

TITLE: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF THE MEANINGS AND CONNOTATIONS OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN TVET COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY OF a TVET College in the Western Cape.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of a degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of others has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Cornelis Retief

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to critically examine the meanings and connotations of graduate Attributes within the South African TVET system, with a particular focus on a TVET College in the Western Cape. The study sought to explore the nuanced perspectives of graduate Attributes as perceived by educational institutions and graduates (NATED HR), as well as their relevance and impact within the industry. It examined how vocational education and training defined, perceived, and valued these attributes. It challenges the traditional view of industry requirements, suggesting that graduate attributes in vocational education should be context specific. The research focuses on three questions: What are the various meanings and conceptualisations of graduate Attributes within the context of the NATED HRM programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape? What are the specific graduate Attributes emphasised in the HRM programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape, and how are they integrated into the curriculum? What are the perceptions of HRM graduates and teachers regarding the contextual factors affecting the understanding of graduate Attributes? A qualitative case study design was adopted, involving 21 participants (10 lecturers and 11 graduates) selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semistructured interviews until saturation was reached. The study found that key graduate attributes, such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability amongst others, were emphasised in the HRM program. These attributes were integrated through practical exercises, assessments, and group activities, though their implementation varied across courses. Teaching methodologies like experiential learning and collaborative activities were found to be crucial in developing these attributes. Both graduates and lecturers agreed that attributes such as job readiness and adaptability are essential for workplace success. However, challenges such as time constraints in the curriculum were noted. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of graduate attributes in improving workforce preparedness. While the

HRM programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape effectively integrates these attributes, further improvements in curriculum consistency and structured support are needed to enhance employability outcomes.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This research aimed to critically examine the meanings and connotations of graduate attributes within the South African TVET system, with a particular focus on a TVET College in the Western Cape. The study sought to explore the nuanced perspectives of graduate attributes as perceived by educational institutions and graduates (NATED HR), as well as their relevance and impact within the industry. It examined how vocational education and training defined, perceived, and valued these attributes. A case study approach was employed, utilising in-depth interviews. The findings provided insights into the alignment of TVET curricula with industry needs, contributing to a deeper understanding of the role and impact of graduate attributes in vocational education in South Africa.

1.2 FOCAL RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem engages with the intricate and often debated concept of graduate attributes within the South African TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) system, with a specific lens on a TVET College in the Western Cape. This exploration is significant as it challenges the traditional notion of 'industry requirements,' suggesting that these requirements may not be universal or generic. Instead, the study sought to understand graduate attributes, examining their meanings and implications within the context of vocational education (Jackson, 2013). While vocational training and skill development remain central themes in TVET colleges, this research shifts the focus from aligning these attributes with industry needs to an indepth understanding of them. The study dissected the multifaceted concept of graduate attributes, analysing the layers of meanings and expectations attached to it within the TVET context (Clarke and Winch, 2015). It examined how these attributes are defined, perceived, and valued within the educational setting of a TVET College in the Western Cape

The proposed research investigated how these graduate attributes manifested in the curriculum and pedagogical approaches at the college and how they were embodied in

the cohort of HRM graduates. This aspect was critical for understanding the role and impact of vocational education in shaping graduates' competencies and identities (Bridgstock, 2014). The central research question was framed as: How can we understand the concept of graduate attributes, and what did these look like in a cohort of HRM graduates at a TVET college? This question aimed to delve into the essence of graduate attributes, shedding light on their conceptualisation and real-life embodiment in the context of vocational education (Griffiths and Guile, 2013).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of the research question for the study was as follows: In what specific ways were graduate attributes manifested and evaluated within the curriculum and teaching approaches at a TVET College in the Western Cape, and how were these attributes reflected in the competencies and identities of HRM graduates? To refine the research, the following sub-questions were considered to further explore distinct elements related to the main question:

1. What are the various meanings and conceptualisations of "graduate attributes" within the context of the NATED HRM programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape?
2. What are the specific graduate attributes emphasised in the HRM programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape, and how are they integrated into the curriculum?
3. What are HRM graduates' and lecturers' perceptions of the contextual factors influencing the understanding and development of graduate attributes?

1.4 RATIONALE

The rationale behind this research lies in the need to critically assess and understand the role of graduate attributes in the TVET sector in South Africa, particularly in the context of a TVET College in the Western Cape. Despite the significant role that TVET colleges played in skill development and vocational training, there is a lack of clarity

and consensus on what constitutes effective graduate attributes within this educational framework.

Given the case of a TVET College in the Western Cape, the institution has adopted a set of graduate attributes tailored to meet both industry demands and the unique socioeconomic context of the region. These attributes include technical competence, ethical reasoning, problem-solving, communication proficiency, teamwork, and a strong work ethic. What distinguishes this College is its deliberate emphasis on *entrepreneurial thinking and adaptability to technological change*, particularly within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). These priorities are further institutionalised through initiatives such as the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator and the 4IR Centre, which serve as practical platforms to nurture innovation, digital skills, and enterprise development among students. Together, these centres enhance the realworld application of graduate attributes by offering experiential learning opportunities and direct industry exposure.

Unlike traditional TVET Colleges and universities that often prioritise academic scholarship and theoretical depth, this TVET College places greater focus on practical competence, industry relevance, and community engagement. For instance, while a university might underscore global citizenship and research capability, this College centres its attributes around *local applicability, employability, and hands-on expertise*. The existence of the Entrepreneurship and 4IR Centres reflects the institution's strategic commitment to equipping graduates not only with knowledge but with the mindset and tools to create value in a rapidly changing economy. These graduate attributes, supported by institutional infrastructure, align with national policy imperatives and reaffirm the College's role in promoting inclusive economic development through skills and enterprise.

Scholars have highlighted the impact of colonialism and the subsequent challenges in curriculum transformation, emphasising that traditional conceptions of graduate attributes (GAs), rooted in the Global North and neoliberal colonial education, are highly theoretical. These models often produce graduates with an employmentseeking mindset (Thondhlana et al., 2021). There is a pressing need to shift this focus toward fostering entrepreneurship and integrating work-integrated learning into curriculum

transformation efforts. Furthermore, Mbembe (2016) critiques African universities as local adaptations of a dominant academic model grounded in a Eurocentric epistemic framework. Thondhlana et al. (2021) contend that this model has become hegemonic, systematically suppressing ideas, perspectives, and visions that lie outside its established parameters.

Given these realities, this research sought to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring the various dimensions and interpretations of graduate attributes, assessing their relevance and employability efficacy. The study aimed to contribute to the discourse on vocational education and training in South Africa by providing insights that could have informed curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and policy decisions in the TVET sector.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative case study design was adopted for this exploratory research. The research design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for an in-depth examination of a specific group or context, providing detailed insights into the phenomenon being studied. The target population for this research consisted of Human Resource Management graduates and lecturers in South African Higher Education Institutions, specifically at a TVET College in the Western Cape. The qualitative case study approach enabled the retention of a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of the participants regarding the research topic.

The sampling strategy for this research involved a purposive selection of recent Human Resource Management (HRM) graduates and lecturers from a TVET College in the Western Cape. This non-probability sampling method ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences and insights into the conceptualisation and real-life embodiment of graduate attributes (GAs) in vocational education. The study targeted a minimum of 21 participants, including 10 lecturers and 11 graduates, to gather diverse perspectives on how GAs were perceived, taught, and evaluated. Data collection continued until saturation was reached, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Communication with participants occurred through platforms like WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, or email to facilitate informed participation.

Data collection primarily involved semi-structured interviews with graduates and lecturers, exploring the relevance of Human and Social Capital theories within the South African TVET context. The research adopted a qualitative case study approach, with thematic analysis used to identify key themes from the data. The analysis was supported by Atlas.ti software to systematically organize and interpret qualitative data, ensuring the research remained rigorously reflexive. Although the study's exploratory nature and context-specific focus limited its generalizability, it aimed to provide a critical, in-depth examination of graduate attributes in the South African TVET sector.

1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter One provided the introduction and background of the study. Chapter Two presented the literature review, outlining existing knowledge on the research topic. The research design and methodology, including the data collection and analysis methods, were detailed in Chapter Three. The results were presented and discussed in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the study with the researcher's conclusions and recommendations.

1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics was a cornerstone throughout the entirety of the research process. To ensure adherence to the highest ethical standards, the research was conducted in compliance with the UCT Code of Ethics for Research. Ethical clearance was also sought from the UCT Research Ethics Committee, thereby validating the project's integrity. All participants, integral to understanding the nuances of graduate attributes, were fully briefed on the research's purpose. Their right to withdraw from the study at any point was emphasised, ensuring their participation remained voluntary and respectful. Before data collection, informed consent was acquired from all participants, reaffirming their agency in the study. Throughout the research process, strict measures were implemented to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, thereby upholding their privacy and the ethical standards of the investigation.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an introduction and background to the study, outlining the problem statement, research questions, and objectives. It also provided the rationale for the study, alongside an overview of the methodology employed for data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations and procedures implemented to ensure compliance with ethical standards were also discussed. The next chapter delves into the comprehensive literature review.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter provides an in-depth review of the concepts, theories, and empirical evidence relating to graduate attributes. It introduces the idea of graduate attributes, emphasising their growing significance in higher education for the holistic development of students. The chapter outlines the broad range of skills and qualities considered essential for success in both academic and professional arenas and the curriculum design, assessment, and implementation implications on graduate attributes. Additionally, it critiques the variability in the conceptualisation and implementation of graduate attributes across different cultural, social and economic contexts, highlighting the need for a more contextualised approach that aligns with local needs and values

2.2 OVERVIEW OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

The concept of graduate attributes has gained significant traction in higher education as a framework for the holistic development of students beyond academic content knowledge. Graduate attributes are broadly defined as the skills, knowledge, values, and dispositions that students are expected to develop during their academic journey, preparing them for both life and work in a globalised and complex world (Barrie, 2007). These include critical thinking, ethical reasoning, communication, problem-solving, and lifelong learning, among others.

While workplace-relevant skills such as teamwork, self-management, and technological proficiency are widely recognised (Brown, 2013; Bowley, 2018), research highlights persistent gaps between institutional aspirations and employability outcomes (Powell & McGrath, 2019; Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016). This misalignment is often due to limited workplace exposure, economic constraints, and a disconnect between academic curricula and industry needs. Thus, the challenge lies not only in defining graduate attributes but in implementing and assessing them meaningfully within real-world and institutional contexts.

Critiques of dominant graduate attribute models point out that they often reflect Western, individualistic values and overlook communal and relational aspects of learning central to other cultural contexts (Jones, 2009; Singh, 2011; Leask, 2009). The variation across institutions and countries in the conceptualisation of these attributes underscores the need

for a contextualised approach—one that accounts for institutional missions, local economies, and student demographics (Killick, 2012). Archer's (1988) Social Realist perspective supports this view by proposing that cultural and societal norms shape how educational values are formed and enacted, though critics warn against viewing culture as static.

In this light, the University of the Free State (UFS) offers a locally relevant model that aligns with global standards while addressing South Africa's specific socio-economic realities. The UFS's Teaching and Learning Strategy 2025–2030 outlines a shift from content-heavy, discipline-specific education to a more holistic and transformative approach (University of the Free State, 2025). Responding to the increasing enrolment of students from quintile 1–3 schools, UFS embeds foundational literacies such as academic and mathematical literacy, ICT, and lifelong learning into its curricula (Soffel, 2016).

Notably, UFS foregrounds values-based and socially responsive attributes such as ethical reasoning for sustainability, community engagement, and an entrepreneurial mindset (Rhodes, 2008; Bacigalupo et al., 2016; NFTE, 2023). These attributes aim to cultivate graduates who are not only employable but also adaptable, responsible, and capable of contributing meaningfully to a diverse society. This approach challenges prevailing models of graduate development that often simplify assessment through standardised indicators, failing to capture broader societal expectations.

