As such, graduates become unemployable, which may increase the number of unemployed graduates in the country. The SETA internship programs are normally run for a period of six to twelve months, which is short of giving room for learners/graduates to adapt and adjust while they are expected to perform on the job (ETDP SETA, 2020). This study seeks to investigate how formal learning at the Durban University of Technology and at the SETA internship program prepares students and graduates for the work environment.

The idea behind this study is that the higher education institutional programs have not led to sustained change to increase learners' employability. The formal learning programs for clothing and textile qualifications have no strong experiential learning component in their curricula. Given that South Africa is faced with high unemployment and poverty, it is becoming more important today that that higher education institutions work with companies to find out what their skill requirements are so that there is alignment in what is taught and what is done at work. These are conversations that should be prioritised across the board so that internships become a space where learners are giving one more space to practice their craft before being fully fledged members of the South African labour market.

With the above-mentioned challenge of unemployment, the clothing and textile industry is struggling to find employees with the right skill. This study seeks to investigate how formal and experiential learning facilitates internships and related work readiness of learners in the clothing and textile industry, particularly looking at students from Durban University of Technology in KwaZulu Natal province for the case study.

1.3. Research Aim

The main aim of this study is to investigate how formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internships can be facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness amongst DUT students and graduates in the clothing and textile SETA program.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1.4.1.** To ascertain what the learners are taught in the clothing and textile diploma at the Durban Institute of Technology to get them industry ready.
- 1.4.2.** To evaluate what the SETA internship and work experience program offers the learners and interns to assist them with work readiness.
- 1.4.3.** To understand what the employers are looking for from the graduates to be employable in the industry.

1.5. Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives, the study will answer the following key questions:

- 1.5.1.** What are learners being taught in the clothing and textile diploma at Durban University of Technology to get them to be work or industry-ready?
- 1.5.2.** What is the SETA's internship and workplace program offering the learners and interns to assist them with work readiness?
- 1.5.3.** What are the employers looking for from the graduates to be employable in the industry?

1.6. Significance of the study

There is a high unemployment rate in South Africa among graduates. Yet, employers struggle to find quality graduates with practice experience to fill vacant positions due to the skills gap among graduates. Qualifications alone from higher education institutions are no longer sufficient for transition into the clothing and textile industry labour market.

In a skills shortage survey conducted by Manpower Group (2013), it was discovered that many employers globally found a lack of skills to negatively impact business operations. This is due to a lack of available candidates with employability skills. According to the survey, Japan and Brazil has the highest skill scarcity where 81% and 71% of respondents struggle to find employees with right skills (Manpower Group 2012). In this context, one can postulate that HEIs have a vital task in delivering graduates with the skills and knowledge required in the labour market. Howard (2018) maintains however, that experiential learning is fundamental.

To increase the employability of graduates, internships and work experience should be an integral part of HEIs curricula to transform the clothing and textile sector's workforce into a highly skilled industry with qualified people with the right skills. The challenge is that companies within the clothing and textile industry are not investing resources for human capital development (Noe and Kodwani, 2018); such as investing in workplace learning, training, and education materials to enhance formal learning opportunities (Noe and Kodwani, 2018).

Although there are many studies, such as Svensson, Ellström and Aberg (2004) and Howard (2018) on formal and experiential learning, there is no consensus in literature because issues persist on the integration of experiential learning into formal learning. For instance, employers complain about the right candidates, but many are not accepting learners for internships. Dynamic changes in the labour market require new employability skills, making this study relevant to identifying skills in this age. This study is unique as it focuses on learners, interns, higher education institutions, employers, and government agencies in the clothing and textile industry to understand the challenges and implementation of policy that improve the clothing and textile curriculum to increase the quality of graduates.

A study of this nature is important as it can inform higher education institutions and more especially the Durban University of Technology, the clothing and textile SETA program, as well as the employers in the industry, of the gaps in alignment between what higher education institutions teach and what industry requires. These stakeholders can also be aware of how they can go about improving their policies, practices, and strategies in the recruitment, training, and development of learners doing the clothing internship and work experience program by enhancing formal learning and experiential learning opportunities so that it is better able to facilitate the employability of students after graduation. This study adds to the body of knowledge on how formal learning and experiential learning facilitates the employability of learners, and work readiness of graduates in South Africa.

1.7. Summary of chapters

This study consists of six chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter introduces the study and provides the background context into the work.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter reviews the literature on formal learning and experiential learning. It presents formal learning, experiential learning, internships, employability, and work-readiness concepts. It discusses various policies on skills development in South Africa, skills needed in the clothing and textile labour market, the role of SETA in skills development, issues that affect the employability of learners, and internship and work experience program.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter outlines the research methods adopted in the study and the justification for the adopted methods. The chapter presents the steps followed to gather accurate data that could be easily interpreted for this study. It highlights the research questions, information on the participants, the research instruments, data analysis, sampling, and the sampling method and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Analysis and discussion of research results

This chapter presents the empirical results of the qualitative data analysis. The study aims to determine the learners, managers, and employers' perceptions of clothing and textile formal learning and experiential learning in KZN. Its objectives are first, to ascertain what the learners are taught in the training institutions to get them industry ready. Secondly, evaluate the development opportunities that the SETA internship and work experience program offers the learners/graduates to assist them with job readiness. Finally, to understand what the employers are looking for from the graduates to be employable in the industry. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter provides the conclusion, contribution to knowledge and recommendations.

1.8. Conclusion

Chapter 1 commenced with the background regarding clothing and textile industry and highlighting the challenges faced by the industry. It provides an in-depth discussion of the skills gap that exist between graduates and employers in the clothing and textile industry. It further presents SETA's initiatives to bridge the skills gap that currently exist in the job market. The problem statement is presented which formed the basis for the study, and the research objectives and questions are mentioned. Thereafter, the research significance providing a detailed discussion as to why this study is relevant is presented followed by the results analysis and discussion. Lastly, conclusion and recommendations on this study is presented. The chapter presents a detailed discussion on the literature review both internationally and locally.

CHAPTER 2

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the importance of higher education, its curriculum and role in equipping learners with employability skills. It also presents discussions on formal learning, and work-readiness skills learners acquire through formal learning. The chapter further delves into the purpose of internships, policies addressing higher education and skills development, and higher education institutions roles in addressing the needs of society. This is then followed by discussion on the role of SETA aimed at skills development. The chapter provides brief details of the clothing and textile industry in South Africa; this includes progression and the current state of the clothing and textile industry. Lastly, the chapter provides a discussion of the role of the clothing and textile industry in creating jobs as well as the main issues relating to employment in South Africa.

2.2. Understanding the Importance of Higher Education

Historically, HEIs were significant for research knowledge, and the model was not to transfer knowledge for use but to emphasise how the knowledge was discovered (Cloete, 2014). Over the years, HEIs have become important for knowledge transfer to the corporate sectors, enhancing economic growth and development through the creation and supply of skilled manpower to meet the needs of different industries (Howard, 2018, Buchbinder, 1993). Higher education contributes to socio-economic development with the creation of human capital producing new knowledge through research, the distribution and use of knowledge, and the preservation of knowledge (inter-generational storage and knowledge transmission) (Buchbinder, 1993, Pouris and Inglesi-Lotz, 2014).

Higher education is relevant for human capital development and economic growth (Chetty, 2012). In Africa, human capital has been the main determining factor stimulating economic growth during the last decade (Fisher and Scott, 2011, Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). The present skills demanded by employers and the supply of

graduate environment necessitate the need to include internship and work experience programs in higher education curriculum for learners to acquire skills necessary for employability. Mobarak (2019) states that HEIs have a responsibility to both learners and the public to provide applicable teaching and learning that add value to economic growth. According to Cloete (2014), HEIs in developing countries have crucial roles in developing effective curricula, making it possible for quality graduates to compete in a competitive knowledge economy.

African countries make efforts to develop their higher education system. In the past, organisations such as the World Bank, based on a study on the rate of return to investment on education, emphasised that Africa should refocus and concentrate on primary education. In that period, there was a dramatic decrease in funding for higher education from US\$6,800 in 1980 to US\$1,200 in 2002 (Cloete, 2014, Bloom et al., 2006). Calls arose from people such as Kofi Annan who was the former Secretary-General, the United Nations in 2005 emphasising that higher education has a fundamental role to play in the development of African economies (Cloete, 2014).

Africa has witnessed a growth in the number of HEIs offering degrees (Fisher and Scott, 2011). Many African countries had at least one university at the time of independence. For instance, in Uganda had only one university called Makerere University until 1998 (Muriisa, 2014). By 2010, the number of universities has grown to 29, and further to 40 universities by 2015 in Uganda (Muriisa, 2014). Similarly, Rwanda had only one university, but after the 1994 genocide, there are 29 universities as of 2016 (Muriisa and Rwabyoma, 2019).

The HEIs in Rwanda and Uganda have made great strides in reforming the curricula to contribute to the country's growth (Muriisa and Rwabyoma, 2019). In South Africa, there is an increase in learners' enrolment to HEIs. The HE system in South Africa has been going through an exercise of transformation in order to address the educational imbalances of the past. This was the unique exclusionary apartheid context which undermined the right of black people to key technical skills (Akoojee, 2010). The funding of HE institutions (HEIs) was one of the changes used to transform the HE system in South Africa. As a result, research shows that, university enrolment of students in South Africa is the highest amongst other African countries (Fisher and Scott, 2011, Cloete, 2014).

Funding of HE in South Africa remained the key challenge as the HEIs were characterised by insufficient funding due to a steady decline of funds (Wangenge-Ouma and Cloete 2008; Akor and Roux 2006). The transformation agenda of HE led to the expansion of HE which put serious constraints on state funding of HEIs and those from poor backgrounds accessing HE (Allais 2017).

The role of higher education has been tested by globalisation as it continues to challenge knowledge production (Bennett, 2018, Buchbinder, 1993). There have been critiques on how study programs are developed, whether the HEIs in Africa address the country's needs, and whether the curricula relate to industry and the state's growth. Despite an increase in enrolment of HEIs in Africa, the enrolment rate is still less than 10 percent, which is the lowest compared to other regions in the world (Cloete, 2014, Bloom et al., 2006).

Annan's words are relevant in Africa today, as there is an increase in the number of HEIs which should increase the number of skilled graduates in the workforce and industry productivity. Yet, employers consistently identify skills shortages, which remains a challenge driving economic growth and development in Africa (Fisher and Scott, 2011, Manenzhe, 2018). According to Bloom et al. (2006), donor organisations such as the World Bank have reconsidered and now secondary and higher education to increase skilled labour in Africa.

Countries such as Taiwan and Korea invested resources into the HEIs in the 90s' to facilitate knowledge transfer for economic growth. By 2000, enrolment capacity into these HEIs has increased and is leading in human capital formation (Cloete, 2014). Many African governments, after independence, have not focussed on promoting the development role of HEIs to drive technological changes and innovations that will stimulate economic growth and development in African countries (Cloete, 2014). As a result, the HEIs in Africa is lagging in enrolments, and the ability to transfer usable knowledge to drive technological changes and stimulate economic growth is in decline.

Some African countries have implemented innovative policies to strengthen higher education systems. Yet there are signs that the policies are yielding less progress than in other developed and developing countries (Cloete, 2014, Bloom et al., 2006). For instance, South Africa increased investments in HEIs after 1994 to increase

knowledge transfer. However, the rate of return on such investment is not high vis-à-vis the cost of investments. There is no increase in research and development personnel, and research and development growth to GDP is low compared to countries like Portugal with a similar cost of investment (Cloete, 2014).

Additionally, there is no corresponding increase in the skilled workforce. Unless there is a corresponding increase in experiential learning incorporated into the curricula of higher institutions, the value of degrees may fall as more people gain graduate status without employability skills (Bennett, 2018). Studies such as Bennett (2018) and Howard (2018) call for HEIs to align their curriculum with the industry needs to increase learners' employability.

2.3. Merging higher education curriculum and the needs of society and industries

Integration of formal learning with experiential learning has been an ongoing discussion (Howard, 2018, Malcolm et al., 2003, Emenheiser, 1981). Several models have been proposed to facilitate such integration (Malcolm, Hodgkinson and Colley 2003; Svensson, Ellström and Aberg 2004). One of the models is the integration of formal and experiential learning through e-learning (Svensson et al., 2004). Another model proposed by Malcolm et al. (2003) motivates for short periods of workplace learning at different intervals during the study program. There are different models, resulting in a lack of consensus from the empirical literature. According to Malcolm et al. (2003), there is also the political dimension, where government introduces policies to facilitate experiential learning for disadvantaged learners for social cohesion and enhance economic growth.

Skills development is becoming an increasingly important policy issue, especially in the developing countries (Allais et al., 2021). The challenge is the integration of experiential learning into formal learning. For instance, employers set objectives, curricula content, assessments, and funding (Malcolm et al., 2003, Devins and Reynolds, 2018). Nevertheless, integrating formal and experiential learning through theoretical content with the practical application has both individual and organizational benefits (Coco 2000, Merrit, 2005). The individual benefits apply to the learners, which include improved learners' maturity level and self-confidence (Merrit 2005). Other

individual benefits identified in the empirical literature (Binder, Baguley, Crook and Miller 2015) include:

- Learners are adequately prepared for the workplace.
- It will take a shorter amount of time for learners to adapt to the working environment after graduation.
- Since learners are exposed to the workplace during their studies, they can choose whether to pursue their career path in such a field or not or not.
- Learners will obtain the appropriate and necessary skills, influencing their employability.
- The exposure to practical is invaluable for the clothing and textile interns.

A rise in fast-growing technologies, competition, and globalization, HEIs find themselves under pressure to produce graduates that are employable to address multifaceted problems and the new and unpredictable challenges of the future (Gadola and Chindamo, 2019, Shah and Nair, 2011). The labour market needs have unmasked the need to merge higher education curricula and the needs of society and industries. HEIs must therefore be able to predict and plan according to the skills gap so that the programs stay relevant with the needed skills.