A national poll cited in Shavelson and Huang (2003) revealed that the public considers attributes such as personal maturity, problem-solving ability, interpersonal skills, and citizenship to be essential goals of higher education. Similarly, Bok (2006) contends that universities must nurture not only intellectual development but also character, communication, and global citizenship. Business leaders surveyed through AAC&U's LEAP initiative further support the inclusion of cultural awareness, social responsibility, and integrative learning (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2008). Rhodes (2008) reinforces this perspective with the VALUE framework, which emphasises authentic, multidimensional assessment of such broad learning outcomes.

The literature also stresses the importance of integrating graduate attributes into teaching, assessment, and curriculum design in a way that students can recognise and reflect upon (Oliver, 2011). However, widespread institutional challenges remain, including faculty engagement and the difficulty of validly measuring complex attributes (Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009). In the context of the present study, these debates underscore the importance of

critically examining which attributes are prioritised, how they are taught and assessed, and how factors such as race, language, class, and gender shape students' access to and experience of these attributes.

In concluding this discourse in this context, the evolving discourse on graduate attributes highlights a tension between universal standards and local relevance. The UFS model, situated within both global debates and South Africa's unique higher education landscape, contributes a valuable example of how institutions might adapt graduate attribute frameworks to be both context-sensitive and future-facing.

2.3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.3.1 Social Realism and Critical Realism

The theoretical foundations of this study are rooted in the concepts of social realism and critical realism, which offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexity of graduate attributes within higher education. Social realism, as articulated by Archer (1995), emphasises the significance of social structures, cultural systems, and individual agency in shaping educational outcomes. This perspective is particularly relevant to the study of graduate attributes, as it acknowledges the role of institutional contexts, disciplinary norms, and individual actions in developing and accessing these attributes.

Transitioning to critical realism, a theory developed further by Bhaskar (1975) and later by Archer (1995), provides an even deeper analytical lens through which to examine graduate attributes. Critical realism builds on the insights of social realism by proposing a stratified reality composed of the empirical (experiences), the actual (events), and the real (underlying mechanisms). This ontological framework facilitates a nuanced exploration of how graduate attributes are constructed, perceived, and function within broader societal structures and norms. It also examines how these attributes are influenced by underlying societal practices and collective expectations, highlighting the interplay between education and the social context in which it occurs.

The interplay between structure, culture, and agency is central to understanding graduate attributes from a Critical Realist perspective. Structures refer to the institutional and disciplinary frameworks that shape the definition and assessment of graduate attributes, culture encompasses the shared beliefs and practices that influence perceptions of these attributes, and agency represents the capacity of individuals, both educators and students, to act within and upon these structures and cultures. This triadic relationship underscores the dynamic and contingent nature of graduate attributes, highlighting how they are both products of and contributors to the educational ecosystem.

Critically, this theoretical backdrop illuminates the importance of considering graduate attributes not as static or universal qualities but as contextually bound and dynamically constructed through interactions between individuals, institutions and broader sociocultural forces. It challenges the notion of graduate attributes as merely instrumental skills for employability, advocating instead for a deeper understanding of their role in fostering critical thinking, ethical understanding, and lifelong learning within specific educational and societal contexts.

In applying these theories to the study of graduate attributes, this research adopts a critical stance towards existing conceptualisations and practices. It seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms by which graduate attributes are defined, developed, and valued, and to question the extent to which they align with or diverge from the principles of social and critical realism. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and critical discourse on graduate attributes, one that recognises their potential to shape and be shaped by the complex interplay of structure, culture, and agency in higher education.

2.3.2 Critical Examination of Graduate Attributes

According to Oliver (2015), these attributes are increasingly recognised for their importance in shaping well-rounded graduates who are equipped to navigate the complexities of diverse societal contexts. The current formulations of graduate attributes often reflect the dominant educational paradigms of the Global North, characterised by Western, liberal humanist, and individualist conceptions. These

attributes typically prioritise competencies such as critical thinking, communication skills, and self-directed learning, which align with the values and expectations of Western educational systems (Jones and Killick, 2013). However, this dominance raises significant concerns regarding the inclusivity and applicability of such attributes to students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Critically examining these formulations through a more inclusive lens reveals a potential mismatch between the prescribed attributes and the lived experiences of students from non-Western contexts. Scholars argue that these dominant conceptions often overlook the communal, relational, and interdependent values prevalent in many cultures, thus limiting the relevance and effectiveness of graduate attributes for a significant portion of the global student population (Leask, 2015; Ahenakew and Naepi, 2015). For instance, the emphasis on individual achievement and competition may conflict with the communal values of collaboration and collective success valued in many African, Asian and Indigenous cultures.

Moreover, the critique extends beyond cultural mismatches to address how these attributes are embedded within broader socio-political and economic structures that privilege certain forms of knowledge and ways of being over others (Leask, 2009). This critique suggests that the prevailing models of graduate attributes inadvertently perpetuate inequalities by ascribing value to Western-centric norms and practices, potentially marginalising students whose identities and experiences do not align with these norms (Stein and Andreotti, 2016).

In response to these critiques, there is a growing call for a more contextualised and inclusive approach to defining and developing graduate attributes. Such an approach would not only recognise but also integrate the diverse cultural, social, and economic realities of students into the conception and assessment of graduate attributes. By doing so, higher education institutions can move towards more equitable and meaningful educational outcomes that truly reflect the diversity of the global student body.

2.3.3 Contextualisation of Graduate Attributes

The call for the contextualisation of graduate attributes recognises the critical need to adapt these educational outcomes to reflect a broader range of cultural, social, and economic realities (Benvenuti, MacGregor and de Klerk, 2022; Leask, 2009). This approach advocates for the inclusion of considerations such as race, class, gender, language, and global perspectives in the development and assessment of graduate attributes (Jones and Killick, 2013). Through the lens of social realism and critical realism, this contextualisation is theoretically justified as these frameworks emphasise the importance of acknowledging the diverse social structures, cultural practices, and individual agencies that influence educational experiences and outcomes.

2.3.4 Social and Critical Realism as Theoretical Frameworks

Social realism, with its focus on the significance of knowledge and its situatedness within specific social contexts, provides a foundation for understanding how graduate attributes can be made more relevant and equitable (Maton, 2004). It posits that for education to be genuinely transformative, it must engage with the social conditions of knowledge production and dissemination (Bhaskar, 1979). Critical realism extends this argument by highlighting the stratified nature of reality and the necessity of uncovering the underlying mechanisms that produce observable educational phenomena (Gillborn, 2005). This includes examining how societal structures and cultural assumptions shape what is valued as knowledge and competence in higher education.

2.3.5 Addressing Diversity and Inequality

By incorporating considerations of race, class, gender, language, and global perspectives, the contextualisation of graduate attributes challenges the homogenising tendencies of education systems (Hockings, 2010). This approach acknowledges that students come from varied backgrounds and that these differences impact their learning experiences and opportunities. For instance, the way in which graduate attributes are conceptualised and assessed can inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities by privileging certain forms of knowledge and ways of communicating over others (Hockings, 2010).

2.3.6 Towards Inclusive Educational Practices

The move towards contextualising graduate attributes represents an effort to create more inclusive educational practices that recognise and value diversity. This involves rethinking curriculum design, teaching methods, and assessment practices to ensure that they reflect a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives (Hocking, 2010). Furthermore, this contextualisation requires a commitment to critical reflexivity among educators and policymakers, encouraging them to examine their assumptions about knowledge, competence, and educational success (Brookfield, 1995).

The contextualisation of graduate attributes is not merely an academic exercise but a practical endeavour aimed at making higher education more responsive to the needs of a diverse student body (Barnett, 2007). By grounding this effort in the theoretical frameworks of social and critical realism, this approach offers a robust justification for reimagining graduate attributes in a way that is inclusive, equitable, and reflective of the complex realities of the globalised world.

2.3.7 Conceptions of Graduate Attributes

The conceptualisation of graduate attributes has emerged to be a critical discourse within higher education, reflecting a collective exercise to outline the essential skills and competencies that are deemed necessary for graduates to successfully navigate and contribute to the contemporary workforce and society (Barrie, 2004). This literature review embarks on a critical examination of the existing scholarship regarding the conceptions of graduate attributes, leveraging seminal contributions from esteemed scholars such as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Their pioneering work in capability theory offers invaluable insights into understanding education's role in fostering the holistic development of individuals. Through a comprehensive and evaluative lens, the following discussion illuminates the various dimensions of graduate attributes and spotlights the gaps in critical as well as contextual analyses within the literature.

2.3.8 Pedagogical Approaches to Developing Graduate Attributes

The exploration of pedagogical strategies conducive to the cultivation of graduate attributes reveals a domain ripe for further scholarly inquiry. While the significance of pedagogy is acknowledged across the board, there exists a paucity of detailed analyses examining the efficacy of various teaching methodologies, curricular designs, and assessment mechanisms in nurturing these attributes. The literature suggests that innovative pedagogical frameworks such as problem-based learning, service learning, and experiential learning present promising pathways for the development of graduate attributes by engaging students with real-world issues and reflective practices (Kilpatrick, Barrett, and Jones, 2013). However, comprehensive evaluations assessing the effectiveness of these pedagogical models across different disciplines and cultural settings are notably scarce.

To deepen the theoretical foundation, the research examines how constructs such as race, class, gender, and language can be interpreted through Social Realist and Critical Realist lenses. Race is argued as a real mechanism of power, where hegemonic assumptions of superiority perpetuate and reinforce "White, Western" conceptions of graduate attributes (Komane, 2022; McCoy and Rodricks, 2015). These conceptions often align with individualist, neoliberal ideologies, framing GAs as market-driven traits rather than collective or context-specific capabilities (Busch, 2023; Bowman, Salter, Stephenson and Humble, 2024; Elmore, 2023). Similarly, the class can be seen as a structural determinant influencing access to educational opportunities, thereby shaping the acquisition and operationalisation of graduate attributes (Munir, Faiza, Jamal, Daud, and Iqbal, 2023). Gender and language, too, are explored as mechanisms that contribute to the stratification of educational outcomes, influencing perceptions of competency and success in culturally specific ways (Jacob et al., 2020; Marks, 2008; Mcdool, and Morris, 2020).

The study critiques the variability in the conceptualisation and implementation of graduate attributes across different cultural, social, and economic contexts. It highlights how a Realist perspective can expose the hidden mechanisms and structures that sustain inequalities, calling for a more contextualised and inclusive approach to GA frameworks. This approach would better align with local needs and

values, challenging dominant paradigms and fostering a more equitable higher education system.

2.3.9 The Role of Context in Shaping Graduate Attributes

The investigation into the role of contextual factors in defining and prioritising graduate attributes constitutes a critical yet underexplored area of research. The extent to which socio-economic conditions, cultural values, and educational traditions influence the conceptualisation and perceived value of graduate attributes, particularly in developing countries, remains inadequately addressed. In such environments, where higher education is often viewed as a conduit for social and economic upliftment, the correlation between graduate attributes and societal advancement objectives becomes particularly salient (Knight and Yorke, 2004). Nevertheless, the discourse frequently treats graduate attributes as a homogeneous set of competencies, largely overlooking the variability in their relevance and application across different societal and educational contexts (Leask, 2009).

2.3.10 Incorporating Student Perspectives on Graduate Attributes

Equally important is the inclusion of student voices in the discourse on graduate attributes. Investigating students' perceptions of these attributes, their relevance to personal and professional goals, and the obstacles encountered in acquiring these competencies can offer invaluable insights into the effectiveness of educational strategies and highlight areas in need of curricular innovation (Jackson, 2016). "; and ensure that the following comment is addressed and make this discussion evaluative a proper critique and comprehensive: Yes, but needs greater unpacking: what does this mean and how does this fit with Realist considerations of GAs and their incorporation in curriculum?

The inclusion of student perspectives in the discourse on graduate attributes is not merely beneficial but essential for developing an effective educational strategy. Investigating how students perceive these attributes, their relevance to personal and professional aspirations, and the challenges faced in acquiring these competencies provides a critical lens through which the applicability and impact of graduate attributes

can be assessed (Jackson, 2016). This engagement goes beyond simple consultation; it involves integrating student feedback into a continuous cycle of curriculum development and refinement.

From a Realist perspective, where graduate attributes are viewed not just as individual traits but as outcomes shaped by educational processes within specific social contexts, understanding student perceptions becomes pivotal. It enables educators to see how attributes are internalised and enacted by students, thus providing direct insights into the effectiveness of how these attributes are currently integrated into the curriculum. For instance, if students report that certain attributes seem disconnected from their real-world applications, this could indicate a misalignment between the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum and the practical demands of the outside world.

Moreover, incorporating student feedback into the development of graduate attributes aligns with Archer's critical realist framework, which advocates for an approach that recognises the active role of the individual within broader structural constraints. By actively soliciting and incorporating students' insights, educators can ensure that the development of graduate attributes not only addresses the institutional mission and external societal needs but also resonates with the student body's diverse experiences and expectations. This approach can highlight potential areas where the curriculum may inadvertently reinforce existing biases or overlook important cultural or societal nuances.

Thus, integrating student perspectives into the curriculum development process should focus on how well these insights are used to bridge the gap between theoretical educational objectives and the practical, lived experiences of students. There is a need to assess whether these contributions lead to tangible changes in curriculum design, ensuring that graduate attributes are both realistic and relevant, fostering an educational environment that is responsive and adaptive to the evolving needs of its students.

2.3.11 Assessment of Graduate Attributes

This section provides an overview of current graduate assessment and critique from Critical Realistic perspectives.

2.3.12 Overview of Current Assessment Practices

Current practices in assessing graduate attributes vary widely among colleges, often integrating both direct and indirect methods of assessment. Direct assessment methods include exams, projects, portfolios, and capstone experiences, where students' work is evaluated against predetermined criteria or rubrics. Indirect methods involve surveys, interviews, and reflection essays, where students self-assess their skills or report their learning experiences (Barrie, 2007; Treleaven and Voola, 2008). Several institutions have also adopted competency-based education (CBE) models, which focus on demonstrating students' competence in specific attributes through practical, real-world tasks (Caspersz and Olaru, 2017). Despite the variety of methods employed, the assessment of graduate attributes poses significant challenges, particularly in ensuring reliability, validity, and alignment with industry needs.

2.3.13 Critique from a Critical Realist Perspective

From a critical realist perspective, which emphasizes the importance of understanding both the material and the social conditions that influence phenomena (Bhaskar, 1978), the existing methods of assessing graduate attributes are subject to critique on several fronts.

First, the reduction of complex, multifaceted attributes into measurable outcomes can oversimplify and misrepresent the true nature of these attributes. This reductionism fails to account for the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts that shape the development and demonstration of graduate attributes (Kreber, 2013). For instance, the emphasis on quantifiable outcomes may neglect the deeper, transformative aspects of learning that contribute to a student's ability to think critically, engage ethically, or communicate effectively in diverse settings.

Second, existing assessments often prioritise technical and cognitive skills over affective and relational attributes, such as empathy, resilience, and collaboration, which are increasingly recognised as crucial for success in today's complex, interconnected world (Oliver, 2015). This imbalance reflects a broader epistemological bias towards positivist approaches, which value measurable, observable outcomes over subjective, experiential knowledge (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Moreover, the reliance on direct assessment methods, while valuable for ensuring accountability and standards, can lead to a narrow focus on achieving specific outcomes at the expense of fostering holistic, integrated learning experiences. Such approaches risk promoting a transactional view of education, where learning is seen as a commodity to be acquired rather than a transformative process (Barnett, 1990).

The assessment of graduate attributes remains a complex, multifaceted challenge within higher education. A critical realist perspective highlights the limitations of current practices and offers valuable insights for rethinking assessment in ways that are more holistic, contextual, and collaborative. Engaging with Realist theory as an alternative or complementary lens in the context of graduate attributes offers significant value by addressing the limitations of dominant educational paradigms, particularly those shaped by neoliberal, individualist ideologies. While traditional critiques focus on how market-driven concepts of graduate attributes (GAs) often marginalise collective, context-specific, and socially inclusive capabilities, Realism provides a theoretical framework that deepens our understanding of the underlying structures influencing educational systems and GAs.

Realist theory, particularly as applied in education by scholars (Boughey and McKenna, 2017; Lockett, 2019) brings attention to the mechanisms that are often invisible in other frameworks but play a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes. These mechanisms—such as social structures, power relations, and cultural norms—are critical in understanding why certain GAs are valorised while others are excluded. Through Realism, education is viewed not just as a site for the transmission of knowledge but as a complex system embedded within broader societal structures, which determine access, success, and the operationalisation of GAs.

2.3.14 Summary of Reviewed Literature

Graduate attributes, as defined by Barrie (2007), encompass the skills, knowledge, and abilities that universities agree their students should develop during their time in higher education. These attributes are increasingly recognised for their importance in shaping well-rounded graduates who are equipped to navigate the complexities of diverse societal contexts (Oliver, 2015). This perspective underscores the role of graduate attributes in preparing students for broad, adaptive engagement in a variety of social, cultural, and personal scenarios. Comparative analysis of literature from various scholars (Barrie, 2007; Oliver, 2015; Bridgstock, 2009) reveals a consensus on the significance of these attributes, yet there is a notable divergence in how institutions conceptualise, implement, and assess them.

A critical evaluation of the methodologies employed across different studies illustrates a predominant reliance on qualitative assessments, often through surveys and interviews with faculty and students (Stirling, 2016). While these methods provide valuable insights into perceptions of graduate attributes, they fall short in offering a standardised measure of assessment. This gap in the literature signals a pressing need for the development of more robust, quantitative tools that can provide empirical data on the effectiveness of educational strategies in fostering these attributes.

The literature reveals a significant challenge in achieving a universal definition and understanding of what constitutes essential graduate attributes. This ambiguity complicates the assessment process and raises questions about the comparability of graduate attributes across different disciplines and institutions (Barrie, 2007; Oliver, 2015). Furthermore, the critique extends to the practical implementation of pedagogical strategies aimed at developing these attributes. The work of Bridgstock (2009) and Stirling (2016) highlights a frequent disconnect between theoretical frameworks and practical application, suggesting that many educational institutions struggle to embed these attributes cohesively into their curricula.

Another critical area of concern identified in the literature is the lack of consideration for the contextual factors that influence the development and relevance of graduate attributes. Factors such as cultural background, socio-economic status, and the rapidly

evolving job market significantly impact the applicability and acquisition of certain attributes (Jones, 2009; Tymon, 2013). This oversight underscores the necessity for a more contextualised and critical approach to understanding graduate attributes, one that transcends a one-size-fits-all model.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This literature review identified significant insights regarding graduate attributes, emphasizing their crucial role in the academic and professional formation of students within the higher education sphere. The findings from the review underscore the intricate challenges inherent in creating, applying, and evaluating these attributes in a manner that is both universally applicable and attuned to the specific contexts of diverse student populations. The critical review of current literature advocates for a thorough reassessment of existing educational frameworks, urging the adoption of a more refined and inclusive strategy that recognises and addresses the varied experiences and needs of students around the world. This call to action proposes a strategic overhaul of educational practices and infrastructures to more effectively equip students for navigating the complexities and seizing the opportunities of the 21st century landscape. The next chapter explores the research methodology adopted in the conducting of this research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlined the methodology employed to explore the nuances and implications of graduate attributes, as perceived within the context of the Human Resource Management (HRM) programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape. The investigation into these attributes necessitated a qualitative research approach, which facilitated a detailed exploration of the nuanced perceptions and lived experiences of both graduates and lecturers. Such an approach was essential for capturing the depth and complexity inherent in how educational outcomes were interpreted and valued within vocational settings.

The chapter established the linkage between the research questions developed in Chapter 1 and the methodological choices made to effectively address them. By focusing on qualitative methods, the study aimed to uncover rich, contextual insights that quantitative methods might have overlooked. The methodology section was thus critical, as it set the foundation for gathering authentic, comprehensive data to support a deeper understanding of the role of graduate attributes in shaping professional and personal identities.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

The philosophical underpinning of this research aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, which is foundational in qualitative research aiming to understand complex social realities from the subjective experiences of the participants (Yanow and SchwartzShea,2014). This paradigm supports the notion that reality is socially constructed and multifaceted, thus best explored through direct interaction with the individuals experiencing it (Hammersley, 2013). The interpretivist approach allows the researcher to gain insights into the contextual specifics (Tuli,2010) of graduate attributes within the HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape, by interpreting phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. This

philosophical stance justifies the qualitative methods used in this study, emphasising the depth and quality of data gathered through personal engagements rather than the breadth of quantitative metrics.

3.2.2 Ontology

According to Crotty (1998), ontology is a community-based worldview regarding the nature of our world. Ontology is the study of being, which informs the theoretical perspective (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In contrast, ontology is also concerned with the nature of being, existence or reality (Creswell, 2015). In carrying out research, the ontological question is about the form and nature of reality and, thus, what knowledge could be created about the phenomena. In this context, the ontological concern in this study is about the realities that could be known regarding nuances and implications of graduate attributes, as perceived within the context of the Human Resource Management (HRM) programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape.

3.2.3 Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with beliefs that relate to the scope and nature of knowledge or what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a particular field of study, that is, the types of evidence used to make claims (Creswell, 2015). In epistemology, researchers consider how knowledge is acquired and how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). According to Maynard (1994), epistemology is concerned with establishing a philosophical underpinning for what kinds of knowledge are feasible and how we may ensure that they are both adequate and acceptable. Therefore, epistemology is concerned with the appropriate level of knowledge in a certain field of study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). In the context of the study on the nuances and implications of graduate attributes within the Human Resource Management (HRM) programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape, epistemology provides a framework to interrogate the types of knowledge that are regarded as legitimate and valuable in shaping graduate outcomes.

This is particularly relevant when considering graduate attributes, as they encompass not only technical competencies but also soft skills, ethical values, and broader social capabilities. The epistemological underpinning of the study ensures that the inquiry is

grounded in a coherent understanding of what counts as knowledge in vocational education and how such knowledge aligns with both academic and industry expectations.

3.2.4 Methodological Choice

The interpretivist paradigm, foundational in qualitative research, emphasises understanding complex social realities through the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals or groups attribute to phenomena (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022; Scauso, 2024). This approach is critical for research that aims to explore deeply contextual and human-centric issues, such as the perceptions and implications of graduate attributes in educational programs.

Interpretivism operates on the premise that reality is socially constructed (Junjie and Yingxin, 2022; Ryan, 2018), emphasising the importance of context and the nuanced perspectives of participants. Researchers employing this paradigm focus on rich, descriptive methods such as interviews, participant observations, and case studies, aiming to uncover the intricate ways individuals understand their experiences and social environments (Pervin, and Mokhtar, 2022; Junjie and Yingxin, 2022).

Reflexivity, or critical self-awareness of the researcher's biases and their influence on the study, is also integral to maintaining validity in this approach (Mantzoukas, 2005; Probst and Berenson, 2014).

The choice of a qualitative methodology is driven by the need to capture detailed, textured insights into how graduate attributes are perceived and manifested in the educational setting of a South African TVET college. Qualitative methods are ideal for this type of exploratory research because they enable a deeper understanding of the contexts and complexities of human behaviour and organisational practices. They are particularly effective in identifying and analysing the nuances and subtleties that define the educational landscape, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study than would be possible through quantitative methods alone.