There is a skills shortage in the clothing and textile industry in South Africa (Akor, 2008, Allais et al., 2021). The Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998 defines skills shortage as a situation where employers have trouble finding people with the required qualifications and experience in filling vacancies for a specific occupation. The Fisher and Scott (2011) study followed undergraduates over several years in South Africa and found that though there is a rise in the enrolment figures at HEIs, the graduate output is not meeting the country's needs (Fisher & Scott 2011). South Africa needs to produce skilled graduates for workplace.

The HEIs also in many countries is failing to equip learners with relevant skills needed in the labour market (Slay, 2010; Zieminski, 2009). As work is getting more complex, employers look for more specific skills from graduates (Slay, 2010; Zieminski, 2009). This calls for a review of the curriculum to ensure that graduates skills match the societal and industry needs. Dewey's experiential learning theory model suggests that education should be seen as a continuous reconstructing experience (Dewey, 1938).

The continuous reconstruction of the curriculum could be achieved with the integration of experiential learning into formal learning.

Dewey (1938) suggested that experiential learning should continue after completion of a degree program, in the form of a full-time workplace learning through an internship program. Although there is no sufficient evidence about graduates continued learning after graduation to ensure they remain employable. Findings from empirical literature emphasise that workplace learning for learners is important for human capital development, the performance of an organization and even countries (Malcolm et al., 2003, Devins and Reynolds, 2018).

In the field of education, the relevance of the curriculum should be reflected from the viewpoint of learners (Eagleton, 2015; Dachner and Polin, 2016). According to Kember et al. (2008), if the theory of relevance is not explicit, then learners may not be motivated to learn. The theoretical aspects therefore should be relevant to local cases that learners could relate to (Kember et al., 2008). Appropriate theoretical content enhances learning that is focused, contextualized, and situated, which help learners and the industry (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The need for relevant content is necessary for learners and graduate to become experts and competent in their chosen fields (Tynjälä, 2008). Stenström (2006) posits that most graduates believe their working-life skills are insufficient.

Freire (2006) emphasizes that as practice cannot negate theory, so also vice-versa. Their study supports the integration of theory with practice to avoid “theoretic elitism” (Freire, 2006). The integration of theory with practice enables learners use theoretical knowledge already acquired in the classrooms to create new knowledge. In addition, learners should be able to transform their practical experiences into knowledge (Freire, 2006).

The integration of experiential learning into formal learning, takes the view that employers should set objectives for HEIs (Malcolm et al., 2003). According to Tynjälä (2008), consultation with the workplace by HEIs to determine the needs of the industry is not happening. There is a disparity between the industry needs and what is offered through the HEIs (Tynjälä, 2008). Tynjälä (2008) states that HEIs could therefore benefit by assessing the industry needs, necessary to increase employability of

learners in the industry, in the future (Rainie and Anderson, 2017). According to Gordon (1999), through the assessment of industry needs, the societal expectations about the curricula and factors to achieving curricula goals can be determined.

Still, on consultation with the workplace by HEIs, Schomburg (2007) conducted a survey in Europe aimed to determine the conditions of graduate employability and the relationship between HEIs, the labour market, and the role competency in this relationship (Schomburg, 2007). The results of the survey established that standards had been determined by labour markets long before education structures were in place. Labour markets, therefore, play a crucial role in delivering inputs concerning formal learning content at higher institutions of learning to ensure that learners have the level of competency required in the labour market (Schomburg, 2007).

Studies such as Barth et al. (2007) and Strauss and Sawyer (1986) investigate the sustainability of competence development in higher education. There is, however, no consensus about the right combination for competency to ensure graduate employability in the labour market. There is a need to consider the contextual conditions for development of competence, to understand how it is developed and achieved (Ellström and Kock, 2008). Other studies such as García-Aracil and Van der Velden, (2008), Rychen and Salganik, (2003) agree that competencies are essential to becoming more employable, which can be attained through work experience, or informally. This implies the involvement of organizations in creating conditions that will enable learners to acquire competency.

There are many organizational benefits of integrating experiential learning with formal learning (Howard, 2018, Tynjälä, 2008, Coco, 2000). It provides organisations with the benefit of effectively creating a pool of skilled workers from which they can recruit full-time employees. Integrating formal learning with experiential learning implies collaboration between relevant stakeholders in higher education and the industry. Collaboration can be defined as people working together for a common goal (Tynjälä 2008). It has been identified as a factor that influences the integration between formal and experiential learning. HEIs and organisations need to collaborate to achieve the goal of ensuring that learners are work-ready after graduation, to ensure that there is the continuous development of learners' competence (Tynjälä, 2008).

2.4. What is Formal learning?

Formal learning is defined as theoretical knowledge acquired mainly in the classrooms such as schools, universities, and training centres (Devins and Reynolds, 2018, Hager, 2012). The training department defines the goals and objectives of the formal learning program. Formal learning can also be called structured learning or synchronous learning. Formal learning includes classroom instruction, web-based training, remote labs, e-learning courses, workshops, seminars, and webinars (Hager, 2012).

According to Hager (2012), this formal learning is intentional learning, and includes three basic features. Firstly, a specified curriculum which sets out relevant contents that is to be learned. Secondly, the specified curriculum is taught by an assigned instructor, teacher, or group of teachers. Lastly, the learning attainments of individual learner is assessed to show learners understanding of the content taught and certified in some way leading to degrees and certifications (Boud, 2007, Hager, 2012).

Boud (2007) proposed a structure of whether actual attendance at the higher institution of learning is necessary on helping learners achieve learning. Formal learning is a structured model, presenting a rigid curriculum, which correspond to rules and laws (Hager, 2012). In addition to the basic features of formal learning, to classify learning as formal, the training institutions must be formally accredited (Eraut, 2000). Formal learning is based on direct instruction from teachers to learners; also based on learners' engagement in different activities such as lectures, discussions, simulations, role-plays, among others (Enos, Kehrhahn, and Bell, 2003).

Thus, formal learning is based on specific learning objectives with pre-determined outcomes (Gerber, Marek, and Cavallo 2001). Structured learning takes place in formal educational institutions. It is therefore different from experiential learning that occurs in the workplace. Formal learning is relevant for experiential learning because to apply knowledge in practice, it must first be achieved formally.

2.5. Experiential learning as a form of learning

The experiential learning model, proposed by Lewin et al. (1939) and expanded by Kolb and Fry (1975), cites learning as a combined and active process of a four-stage cycle: (1) immediate concrete experience, (2) observations of this experience with data collection, which is then used in (3) data analysis and abstract summary, which provide feedback for (4) modification of choices in new experiences. It proposes that efficient learning happens when a learner performs all four stages of the model. The model functions on the basis that knowledge can be gained continuously through personal and environmental experiences.

Experiential learning is the opposite of formal learning, where the learners play a passive role by hearing, reading, or watching others' experiences, which helps learners adapt to the industry (Malcolm et al., 2003, Gadola and Chindamo, 2017). Some study fields like engineering have expressed experiential learning as "active learning, or hands-on learning" as a way for learners to establish their career in the field and engage with practice, due to the complexity in the field from rapid changes in technology and technology advancements (Ozek, 2018, Gadola and Chindamo, 2017). This implies the active role of the learner. Experiential learning plays a multidimensional significance, and Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) summarize its importance as follows:

- Experiential learning allows learners to experience concepts first-hand and, give learners a richer and meaningful understanding of theoretical concepts and its operation in the real world.
- It enhances the effective quality of the course content. This occurs when learners are engaged in problem-solving and are part of their work activities.
- It significantly improves learners' learning retention for concepts insofar as the information gets stored in long-term memory.

Experiential learning is defined as work-based learning, which follows an active and adaptive practical training process. Through this process, learners acquire relevant knowledge occurring informally in the workplace by transforming experience through perception, cognition, and behaviour (Karunaratne and Perera, 2019, Waite, 2018). Experiential learning is a response to the skills gap for more relevance of academic

institution programs in a dynamic and changing clothing and textile industry (Howard, 2018, Wood and Bischoff, 2019). Incorporating experiential learning in the form of internship into formal learning is vital to ensuring a holistic education system as a strategy for learners' employability after graduation since the industry prefers graduates with experience (Karunaratne and Perera, 2019, Ozek, 2018).

Dewey's model illustrates that a teacher organizes knowledge into smaller logical pieces. Experiences for learners are then facilitated according to their readiness. The end goal of these experiences is learning, which in turn leads to learner's readiness and knowledge. Similarly, Schon (1983) emphasises that the power of experiential learning is evident when learners conceptualise previously learned contents in new and different ways. This ideally happens in the workplace when people are given the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired through formal learning. Experiential learning takes place either in the work environment or a simulated work environment (Karunaratne and Perera, 2019, Waite, 2018). For the purpose of this study, experiential learning is considered as workplace learning. Formal education should be supplemented by workplace learning for it to be effective (Devins and Reynolds, 2018, Coco, 2000, Ellström and Kock, 2008).

2.6. Internships as part of formal learning

An internship is a temporary period of supervised work experience that allows learners to apply academic and theoretical knowledge to the actual work environment (Ozek, 2018). It enhances understanding of practical issues relevant to a particular study field (Emenheiser, 1981; Ozek, 2018). The temporary period of internship can take place at different times within the duration of the study program before the completion of the specific degree (Malcolm et al., 2003). The internship may be part-time or full-time, paid, or unpaid over the intern's learning duration (Ozek, 2018).

Internship eliminates the situation where graduates leave college knowing bits of everything but mastering none (Howard, 2018). Internship programs incorporated in higher institutional curricula allow learners to experience how the theory works in the actual work environment (Karunaratne and Perera, 2019). Many academic institutions have introduced internship programs into their academic curricula as a compulsory requirement for some degree programs in various countries (Ozek, 2018, Readh, 2019; Ayofe and Ajetola, 2009). For instance, Sri Lanka (Karunaratne and Perera,

2019), Turkey (Ozek, 2018), United States of America (Connell and Kozar, 2015). The benefit of internships in academic programs includes providing learners with an opportunity to relate theoretical knowledge to work situations for a clearer understanding of modules and courses in their respective field of study (Connell and Kozar, 2015, Emenheiser, 1981). It enables the development of a good partnership with the community and academic institutions. Internship programs allow academic institutions to provide occupational guidance to learners. This enables academic institutions to keep pace with the changing dynamics and developments in the industry that can shape the academic curriculum to develop industry skills (Emenheiser, 1981, Ozek, 2018).

Studies have shown that internship strengthens self-confidence and significantly increases the perception of preparedness among learners in the work learning process (Emenheiser, 1981, Karunaratne and Perera, 2019). In addition, an internship helps learners gain an increased sense of responsibility for their efforts, enhance attitudes and knowledge necessary for successful job performance, acquire good work habits, and increase learners' ability to work with other employees as a team (Bennett, 2019, Emenheiser, 1981). Internship programs enable learners to explore the field of interest to determine whether the chosen field is personally suitable (Emenheiser, 1981).

Every organisation aims to find the best-qualified person for each job, and retaining such employees helps companies reduce the cost of recruitment (Readh, 2019). Nevertheless, graduates' lack of employability may create a gap for recruiters to find qualified candidates to meet the industry's demands (Howard, 2018). Ways organisations breach the skills gap include training existing staff and accepting learners for an internship within the academia-industry partnership (Howard, 2018, Readh, 2019). Internship benefits the industry by providing and maintaining a supply of potential skilled employees by providing job training for future employees (Henderson and Trede, 2017; Ozek, 2018). The internship attracts young learners enabling employers to access the needed creativity needed and get acquainted with the learners to know their future employment capabilities.

In earlier studies such as Emenheiser (1981)'s survey in the clothing and textile industry, employers responded that they are willing to work with learners in their internship programs. These employers were unwilling to supervise learners to give

such learners full practical training needed within the internship period. Adequate supervision during the internship period helps learners develop their capabilities for successive experiential learning outcomes (Henderson and Trede, 2017).

Karunaratne and Perera (2019) examine the learner perception of the effectiveness of internship programs using a case study approach for programs offered in the department of textile at a university in Sri Lanka. They found that learners did not rate their experiential learning as good or excellent. Their findings show that the internship programs were not helpful in acquiring skills and knowledge. Their study calls for further improvements in internship programs between the education sector and the industry for the effectiveness of experiential learning (Karunaratne and Perera, 2019). Similarly, Ozek (2018) in a study on learner-interns in Turkey concluded that experiential learning success depends on the availability of well-structured internship programs and cooperative education program models with the community and academic institutions. These are all part of the challenges of integration of experiential learning into formal learning.

2.7. What is employability?

Employability is diversely defined. Okafor (2015) defines it as that which HEIs does to enhance its curricula to create social networks and work habits that would benefit learners. On the other hand, the Confederation of British Industry CBI (1999) defines employability as a set of skills, and knowledge that people seeking employment should have to ensure their capability of effectiveness in the workplace for the benefit of the employee, their employer, and the economy.

The historical advancement of the employability concept dates to 1988 when Gazier described seven functioning concepts of employability: dichotomic, socio-medical, manpower, flow, labour market performance, initiative, and interactive employability (Misra, 2017). Currently, labour market performance stresses the need to do well and pace up with the changes in the market. On the other hand, initiative employability explicates the challenges in looking for prospects in an unpredictable job market. Likewise, interactive employability summarizes the emphasis on the interaction of personal attributes, changing circumstances, and the labour market.

Employability is more than just securing jobs by graduates in the labour market, but it also about the graduate being able to utilize what they have learned (Bennett, 2018). It is a key measure of learner lifetime success that focusses beyond academic grade achievement (Bringle et al., 2010). Generally, employability skills are classified into field-specific, generic, or transferable. Employability of learners requires an all-inclusive approach, such as integrating discipline-related theoretical concepts and industry experience to increase employability of graduates (Wolff and Booth, 2018).

2.7.1. The relationship between education and employability

Various scholars have alluded that the transformational nature of the global value chain is broadening the gap between the knowledge gained by graduates and the skills required by the work industry (Andrews and Higson, 2008 Ayofe and Ajetola, 2009). This gap has led to a growing debate on the responsibilities of all stakeholders implicated in the procurement of skills. In contrast to this, Eddie et al. (2014) state that employers often complain that graduates are not work-ready. This is because the labour market expects that higher education prepares learners and develops their employability skills. Contrarily, HEIs argue that delivering the relevant set of skills and attributes is not the responsibility of higher education (Alowayr and McCrindle, 2016, Bexley et al., 2013).