3.2.5 Research Strategy

The research adopts a case study methodology, a widely recognized approach for conducting holistic and in-depth investigations. This method enables the researcher to examine the HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape within its real-life context, preserving the complexity and richness of the case. The case study methodology is particularly effective for exploring educational processes, institutional decision-making, and the integration and impact of graduate attributes. By focusing on a single institution, it provides nuanced insights that may not emerge in broader studies, allowing for a detailed analysis of specific dynamics. This approach serves as a powerful tool for advancing both practical solutions and theoretical understandings (Schoch, 2020; Priya, 2021).

3.2.6 Issues Relating to Research Design

The adoption of these methodological choices brings several considerations into play. First, the qualitative approach demands a high level of interaction between the researcher and participants, which can introduce bias but also provides a depth of understanding unachievable by detached survey methods (Lim, 2024; Stenfors, Kajamaa, and Bennett, 2020). The case study strategy, while offering profound insights into a specific context, may limit the generalisability of the findings (Cleland, MacLeod Ellaway, 2021; Lim, 2024). However, this limitation is acknowledged and mitigated through the careful consideration of the case's contextual factors, which can inform broader discussions within educational research, especially in similar vocational settings. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm requires that the findings be interpreted in light of the participants' perspectives and contexts, ensuring that conclusions drawn are reflective of and remain true to their experiences.

By carefully designing the research in alignment with these principles and considerations, the study ensures that the findings will provide valuable insights into the implementation and impact of graduate attributes in the South African vocational education sector.

3.3 RESEARCH SETTING

The setting for this research, a TVET College in the Western Cape, is located within a socio economically diverse area of South Africa. This environment provides a unique backdrop for examining the intricacies of vocational education, particularly focusing on the HRM program's Labour Relations curriculum. The college acts as a microcosm of the broader national educational landscape, illustrating how graduate attributes are developed and valued within the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. The demographic and geographic specifics of the college offer insightful perspectives on the challenges and opportunities faced by vocational institutions in emerging economies, where educational outcomes are deeply intertwined with economic imperatives and social mobility (Wheelahan et al., 2019).

The curriculum is designed to provide students with a robust understanding of labour relations, integrating key elements such as legal terminology, effective communication skills, and the application of significant legislation, including the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Labour Relations Act. This practical orientation reflects a global trend in TVET education, prioritizing alignment with industry demands. However, this pragmatic approach raises critical questions about the breadth and depth of the graduate attributes it cultivates, particularly regarding their capacity to navigate complex, unforeseen challenges in professional settings.

This inquiry is particularly pressing in the South African context, where higher education is viewed as a driver for socio-economic transformation (McGrath, 2017). While the curriculum's focus on individual graduate attributes aligns with employability objectives, it appears to overlook the sociolinguistic, racial, gender, socio-economic, and class dimensions of the broader socio-political landscape. This limited perspective may compromise the curriculum's effectiveness, as it risks neglecting the systemic and intersectional factors shaping workplace dynamics and societal challenges. Such omissions could hinder graduates' ability to engage meaningfully and adaptively within diverse and inequitable environments.

HR graduate attributes are shaped by the interaction of culture, institutions, and agents, balancing hard skills (technical abilities like labour law compliance, recruitment

processes, payroll systems, performance management, and policy drafting) and soft skills (interpersonal abilities like cultural sensitivity). Institutions design programmes to align with cultural values, while agents—educators, students, and employers—develop these attributes through teaching and practice, ensuring graduates meet diverse workforce demands. It is crucial to assess the extent to which these methodologies facilitate the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills alongside technical competencies. This inquiry is essential for evaluating whether the pedagogical approaches used successfully cultivate a holistic educational experience that aligns with the transformative goals of TVET education (Avis, 2018).

The socio-economic diversity at a TVET College in the Western Cape adds significant complexity to the Labour Relations curriculum by introducing varied learning needs, cultural perspectives, and career aspirations. This diversity shapes how graduate attributes are perceived and valued by students, directly influencing their engagement with the learning process and their ultimate educational outcomes. Students from differing backgrounds may face challenges like unequal access to resources or varying levels of preparedness, requiring the curriculum to balance foundational support with advanced content.

The Labour Relations curriculum within the HRM program provides a focused lens to explore how graduate attributes are integrated into curricula and how they resonate with both students' aspirations and the demands of the labour market. Its emphasis on practical skills, legal frameworks, and communication offers a rich setting for investigating the transformative potential of vocational education in South Africa. By addressing socio-economic diversity and emphasizing inclusivity, the curriculum highlights both its strengths and areas for improvement in equipping students to navigate the complexities of modern workplaces and integrate into broader society (Fongwa, 2017; Tomlinson, 2018).

3.4 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The process of participant selection in qualitative research is crucial for ensuring the depth and relevance of the data collected (Bazen, Barg, and Takeshita, 2021; Subedi,

2021). For this study, the purposive selection technique is employed, which is particularly suitable for exploratory research that aims to delve into specific phenomena experienced by distinct groups (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method allows the researcher to selectively choose individuals who are especially knowledgeable or have firsthand experience relevant to the graduate attributes developed in the HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape.

3.4.1 Target Populations and Study Sample

This study seeks to engage two key groups within the HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape: graduates and lecturers. By exploring their lived experiences and perspectives, the research aims to understand how they perceive and navigate the educational process, particularly in relation to the socio-cultural dynamics of the curriculum. Framed within an interpretivist paradigm, the study emphasizes the subjective meanings participants attribute to their experiences, uncovering (Bentalha, and Alla, 2024; Lim, 2024) how structural inequalities and cultural contexts shape their educational journeys and outcomes.

3.4.2 Graduates

The graduate cohort included individuals who had recently completed the HRM program and were navigating diverse socio-cultural environments. While their perspectives were crucial for understanding how well the curriculum addressed societal norms and prepared students for broader social participation, there were limitations in their ability to provide the requisite insight. These recent graduates were still in the process of adjusting to the complexities of the workforce and societal roles, which constrained their capacity to critically assess the curriculum's impact on social change. By focusing on their post-graduation experiences, the study explored how educational strategies had empowered them to understand and critique the structural dynamics they encountered. This approach aligned with the critical theory framework by examining the extent to which the education they received fostered critical consciousness and societal engagement among graduates.

3.4.3 Lecturers

The 10 lecturers were selected to offer a rich, diverse range of instructional perspectives, ensuring a nuanced understanding of how the curriculum is implemented and experienced. This sample size was intentionally chosen to capture the variety of pedagogical approaches and to provide a deeper insight into the interpretive dynamics of teaching within the HRM program. By focusing on their experiences and reflections, the study aimed to uncover how faculty perceive and navigate the challenges of integrating critical theory and socio-cultural awareness into vocational education.

3.4.4 Sample Size Justification

The overall population comprised approximately 150 graduates who completed the NATED Human Resource Management (HRM) programme between 2019 and 2023, and 15 lecturers who were involved in delivering the HRM curriculum during this period at a TVET College in the Western Cape. The total estimated population from which the sample was drawn was therefore 165 individuals.

Out of this population, 21 participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement with or experience in the HRM programme. This included 11 graduates and 10 lecturers. The inclusion criteria for graduates were: (a) having completed the HRM programme within the last five years, and (b) availability and willingness to reflect on their academic and employment experiences. Lecturers were selected based on: (a) their current or past teaching experience within the NATED HRM programme, and (b) their involvement in curriculum implementation or graduate preparation.

This sampling strategy was chosen to ensure data richness and relevance to the study's aim of exploring the integration and effectiveness of graduate attributes in the HRM programme.

The sample size of 11 graduates and 10 lecturers was strategically chosen based on the concept of saturation in qualitative research. Saturation was generally reached when no additional data were found to develop new code or themes (Braun and Clarke,

2021; Guest, Namey and Chen, 2020). Studies suggest that saturation often occurs within 12 to 20 interviews in educational research settings (Vasileiou et al., 2018). By selecting 11 graduates, the study aimed to capture a broad range of experiences while remaining within the limits where additional data do not necessarily contribute to more information. The 10 lecturers were chosen to provide a comprehensive overview of the instructional perspectives, ensuring that the sample size is sufficiently representative to gather diverse insights about pedagogical effectiveness and curriculum implementation.

3.4.5 Rationale for Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was particularly appropriate for this study, as it allowed the researcher to select individuals with specific insights into the HRM program's influence on graduate outcomes. Graduates who had recently completed the program offered valuable perspectives, though their ability to critically assess the long-term impact was limited by their ongoing adjustment to the workforce. To address this, the study focused on their immediate post-graduation reflections, recognising that their views might evolve.

The lecturers provided a deeper understanding of the curriculum's intentions and challenges, though their insights were influenced by institutional norms and pedagogical limitations. The study addressed this by using structured interviews, allowing faculty to reflect on their experiences and challenges in implementing the curriculum.

This approach facilitated the collection of detailed, relevant data, in line with best practices in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015; Etikan et al., 2017). Despite the limitations, the study aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the HRM program's impact.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In the context of this study on HR graduate attributes within a TVET college, purposive sampling was particularly relevant as it allowed the selection of graduates and

lecturers with direct experience of the HRM programme. Recent graduates provided critical insights into how the programme shaped their readiness for the workplace and their engagement with broader socio-cultural dynamics. However, their ability to evaluate the programme's long-term impact was naturally constrained by their limited professional experience. To address this, the study prioritised capturing their immediate post-graduation reflections, acknowledging that these perspectives might evolve with time.

Lecturers, on the other hand, offered valuable insights into the design and delivery of the HRM curriculum, particularly in embedding graduate attributes such as critical thinking and socio-cultural awareness. Their reflections were shaped by institutional norms and the practical challenges of implementing the curriculum within a vocational education setting. Structured interviews enabled them to articulate their experiences and challenges, providing a deeper understanding of how the curriculum was designed to meet the evolving demands of the labour market and societal expectations.

This targeted approach facilitated the collection of rich, relevant data, enabling a nuanced analysis of how HR graduate attributes are integrated into the TVET curriculum. Despite the limitations, the study provided a comprehensive view of the program's impact, aligning with best practices in qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015; Etikan et al., 2017).

3.5.1 Understanding the Research Instruments

The semi-structured interview guides used in this study were carefully designed to gather in-depth insights (Naz., Gulab and Aslam., 2022; Ruslin at al., 2022). into the perceptions and experiences of graduates and faculty regarding graduate attributes in the NATED: Human Resource Management program at a TVET College in the Western Cape. Two distinct guides; *Interview Guide A for lecturers* and *Interview Guide B* for graduates (attached to the appendix of the study), ensured that the questions were tailored to the specific roles and experiences of each participant group.

Interview Guide A consisted of questions aimed at uncovering lecturers' understanding of graduate attributes, their importance, and the methods used to assess and promote

them. Questions also explored how factors such as race, class, gender, and language were considered in designing equitable approaches to fostering graduate attributes. These questions were intended to reveal how faculty integrated these attributes into the curriculum, their pedagogical strategies, and the challenges they encountered in promoting critical thinking and social awareness.

Interview Guide B was developed to capture graduates' perspectives on how the program influenced their understanding of graduate attributes and prepared them for professional and societal roles. Questions focused on the visibility of these attributes in the curriculum, the significance of specific attributes, and the effectiveness of teaching and assessment strategies. These were designed to explore the graduates' firsthand experiences of how the curriculum supported their development of critical consciousness and practical competencies.

This dual approach ensured that the research captured a comprehensive view of the HRM programmes impact. Faculty insights highlighted the intentions and challenges behind the curriculum design, while graduates' reflections provided valuable feedback on its real-world applicability. Together, these perspectives addressed the study's core aim of assessing how the programmes fostered graduate attributes that align with critical theory and transformative societal engagement.