Pavlin (2014) posits that “the development of competencies for sustainable employability requires a three-tier commitment by stakeholders.” This denotes the compatibility of the individual, the education system, and professional destinations. The higher education sector is vital in promoting employability and ensuring the nation’s economic development (Cloete, 2014). The South African economy is not performing well in 2022 as it is greatly impacted by the high unemployment rate, making job creation hard (Letseka and Cosser, 2010). Like many regimes globally, the South African government increased the pressure on the higher education sector to play its part in preparing learners for a highly skilled and competitive environment to improve economic development (Cloete, 2014).

A study conducted by Allais and Nathan (2014) examined the interrelation between education and work in South Africa. The study explored theories that aimed to explain the link between the labour market, including human capital theory, education as a positional good, education as a proxy for trainability, education as a legitimized means

for social inclusion and exclusion, and more recently, the idea of the global auction, as well as the idea of the educational transformation of work. It was found that most graduates of Universities of Technology are struggling to obtain job placements. Employers are vocal about their need for skilled employees and are part of skills development dispensation that encourages internships and work placements.

However, Motala and Vally (2014) puts forward a very provoking view on rethinking the relationship between education, skills, and employment. The study stated that accepting the relationship between education and training and economy, and the idea that higher education has a defining role in promoting individual economic capability and national economic performances, requires critical reflection. The role and the purpose of universities are understood through the crude and uninformed formulation of many business leaders, experts, economists, and even some of the higher education leaders and academics.

The government introduced different legislation and direct investments in the education sector (Cloete, 2014, Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). Yet, employers' express concerns are that graduates lack knowledge and skills (Manenzhe, 2018, Beddie et al., 2014). Harvey (2000) argues that the relationship between academia and labour market, should not be perceived as an "apologist for anti-intellectualism", which may void academic freedom. Harvey (2000) proposes that the training of learners in HEIs, should be for jobs instead of than improving the learners' minds. This is important in ensuring that learners are well equipped and apply industry-needed skills.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), in partnership with Higher Education South Africa (HESA), performed a nation-wide study on graduates in South Africa, from an employer's perspective (Griesel and Parker, 2009). Based on their findings, employability is influenced by four inter-related components. Firstly, skilful practices (communication, management of time, self and resources, problem-solving and lifelong learning). Secondly, specialized expertise in a field of knowledge. Thirdly, confidence about personal identity and self-worth. Lastly, metacognition (self-awareness and the capability to reflect on, in and for action) (Griesel and Parker, 2009). At the same time, learners must be willing to learn, develop, bring innovative

concepts, and contribute to the growth and accomplishment of organizational aspirations.

Academic skills are a prerequisite requirement for employers. Apart from academic qualifications, employers look for work experience (Botes and Sharma, 2017). For instance, a study survey of 400 organizations from different countries, which was carried out by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, (NACE, 2016), found that three out of ten employers considered fresh graduates to have capacity to apply their skills and knowledge in the work environment.

Contrary to Harvey (2000), Manpower (2012) proposes that the government should play a catalyst in national skills development creation plans. Deliberations need to involve relevant multi-stakeholders and ensure that educators, organisations, and learners play appropriate roles in creating a skilled and dynamic workforce. On the other hand, Walker and Fongwa (2017) advocate for core curriculum and educational methods that clearly prepare graduates to participate efficiently in the South African environment of inequality and poverty. Lourens and Fourie-Malherbe (2018) investigate the factors that determine the professional success of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Their study finds that learners need to acknowledge the importance of developing a strong graduate profile, consciously build the profile from their final years in college and perform well academically throughout their time at university. It expands the point that learner should also develop a broad range of attributes through extra-curricular involvement and strengthening their social networks (Lourens and Fourie-Malherbe, 2018).

2.7.2. How do formal learning and experiential learning facilitate employability?

The unemployment rate in South Africa averaged 35.7 percent in the fourth quarter in 2021 compared to 24.68 percent in 2010 (Statistics South Africa, 2022). In terms of employment growth and creating new jobs, the South African economy is non-performing. The composition of employed persons with higher education qualification is highest among the white and Indian population groups (Statistics South Africa, 2017). Among which, 47.3 percent are whites, 29.7 percent of the employed persons with higher education qualification are Indians. While black and coloured population

groups are 16.2 percent and 13.3 percent, respectively (Statistics South Africa, 2017). In 2015 and 2016, more than 50 percent of the employed black and coloured population group have education qualifications less than matric.

Similarly, Bennett (2018) finds that there is unequal employability for disadvantaged learners even years after graduation from higher education, in Australia. Bennett (2018) called for government policies to redress the inequality. In South Africa, blacks have less employment due to lower education levels. However, unemployment is less as more people have higher education (Manenzhe, 2018). Higher education is responsible for preparing learners as skilled employees for future employment in the era of rapid technological changes, skills shortages, a shrinking and aging workforce (Griesel and Parker 2009). Due to the rapid technological changes and shifts in the labour market dynamics and requirements, it takes a completed higher education degree to escape unemployment in South Africa (Manenzhe, 2018). The South African higher education sector is gradually and increasingly becoming aware of having a more seamless interface between HEIs and the workplace (Chetty 2012).

According to Harvey (2000), the new reality for HEIs in a fast-changing world is responsiveness. Employers expect the higher education system to equip learners with the basic skills needed to be work-ready and add value to the workplace (Brennan & Little 2010). De Weert (2011) and Sastry and Bekhradnia (2007) suggest that employers have a responsibility to equip learners with the necessary skills to function effectively at the workplace. Employers can transfer skills through programs such as work placements, work-based learning, and internships Employer engagement with the higher education institutions could provide better skills planning because the modules offered could be aligned to the needs of the employer.

2.8. What is work readiness?

Caballero et al. (2011) caution that the work-readiness construct is still at its conception stage. For this reason, there is no clear definition for work readiness. To complicate the situation, Raftopoulos et al. (2009) provides different constructs for work readiness, including employment ability, employment readiness, workforce readiness, work preparedness, ready to work, among others.

2.8.1. How does formal learning impact the work readiness of individuals

Employability of learners after graduation is not at the core of higher education curricula (Bennett, 2018). Higher institutions are partly responsible for instilling employability skills in graduates before they enter the labour market (Griesel and Parker 2009). The necessary skills needed for work-readiness mainly acquired through higher education include research skills, concepts, problem-solving skills, managing complex information and critical thinking (CBI 2009) (Bennett, 2018).

Higher education provides opportunities to transfer soft skills such as self-management, numeracy, communication and literacy, teamwork, decision making, business and customer awareness (Young, 2013). Soft skills are not taught but transfer of such soft skills is typically relevant when higher education systems have competency-oriented academic programs in the curriculum. Then use knowledge transfer partnerships (KTPs) with employers to enhance learners' employability skills (Young, 2013). In formal learning, class assignments, tests, and presentations are different methods to assess learners' understanding of concepts in the classroom. According to Zulauf (2006), these assessments may be supplemented with internships to assess work-readiness of learners.

2.8.2. How does experiential learning facilitate work readiness?

According to Ngcobo and Govender (2015), organisations have realised that skilled labour benefits firms and the economy. It is important that learners are appropriately trained and work-ready for tasks and responsibilities in the workplace. Experiential learning exposes learners to the work environment, which prepares their minds for employment after graduation. This improves their self-confidence. The internship period exposes learners to the necessary skills required to be acquired for employability after graduation, thus, give learners ample opportunities to focus in areas they know they are lacking to enhance their employability after graduation (Howard, 2018). The exposure to work environment during the undergraduate period, fosters innovative capacity and metacognitive knowledge of learners, which facilitates work-readiness of learners (Bennett, 2018).

2.9. The South African labour market

Like other markets in the world, the South African labour market consists of a supply and demand side (StatsSA, 2009). The supply side of the labour market consist of the economically active and working-age population either skilled or unskilled, employed, or unemployed. The demand side of the labour market include organisations, businesses, and the government (StatsSA, 2009). For the supply side, the South African labour market is characterised with a high percentage of low-skilled labour and a small percentage of skilled labour (Mosomi and Wittenberg, 2020).

For skilled labour in South Africa, there has been an increase in the number of graduates since 2000 (Fisher and Scott, 2011). Given the background of the South African labour market and mismatches in skills, an increase in graduates means an increase in the unemployment of graduates (Fourie-Malherbe, 2021, Ndlovu and Ndebele, 2019). The South African labour market is not creating enough jobs to absorb the increase in the number of new graduates or to fill for existing job losses (BusinessTech, 2022). The 2007/08 financial crisis negatively affected the labour market, and the employment growth rate has not recovered ever since (Mosomi and Wittenberg, 2020).

Another reason for the rise in unemployment is the influx of cheap products from China, especially in the clothing and textile industry, which reduced the industry's production capacities and output as most businesses could not compete favourably on cost (Manenzhe, 2018, Wood and Bischoff, 2019).

South Africa's racially divided past, impacted different aspect of life, including the labour market and the education system (Mzangwa, 2019). These inequalities are being tackled with government interventions using policies for equal opportunities for jobs in the labour market and access to education for all the population groups. These policies are yet to yield the desired impact in terms of reducing inequality. (Mosomi and Wittenberg, 2020). While access to education is gradually converging across the racial groups, the previously disadvantaged (blacks and coloured) remain the most severely affected by high unemployment. According to Mosomi and Wittenberg (2020), it is unlikely that the current labour market will significantly reduce unemployment in the country in the next decade.

The South African labour market calls for a shift to be work creators rather than looking for employment. Young graduates need to be encouraged to invest in self-generating initiatives for sustainability and to address the high unemployment rate in South Africa.

2.9.1. The skills needed for the labour market in South Africa

Skills are defined as the knowledge and capabilities to perform certain tasks according to expertise and competencies (Heidary et al., 2018). Employers seek candidates who have practical experience, which could be gained informally through internships for new graduates (Wood and Bischoff, 2019; Hansen, 2017). The clothing and textile industry in the 18th century was the main industry of the first industrial revolution in the European countries (ILO, 2019). The industry has been a labour-intensive and a powerhouse for employment generation, particularly low-skilled workers (Emenheiser, 1981). By the 1980s with the rise in globalisation, firms in the developed countries moved their production hub to the developing countries with low labour and low manufacturing costs, which such developing countries have also benefited through exports (ILO, 2019).

Globalisation, technological changes, and advancements, changing nature of the industries, among other factors, are shaping the labour-intensive industry, requiring less low-skilled labour and more skilled labour, which is also a challenge for the South African industry (FP&M SETA, 2014). Skilled labour has become scarce and critical (FP&M SETA, 2014). For instance, design skill is very scarce in the South African clothing and textile industry (FP&M SETA, 2014, FP&M SETA, 2017). Design in footwear, clothing, textiles, furniture, and textiles are key drivers of sales growth and competitiveness of firms in the industry. Other skills needed that are scarce include patternmakers, materials engineer technologists, product assemblers, machinists. Critical skills jobs require problem-solving skills and critical thinking. These jobs include patternmaking, information technologist, operation management, sales, and marketing (FP&M SETA, 2014).

Skills deficit was identified as an intrinsic to the achievement of democratic development state post-apartheid. The DHET saw an opportunity to respond to skills shortages, youth exclusion and the inverted pyramid of post-school provisioning which continued the skewed enrolment pattern of higher university enrolment (Akoojee,

2012). In this context, higher learning institutions are relevant to developing problem-solving and critical thinking (Bennett, 2018). At the same time, the workplace skills in high demand are communication, teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, initiative, and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management, learning, and technology (Brown, 2013; Harvey, 2000). These skills continue to be relevant across different fields and economic sectors (Bowley, 2018). These work-skills in high demand are also classed as soft skills (Bowley, 2018). The soft skills also in high demand according to a survey of 2000 business leaders include leadership, strategy, management, collaboration, and time management (Bowley, 2018). Workplace skills development can be achieved through internships and workplace learning (FP&M SETA, 2020).

These skills development is relevant for learners' employability after graduation (Griesel and Parker 2009). For instance, a graduate with interactive ability can communicate effectively (formally and informally). The person is comfortable working with people at all levels in the organization, work effectively in teams, and flexible to switch roles from one project situation to another (Brits, 2018). Raftopoulos et al., (2009) state that skills development has become important around the world as governments and organisations compete to attract, develop, and retain workers that are good and highly skilled. In this context, employees are critical in creating competitive edge for organisations. Skills development is therefore a key factor for the survival of organisations and economic growth (Oosthuizen and Kara 2008). This competition for skills in the labour market has escalated to the employment of graduates in organizations where graduates are now required to produce qualifications and couple them with skills necessary for the labour market (Oviawe and Uwameiye, 2020). Internship facilitates the development of such skills (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, FP&M SETA, 2020).

However, it has been argued by Allais (2013) that studies of global employer preferences have not found that technical skills were the most desired in the workplace. Rather, of the skills ranked as most important across all studies, more than 50% were socio-emotional skills, 29,7% were higher-order cognitive, and 12,7% were technical. Socio-emotional skills were ranked as the most important in almost all countries examined. While the study did not cover South Africa, it nonetheless holds

some implications for South Africa. There is the general point made earlier, that many of the skills employers thought of as contributing to the job-readiness of graduates could be classified as socio-emotional or higher cognitive.

This suggests that a narrow focus on giving learners technical skills will not necessarily make them more attractive in the job market, nor allow them to meet the needs of employers. If international experience is to guide South Africa, education should be focusing on a rounded array of skills. Technical skills are clearly important, and there are definitely low levels of these skills in South Africa. However, there are extremely low levels of general skills as well. The poor quality of South Africa's education system is well known (Allais, 2013).

2.10. Policies addressing higher education and experiential learning programs

Over the years, institutions of higher learning have become a catalyst in producing high-level research but seem unable to prepare graduates for employment in the labour market (Akor, 2008, Alowayr and McCrindle, 2016). As a result, there is an increase in the literature on higher education and policy on graduates' absorption into the labour market. Various studies (Artess et al., 2017, Beddie et al., 2014, Boud, 2007, Bowley, 2018) suggest a close relationship between government and institutions of higher learning needs to be developed to ensure the use of the high-level research and policy discourse to formulate an effective strategy for graduate employment.

Graduates recognize government initiatives such as internships and graduate programs to assist graduates with skills and work experience (Beddie et al., 2014). However, the number of graduates without employment continues to grow, suggesting loopholes in the government initiatives. Some studies (Andrews and Higson, 2008, Kock and Ellström, 2011, Teijeiro et al., 2013) argue that internships offered for only 12 months are not effective enough in ensuring the competitiveness and employability of graduates. These studies call for an extension of the internship period to help graduates gain the work experience required for entry-level positions in the labour market and an increase in the number of internships each department offers annually. Ngcobo and Govender (2015) suggest that the internship period should be more than one year as many employers require at least three years of work experience. This reveals that experiential learning remains an important factor for skills development.

There is the need for partnership between South African higher education institutions, government, and employers, to address the skills shortage-related issues in the country.

2.10.1. South African higher education and its policy efforts that consider the needs of society and industries

Government involvement in higher education in South Africa is a public policy effort, to correct the inadequacies that were inherent in the higher education system during the apartheid era (Akor, 2008). The purpose is to equalise opportunities, particularly for people that were previously disadvantaged due to segregation policies before 1994 in the apartheid era (Mzangwa, 2019). The advocacy for equity and wider participation in higher education through policies aim to set the higher education landscape in South Africa on a path of growth and development (Akor, 2008). Also, to advance education and skills (Mzangwa, 2019). Yet these policies have not delivered its purpose (Cloete, 2014).

Policy implementation in the South African higher education sector since 1994 has been difficult because of a lack of unanimity around the new higher education policies (Mzangwa, 2019). Due to competing ideas, the interpretation of the policies over the modalities for transforming higher education and poor implementation of the policies (Mzangwa, 2019). Commissions and statutory bodies were established to oversee the implementation of the higher education policy priorities, such as the National Higher Education Commission, DHE, and others (Mzangwa, 2019). The priority of the policy is equity access to higher education. South Africa is a rainbow country with different groups of whites, coloured, Indians and blacks. According to a study from the US, blacks are not expected to progress or complete higher education compared to whites.

The apartheid regime created a wide social gap among the population groups in South Africa, making it difficult for blacks to access higher education up to the 1980s (Mzangwa, 2019). Thus, restructuring the higher education system in South Africa reflects the global trends in higher education. The South African educational policies and legislations have, in many cases, been adapted from international best practices. Although altered to suit the South African developmental context (Cloete, 2014). In the

development of higher educational structures internationally, two trends is observed. First, governments attempt to get more involved in higher education. Secondly, there is the decreasing funding to support to higher education from governments (Mzangwa, 2019). Although government and HEIs are pulled apart by their separate desires for institutional autonomy. At the same, they also find themselves in a closer alliance for common goals to serve the economic interests of their countries. HEIs are important for socio-development and form part of stimulating economic prosperity (Mzangwa, 2019, Malcolm et al., 2003).

2.11. The purpose of internships

The purpose of internships is for learners to get work experience during their undergraduate degree programs. It gives learners the opportunity to apply theoretical concepts learned in the classroom practically; and build professional networks (Ozek, 2018). There are many and varying career opportunities in the clothing and textile industry, many of which need specialised training (Emenheiser, 1981). Graduates with degrees should be able to transition into the industry. Many graduates are not aware of the different jobs available in the industry and possible limitations in the field (Emenheiser, 1981).

Internship therefore provides learners before graduation with opportunities to develop their abilities and connect with real jobs that fit their personal abilities (Emenheiser, 1981, Devins and Reynolds, 2018). It bridges a gap between the learner's career path and employability (Kamaul et al., 2013). Such programs in South Africa are regarded as practical programs aimed at helping learners with the continuous development. Internship forms part of a learner's career development, and it is a required part of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula in South Africa, being completed within a specific semester during the study program (Allais et al., 2021). Internships provide valued work experience under the guidance of a mentor at the workplace (Devins and Reynolds, 2018). An intern can achieve their own learning goals, either short or long-term, while getting a feel of the industry.

The Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD) recognises that combining internships with formal learning facilitates young learners' easy

transition from HEIs into the labour market (Devins and Reynolds, 2018). North American technical high schools and community college curriculum structure centres on internships. The practical experience component of their curriculum makes learning real. Internships are based on sound education and philosophical bases (Devins and Reynolds, 2018).

Internships are recognised in different disciplines, such as accounting and engineering, which are meaningful for learners, learners to advance their academic programs, and necessary skills to transition into the labour market (Ozek, 2018, McCarthy, 2016, Gadola and Chindamo, 2017).

The success of an internship depends on its design (Ozek, 2018). Succinctly, the Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998, and the National Skills Development Strategy 1 of 2005 (Department of Labour 2007), promotes the use of internships as an effective tool to enhance employability of learners and their career development. It can be postulated that mentorship, learning and assessment plans, in-house training, and short courses are components of the internship program.

2.12. What are SETAs?

Many unemployed South Africans lack set of skills for absorption into the labour market (Mobarak, 2019). As a result, education, training, and skills development are relevant (education SETA South Africa, 2014). Before establishing the Sector Education and Training Authorities, (SETAs), there were 33 industry training boards in South Africa in different economic areas (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). The industry training boards were responsible for education and training; however, their focus, was on apprenticeships (Rensburg et al., 2012).

Apprenticeships were inadequate to meet up with the quantity and quality of skills demand in the country. A shortage of skills to match the demands of the industries led the South African government to revolutionize, which led to the introduction of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (Kruss et al., 2014). The act establishes the Sector and Education Training Authorities (SETA). SETAs were established in early 2000 to bridge the gap between education and work (Kruss et al., 2014, Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). SETAs play an oversight role, ensuring the quality assurance of education and training programs and finance the provision of skills for all economic

sectors through mandatory and discretionary grant disbursement (education SETA South Africa, 2014).

According to the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998, the SETAs are to make abilities advancement accessible in work environments, particularly for already disadvantaged individuals, including blacks, women, and individuals with disabilities and to enhance the nature of formal instruction to get learners ready for work (RSA, 1998).

The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999, the Skills Development Amendment Act 26 of 2011, and the National Skills Development Strategy III of 2011 are the legislative frameworks guiding the roles of SETAs. SETAs were originally reporting to the National Department of Labour. From 2009, SETAs work closely with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). There are twenty-one SETAs to cover the nation's economic regions to assess skills needs in each sector and guarantee skills development programs to breach the skills gap.

2.12.1. The role of SETA internships programs in the clothing and textile industry in South Africa

The South African clothing and textile industry declined in productivity, competition, falling export share, and significant job losses (Boucher, 2020). South African clothing and textile industry is dominated by unskilled and semi-skilled labour. In developed economies such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom, skilled labour has been identified as a critical factor in developing the industry, which provides such countries with efficient value chain processes and competitive advantage (Morris and Reed, 2008). Consequently, South Africa needs to increase skills in the clothing and textile industry (Morris and Reed, 2008; Ngcobo and Govender, 2015).

This led to the establishment of SETAs to produce enough right level skills in each South African sector that skills have been recognized as critical in line with the Skills Development Act of 1998 (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, Rensburg et al., 2012, Visser and Kruss, 2009), also, to promote competition, economic growth, and development in the country.

The Clothing, Textile, Footwear, and Leather (CTFL) SETA is the relevant training authority for the Clothing and Textile industry. The Skills Development Act of 1998 encourages firms to partner with SETA and other public and private training providers to promote experiential learning programs through internships to reduce the skills gap (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015, Rensburg et al., 2012). There is a shortage of trainers and mentors across the CTFL sector (FP&M SETA, 2017). Formal tertiary institutions' support to produce graduate learners for the clothing and textile industry has been limited in South Africa (Morris and Reed, 2008). There are over 25 public universities in South Africa, only five tertiary institutions have the clothing and textile industry support, while SETA supports three formal tertiary institutions such as the Durban University of Technology, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and University of Johannesburg (Morris and Reed, 2008). Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges train learners in a skilled trade; however, they are underutilized due to inadequate resources and the perception of poor-quality training (FP&M SETA, 2017). There is a gap in the formal learning institutions to fill the relevant skilled gap needed in the dynamic and changing clothing and textile industry.

The SETA aims to reduce the skills gap in the clothing and textile industry, implementing effective learning programs and skills planning to improve the industry's productivity (Morris and Reed, 2008, Rensburg et al., 2012). SETA develops new skills plans, training of artisans, and production management training programs to bridge the industry skills gap across entry, mid or high-level jobs using vocational and occupational certification via apprenticeship and leadership programs. Despite all these efforts, SETA's effectiveness is highly uneven and lacks credibility among manufacturers in the industry (Morris and Reed, 2008).

This was supported by Ngcobo and Govender (2015)'s study, where only about a 46 percent of the study respondents knew about SETA. Only eight percent of respondents agree that SETA addresses the skills shortage (Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). High unemployment among the learners and apprenticeships from the SETA programs (Morris and Reed, 2008, Ngcobo and Govender, 2015). There is also reduced enrolment into the tertiary institutions for the clothing and textile programs (FP&M SETA, 2017; Morris and Reed, 2008). In this context, many firms either train their unskilled staff to fill higher job positions or import skills from abroad.

To achieve the SETA aim, targets were set for the enrolment of learners into CTFL programs, although the number of learnership registration decreased over the years. Nevertheless, the targets set by SETA were achieved in the number of registration and completion of learnerships. The qualities of the skills these graduates possess were questioned by employers (Rensburg et al., 2012). The reason that SETAs have suffered failures such as inefficient management due to bureaucratic systems, inadequate information on learner needs, firm demands, and lack of capacity to conduct skills planning (Rensburg et al., 2012).

Skills development is relevant to place South Africa as a key player in a globally competitive environment. A continual decline in the number of apprentices and the apprenticeship system's limited reach led to the development of the modern learnership system in 2001 under National Skills Development Strategy 1 (NSDS1) (Rensburg et al., 2012, Visser and Kruss, 2009). The new learnership system aimed to provide workplace learning in the form of internships incorporated into institutional learning academic programs (Rensburg et al., 2012, Visser and Kruss, 2009). To enhance the quality of learner skills to become employable rather than theoretical knowledge (Visser and Kruss, 2009).

The new learnership system differs from the apprenticeship system. The learnership incorporates internships (structured workplace learning) into formal learning in academic institutions to obtain a recognizable occupational qualification (Rensburg et al., 2012). Learnership operates at all skills levels such as high (NQF levels 5 to 8), intermediate or artisanal skills level (NQF level 4), and basic skills levels (NQF levels 1 to 3) (Rensburg et al., 2012, Visser and Kruss, 2009). To achieve sustainable growth in the clothing and textile industry, South Africa requires a multi-prolonged skills development strategy targeting high, intermediate, and low-level skills concurrently in differential ways (Visser and Kruss, 2009).

This implies that a single intervention mechanism, such as SETA does not yield sufficient growth and development outcomes in the labour-intensive market. It is argued that the new learnership system could create an imbalance in the demand for skills between the basic, intermediate, and high skills levels. In particular, where there is an over-emphasis on skills development at the basic skills level, which could create more unemployment for basic skills learners.

In developing countries such as Pakistan, Kenya, and Ghana, including South Africa, poverty is associated with a lack of appropriate employability skills (Kamaul et al., 2013). Lack of finance to pursue educational training for skills acquisition contribute to skills imbalance where learners pursue basic skills programs for low-skilled entry-level jobs. SETA's learners' enrolment has shifted, with African representation increasing to over 62 percent across all industries (FP&M SETA, 2017; Visser and Kruss, 2009). While the proportion of other races, such as white and Indian learners declined and coloured learners stayed at 13 percent (FP&M SETA, 2017; Visser & Kruss, 2009). The distribution of learners by race in the learnership system for the clothing and textile industry is majorly coloured. According to Visser and Kruss (2009), this reflects old occupational patterns where the clothing and textile industry are traditionally known for its large employment of coloured workers.

2.12.2. Challenges faced by SETAs

A study examined by Kraak (2007), evaluated the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) initiated by SETA and found that the programme has been faced with challenges including lack of political will to ensure the success of the integrated approach to education and training formally adopted in South Africa; severe governance problems with regard to the management of SETAs, including financial mismanagement and fraud; and lastly, a multitude of operational problems, making the rollout of the NSDS an extremely difficult and complex task. Therefore, SETAs have had uneven levels of success in skills development and training and have been undergoing a process defined by Marock, Harrison-Train, Soobrayan and Gunthorpe (2008) as 'institution building with a focus on improved co-ordination and delivery.

2.13. The textile sector and its importance in the history of this country's development

The clothing and textile industry is a service-oriented industry that provides various services to different clients in different ways for fabrics, apparel, and garments with a skilled workforce (Readh, 2019, Emenheiser, 1981). The clothing and textile industry is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, with a huge domestic and increasing export market arising from a growing population, fast fashion, and rising income levels. It is also an important industry for a country in the long run by providing

a sustainable source of earnings, foreign investments, stable growth, and developments (Manenzhe, 2018). This industry is a major part of manufacturing production sectors, generate employment, and trade in many developing countries (Manenzhe, 2018).

In South Africa, the clothing and textile industry saw an increase in production in 1997 before falling sharply and employment has fallen ever since (Manenzhe, 2018). Output has been on decline since the mid-1990s, arising from low domestic demand, cheap influx of Chinese clothing and textile products (Manenzhe, 2018).

The South African clothing and textile industry's role in the country's general economy is crucial both as an employer of the population and for economic growth (FP&M SETA, 2017). Due to the impact of Covid-19 affecting global trade, there are plans to revive the industry where retailers source locally made products.

A mismatch between the skills demanded by employers and those which the employees actually use in doing their work in the clothing and textile sector. For example, Baatjes (2014) reported on a textile factory study which showed incongruence between the skills which the employer expected graduates/employees to have at the point of recruitment and the competencies the employees needed in performing their tasks after being hired. The study therefore slams the current discourse on students and graduates learning, the skills shortage, unemployment and unemployability in South Africa for paying too much attention to credentialism at the expense of a more critical analysis of the structural and historical social context in which these problems are manifesting themselves. Accordingly, the lack of a skilled workforce can affect the growth of the clothing and textile industry. Therefore, this study investigates the integration of experiential learning into formal learning as a facilitative mechanism for employability.