3.5.2 Administration of the Interviews

Interviews were conducted by the researcher either in person or through virtual platforms, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp video calls. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 minutes. All participating lecturers chose to be interviewed in person. Among the student participants, three opted for interviews via Microsoft Teams, two via Zoom, and five via WhatsApp video call. The use of multiple platforms allowed for flexibility and inclusivity, particularly for participants who were geographically dispersed or unable to attend in-person sessions. All interviews, whether in person or online, were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher for the purposes of analysis. This approach ensured sufficient depth in the discussions while maintaining comfort for the participants (Maulana, 2021; Wakelin, McAraCouper and Fleming, 2024). The interviews were scheduled in quiet, private settings to create a conducive

atmosphere for open and honest dialogue. Before each session, participants were informed about the study's purpose and their rights. Consent forms were signed to confirm their voluntary participation (see Appendices). Detailed notes were taken during the interviews to capture both verbal responses and non-verbal cues, providing a rich dataset for later analysis.

3.5.3 Pilot Study

Before the full-scale data collection, a pilot study was conducted with two graduates and two lecturers who volunteered to participate. The primary aim of the pilot study was to test the interview guides for clarity and effectiveness in eliciting the desired information (Lee, Simko and Gentile, 2021; Shakir, and Rahman, 2022). This stage was critical, as it allowed for necessary adjustments to the interview questions based on the feedback received. Participants in the pilot study were asked to provide feedback on the clarity of the questions and the comfort of the interview process. The feedback was used to refine the interview questions, adjusting phrasing or order to improve the flow and ensure that each question effectively contributed to understanding the core research themes. This iterative process helped fine-tune the research instruments, ensuring that the final set of questions was capable of capturing comprehensive and relevant data.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

For this study on HR graduate attributes in a TVET college context, thematic analysis was applied to systematically examine qualitative data, highlighting themes that captured the complexities of educational experiences. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2021), involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This method aligned with the study's objectives by enabling a nuanced exploration of the interactions between curriculum, faculty, and graduate experiences.

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step methodology:

1. **Familiarisation with the Data:** The researcher thoroughly read the interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of their content.

2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Relevant data segments were systematically coded to capture their essence.
3. **Searching for Themes:** The codes were collated into potential themes, reflecting meaningful patterns in the data.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Themes were refined to ensure they accurately represented the data and were coherent.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme underwent final analysis to determine its significance and was assigned clear, descriptive labels.
6. **Producing the Report:** The results were compiled into a narrative contextualised within existing literature, supported by illustrative data extracts.

Analytic process in ATLAS.ti

The coding process was conducted using **ATLAS.ti 25** to ensure a systematic and rigorous analysis of the qualitative data. The following steps were undertaken:

1. **Project Setup:** I began by creating a new project in ATLAS.ti (Cornelius Retief_M_ED Project) and importing 21 transcribed interview documents into the project workspace. Each document was assigned to a relevant participant group (i.e. graduates or lecturers) to support comparative analysis later.
2. **Open Coding:** I engaged in line-by-line reading of the transcripts and applied **open coding** to segments of text that represented significant ideas, perceptions, or patterns. These codes were largely descriptive and grounded in the data (datadriven), capturing the essence of participants' responses without imposing preconceived categories.
3. **Code Management:** As codes began to accumulate, I reviewed and refined them for clarity, consistency, and relevance. ATLAS.ti's **Code Manager** was used to merge overlapping codes, rename codes for clarity, and organise them into emerging categories.

4. **Axial Coding / Categorisation:** Using the **Code Groups** features, I grouped related codes into categories and linked them to broader conceptual themes. At this stage, I also began relating the codes to the research questions and theoretical framework to ensure conceptual coherence.
5. **Memoing and Annotation:** I wrote analytic **memos** alongside the coding process to document my thoughts, emerging insights, and justifications for coding decisions. ATLAS.ti's **Memo** tool enabled me to reflect critically on the developing analysis and to track interpretive decisions.
6. **Quotation Retrieval:** Finally, ATLAS.ti's **Quotation Manager** allowed for easy retrieval of relevant excerpts from the data to support the themes discussed in the findings chapter. These quotations were used to illustrate key points and ensure the voices of participants were authentically represented

The flexibility and depth of thematic analysis made it particularly suitable for exploring the rich and contextual interactions within this study. To enhance methodological rigour, ATLAS.ti Version 25 software was used for data organisation and retrieval, ensuring a structured and transparent approach to analysis (Gupta, 2024; Ronzani, da Costa, da Silva, Pigola and de Paiva, 2020). This tool helped manage the complexity of the dataset, maintaining the reliability and validity of the research findings.

By adhering to these robust analytical standards, the study successfully identified themes that provided valuable insights into how the HRM programme at the TVET college influenced graduate preparedness, faculty perspectives, and the integration of graduate attributes.

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness in qualitative research, as conceptualized through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, plays a critical role in ensuring that the findings of this study on HR graduate attributes in the TVET college context are rigorous and reflective of the participants' lived experiences (Nowell et al., 2017; Tracy, 2020). These criteria directly relate to the study's qualitative orientation and its broader social and critical value by upholding the integrity of the research process and outcomes.

3.7.1 Credibility

In this study, credibility was vital to accurately capture the perspectives of faculty and graduates on how the HRM curriculum fosters graduate attributes. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation allowed the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences, enhancing the depth and authenticity of the findings (Morse, 2015). Peer debriefing ensured that the data interpretation remained unbiased and aligned with the participants' perspectives, further strengthening the study's credibility. By adhering to these principles, the study emphasized the socio-cultural significance of graduate attributes within the HRM programme, critically examining how the curriculum prepares graduates not only for employment but also for meaningful societal engagement, addressing issues of equity, empowerment, and transformation.

3.7.2 Transferability

The study's value lies in its potential applicability to similar educational and institutional contexts. By providing a thick description of the research setting, including detailed accounts of the curriculum, teaching practices, and participant experiences, the study ensures that others can evaluate its findings for relevance in their contexts (Tracy, 2020). This transferability ensures that the insights gained could influence curriculum design and teaching strategies in other TVET colleges or similar institutions.

Furthermore, trustworthiness in this aspect underpins the study's contribution to educational discourse, ensuring its findings remain both robust and impactful in addressing broader societal and educational challenges

3.7.3 Dependability

The dependability of the study was reinforced by maintaining a detailed audit trail that documented every step of the research process. This included decisions about data collection, coding, and analysis, ensuring that the process was consistent and transparent (Nowell et al., 2017). Such a methodological approach not only strengthens the reliability of the findings but also highlights the study's critical value by

showcasing a replicable framework for examining curriculum efficacy in other vocational education settings.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, achieved through reflexivity and member checking, was central to the study's objective of minimizing researcher bias and prioritizing participants' voices (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Reflexivity ensured that the researcher continually evaluated their positionality and assumptions, aligning with the critical theory framework by acknowledging and mitigating power dynamics inherent in the research process. Member checking allowed participants to review and validate interpretations, affirming the authenticity of the findings. By adhering to these practices, the study underlines its role in fostering equity, empowerment, and transformation, thus ensuring that its findings contribute meaningfully to both social and educational contexts.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in this study went beyond participant engagement to include the broader educational context and the critical analysis of graduate attributes (GAs). Ethics ensured the research addressed issues of equity, empowerment, and societal impact, reflecting the study's critical and social objectives.

3.8.1 Ethical Approval

Approval from the School of Education Research Ethics Committee (EDN REC) ensured the study met ethical standards and addressed any risks (Resnik, 2018). The research design, participant recruitment, and data handling procedures were reviewed and approved, with the approval letter included in the appendix.

3.8.2 Informed Consent

Participants were provided with clear consent forms outlining the study's purpose, risks, and benefits (Resnik, 2018). They were informed of their right to withdraw without consequence, and could ask questions before signing the consent form.

3.8.3 Voluntary Participation

Participation was voluntary, ensuring that participants were not coerced (Galletta and Cross, 2013). This was clearly stated in the consent form and reiterated during the interview process.

3.8.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing interview transcripts and restricting access to the data. All identifying information was removed to protect participants' privacy (Sim and Waterfield, 2019).

3.8.5 Data Security

Data were encrypted and stored securely, with physical copies kept in locked storage (Metschke and Wellbrock, 2017). This protected the integrity and confidentiality of the data.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an outline of the methodological framework employed to explore the development and impact of graduate attributes within the HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research was designed to capture in-depth insights into the nuanced social interactions and specific educational settings of the programme. The use of semistructured interviews, enhanced by rigorous data analysis through thematic analysis, ensured a comprehensive understanding of both the pedagogical strategies and student experiences. Ethical considerations were stringently adhered to, safeguarding participant confidentiality and data integrity. This thorough methodological foundation ensures that the findings are robust and credible, setting the stage for the next chapter, which will present the findings, linking them to the theoretical underpinnings discussed in Chapter 2 and addressing the central research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, diverse aspects of the research methodology were explored. This chapter unveils the findings from meticulous data analysis, stemming from interviews conducted with 21 respondents. The study seeks to understand graduate attributes' nuances and implications, as perceived by educational institutions and graduate students. Specifically, the study explores how graduates' attributes are defined, perceived, and valued within vocational education and training. The textual data results that emerged are organised into discernible themes and sub-themes.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results are presented in this section of the study. Two interview Guides were employed in the study, specifically, Interview Guides A and B. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, whilst Interview Guide A was administered to the lecturers, interview B was administered to the HR graduates who were former students of the institution in the case study (TVET College in the Western Cape). The Interview Guide A consisted of eleven questions posed to the respondents (lecturers). Four questions were posed to gather demographic information from the respondents. The ensuing three questions were centred on Graduate Attributes (GAs). Regarding these questions on GAs, the researcher seeks to explore the opinions, views and experiences of the lecturers, specifically their level of comprehension of the concept of GAs, the importance of GAs development, and the methods they have employed to assess and recognise the development of graduate attributes in students. The next two questions aimed at exploring the assessment of GAs with due consideration of the interplay of demographic traits of the students regarding race, class, gender, language background, and students' educational and social backgrounds in understanding the meaning of GAs and their development in the course. The next question was to explore the exemplary adopted practices in the course to address the diversity factors based on demographic traits to promote equity in the development of GAs. The last question in the interview guide A was about knowing who is responsible for the development of GAs. Similarly, the interview guide B administered to the graduate students consisted

of ten questions. The first four questions were geared towards collecting demographic information from the graduate students. The ensuing two questions were centred on Graduate Attributes (GAs). Regarding these questions on GAs, the researcher seeks to explore the opinions, views and experiences of the graduate students, specifically their comprehension of the concept of GAs, the importance of GAs development, and the most important Graduate attributes to develop based on their perspectives. The last three questions in the interview guide B were aimed at exploring the visibility of GAs, ways in which the teaching and development of GAs are integrated into course curriculum, teaching and assessment, and the kind of course curriculum design that aids in the development of GAs. The results are categorised into two main segments: the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the thematic findings derived from the textual data.