2.14. Conclusion

The literature on formal learning and experiential learning has increased since the 1980s (Waite, 2018, Karunaratne and Perera, 2019, Bennett, 2018). Yet, certain challenges remain for formal learning as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness for learners. There is no consensus in the literature about the

integration of experiential learning into formal learning. Literature suggests e-learning for experiential learning, and another suggest multiple short periods incorporated into the curricula of HEIs. The literature identifies that experiential learning benefits skills development and facilitates economic growth. Yet, challenges remain about facilitating experiential learning such as employers' collaboration among others. This chapter discussed the importance of the clothing and textile industry in South African development. The next chapter presents the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER 3

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology to be adopted in this research project in order to investigate how formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internships can be facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness amongst DUT learners and graduates in the clothing and textile SETA program. The chapter starts with introducing the research paradigm, highlighting the research approach and method, followed by the location of the study, as well as the research instrument, and how the participants were chosen. It also presents the techniques to analyse the data, the justification for using the techniques, and the ethical considerations.

3.2. Research paradigm

Cohen et al (2011) define a research paradigm as a way of pursuing knowledge, that is based on principles guiding researcher as to phenomena or problems that are worth researching, including what the best research method would be. There are two research views in the social sciences according to Bryman, (2012) and Cohen et al (2011). The first view is the positivist or the established traditional view. This view is also the same as the natural sciences. The positivist view is concerned with discovering the natural and universal laws that regulate and determine the individual and social behaviour (Cohen et al 2011). The second, is the interpretive view. It emphasizes how people differ from inanimate natural phenomena, and different from each other (Cohen et al 2011). While this current study may be interpretive in its nature, it ascribes to social constructivism as a paradigm. Social constructivism emphasise that learning is a social process, which occurs through social interaction with people or when people engage in social activities (Beaumie, 2006).

3.3. Research Method

This study adopts qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is employed by a researcher, who is trying to understand the meanings people assign to a particular problem (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is any type of research with its findings not arrived at by statistical procedures (Rahman, 2017). Qualitative research involves non-numerical data (Rahman, 2017). The words or texts obtained from qualitative methods can be converted into numerical using content analysis and then analysed using quantitative analysis. Qualitative research involves a wide range of goals, audiences, and methodologies (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Given that historical roots may run deep in the psychoanalytic tradition, qualitative research usually studies human motivation through the understanding of perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes (Denzin, 2001, Rahman, 2017).

Qualitative research can be associated with an interpretive view or philosophy because researchers try to seek meaning of the subjective and social constructs expressed by the participants in the research about the phenomenon being studied (Rahman, 2017, Gephart Jr, 2018). Social constructionism shows that partially shared meanings and realities depend on people's interpretation of the events around them (Beaumie, 2006). In qualitative research, because meanings depend on social interaction, therefore, qualitative data may likely be more varied, elastic, and complex than quantitative data. As a result, some weaknesses of qualitative data are smaller sample sizes and time-consuming (Rahman, 2017).

Qualitative research involves a dynamic researcher who must be skilled to ask, listen and understand respondents' non-verbal language. A good researcher/interviewer is trained to watch for opportunities to probe or dig deeper into their ideas. Qualitative research is subjective because it is based on human observation and interactions, generating new knowledge into the existing store of knowledge. This study, therefore, takes the form of a qualitative approach to assessing the impact of internships and work experience in the clothing industry.

3.4. Population and Sample

A sample is a small part of a group that is used as a data source during an investigation, and the findings can be adopted to describe the group as a whole (Cohen et al, 2011). A sample is a representation of the target population (Robinson, 2014). Sampling is a central practice in qualitative research studies (Robinson, 2014). Since it is not practical to survey the views of all clothing accredited training providers implementing an internship and work experience program, the researcher opts to focus on a prominent clothing manufacturing organisation that is convenient for the researcher.

3.5. Sampling Size

In the ZA Gear clothing company, eight (8) employees were selected for the study. Five (5) respondents are learners currently on the company's internship and work experience programs. The remaining three (3) respondents are ZA Gear supervisors overseeing these learners while on the program. Also, for reporting, two (2) employees from FP&M SETA, namely the KZN Regional Manager and the General Manager were interviewed. The study is about formal learning and experiential learning. Therefore, data was sourced from a higher institution of learning. One (1) recruitment agent from Malitinne Placement recruitment, four (4) lecturers and fifteen (15) students of the clothing and textile departments of DUT. Five (5) students¹ were selected from first, second and third academic levels of the clothing and textile department at DUT, totalling fifteen students. The total sample size is thirty (30) respondents for the study.

3.5.1. Sampling design and technique

There are different sampling techniques available for a researcher to use when recruiting participants. This includes random, stratified, quota, snowball, convenience, and purposeful sampling (Robinson, 2014). Random sampling is the selection of participants using a random sampling procedure from a population. According to Robinson (2014), studies that claim to use random sampling methods for sample selection usually do not. Instead, they source potential participants who are

¹ Students refers to learners in higher institutions either in first, second or third year of their study

convenient, in their proximity, and willing to participate. This is called convenience sampling.

The chosen sampling method for this study is convenience sampling, which is a sampling technique used in qualitative research to recruit easily accessible and convenient participants. The recruited participants must also meet some required criteria relating to the subject area as specified by the researcher (Robinson, 2014, Etikan et al., 2016). The criteria may include utilizing geographic location and resources that make participant recruitment convenient (Robinson, 2014). In this study, convenience sampling methods are utilized. The justification for using convenience sampling within a geographical location is that the case study research conducted for this study particularly looks at KwaZulu-Natal and its surrounding areas. In addition, KwaZulu-Natal was selected for this study because it is the second-largest province for the clothing sector in South Africa after the Western cape (Ramdass and Kruger, 2011, Manenzhe, 2018).

Convenience sampling technique enable researchers to recruit participants that can provide in-depth information about the subject matter under investigation (Etikan et al., 2016). It is highly subjective and determined by the researcher's need for information (Hox and Boeije, 2005). One (1) clothing manufacturing firm, one (1) government institution, one (1) higher academic institution, and (1) recruitment agency professional was conveniently selected to collect data for robust analysis and detailed findings. Employees and learners in each institution were conveniently selected and interviewed to investigate the relationship between formal and experiential learning and the role of SETA, universities, and colleges as the facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness of learners and to find the challenges and the implications of developing internship programs into formal learning as a response to learners' skills gap and employability in the clothing and textile industry in South Africa.

In convenience sampling, the saturation point for data may not be achieved. To solve this issue, sample sizes in convenience sampling be determined based on theoretical saturation (Beni, 2014). In this context, a saturation point is reached in the data collection when new findings added do not further increase the understanding of the research questions (Beni, 2014). A semi-structured interview utilized as a method of

data collection is a justification for convenience sampling and small sample size for the study.

3.6. Data collection method

Social scientists use several different data collection strategies for primary and secondary data (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Primary data collection methods involve collecting data using in-depth interviews, observation, and photographs.

Interviews are among the most common method of data collection (Hox and Boeije, 2005, Guest et al., 2013). An interview is verbal communication between the researcher and knowledgeable participants (Fox, 2009). The participants (interviewees) are usually considered knowledgeable about the topic of interest (Guest et al., 2013, Qu and Dumay, 2011). While all qualitative interviews are usually employed to know the interviewees better, the purpose of that knowing varies according to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Interviews are considered casual everyday conversations, thus deemed unreliable and not objective to some quantitative researchers (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Interviewing helps to explore and better understand the topic of interest. The qualitative interview is classified into structured, semi-structured, and unstructured categories (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, Fox, 2009, Qu and Dumay, 2011).

This study employed semi-structured interviews, usually based on open-ended questions, allowing researchers to seek new insights, including asking questions, and assessing phenomena from different perspectives (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, Qu and Dumay, 2011). According to Fox (2009), the semi-structured interview is useful when drawing up a list of standardized questions is impossible because little is known about the subject area. The disadvantage of the semi-structured interview as a data collection method is that it is more time-consuming than a structured interview (Fox, 2009, Rahman, 2017). Due to the nature of this study, where little is known about the research topic, the semi-structured interview is more appropriate as it will give a detailed description of the phenomenon that is unknown to the researcher and will add new data to the existing store of knowledge.

Semi-structured interviews are more flexible as they allow a researcher to better understand the present working environment, influential factors, and consequences. The advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that it allows interviewees to talk about their experiences, views, or opinions that the interviewer may not have expected instead of rigid structured interviews (Guest et al., 2013, Hox and Boeije, 2005). Conducting interviews requires skills such as effective communication, listening, note-taking, and the ability to ask informed questions (Qu and Dumay, 2011). These skills enable the researcher (interviewer) to collect quality and relevant data needed for the study (Fox, 2009). Apart from these skills, adequate preparation before the interviews is relevant.

Interviews can be conducted on a one-one basis (individual) or in a group setting known as a focus group (Qu and Dumay, 2011). The focus group involves interviewing several people at the same time. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all interviews with employers, supervisors, lecturers, students, and interns are conducted by the corresponding researcher virtually on a one-to-one basis. All interviews are recorded and transcribed. The interview responses are recorded for reliability, to minimize errors in the discussion of findings, and to make practical recommendations. The semi-structured interview questions are not the same for managers/supervisors, learners in internships, students and lecturers, and government and recruitment professionals.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted on information gathered from the interviews. This study uses a qualitative data analysis to analyse the data collected from the interviews. This entails a rigorous and logical process to give data meaning (Gray, 2014). Qualitative data analysis is used because it provides detailed descriptions and explanations that demonstrate the chronological flow of events and often lead to serendipitous findings (Gray 2014).

Thematic analysis is employed to interpret the data collected. David and Sutton (2011) assert that thematic analysis is a type of qualitative content analysis which gives a researcher the need to spend quality time with data and working out what themes emerges from the data rather than being imposed upon it from researcher's own beliefs. In thematic analysis, emergence of themes from data brings out uniqueness

about the data and represents a level of patterned response or meaning in the data (Gray, 2014).

There are two thematic analyses, inductive and theoretical (Braun and Clarke, 2006). When themes emerge from the data or data-driven, it is an inductive approach. Contrarily, a theoretical thematic analysis emerges from the researcher's theoretical stance. The theoretical thematic analysis may provide a detailed analysis of certain aspects of the data. This study uses the inductive thematic analysis.

3.8. Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, some questions, which were found to be replications of other questions, were excluded to avoid potential misunderstanding among the participants.

Qualitative data obtained from the interviews are analysed according to four central practices to contribute to the quality, trustworthiness, and transparency of the data (Gibbs 2008). The following practices were applied:

- During the data collection using semi-structured interviews, data collation, and interpretation, the conceptual framework of this study was always in consideration.
- Confidentiality and openness principles were upheld during the interviews (ethical consent was signed by all interviewees). Participants were not guided or led in answering questions, and free discussions were encouraged during the interviews.
- The purpose of the research and its context were clarified to the participants and dismissed any fears of victimization.
- Multiple and contradictory descriptions by participants were included in the study to avoid creating a simple fit between interview data and theoretical underpinning.

3.9. Ethical Procedures

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal granting permission to the researcher to carry out the study. Gatekeeper permission was obtained from ZA Gear Ltd (Pty), FP&M SETA, Durban University of Technology, and Malitinne Placement Recruitment to collect data for the study in their institution, and respondents were given informed consent letters to sign. Due to the Covid-19 worldwide pandemic that led to seven months of lockdown in South Africa between March 2020 and October 2020, social distancing protocols released by the government were be adhered to with human interactions as of the year 2021.

In this regard, this study adopted virtual interviews for participants. Secondary data was collected from ZA Gear, namely implementation plans, progress reports, and close-out reports on internship and work experience. Information was also gathered from the FP&M SETA annual reports. Confidentiality of participants is maintained, and all data collected are used for academic purposes only.

3.10. Conclusion

The study aims to investigate formal and experiential learning as facilitative mechanisms for learners' work readiness and employability. The study used a prominent large clothing manufacturing firm in KwaZulu-Natal.

This chapter discussed the approaches employed to collect data, data sources, approaches employed to recruit participants for the interview, and steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the data sourced. The next chapter presents the data analysis and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 4

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

4.1. Introduction

This section discusses the research findings of data obtained from interviews, and existing literature. The study investigates how formal and experiential learning in the form of internship can be facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness amongst learners of KwaZulu Natal province in the clothing and textile SETA program. Firstly, its objectives are to ascertain what the learners are taught in the training institutions to get them industry ready. Secondly, to evaluate the development opportunities that the SETA internship and work experience program offer the learners/graduates to assist them with job readiness. Finally, to understand what the employers are looking for from the graduates to be employable in the industry. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

4.2. Participant's characteristics

The study consists of a series of semi-structured interviews with employees from both ZA Gear and the FP&M SETA, learners placed on internship and work experience programs funded by the FP&M SETA into ZA GEAR Clothing Company. The employees from ZA GEAR are managers and supervisors that oversee the interns while on the program. In addition, lecturers and students from the clothing and textile department at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Also, a recruitment agency by Malitinne Placement.

Eight (8) employees were selected for the study in ZA Gear clothing company. Five (5) respondents are graduates currently on the company's internship and work experience programs. The remaining three (3) respondents are ZA Gear supervisors overseeing these graduates while on the program. Also, for reporting, two (2) employees from FP&M SETA, namely the KZN Regional Manager and the General Manager. One (1) Recruitment agent from Malitinne Placement. The study examines formal learning and experiential learning, and the data was sourced from a higher institution of learning. Four (4) lecturers and fifteen (15) students of the clothing and textile departments of DUT. Five (5) students were selected in each year (Year 1, 2, and 3) of the clothing and textile department of DUT, making a total of fifteen students.

The interview responses were recorded for reliability and to minimize errors in the discussion of findings and make practical recommendations. The total sample size is thirty (30) respondents for the study. Unique pseudonyms were used to differentiate between employer, learners, interns, lecturers, and graduate responses. The student pseudonyms start with a number representing the year of the student (for instance, Third Year Student Number TYS...), interns with the letter I followed by a number (I..), and those of the employer, employer representatives such as SETA and recruitment agency start with the E letter (for instance, E..) and those of lecturers start with letter L (for instance, L..).

4.3. Learners' profile and employer profiles

The profile of student respondents is all from the Durban University of Technology, five are Third Years while five are Second Years and the other five are First Years clothing and textile students. For employers, it was mainly those from SETA funded work-based programs focusing on clothing and textile. In graduate employability study, the sample focus on students/graduates. For richness of the study, credibility and trustworthiness, responses from employers are included. Employers selected for this study are from the clothing and textile industry. ZA Gear and the FP&M SETA employers were included to have a better understanding of the study. The section's themes that follow were guided by themes emanating from the research questions that guided the study during the data collection from interviews and observation.

4.4. What are learners being taught in the institutions to get them to be job or industry ready

The section presents findings for research question 1: What are learners being taught in the institutions to get them to be job or industry-ready?

4.4.1. What learners are being taught in higher institutions to be job-ready

On the modules taught, all the First Year Students at Durban University of Technology (DUT) listed the same theoretical modules, including pattern technology, garment technology, creative design, theory of clothing, garment design, and development. The researcher observed that these were the main subjects across the board. This focus on the content taught at DUT is important as it helps the researcher establish core subjects taught to make the students industry ready. Most importantly, it helped to

determine the relevance of the content vis-a-vis the requirements of the textile and clothing industry and the employability of the students.

When asked whether they relate to the content taught, all the students acknowledged that they do relate to the content. They explained that due to the Coronavirus outbreak and the national lockdown that followed, they were assessed via assignment and examinations to check on their progress and understanding of the content given to them. From the interviews, all respondents from the first-year students confirmed that the content being taught can be applied practically. Being first year students, their interpretation that the theoretical aspect of the content taught could be applied practically is based on their level of understanding.

Necessary skills are needed apart from theoretical content for employability after graduation (Bennett, 2018), which, therefore, shows the need for the integration of experiential learning into formal learning. Integrating formal and experiential learning through relevant curricula content with the practical sessions has both individual and organizational benefits (Coco 2000; Merrit, 2005; Binder et al, 2015). The individual benefits to the learners include an improved maturity level and self-confidence (Merrit 2005).

The researcher observes the relevance of the theoretical content, assist the learners to conceptualise practically since their program requires them to be able to design and make garments as a product. The findings are similar to Howard (2018) in Ghana who found that the theoretical contents offered in clothing and textile programs in HEIs are relevant for the industry. Despite having practical's, the students call for more practical sessions. It was noted that many were greatly affected by lockdown regulations following the coronavirus outbreak. The national lockdown hindered students from undertaking practical work, pushing them to focus more on theory. One of the students commented, calling for more practical study.

“Most of the work done at the university for undergraduate learning is strictly theoretical. The transformation from a theoretical approach to a practical approach, the program is not fully preparing us” (Third Year Student 1).

This shows that there is a greater need for the university to do more practical work with the learners to prepare them for the world of work as soon as the lockdown restrictions are eased. At the same time, the respondent acknowledged the relevance of the theoretical aspect that they are gaining from the university. These responses are in line with studies such as Ozek (2018), Malcolm et al. (2003), Binder et al. (2015) that incorporating practical work in the HEIs curricula adequately prepare learners for the workplace which is invaluable for clothing and textile graduates.

There was a consensus amongst all student respondents that when they are fully equipped with relevant practical skills, they stand a better chance of being absorbed by the labour market. This gives them opportunities to contribute significantly toward economic growth and development. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that students with the appropriate knowledge and skills, acquired from theoretical and practical during their study program, are likely to be absorbed in the clothing and textile industry.

On the relevance of the content, one can posit that for South African HEIs to play a greater role in the clothing and textile industry needs, there is a need for continuous reviewing of the relevant content so that integration of formal and experiential learning may be an ongoing process. This will facilitate learners to acquire relevant skills from such HEIs to contribute to the country's social-economic development (Kamaul et al., 2013, Howard, 2018).

4.4.2. Intern assessments of what they are being taught and labour market requirements

Intern responses vary as some respondents acknowledge the gap between what they are taught in the classroom and workplace learning. One elucidated that they did not learn anything from the DUT program to prepare them for the world in the textile and clothing environment. This is because there is a need for HEIs to make theory more relevant to practice in the clothing and textile program. Such a response speaks to the lack of alignment between what is needed in the industry and what is being taught in the institution. Alvarado (2012) acknowledges that HEIs struggle to keep up with the needs of the industry as it is continuously transforming due to new technologies being launched and expertise foundations growing. This leaves graduate not fully prepared

and this calls for HEIs not only to focus on guaranteeing that graduates improve skills that increase their employability but on ensuring that graduates keep on learning.

The response above from the respondent makes clear a need for HEIs offering clothing and textile programs to collaborate with employers and government to structure curricula that enable learners to gain experience while studying. Universities and industry need to have ongoing discussions for the placement of learners during internships in the relevant areas learners can acquire work experience and apply the theoretical knowledge and skills that have been formally acquired (Ellstrom and Kock 2009; Waite, 2018). This is evident from the employers who commented that:

“Learners need to be assigned learning tasks that match their intellectual ability to merge formal and experiential learning” (Employer 3).

Various scholars have also cited that matching and aligning skills ensure the continuation of learning and competence development amongst learners (Waite, 2018, Walker and Fongwa, 2017).

4.4.3. Lack of technical skills

All first year and third-year students express a need for training in technical skills for entry access to the labour market. The technical skills include how to operate modern sewing machines, as most of the machines used at the university are old models. This is a critical technical skill needed for them to fulfil their duties in the industry. This was noted as one of the challenges that faces graduates who lack technical skills. Interns all highlight that this is a huge gap they are facing:

“Institutions of higher learning need to create the skills that are required for the clothing and textile industry because some of the things have become irrelevant since the technology of machines is constantly changing and our institutions are not transforming as fast”. (Intern 3).

From this, one can deduce that DUT has a long way to modernize the sewing equipment used to teach learners as machines are constantly changing, and learners need technical skills to operate them (Artess et al., 2017). This disadvantage learners when they are released to the industry. This also calls for the HEIs to invest more funds in acquiring the latest machines so that learners learn to operate them earlier.

A holistic approach is needed to integrate discipline-related theoretical concepts and technical skills to produce graduates with employable skills (Wolff and Booth, 2018). Globally, calls have been made for higher education institutions, states, and regions to position strategic employability for learners' lifetime socioeconomic success (Bennett, 2018, Bloom et al., 2006, Wood and Bischoff, 2019, Devins and Reynolds, 2018). DUT has remained stagnant in terms of offering advanced machinery for learning purposes while other HEIs in the world now include experiential learning in their curriculum (Nguyen et al., 2019) to make the graduates work ready (Artess et al., 2017, Clarke, 2018).

4.4.4. Employer expectations from graduates

The employers were asked what they were looking for, and the following table summarizes their expectations:

Table 1: Employer skills expectations

Type of the skill	What employers are seeking
Self-reliance skills	Willingness to learn; Networking; Planning action.
People skills	Teamwork; Interpersonal skills; Oral communication;
General employment skills	Problem-solving; Flexibility; Computer literacy; Numeracy; Commitment
Specialist skills	Specific occupational knowledge skills; Technical skills

Source: Own data

From Table 1, can infer that even though employers are looking for graduates who can use machinery, it is essential for institutions to have contemporary machines in teaching so that learners gain technical skills. This translates to making it easier for learners to transition into work and be productive for employers.

Employers emphasize that they need soft skills and practical experience for the workplace. Below is the employer response on relevant skills and experience learners need to acquire before graduation:

“Willing to learn (The learner has no skill when they come to the industry and that is why it is called work experience. We are supposed to see what skill they have and improve it.)” (Employer 1).

“We advertise the opportunity and select qualifying applicants, those with the required qualifications. The qualifications are the main document required; skills can be gained through the program” (Employer 3).

“Basic time keeping skills, respect, commitment to the organization, reporting skills and the fundamentals of the skills they are intended to be employed for” (Employer 5).

Employer respondents acknowledge the need for HEIs degree programs to shift towards being labour market oriented. At the same time, the employers indicate the specific skills and qualities that are critical when they are looking for learners to join. Some of the responses are as follows:

“A learner that is willing to learn” (Employer 5).

“ZA GEAR prefers learners under the age of 35, learners who obtained their qualifications in the universities/TVET Colleges” (Employer 3).

The employers interviewed indicate that when recruiting interns, they look at learners who are willing to learn. This is supported by employers' responses as follows:

“We are looking for graduates with absolutely no experience; the SETA internship is considered to be for a graduate who is looking for experiential training and who were never been in the internship program” (Employer 4).

“Willingness to learn, commitment, dedication, someone who understands the financial landscape of South African businesses, especially SMMEs. Productive, reliable, and efficient candidates” (Employer 1).

The job-matching theory states that education and training aim is prepare learners for job-related tasks (Verecicio, 2016). When there is a mismatch between employer expectations and graduate skills levels, it significantly affects productivity of organisations, wages for employees, and the ability of graduates to gain meaningful employment. Therefore, graduates possessing employability skills is relevant to the graduates, organisations and the economy. The employers' responses agree that it is important for learners to be able to utilize the knowledge and skills gained theoretically within the work context.

Another employer responded that:

“You might find that not many graduates have a combination of what we want. Because in textile and clothing sector we look at a unique combination of skills”
(Employer 2).

The unique employers are looking for is the combination of practical and soft skills in addition to the qualifications. Soft skills such as self-management, numeracy, communication and literacy, teamwork, problem-solving, decision making, time efficiency and business and customer awareness. According to Young (2013), the transfer of soft skills is the responsibility of HEIs. Young (2013) stated that HEIs with competency-oriented study programs embedded in the curricula are those with the ability to transfer soft skills to enhance learners' employability skills.

4.4.5. Employers' assessment of the adequacy of learners' ability to apply classroom knowledge to the work environment

Employers were asked to give their views on the ability of learners to contextualize what was taught in the classrooms into work environment. Employer's responses are as follows:

“It's more theoretical, due to the capacity of the proper utilization of craft/trade/skills resources that the learners usually possess when they get to the workplace the 1st time” (Employer 2).

“Most struggle with the new real situation environment and the productivity deliverable outcomes required” (Employer 3).

The employers also agree with learners that what was taught was not sufficient to help learners get employment as some struggle to implement what they have been taught.

Other responses came from the interviewed employers included the following:

“What I have established as an experiential learning practitioner, what learners are being taught in institutions of higher learning is mostly the theoretical part in most cases not relevant to the real-life working environment and as a result undergraduates and graduates struggle to settle in the workplace in the first three months” (Employer 5).

“From my understanding, the learners are taught the difference between reality and perceived reality. What the learners are receiving from school is sometimes different from what the industry is implementing” (Employer 4).

The employers also indicate that some of the training given to learners is based on the institution they are studying with. This is evidenced by what one employer who explained the following:

“The type of training that the learners receive is based on the type of training institution that they attend. A skills development provider that conducts training based on occupational qualifications has a work-based place and practical training that is beneficial to the learner in the industry environment and allows them to be industry-ready for the position they are employed for. An academic tertiary institution may have a WIL program aligned to the qualification which allows the learner access to the work environment which allows them exposure to the industry though not necessarily industry-ready” (Employer 2).

At the same time, the employers emphasize that there are certain skills not given to learners, and these employers responded that:

“They have also not been equipped with computer literacy and workplace readiness skills to fully embrace the experiential learning opportunity afforded to them” (Employer 1).

“It is a different case since not all the qualifications are in line with the actual work. A good institution teaches the students to adapt and grow not to give them teaching that will box them to only apply as that won’t make them grow. If the institution can train for growth and not for getting a certificate that will be a different level of students” (Employer 3).

“Not really because the work experience is a different game compared to the studying at the university, implementing the theory in the workplace requires supervision and mentoring to assist the learner in gaining the appropriate experience in the right field” (Employer 1).

“This can be very objective as different personality traits cope differently with the theoretical information they have been taught and the practical application thereafter but, in my opinion, a higher percentage of learners who have achieved a degree or diploma without practical exposure do tend to find it difficult to utilize their knowledge effectively in a working environment” (Employer 2).

“Yes, to a certain extent, one of the most critical aspects that the learners need to be equipped is that fact that 3 to 4 years is not enough to master your craft /skill and when they can to the workplace, they need to get in there with an open

mind and not with the arrogance that they have degrees or diplomas and that is enough. The 1st 2-3 years of practical learning/workplace learning are very essential to sharpen their skills” (Employer 4).

These responses reveal that some felt the theoretical content taught at HEIs is not reflective of the clothing and textile industry needs, while others indicate that to a certain extent some of the theoretical aspects are relevant and practical to the workplace.

On the other hand, first-year student respondents seemed confident that HEIs can prepare them effectively for the workplace. Most students state that they have a passion for the program, however the major challenge they face is that they want the teaching and learning processes to adapt to suit workplace needs as much as was expected from the graduates by the employers.

Participant concerns about workplace readiness were evident amongst interns looking at the employability factor. The fact that participants kept on mentioning the outdated technology still used by the institution shows that the problem is experienced across all HEIs with offering clothing and textile study programs in the country. This in turn points to the need for a broader conversation across the HEIs and relevant stakeholders in the education sector. Although graduates gain skills and knowledge from HEIs that are transferable to workplaces, the curricula content, still has shortcomings, including the teaching and learning process that hinder employability of graduates for work readiness. There is a need for experiential learning for labour market relevance in HEIs curricula structures, as is evident in response of participants.

Lecturer perception of what they teach learners in classrooms, gives the learners the ability to apply the knowledge in the work environment. The lecturers indicate that lack of access to the practical aspect of the theory negatively impact on the progress of learners; one lecturer responded that:

“Purely academic qualifications do not allow learners to practice the practical application of the theory they have been taught and this may negatively impact their progress and initial ability to align to industry requirements” (Lecturer 4).