4.2.2 Thematic Results

The responses obtained through the interviews from the students and lecturers were coded, synthesised and grouped to emerge themes and sub-themes as presented in

Table 4.1 below

Table 4-1: Emerging themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEME	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTIONS OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES	Conceptualisation of Graduate Attributes Soft skills and abilities as Perceived Graduate Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem-solving skills - Communication skills - Leadership abilities - Interpersonal Skills 	RQ1 and RQ3

THEMES	SUB-THEME	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical Behaviour and Responsibility - Adaptability - Teamwork - Critical thinking - Entrepreneurship Orientation - Global and cultural knowledge - Hard Skills and Abilities as Graduate Attributes - Technical Competence - Analytical Skills - Digital literacy - Formative and summative evaluations 	

<p>IMPORTANCE OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES</p>	<p>Lecturers</p> <p>Preparedness for job readiness</p> <p>Enhancing the application of knowledge in the workplace</p> <p>Employability and adaptability</p>	<p>RQ3</p>
	<p>Students:</p> <p>Developing the skills and quality required by employers</p>	
<p>THEMES</p>	<p>SUB-THEME</p>	<p>RESEARCH OBJECTIVES</p>
	<p>Develop and shape students' experience</p> <p>Navigating the Workforce Complexities</p> <p>Further studies and professional growth</p>	

<p>CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE UNDERSTANDING OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES</p>	<p>Individual -Student Background</p> <p>Institutional Factors Curriculum Design: -Teaching and Learning Methods - Student Support and Development - Student and Institutional Commitment - Assessment Practices Societal factors - Cultural Context - Economic and Labor Market Demands - Community Engagement</p>	
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4.2.2.1 THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTIONS OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

The result emanating from the study regarding the understanding and perception of graduates in terms of the exit graduates acquired skills, knowledge and attitudes at the end of their 3-year diploma programme in Human Resource Management at a TVET College in the Western Cape. When the respondents were asked about their understanding of the concept/idea of graduate attributes in the Human Resource Management programme in NATED at a TVET College in the Western Cape, the results from the respondents (lecturers and students) were grouped to emerge the following sub-themes. The subthemes are the conceptualisation of graduate attributes, soft skills and abilities as perceived graduate attributes and hard skills and abilities as perceived graduate attributes. Each of these sub-themes is further discussed below.

4.2.2.1.1 Conceptualisation of Graduate Attributes

When the respondents were asked about their understanding of the concept/idea of graduate attributes in the Human Resource Management programme in NATED at a TVET College in the Western Cape, mixed responses were obtained from the lecturers and the students, which helps in providing an insightful understanding of the concept.

Lecturers

Given the emanating data from the interviews, the lecturers describe graduate attributes as the essential abilities, talents, and competencies that students are expected to acquire throughout their academic careers. The lecturers maintain that these attributes go beyond disciplinary knowledge to encompass both personal and professional development. This can be observed in the following statement from the respondent.

“Graduate attributes encompass a range of technical skills, such as proficiency in office software applications, data management, information processing, and document preparation, as well as non-technical skills like attention to detail, time management, problem-solving, and effective communication.” [P4]

“Graduate attributes refer to the essential skills and qualities students learn during their studies.” [P6]

“Graduate attributes could be the traits, abilities, knowledge, and attitudes that a student is expected to have after completing the Human Resource Management diploma at a TVET College in the Western Cape.” [P7]

Students

Students describe graduate traits as the key qualities, values, and abilities gained via academic experiences that prepare them for future vocations and life. These characteristics are viewed as an outcome of formal education and broader learning experiences, which provide students with the skills and knowledge required for

success in their chosen fields. This can be observed in the following statement from the respondent:

“Graduate attributes refer to the skills, values, and qualities that students acquire through their academic program, preparing them for success in their future careers and lives.” [P15]

“The high-level qualities, skills and understanding that an HR student gains as a result of learning and experiences they engage with while at a TVET college, university and other forms of tertiary education.” [P16]

“Graduate attributes in NATED Human Resource Management programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape likely refer to the skills, knowledge, and qualities that students are expected to possess upon completing their studies in the college.” [P16]

“The concept of Graduate attributes looks at the quality, capabilities, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills acquired by students during their studies.” [P21]

Given the existing knowledge of the concept of Graduate Attributes, Barrie (2007) conceptualised GAs as the skills, knowledge, and abilities that universities intend for students to develop throughout their education. This definition is reflected in the study's findings as presented above. As already discussed in the theoretical framework in chapter 2, Oliver (2015) argues that these attributes are increasingly recognised for their importance in shaping well-rounded graduates who are equipped to navigate the complexities of diverse societal contexts.

4.2.2.1.2 Perceived Soft Skills and Abilities as Graduate Attributes

In a follow-up question exploring the concept of graduate attributes, respondents shared their perceptions of the essential attributes an HR graduate from a TVET college should possess for workplace success. The responses were categorised into soft and hard skills. This presentation focuses on soft skills, which include problemsolving, communication, leadership, interpersonal skills, ethical behaviour, adaptability, teamwork, critical thinking, entrepreneurial orientation, global and cultural

awareness, lifelong learning and social responsibility. These sub-themes are tabulated below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Distribution of responses on identified graduate attributes related to perceived soft skills and abilities

Sub-themes (Graduate Attributes)	Number of Responses		Total Number of Responses	Number Responses Percentage
	Lecturers	Students		
Problem-solving skills	6	7	13	20,3%
Communication skills	4	7	11	17,2%
Leadership abilities	2	3	5	7,8%
Interpersonal skills	4	2	6	9,4%
Ethical behaviour and responsibility	1	1	2	3,1%
Adaptability	4	3	7	10,9%
Teamwork	2	6	8	12,5%
Critical thinking	2	8	10	15,6%
Entrepreneurial orientation	1	0	1	1,6%
Global and cultural knowledge	1	0	1	1,6%
Total			64	100,0%

Table 4.2 presents the total number of respective responses given by participants in relation to each identified graduate attribute sub-theme. The responses are disaggregated by participant group (lecturers and students), and the percentage column indicates the proportion of each sub-theme response relative to the total number of responses (n = 64)

The Table represents the percentage distribution of the identified graduate attributes related to soft skills and abilities. These attributes are perceived as follows: Problemsolving skills; Communication skills; Leadership skills; Interpersonal skills; Ethical behaviour and responsibility; Adaptability; Teamwork; Critical thinking; and Entrepreneurship orientation. As shown in Table 4.2 above, 20,3% of the responses, which is most of the responses received from both the lecturer and students identified problem-solving skills as one of the perceived soft skills and abilities required of a NATED Human Resources graduate. 17,2% of the respondents believed Communication skills are a critical attribute for NATED Human Resource (HR) graduates, as they play a pivotal role in virtually every HR function. Another 15,2% of the respondents believe that critical skills and critical thinking skills are also essential for NATED Human Resource graduates, as they help HR professionals address complex issues and make sound decisions. The respondents also highlighted Teamwork (12,5%) and adaptability (10,9%) as requisite graduate attributes for NATED Human resource graduates. Teamwork and adaptability are important for NATED Human resource graduates as they enhance their ability to function effectively in a dynamic and collaborative environment. Then Interpersonal (9,4%) and leadership skills (7,8) were also highlighted by the respondents as essential graduate attributes for NATED human resource graduates as such skills help in empowering them to manage people, foster a positive work environment, and guide teams toward success. The respondents also highlighted ethical behaviour and responsibility (3,1%) as critical attributes for NATED human resource graduates.

These qualities are essential for promoting and maintaining trust and compliance within an organisation. Lastly, a minor segment of the respondents (1,6%) believed in the imperativeness as a valuable graduate attribute for NATED human resources, specifically in today's dynamic business environment and especially in South Africa, where the youth unemployment rate is high. Entrepreneurship orientation entails the ability to think creatively, take initiative, and drive innovation within the HR function. The study's findings regarding problem-solving skills, communication and teamwork corroborate with the scholarship of Brown (2013). According to Brown (2013), workplace-focused skills in high demand are communication, teamwork, problemsolving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management,

learning, and technology. Bowley argues (2018) that these skills continue to be relevant across various fields in different economic sectors. Given the evidence in the data collected from a survey of 2000 business leaders, Bowley (2018) argues that “soft skills” are in higher demand than hard skills. It is thus evident that the responsibility for the development of these skills must be reconsidered (Mobarak, 2019).

These findings also support the existing literature regarding the employment gap between graduates and the actual industry requirements. Akin to research by Paterson et al. (2017) and Ramnund-Mansingh and Reddy (2021), their study found that there is an over-emphasis on the technical aspects of the curriculum at the expense of other sectors in the South African economy that require a broader skillset. As employers require more focus on communication and problem-solving, there appears to be a dire need for a more balanced approach towards the educational attributes of learners in South Africa, where unemployment levels remain very high. Aptitude alone is not enough anymore to fit in the modern economy, where the curriculum prepares graduates for the work of a lifetime with only a few specific tools. This supports the findings of this research that TVET programmes, while successful in delivering technical training, often fall short in equipping students with soft skills critical for employability.

4.2.2.1.3 Perceived Hard Skills and Abilities as Graduate Attributes

Perceived Hard Skills and Abilities as Graduate Attributes for NATED Human Resource Graduates are concerned with those technical skills and competencies that NATED HR graduates must possess after undergoing a diploma programme course at a TVET College. Data from the interviews reveals the following hard skills as shown below in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Distribution of responses on identified graduate attributes related to perceived Hard skills and abilities

Sub-themes (Graduate Attributes)	Number of Response		Total number of Responses	Number of Responses in Percentage
	Lecturers	Students		

Technical competence	1	0	1	16,7%
Analytical skills	2	0	2	33,3%
Digital literacy	1	0	1	16,7%
Formative and summative evaluations	2	0	2	33,3%
Total			6	100,0%

As shown in Table 4.3 above, most respondents (33,3%), specifically the lecturers, believed that Analytical skills are a must-have skill to possess as a NATED graduate in Human Resources. Seemingly, respondents believe that analysis constitutes one of the hard skills NATED Human Resource professionals should possess since it allows the HR personnel to understand, make decisions, and resolve various internal organisational issues efficiently. Similarly, 33,3% of the respondents believe that formative and summative evaluations are critical hard skills for NATED Human Resource graduates. This allows them to evaluate and enhance HR processes, training programs, and employee performance. Technical competency and digital literacy were also highlighted by the respondents as hard skills human resource graduates must possess, having undergone a 3-year course at a TVET college. As shown in Table 4.2 above, 16,7% of the respondents are of this notion.

For NATED HR graduates, hard skills like technical competence, analytical skills, digital literacy, and performance in formative and summative evaluations are critical. Abbas and Sagsan (2020) highlight that hard skills enable efficient and productive task performance, while Silva and Lima (2017) emphasise intellectual development for employability. Employers value graduates who are technically skilled, reliable, innovative, and proactive (Desai and Berger, 2016). Abbas et al. (2014) identified critical analysis, problem-solving, and work quality as top priorities for the industry, underscoring the need for HR programmes to integrate these skills into their curriculum to meet workplace demands effectively.

4.2.2.2 THEME 2: IMPORTANCE OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

When the respondents were asked why they think the development of graduate attributes is important, the responses from the interviews provided insights into the importance of developing graduate attributes in TVET college offerings (Curriculum) for NATED human resource graduates. Contextually, responses from lecturers and students were consolidated and analysed, leading to the emergence of the following sub-themes: Preparedness for job readiness; Enhancing the application of skills and knowledge at the workplace; Employability and adaptability; Navigating the workforce complexities

4.2.2.2.1 Preparedness for job readiness.

Readiness for the job is a fundamental graduate attribute for NATED HR graduates from TVET colleges, as it ensures they have the requisite practical abilities and professional and industry-relevant knowledge to thrive in HR roles. The quote below reflects these claims:

“Graduates are not properly prepared to meet the expectations of employers regarding the work readiness of human resource management graduates from the college. Employers seek to recruit graduates who have pertinent employability competencies.”
[P18]

Existing knowledge has shown the pivotal role of universities in developing knowledgeable and skilled graduates, serving as key contributors to talent pools for industries and economic activities (Chigbu and Nekhwevha, 2022). This aligns with the study's focus on assessing the preparedness of NATED HR graduates at a TVET College in the Western Cape for job readiness through the development of essential hard and soft skills. By fostering competencies such as technical proficiency, analytical abilities, digital literacy, problem-solving, communication institutions, critical thinking, collaboration, interpersonal and adaptability TVET colleges aim to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry demands, ensuring that graduates are well-equipped to meet workforce expectations (Silva and Lima, 2017; Desai and Berger, 2016). This connection emphasises the role of graduate attributes in enhancing

employability and supporting economic growth, validating the study's exploration of how these attributes are integrated into the HR curriculum.