The lecturers acknowledge that they follow what they have been given to teach due to a lack of response to their suggestions of reviewing the program. More importantly, it

speaks to so many calls made for the transformation of the entire education system, but nothing is done to transform the system leading to its failure to produce employable graduates. Cloete (2014), among other prominent scholars and stakeholders, considers higher education policies incoherent, prescriptive, contradictory, and ineffective.

“Possibly at 60% the course outline covers what the learners require to know to be ready for the industry, it one of the reasons why sometimes mentors are reserved to take on trainees because it becomes an added duty for them to cover the 40% those tertiary institutions do not cover on top of their daily activities” (Lecturer 2).

Furthermore, the lecturer’s perception of the adequacy of the course content and outlines to prepare learners for work-readiness was sought.

The above response also explains that the learners were not taught fully by the university to make learners ready for the industry. In highlighting the shortfalls of the course, the employers suggest that there was a need to adjust the curriculum. One employer suggested the following:

“Factor in and bring onboard industry expects to continuously update the curriculum and include more practical skills relevant to the industry. A more up-to-date curriculum” (Employer 2).

This is important as employers felt that this was one of the factors contributing to the misalignment of what was taught at the university and what was expected in the workplace. Other participants that spoke of whether there was an alignment of what was taught include the following:

“Sometimes e.g., basics of customer service. When we look at the bigger picture, we need to work on the alignment that industry and education institutions need to take seriously because a student will take 3 years plus and only have a paper that doesn’t link to what they need to do in the industry” (Third Year Student 7).

“The scope at school and the scope in the workplace are completely different therefore there is an alignment, that’s probably the main reason why the Internship program was developed because training is vital for graduates to groom them and assist them in implementing what they learned at school, that way managers and specialist are created through an internship” (Third Year Student 4).

“No. Schooling is based on exposure to various subjects, a basis of information for further development and not specialization. Schools are once again mostly

academically based, unless they are technical schools, and do not equip learners to cope in the workplace environment” (Third Year Student 1).

Various suggestions were brought forth by the participants on what can be added to the graduates' curriculum for them to be industry ready:

“I trust the list is endless but the best is for the academics to go to Industry to understand the gap that currently exists so they can close it” (Employer 4)

“The practical's must be started in the university just to give the students foundation of the workplace, that way students would go the work environment ready to work and behave accordingly” (Intern 5)

“Practical programs that used to be in all schools and were then withdrawn in most schools, such as home economics, woodworking, technical drawing, etc. are more beneficial to students as this helps them to learn to use their theoretical knowledge practically, almost re-wires the brain to anticipate further requirements to achieve a given outcome through the application as opposed to just learning how to do it” (Intern 4).

4.4.6. Employers view regarding graduate employability skills for job-readiness

The employers were also interviewed on whether they have a say on what is taught in training institutions to make students job ready. The following responses from the employers:

“No, an employer doesn't have a say due to the school curriculum that may not match exactly with the job specification/description.”

“We have a process that is done with SETA for training that will be linked to industry, so the problem is with the Universities that we need to work on for the alignment” (Employer 1).

“The employer representative doesn't have a say because the syllabus is constantly changing in the institutions and the companies' job specifications are also changing due to the technological changes, the curriculum in the university doesn't comply with what the work environment can offer to the students” (Employer 1).

“Yes, employer representatives do have a say with regards to occupational qualifications development, industry needs, and scarce and critical skills that are required. This is through the workplace skills plan submitted to the SETA and the research conducted by SETAs to obtain this information from their industries. Employers do not have an influence on academic tertiary institutions and their alignment to industry needs though there are universities that have been offering shorter programs that are more specifically workplace aligned for employee growth” (Employer 1).

The responses varied as some employers indicated that they have a say about occupational qualifications development. The respondents did all agree that they do not have any influence on academic tertiary institutions' alignment to industry needs. They elaborated that they do not have a say as the syllabuses are constantly changing due to technical changes and at the same time the university does not comply with what workplaces can offer to learners. The absence of employer contribution in HEIs curricula structures may continue to increase the gap between the industry needs and HEIs outputs.

This is the reason why studies such as Tynjälä (2008) and Rainie and Anderson (2017) call for collaboration between employers and HEIs. Through the collaboration, HEIs could assess the industry needs. Therefore, a partnership between employers, curricula developers in the South African HEIs, and the government matters in developing curricula, and the industry sets the required standards for relevant content that addresses skills shortage-related issues in the labour market.

Apart from HEIs, government and employers trying to achieve integration of experiential learning into formal learning, learners to develop the critical ability to integrate what is learnt in HEIs with their workplace learning. To enable them to maximize educational gains, as well as to achieve work-readiness, and employable graduates. This integration is important for learners since competence is achieved through integration of formal and experiential learning and not in isolation (Beddie et al., 2014, Howard, 2018, Kamaul et al., 2013, Svensson et al 2004).

4.5. Evaluation of development opportunities offered by SETA internship and work experience to graduates to assist with work readiness.

To evaluate the development opportunities that the SETA internship and work experience program offers learners to assist them with work readiness, the students highlight that they are not aware of the internship opportunities offered by SETA. Such responses reveal that universities must form partnerships with employers in the clothing and textile industry so that learners are regularly referred to do practical work to improve their employability skills. This is important as lack of knowledge shows the gap that exists between students and the opportunities offered by SETA that they can utilize. This reveals the need for platforms to be opened so that such information is shared with all students in HEIs. At the same time, the students indicate that they are

not certain whether they can benefit from the SETA internship. Students may reason this way due lack of awareness of the SETA roles in facilitating placement of students and graduates for internships to bridge skills gap in South Africa. The students' responses reveal a huge knowledge gap in the services offered by SETA and their role in providing internships for learners to gain experience of what they have been taught at the university. In addition, some are still in their first year, and lack knowledge of why SETAs exist.

The employers did indicate that the opportunities available for learners include the following:

*“Artisan programs, receptionist, finance, cutters, designers and many more”
“The FP&M seta is offering an opportunity that helps the students gain the required experience” (Employer 3).*

“Interns that have been placed (through the SETA internship) are often employed thereafter. Further development can be offered in the way of design training, management or supervisory training, and further bursary offerings to the students for lifelong development. There are co-operatives or incubation hubs that offer interns the opportunity to increase their entrepreneurial abilities and create their own companies with exposure to markets for their products. Students that have achieved may also become facilitators for future students. A leadership or internship is a stepping stone to a vast variety of further growth and achievements” (Employer 2).

Looking at the student concerns and their lack of knowledge of the opportunities offered by SETA, the SETA itself can increase its visibility and awareness of its programs and opportunities to learners directly in the HEIs. Students need guidance and support in their career choices from the beginning in their study programs. Guidance on learning how to build social networks, emphasis that learners need to gain work experience, and preparing for different types of work in a broad context. The clothing and textile students reveal that they need guidance on relevant skills and knowledge needed by the labour market. This is important as Wright et al. (2013) stated quality graduates are knowledgeable, skilled, professional, and adaptable to fit into a broad range of tasks in the organisations. The employers emphasised the importance of experiential learning for learners that:

“Having the correct mentor for the program will go a long way. The matter does not need to be looked at the side of the SETA but on the site of the industry as most organizations misunderstand the process of work experience as it is different to normal Employment” (Employer 3)

“The HR department schedule an induction that assists in introducing the students to the workplace, students come from the university unready to perform in the workplace. To get them ready for the industry, terms, and conditions of employment and the code conduct of conduct must be conveyed to the students before the commencement date of employment to restructure their mindset and get them ready for the industry emotionally and physically” (Employer 4)

This means that HEIs should become aware of the labour market changes, to better prepare learners for the workplace. Also, learners should trust that the HEIs will equip them with relevant skills, knowledge, and information that increase their employability after graduation and their future growth. This would motivate the learners during the study program and their viability in an increasingly competitive labour market. Graduate experiences and responses in the study should guide the HEIs towards more appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Suggestions on what can be done to improve the development opportunities of the graduates in the SETA Internship and work experience to assist them with job readiness were highlighted by the employers which included proper mentorship, opportunity to learn, understanding of the reason why the graduate is doing an internship and assistance after internship program to be offered to graduates to find employment.

“There should be standard sign off logbooks for learners to ensure that employers are giving the correct level and amount of exposure to these interns as the standard of workplace exposure differs from company to company, signing a logbook off would hold the employer and intern responsible for achieving all aspects required of the work exposure. Once a learner has completed an internship, they should all be given a reference letter from the company, if they are not retained, to include in their CV” (Employer 1).

From the employer suggestions, experiential learning is relevant and needs to be integrated with formal learning. This can be achieved through assigning mentors to interns, who will guide them with meaningful workplace experience (Devins and Reynolds, 2018).

“Having the correct mentor for the program will go a long way. The matter does not need to be looked at the side of the SETA but on the site of the industry as most organizations misunderstand the process of work experience as it is different to normal employment” (Intern 3)

Experiential learning experiences provide interns with hands-on prospects to utilize theories and processes studied in the classroom in the real world (Andrews and Higson, 2008). These experiences also improve other skills required in the workplace that often receive less attention in university, such as interpersonal communication and working collaboratively. The interns highlight the following benefits and weaknesses of the internship:

“Exposure to the workplace environment, practical alignment of the qualification that the learner has/will achieve, a better understanding of how the industry works, understanding of the integration of responsibilities i.e., how what you do can impact other divisions/staff members/stakeholders, etc” (Intern 2).

From the above response, the purpose of internships is for learners to have work experience and the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge acquired in classroom and to build social and professional networks (Ozek, 2018, McCarthy, 2016, Karunaratne and Perera, 2019). Through exposure, graduates stand an opportunity to be recruited in the industry based on their performance and exposure to a wider network.

Interns are to be assessed and given feedback on their performance. Interns report, however, that in some instances they do not execute the work relevant to their qualifications leaving them underprepared and lessening their chances of employability. This is evidenced below:

“May not be completely aligned to the learner’s qualification, the learner may be used in a division that is not the most beneficial to them and more beneficial to the company’s current needs, overworked” (Intern 5).

This shows that even the work industries have a responsibility to ensure that interns are doing what is relevant to their qualifications for them to gain experience. Various scholars suggest that learning plans for interns should be put in place, and these must indicate the outcomes to be achieved (Emenheiser, 1981, Ozek, 2018), so that intern’s performance is measured against the stated outcomes.

One intern indicate that they are not sure whether the SETA program is effective, and some interns indicate the following:

“The development program opportunity is greatly assisting interns because after they completed the training the chances of being employed by the same company are very high, companies prefer employing employees whom they trained” (Intern 2)

“Without research into this and data analysis, it can only be an assumption that this does create a better opportunity for the learner to gain employment as they have a better understanding of industry needs, pressure of the environment, conduct in the workplace, and can apply their skills. This will enhance their ability to achieve and grow” (Intern 4)

Emenheiser (1981)’s survey found that companies are willing to accept learners for their internship programs. These companies are unwilling to supervise learners to give the learners the full practical training needed within the internship period. Adequate supervision in the industry helps learners develop their capabilities for successive experiential learning outcomes (Henderson and Trede, 2017).

4.6. Challenges encountered by clothing and textile graduates

4.6.1. Poorly paid SETA internships

From the data collected, the interns interviewed cited that they are poorly paid when undertaking an internship:

“My biggest struggle was that most of the internships are poorly unpaid as working for a low wage is simply not feasible for most university students” (Intern 2).

This is a critical aspect to most interns doing internships as they cite that these internships are in areas where they need to travel, and they have been faced with high living expenses. The findings also indicate that poorly paid internships are negatively linked with employment outcomes and learner future wages. At the same time, respondents indicate that despite the importance of internships to get them ready to enter the workforce, there are lower chances of securing a job due to the high unemployment rate affecting the country.

The respondents also cite that qualification was not a passport to securing a job and a decent salary for many young South Africans in the textile and clothing program.

Experience is important as employers recruit from their industry network. However, poorly paid internships demotivate interns as monthly stipends barely cover transport costs leaving the interns to be supported by their families.

4.6.2. Lack of employment after the internship

HEIs in South Africa are lagging to align their curriculum structures to fit employer expectations of graduates, and therefore remains a challenge (Andrews and Higson, 2008, Artess et al., 2017). Graduate negative perception of clothing and textile program may lead to a lack of motivation, ambition, aspiration, and employability skills needed to adequately prepare for the industry. There is also challenge of clothing and textile graduates to integrate formal knowledge and skills acquired in the classrooms into the workplace. The graduate lack of practical experience, problem-solving skills, and computer literacy, among others as highlighted in Table 1 earlier, seem to prevent them from entering the labour market.

The findings confirm that skills, knowledge, and qualification do not translate to successful employment outcomes for interns. This was because one participant argues that:

“Textile and clothing programs cannot overcome structural constraints such as a saturated labour market, a weak economy, and entrenched social inequalities that exist in our society. Irrespective of the quality of education, we continue to reproduce unequal outcomes.”

The HEIs, employers and government need to take note of this reality even more in the context of COVID-19 and the recent social unrest in Durban that disrupted most industries. Every stakeholder has a role to play to reduce the skills gap for young learners and not increase unemployed statistics. HEIs should consider that learners require more practical sessions in their curricula. Employers must take interns who require mentorship to achieve better outcome. Government need to provide adequate resources to support skills development in the country, for instance support for interns.

4.7. Summary of Findings

This study mainly investigated how formal and experiential learning in the form of internships can be facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness amongst DUT students and graduates in the clothing and textile SETA program.

To ascertain what the learners are taught in the clothing and textile study programmes to get them industry-ready, the findings indicate that there is no alignment between skills development in clothing and textile programs and employability. This leaves the topic of learners' employability a highly contested theme as employers think learners are not suited for the work industry. The theoretical content taught can be applied, however, there is a need for more time to be spent on practical than theory. Experiential learning should be incorporated into the module preparation and its delivery to learners in HEIs. This is important as the learners also felt that more time was spent on the theory that does not fully give them time to do practical to be competent in skills such as sewing and designing. Hence all participants recommend that the study program must focus on practical more. The reason is that it will equip the learners with practical experience to thrive in the industry they are being prepared for.

To evaluate what the SETA internship and work experience program offers the graduates to assist them with work readiness, the interns highlighted that internship plays an integral part in putting into practice the knowledge gained from formal learning. In some instances, through exposure, the internships offered an employment opportunity. Due to the high unemployment rate of graduates in South Africa, there is no guarantee of securing a job after doing an internship. These are the sad realities that most learners face even after attaining their degrees.

To understand what the employers are looking for from the learners to be employable in the labour market, employers expressed lack of knowledge, practical and soft skills such as problem-solving, computer literacy, teamwork, communication skills among others. In this study, these employability skills are grouped into four categories namely, self-reliance, people, general employment, and specialist skills. This study findings are consistent with those of Harvey, 2000; Bowley, 2018; Griesel and Parker (2009), the latter who in the South African context, find that employers expect graduates to have

at least four categories of skills, namely, knowledge and intellectual ability, basic skills, workplace skills and knowledge, and interactive and personal skills. The development of these skills is relevant for the employability of learners after graduation (Griesel and Parker 2009).

Academic qualifications are prerequisites for employers, but most employers look beyond it for work experience combined with a qualification. Higher education is relevant for developing problem-solving and critical thinking (Bennett, 2018). Higher education facilitates a learner to develop other soft and practical skills employers are looking for. These findings reveal that it is crucial for degree programs to adequately prepare learners for work-readiness in the clothing and textile industry.

The role of HEIs is to be the hotspot for innovation and development of skilled manpower development (Cloete, 2014, Fisher and Scott, 2011, Buchbinder, 1993), hence the expectations of the interns and students. The clothing and textile industry has changed due to technological advancements, pressures from the workplace, and society in general (ILO, 2019). The findings from this study reveal that the HEIs academic programs are lagging especially on the front of technological innovation and have failed to keep pace with the contemporary clothing and textile industry. The findings highlight that there is need for collaboration between HEIs and employers to determine the competencies required for learners' employability. Employers need to be clear and consistent when communicating their requirements with HEIs. Learners and interns should also keep updated of the competencies that the clothing and textile program aims to develop and how to apply them at the workplace.

The lack of knowledge of the internship offered by SETA reveals a need to provide an early mentorship program to learners of clothing and textile degree programs in HEIs during their study program. With proper guidance, learners can know about the opportunities available and the institutions offering internships within their programs. This also will help address the gaps of knowing what the program has to offer in the real world and the opportunities in the field. At the same time, mentorships will help interns broaden their scope and make informed decisions concerning their career goals and paths.

The findings of the study also reveal that all stakeholders, that is, the HEIs and the employers, have a responsibility to develop workplace-ready interns. Employers need to actively engage more with the HEIs regarding curricula structures to facilitate relevant teaching and learning process that play a pivotal role, ensuring that learners' output by the HEIs meets clothing and textile industry requirements.

Based on intern responses, lecturers need to provide more time to allow learners to convert theory into practice. In the same way, learners should be responsible to increase their knowledge outside the classroom. Lecturers should continuously update teaching methods, to facilitate current teaching and learning process. This is because creating workplace-ready graduates is a major element that impact labour markets and the graduates negatively if not done correctly.

Labour markets around the globe are experiencing substantial shifts – especially in non-tech sectors, and South Africa is not spared in this trend (Cloete, 2014). Corresponding to relevant theories, Cloete (2014), Fisher and Scott (2011), Ngcobo and Govender (2015), that higher education increases labour market performances and enhances future salary through good career paths. These theories have been critiqued in countries with high rates of unemployment like South Africa, where even interns often battle to find employment after finishing their internship. HEIs curricula formulation should facilitate problem-solving and critical thinking which enable graduates to be work-creators than employment seekers. Internships expose learners into the real-world and to know the necessary skills needed that can be acquired or developed during the study program period that will facilitate their employability after graduation.

The realities that they come across in the labour market is that it is very competitive when it comes to employability. Doing an internship is no guarantee of employability in contemporary South Africa. The industry has been heavily impacted by the lockdown and many companies have reduced employees.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter explored what learners are taught in HEIs, whether it was applicable in the work industry and how internships facilitate employability within the textile and clothing sector. In general, the study revealed that theoretical content is applicable practically. The practical sessions are inadequate to facilitate competency for the employability of graduates. The study found that employers struggle to get graduates with employable skills. In this context, a partnership between all stakeholders in the education sector is important.

Learners in internship programs, are not getting adequate mentoring support to facilitate work-based learning for work experience. There is also the issue of financial support during the internship period. The findings show that employers and learners are not aware of SETA roles. They reveal that facilities to facilitate practical sessions in higher institutions of learning are outdated, which denies learners to keep updated to newer technologies in the industry.

CHAPTER 5

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This study aimed to investigate formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internship as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness in KwaZulu Natal clothing and textile SETA. The topic is relevant given the challenge of unemployment and employers struggling to find employee with the right skill despite the increase in learners' enrolment in HEIs and SETAs establishments to facilitate skills development. This chapter provides the conclusion, areas of future research, and recommendations emanating from the study.

5.2. Research Aims

The study aimed to investigate formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internship as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness in the KwaZulu Natal clothing and textile SETA.

5.3. Research Objectives and Research Questions

As specified in Chapter 1, the research objectives were as follows:

- To ascertain what the learners are taught in the training institutions to get them industry ready.
- To evaluate what the SETA internship and work experience program offers the learners and interns to assist them with work readiness.
- To understand what the employers are looking for from the graduates to be employable in the industry.

This study sought to answer the following key research questions:

1. What are learners being taught in the clothing and textile diploma at Durban University of Technology to get them to be work or industry-ready?
2. What is the SETA's internship and workplace offering the learners and interns to assist in work readiness?
3. What are the employers looking for from the graduates to be employable?

The research provided a comprehensive, empirically based, and theoretically informed factors on whether what was taught to learners was applicable and assisted them in job readiness in the textile and clothing industry. Using a qualitative approach, the study identified and analysed the relationship between the clothing and textile industry and employment. The research reveals that the current empirical and theoretical explanations of the determinants of work readiness in the South African clothing and textile industry are insufficient without focusing on textile and clothing learners who are also affected by the dynamics of industry readiness and the curriculum requirements.

5.4. Summary of findings as per each of the objectives

Objective one was to ascertain what the learners are taught in the clothing and textile degree programmes to get them industry ready. The findings indicate that the theoretical content taught in HEIs can be applied practically. There is however a need for experiential learning to be included in the curricula which improves the quality of graduates, as a result increase learners' employability after graduation. Including experiential learning in HEIs curricula benefits the learner's skills development that is lacking in South Africa in form of critical skills.

Objective two was to evaluate what the SETA internship and work experience program offers the graduates to assist them with work readiness. Firstly, the findings show that there is a lack of knowledge of the internship offered by SETA. The findings also reveal that employers are not aware of the role of SETA. The clothing and textile industry in South Africa is reviving itself as the government is promoting demand for clothing and textile output produced locally. The SETA therefore has a major role to play to increase critical skills in the clothing and textile industry by increasing awareness of their organisation to learners, partnership with employers to facilitate internship placements for learners and funding for internship programmes to support learners during the period.

Objective three was to understand what the employers are looking for from the graduates to be employable in the industry. Based on employer response to employability skills they are interested in, this study grouped these into four categories

namely, self-reliance skills, people skills, general employment skills, and specialist skills. Developing these skills is relevant for learners' employability after graduation. Therefore, HEIs should structure their curricula to facilitate learners developing relevant skills in the South African labour market context for employability in the clothing and textile industry.

5.5. What the findings tell us about formal and experiential learning as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness

The study tells us that employers are concerned about the inadequacy of the quality of graduates from HEIs as most learners cannot implement what they have been taught for the benefit of the organisations. This results in additional costs incurred by companies for training and re-training graduates who are supposed to have basic skills. At the same time, for interns placed in internships with employers, these are not providing adequate mentoring support to facilitate workplace learning during the internship period. Even though government recognises experiential learning to increase skills development, integrating it into formal learning is still a challenge.

For experiential learning to be integrated into formal learning, it requires a partnership between HEIs, employers-industry, and the government. All relevant stakeholders identified are needed to increase graduate employability, which increases industry productivity and economic growth. Also, unemployment should be reduced through this because employers will not have difficulty finding right skills among graduates. Learners and interns must be willing to acquire skills to increase their employability chances. Employers need to actively engage with the HEIs regarding curricula structures to increase graduate employability and ease of transition into the labour market. This can be achieved through collaboration between curricula developers at HEIs and the relevant stakeholders of the labour market sector.

5.6. Contribution to knowledge

The contribution of this research emanates from the findings that HEIs need to align their curricula with the industry to increase employability of graduates in the labour market. Learners, on the other hand, should trust that the skills, knowledge, and information provided by HEIs will hold them in a good position to gain access to the employment and their future growth.

The findings of the study contribute to academic knowledge through their theoretical implication for youth employability and the relevance of academic courses offered to learners in South Africa. The findings reveal the knowledge gap in the implementation of what is taught in HEIs and what the industry expects from the learners leaving many young people vulnerable and unemployed. Mentorship and internship programs need to be upscaled and a change of the curriculum development needs to transform so that it equips young people who will be able to even start their clothing and textile projects to tackle the high unemployment rate in South Africa.

5.7. Recommendations

HEIs, employers, and government role for learner employability is relevant to address the complex and underlying challenges to reduce youth unemployment. The researcher recommends the following measures:

- The formal learning process must adopt a multi-dimensional approach through collaboration between the HEIs, the learner, and the potential employers as this will help develop skills specific to an industry.
- For internships, the period of internship program in HEI curricula must have a minimum of a year and not be short-term so that learners have sufficient experience of the industry they are going into after graduation.
- The HEIs must adopt competent-based programs embedded in the curricula to facilitate knowledge and skills to enhance graduate employability for changing labour market and not be overtaken by workplaces as they are places of innovation. This needs urgent attention as industries have high expectations of graduates to be innovators.
- The universities should incorporate more practical elements into the curriculum that will help learners with opportunities to be industry ready.
- There is a need to emphasize self-employment projects in the program so that learners can be entrepreneurial in their pursuits. This will create opportunities for self-employment instead of them waiting to be employed elsewhere.

5.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is imperative that experiential learning is greatly needed amongst the respondents as they believe it will help them develop their skills and knowledge from direct experiences outside a traditional academic context. Restructuring curricula, teaching, and delivery process to ensure experiential learning forms part of the curriculum in the clothing and textile study program, is critical. Skills in clothing and textile industry are considered scarce, despite high unemployment. There should be a model between HEI, employers and relevant stakeholders that facilitate provision of quality graduates from HEIs to eliminate scarce skills in the industry. The research findings reveal the fulfilment of the study's objectives as they revealed the relationship between the clothing and textile industry and the employment of learners that there was still a gap in HEIs to produce industry-ready graduates.

The role of SETA in offering internships cannot be undermined as it opens avenues for some interns to start their businesses based on the experience they attained from internships.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information sheet and consent form

Graduate Business School,
College of Law and Management Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Westville Campus, KwaZulu-Natal.

08 May 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

Information sheet and consent to participate.

My name is Mr Luntu Phillip. I am a master's student from the Graduate Business School, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research titled "An investigation of formal learning and experiential learning as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness: A case study of the work experience and internship programme of the KwaZulu-Natal clothing and textile".

This study is about the clothing and textile industry with its peculiar dynamics and changing technology. The changing dynamics and evolving technology in this industry create new skills, thereby affecting demand for entry-level skills. There is, however, concern whether the educational institutional programmes offered adequately prepare learners for employability in the textile and clothing industry in South Africa. Furthermore, SETAs were established to close the skills gap between education and learners work readiness.

My view is that experiential learning incorporated into formal learning at higher institutions can play a pivotal role to bridge the gap between education and graduate employability. As part of my master's research, I am conducting a study to investigate how formal learning impacts internships and related work experience in the industry, particularly in Durban and surrounding areas.

You are being invited to consider participating in a research study about assessing the impact of internships and work experience in the clothing and textile industry. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions during one group and one individual interview, each of 15-20 minutes duration.

Please note that:

- Your participation is voluntary.
- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The focus group and individual interviews (1 of each) will last for about 15-20 minutes and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for the purposes of this research only.
- Data will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisor. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the University, it will be destroyed.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at “exploring the views of industry employees (management and learners in internship programmes funded by FP&M SETA), active learners and lecturers of higher institution, recruitment professionals and government about the impact of formal and experiential learning in preparing learners/interns for work readiness and their employability in the South African clothing industry.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

- **If you are willing and possibly be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow recording of the interview by the following equipment:**

Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment	

- If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration attached to this statement.

Yours faithfully,

Mr. Luntu Phillip

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact the researcher as follows:

Mr Luntu Phillip

Email: 218082481@stu.ukzn.ac.za Cell: 0727376066

My supervisor is Dr Nomkhosi Luthuli. She is a Lecturer at the Graduate Business School, College of Law and Management Studies, Westville Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Contact details:

Email: luthulin5@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: 031 260 8887

Cell: 0817591507

You may also contact the Research Office at:

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Govern Mbeki Centre

Tel: +27312608350/4557/3587

[Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Appendix 2: Ethical clearance



05 September 2021

Mr Luntu Leon Phillip (218082481)
Grad School Of Bus & Leadership
Westville Campus

Dear Mr Phillip,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00002111/2020

Project title: An investigation of formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internships, as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness: A case study of the work experience and internship programme of the KwaZulu-Natal clothing and textile SETA

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 28 October 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 05 September 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 3: Turnitin report

An investigation of formal learning and experiential learning in the form of internships as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness - A case study of the work experience and inter

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16 July 2022

To: Whom it may concern

Copy editing of thesis

This is to confirm that I have copy edited the Masters Thesis written by Luntu Phillip

Entitled

An investigation of formal and experiential learning in internships as facilitative mechanisms for employability and work readiness: A case study of work experience and internship programs of the KwaZulu-Natal clothing and textile SETA

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries.

Yours faithfully,

Signed by Bastienne Klein

B.A. (Hons.) M.A. UCT

PhD Candidate