4.2.2.2.2 Enhancing the application of skills and knowledge at the workplace

In this context, the respondents highlighted that it is important to develop attributes for NATED human resources graduates because it allows students to become well rounded, versatile, and competent professionals, equipped to manage the complexity of the workplace and make a good impact. These claims are reflected in the following quotes:

“To help and shape the student experience.” [P13]

“The development of graduate attributes is important because it enables students to become well-rounded, adaptable, and effective professionals, equipped to navigate the complexities of the workforce and make a positive impact.” [P14]

The study by Pattinson et al. (2017) highlights key graduate attributes such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and time management, which are highly valued by employers in China. Similarly, this study's findings emphasize the importance of these attributes in enhancing skills and knowledge, equipping graduates to perform effectively and adapt to workplace demands, thereby improving their employability and success in dynamic work environments.

4.2.2.2.3 Employability and Adaptability

Data from the interview regarding the importance of developing graduate attributes highlighted the enhancement of graduate employability and adaptability in the working environment. Seemingly these traits are critical for success in the workplace. Nated HR graduates will become more employable on the possession of key skills valued by employers, making them more competitive in the job market. Adaptability is the attribute that prepares and provides them with the ability to adjust to changing environments, roles and technologies. This can be observed in the following quote:

“Graduate attributes are important for several reasons such as employability. Graduate attributes help students develop the skills and qualities that are highly valued by employers, making them more competitive in the job market.” [P11]

“They help develop and shape your whole student experience. it will help you in being more successful in your career and contribution towards society. [P12]

A central role of universities and training colleges is to equip graduates with the skills and attributes necessary to secure employment and improve their socio-economic mobility (Mtawa, Fongwa, and Wilson-Strydom, 2021). Scholars argue that developing graduates with the relevant competencies and capabilities to meet the evolving demands of employers and adapt to the challenges of the modern world is a crucial mandate for higher education institutions (Abbas et al., 2014; Pheko and Molefhe, 2017). This study’s findings resonate with the existing knowledge regarding the imperativeness of graduate attributes in this context.

4.2.2.2.4 Navigating the Workforce Complexities

Data from the interviews revealed that some respondents believed developing graduate attributes in NATED offering for HR can assist in preparing the graduate to navigate the complexities at the workplace. The ability of NATED HR graduates to adjust to changing circumstances as mentioned above, will boost their capabilities and resiliency to navigate the complexities of career challenges. This can be observed in the following quotes:

“It is important that an HR student be prepared for anything in the world of work. He/she must be equipped with the necessary tools that can be utilised in the workplace.” [P16]

“The development of GA is important because it will assist in developing and shaping the whole student experience. It will help students to be more successful in their careers. It also develops leadership and teamwork skills.” [P21]

The findings of this study align with those of Graham (2017) and Scheerens et al. (2020), who emphasised that soft skills encompass a wide range of interpersonal and

cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking, adaptability, collaboration, and effective communication. These skills are highly valued because they enable employees to tackle complex problems (Meth, Thomson and Brough, 2021), collaborate effectively in diverse teams, and communicate ideas clearly and cohesively (Fajaryati et al., 2020).

4.2.2.2.5 Further studies and professional growth

Data from the interviews revealed that graduate qualities enhance subsequent studies by providing a solid academic foundation and creating a mindset of continuous learning. This prepares students for advanced degrees and deep intellectual involvement. This is evident in the following response:

“It is very important because it helps students to further their studies.” [P3]

“Development of graduates attributes is very important as it gives the students a deeper understanding of the HRM principles, leadership skills and all other skills related to the program.”[P20]

Existing knowledge holds that there is no universal template for determining exactly what and which type of ‘work readiness’ skills will be suitable for specific graduate careers (Barrie, Hughes, and Smith, 2009).

4.2.2.3 THEME 3: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE UNDERSTANDING OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

4.2.2.3.1 Individual

As a contextual factor, the individual plays a crucial role in shaping the understanding and development of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Personal experiences, backgrounds, and skills influence how students engage with and apply GAs. Factors such as prior education, socio-economic status, cultural identity, and personal values impact students' learning and interpretation of these attributes.

Recognising these individual differences allows educational institutions to create inclusive and responsive teaching and assessment strategies, ensuring that all students can develop the competencies needed for success in the workforce.

4.2.2.2.1.1 Student Background

Student background plays a significant role in shaping the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Students with strong foundational education are often better equipped to grasp abstract concepts, while those from under-resourced schools may struggle due to limited prior exposure. Racial and cultural diversity further influences perspectives, as noted by one participant:

“The racial background of an individual can influence their understanding and interpretation, impacting group discussions and responses.” [P9]

However, this diversity also enriches learning when students draw on their unique experiences, as highlighted:

“I encourage students to draw on their backgrounds to enrich learning and contribute to classroom diversity.” [P4]

Institutions that reflect inclusivity in their curriculum by incorporating diverse perspectives help bridge these gaps, fostering equitable learning opportunities for all students. By valuing diverse experiences, educators can enhance the understanding and application of GAs across varied student contexts

The findings of this study emphasise the importance of designing pedagogical tactics that reflect diversity across race, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds to promote inclusivity. This aligns with the concept of inclusive pedagogy, which, as described by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), shifts from separate approaches for some learners to providing rich learning opportunities accessible to all. The study further supports the idea, highlighted by McCleary-Gaddy (2019) and Scudder (2020), that diversity enhances learning when intentionally paired with practices that foster access, belonging, and equitable participation for all students

4.2.2.3.2 Institutional Factors

Institutional factors, particularly in the context of curriculum design, play a critical role in shaping students' understanding and development of Graduate Attributes (GAs). A well-designed curriculum that integrates GAs into its structure, content, and delivery ensures that students acquire both the technical and soft skills necessary for success in the workforce.

Practical application and learning are integral to the curriculum, as they bridge the gap between theory and real-world contexts. By incorporating hands-on experiences, such as internships, projects, and practical assessments, institutions enable students to apply their learning in meaningful ways, enhancing their understanding of GAs such as problem-solving, adaptability, and teamwork.

Furthermore, collaborative and learner-centred curriculum development encourages active student participation and engagement. When students are involved in shaping their learning experiences, they are more likely to develop critical communication and interpersonal skills, which are essential in any professional setting. This approach fosters a sense of ownership over the learning process and allows for the integration of diverse perspectives, making the curriculum more relevant and inclusive.

Finally, skills development and integration ensure that students are equipped with both the technical expertise and the personal attributes required by employers. A curriculum that seamlessly integrates skills like critical thinking, leadership, and digital literacy into the learning process helps students develop holistically, preparing them for the evolving demands of the job market. Together, these institutional factors contribute to a dynamic and responsive educational environment that enhances students' understanding of GAs and prepares them for future success.

4.2.2.3.2.1 Curriculum Design

Curriculum design plays a pivotal role in shaping students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs), as it determines how these attributes are integrated into learning outcomes, assignments, and projects. In exploring the perceptions of students

regarding the curriculum design for NATED HR programs at a TVET College in the Western Cape, their responses highlighted how the structure, content, and delivery of their educational program influenced the development of GAs. The analysis revealed three sub-themes that illuminate the relationship between curriculum design and the comprehension of GAs:

Practical Application and Learning

Students emphasised the importance of practical, hands-on learning experiences that connect theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts. They noted that assignments, projects, and internships offering practical exposure greatly enhance their ability to understand and apply GAs such as problem-solving, adaptability, and teamwork. These claims can be attested by the following quotes from the respondents:

“Students are encouraged to take part in practical projects and teamwork to enhance their problem-solving skills.” [P13]

“Industry perspectives and real-world examples into the curriculum through guest lectures, industry partnerships, case studies, and internships. This exposure to industry practices and trends helps students contextualise their learning, understand the relevance of GAs in the workplace, and develop practical skills.” [P18]

“The usage of PowerPoint formats and documentary videos helps to break down the textbook curriculum into a more comprehending summary.” [P16]

“Active learning approaches, all students must participate in debates and real-life scenarios, group projects.” [P20]

Wang (2023) and Banagan et al. (2024) argue that curriculum ideological and political education should centre on real-world, practical, and cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of situating learning within relevant environments. The findings of this study align with this perspective, highlighting the need for curricula that reflect the lived experiences of students and address the socio-cultural contexts in which they learn, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of education in developing graduate attributes.

Collaborative and Learner-Centred Curriculum Development.

Respondents appreciated curriculum designs that included their input and fostered collaboration between educators, students, and industry stakeholders. This participatory approach enhances the curriculum's relevance and equips students with communication and interpersonal skills necessary for the workplace. Below are quotes from the respondents in this respect:

“The curriculum that will embed graduate attributes into the curriculum can be difficult but needs the academic staff’s involvement.” [P21]

“Collaborative learning activities where individual goals must be identified.” [P15]

Research has shown significant improvements in learning outcomes within learnercentred education, driven by increased student motivation and enhanced learning efficiency (An, 2016; Yildirim and Girgin, 2012; Zhang, 2010).

Skills Development and Integration

Students noted the importance of curricula that balance technical skills with soft skills. They expressed that an effective curriculum should seamlessly integrate graduate attributes such as critical thinking, leadership, and digital literacy into the learning process to prepare them holistically for the workforce. The comments below made by the respondents reflect this thinking.

“Understanding statistical and analytical techniques to solve complex HR problems.” [P11]

“Overall, the curriculum design strategies should focus on a strong foundation in HR principles, applying GAs in HR.” [P11]

“In-depth knowledge of the HR management field, to communicate effectively, to be independent and creative, to have critical judgement and to have ethical and social understanding.” [P11]

The findings from some scholars (Martinez, 2020; Wynn and Okie, 2017) suggest that the development of 21st-century skills, essential for HR positions, can be effectively enhanced through the integration of Project-Based Learning (PBL) curricula. This approach fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills, which are crucial for preparing students for future HR roles. Similarly, the findings of this study emphasise the importance of incorporating such skills into the curriculum, ensuring that students are equipped with the competencies necessary to excel in HR positions and adapt to the dynamic demands of the workplace.

4.2.2.3.2.2 Teaching and Learning Methods

Inclusive pedagogical approaches and teaching methods emerged as significant practices in addressing diversity and promoting equity in the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Respondents highlighted the importance of linking course content to students' diverse backgrounds and experiences to foster a more inclusive learning environment. This approach emphasises examining social structures and power dynamics, encouraging critical thinking and deeper engagement with GAs.

To ensure equitable participation, respondents noted the importance of clear instructions and accessible learning materials. Tailoring teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles further supports individual needs while promoting fairness. One respondent stated:

“Providing clear instructions and accessible materials.” [P4]

Another respondent emphasised the significance of non-discriminatory grouping and equitable treatment:

“Lecturers treat all students equally, regardless of their race, and group them based on criteria unrelated to race or language.” [P7]

Historically contextualised examples were also recognised as effective in fostering diversity awareness and inclusion as mentioned by one of the respondents below:

“I use historically South African contextualised stories to communicate the realities of the lessons in all areas affecting my students’ communities.” [P8]

Research suggests that intentional and enthusiastic inclusion dismantles biases and fosters a sense of belonging (McCleary-Gaddy, 2019; Scudder, 2020). When diversity is paired with intentional inclusion, learning is enriched for all students. In this context, inclusive pedagogy becomes a key driver in ensuring that the understanding of GAs is accessible, equitable, and relevant to students’ lived experiences.

4.2.2.3.2.3 Student Support and Development

Student support and development significantly influence the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs) within the framework of a socially realistic approach. Academic and financial support initiatives address structural inequalities by creating equitable opportunities for all students. Programs like NSFAS funding and SETA bursaries reduce financial barriers, enabling disadvantaged students to access resources such as tuition, textbooks, and transportation.

In addition, mentorship programs, academic advising, and access to learning materials foster a supportive environment, ensuring that students have the tools to succeed academically and professionally. These initiatives also enhance their engagement with GAs by building confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging.

By addressing both individual and systemic barriers, student support and development initiatives ensure that all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, have the opportunity to understand and internalise GAs effectively, preparing them for meaningful contributions to society and the workforce. The data from the study in this context were grouped into the following: *Student Academic and financial support*

Respondents highlighted that Support and development initiatives significantly influence students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs) by fostering a nurturing environment and addressing barriers to success. Respondents emphasised the importance of creating a sense of belonging and connecting students with resources to support their educational journey as reflected in the following statement:

“Foster a sense of belonging and connect with resources.” [P3]

Respondent added that reflecting on and adapting teaching practices ensures support remains effective and relevant as reflected in the following statement:

“Reflect on teaching practices and make adjustments as needed.” [P3]

Financial assistance programs, such as NSFAS funding and SETA bursaries, help disadvantaged students by covering tuition, textbooks, transportation, and other educational needs:

“We provide financial assistance programmes to alleviate financial barriers for HRM students with disadvantaged backgrounds.” [P6]

Facilitating internships and job placements further equips students with practical experience and professional networks, aligning with their career goals:

“We facilitate internship and job placement opportunities for HRM students to gain practical experience and build professional networks.” [P6]

These initiatives collectively enhance students' readiness to engage with and apply GAs in both academic and professional contexts. The findings of this study echo the importance of creating supportive environments where students can effectively utilise feedback, as highlighted by Carless and Boud (2018). The study reinforces the idea that providing coaching and modelling helps students take constructive action based on feedback. Additionally, similar to the findings of Mokgele and Rothmann (2014), this study found that a lack of resources and high study demands are significant factors contributing to burnout, which hinder student engagement and achievement.

The study also supports the notion that providing adequate resources and a nurturing environment are essential for promoting student engagement, development, and the removal of impediments to success

Peer and Social Support

Respondents highlighted that Peer and social support play a vital role in enhancing students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Respondents highlighted the importance of peer support networks in promoting collaborative learning and teamwork. This can be observed in the following statement

“We encourage the practice of peer support networks to enhance learning.” [P4]

The value of diversity within these networks was also emphasized, with racially diverse teamwork recognised as a means of fostering personal and professional development. This diversity enriches the educational experience by exposing students to different perspectives and encouraging inclusive collaboration as reflected below:

“Additionally, racially diverse teamwork helps foster students' development.” [P7]

By promoting peer interactions and diverse group work, these practices create a supportive learning environment where students can collectively develop skills aligned with GAs. On this note, the findings of this study align with Ye, Huang, and Liu's (2021) research, highlighting the importance of social support in reducing academic burnout, particularly among students from diverse backgrounds. The study underscores that peer and social support are crucial in enhancing learning outcomes and alleviating burnout among NATED HR graduates, reinforcing the value of fostering supportive environments to improve academic success and well-being

4.2.2.3.2.4 Students and Institutional Commitments

Institutional culture plays a pivotal role in shaping students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs) through the commitment of both students and academic staff. Respondents emphasised the importance of collaboration in curriculum design, where the involvement of academic staff is critical to embedding GAs effectively: *“The curriculum that will embed graduate attributes into the curriculum can be difficult without the academic staff involvement.”* [P21]

Equally, fostering student participation in practical projects and teamwork was seen as key to enhancing problem-solving skills and promoting active engagement:

“Students should also be encouraged to take part in practical projects and teamwork to enhance their problem-solving skills.” [P11]

A strong commitment to personal and collective development further reinforces this culture:

“Commitment from individuals towards their development.” [P12]

Active learning approaches, such as debates, real-life scenarios, and group projects, were highlighted as essential practices to ensure that students engage with and internalise GAs effectively:

“Active learning approaches, all students must participate in debates and real-life scenarios, group projects.” [P20]

This collaborative and inclusive institutional culture fosters a dynamic learning environment where students are equipped to develop and apply GAs in diverse contexts.

The findings of this study emphasise the critical role of both students and academics in enhancing curriculum design. Similar to Suharyati’s (2021) assertion, the study highlights that improving educational quality requires a collective commitment from all stakeholders. The study further underscores that when students and academics collaborate in curriculum development, it leads to more effective and inclusive educational practices, ultimately strengthening the overall learning experience.

4.2.2.3.2.5 Assessment Practices

Assessment practices are essential in shaping the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs) by addressing structural barriers and enhancing individual capabilities. Through diverse methods such as presentations, group projects, and self-assessments, students are provided equitable opportunities to showcase their skills.

The socially realistic approach highlights the importance of addressing inequalities through inclusive assessments that accommodate diverse learning needs, while the capability approach emphasises timely feedback to empower students to refine their competencies. Together, these practices foster critical thinking, adaptability, and

problem-solving, enabling students to develop key attributes for academic and professional success

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and feedback practices play a crucial role in enhancing students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs), ensuring inclusivity and fostering personal development. Respondents emphasised the centrality of these practices in addressing diversity and promoting equity in GA development. Self-reflection and self-assessment were identified as essential strategies, empowering students to evaluate their progress, recognise their strengths, and identify areas for improvement as reflected below:

“Encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment.” [P4]

Providing flexible assessment options was also emphasised as a way to accommodate diverse learning styles and preferences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to demonstrate their competencies effectively:

“Offering flexible assessment options.” [P4]

Timely feedback and support were seen as fundamental to meeting the individual needs of students, allowing them to adjust and continue their learning journey with clarity:

“Providing timely feedback and support to accommodate different learning styles and needs.” [P6]

These assessment and feedback practices contribute to creating a responsive and inclusive learning environment, enabling all students to develop a deeper understanding of GAs while addressing their diverse needs

The findings of this study reinforce the importance of providing feedback on summative assessments to contextualise learning. By tailoring feedback to students' work, teachers can bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world experiences

as highlighted in the study. This approach aligns with the intention to address diversity and promote equity in graduate attributes development, ensuring that feedback is relevant and supports all students in their professional and personal growth

Presentations

Assessment practices are a critical factor in shaping students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). By incorporating diverse methods such as presentations, group projects, and self-assessments, these practices provide students with opportunities to demonstrate and develop essential skills. Inclusive assessment practices ensure that diverse learning needs are accommodated, fostering fairness and equity. Additionally, timely feedback plays a pivotal role in helping students reflect on their progress, refine their skills, and build confidence. These practices collectively enhance critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities, making assessment a vital element in the development and understanding of GAs.

Respondents emphasized that presentations provide a platform for students to showcase their presentation skills and self-confidence:

“Assessments are done in the classrooms where students must do presentations – it can be assessed how they present themselves, the confidence they portray and how informative the presentations are.” [P1]

Additionally, presentations were integrated with other forms of assessment, such as written assignments and practical demonstrations, to evaluate students' understanding and application of key concepts:

“Additionally, written assessments, presentations, and practical demonstrations are utilised to evaluate students' understanding and application of key concepts and skills.” [P4]

Presentations also provided opportunities for students to engage in real-world scenarios and case studies, enhancing their problem-solving abilities through group discussions and practical exercises:

“They also have the opportunity to engage in real-world scenarios and case studies to develop their problem-solving skills through presentations, group discussions, and written assignments.” [P9]

This approach ensures that students not only develop technical knowledge but also gain essential soft skills, aligning with the key attributes needed in the modern workforce

This finding aligns with the study by Borg and Scott-Young (2020) on the work readiness of project management graduates entering the Australian construction industry. The study revealed that new graduates were generally well-prepared for professional presentations in workplace settings. Moreover, graduates impressed employers with their ability to lead meetings and communicate effectively, often exceeding expectations for recent graduates. This underscores the critical role of presentation skills in the development of graduate attributes, particularly in enhancing employability and professional readiness

4.2.2.3.3 Societal factors

Societal factors, including cultural context, economic and labour market demands, and community engagement, significantly shape students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs).

Cultural context influences how students engage with GAs by acknowledging and incorporating diverse cultural backgrounds into the learning process. A curriculum that reflects the varied cultural experiences of students promotes inclusivity and allows students to see the relevance of their learning in real-world situations. This helps foster deeper engagement with GAs, as students are able to connect course content with their lived experiences and different cultural perspectives.

Economic and labour market demands also play a crucial role in shaping the development of GAs. As the job market evolves, there is an increasing need for graduates who possess not only technical expertise but also the adaptability and skills that align with employers' expectations. GAs such as problem-solving, leadership, and

teamwork are increasingly valued by employers, making it essential for students to develop these attributes in order to remain competitive in the labour market.

Community engagement, particularly through partnerships with industry stakeholders, enriches the educational experience by providing students with opportunities to apply their learning in practical, real-world contexts. Collaborations with businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organisations offer students valuable insights into workplace trends and expectations, further enhancing their readiness for the workforce. These partnerships also provide students with opportunities for internships and networking, which are instrumental in developing professional competencies and career pathways.

Together, these societal factors shape students' development of GAs, ensuring they are prepared to navigate the complexities of diverse work environments and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Data from the interviews in this context are presented below:

4.2.2.3.3.1 Cultural Context

Inclusivity and representation were emphasised by respondents as crucial for assessing Graduate Attributes (GAs) in a way that acknowledges the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. The incorporation of multiple cultural contexts into course materials and assessments promotes fairness and enhances students' engagement by reflecting on their lived experiences.

Respondents highlighted that integrating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum not only acknowledges but builds upon students' cultural knowledge and experiences. By connecting course content to real-life situations, this approach aims to increase motivation, academic achievement, and overall engagement:

“We incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy, which acknowledges and builds upon students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge. By connecting course content to students' lived experiences and cultural contexts, we aim to enhance engagement, motivation, and academic achievement.” [P6]

Cultural diversity in problem-solving and group discussions also enriches the learning environment. Recognising different cultural perspectives can positively influence how students understand and interpret issues, particularly in group contexts:

“The racial background of an individual can influence their understanding and interpretation, and they would have different cultural perspectives and approaches to problem-solving which can impact on the group discussion or response.” [P9]

This emphasis on inclusivity in teaching and assessment practices reflects the growing need for culturally responsive education that values and incorporates the diverse backgrounds of students. It aligns with the findings of Bottiani et al. (2018) and Khasawneh and Khasawneh (2023), who stress the importance of fairness and inclusivity in evaluating GAs. This approach not only supports students' academic growth but also fosters a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

4.2.2.3.3.2 Economic and labour demands

Economic and labour market demands play a significant role in shaping the development and understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). According to respondents, the enhancement of employability and adaptability is key to ensuring that NATED HR graduates are prepared for success in the modern workplace. Graduate attributes are seen as essential for equipping students with skills that employers highly value, thus increasing their competitiveness in the job market.

One respondent highlighted the connection between graduate attributes and employability, noting that these attributes help students develop key skills necessary for success:

“Graduate attributes are important for several reasons such as employability. Graduate attributes help students develop the skills and qualities that are highly valued by employers, making them more competitive in the job market.” [P11]

Adaptability was identified as a crucial attribute that enables graduates to adjust to changing roles, technologies, and environments, preparing them to thrive in dynamic work settings:

“They help develop and shape your whole student experience. It will help you in being more successful in your career and contribution towards society.” [P12]

This aligns with broader scholarship on the role of higher education in preparing graduates to meet the evolving demands of employers and adapt to the challenges of the modern world. As noted by Mtawa, Fongwa, and Wilson-Strydom (2021), the central role of universities and training colleges is to equip graduates with the necessary skills and attributes to secure employment and improve their socioeconomic mobility. These findings reflect the importance of GAs in preparing students for the realities of the job market and ensuring their ongoing success in the workforce.

4.2.2.3.3 Community Engagement

Community engagement, particularly through industry partnerships, plays a significant role in the development of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Respondents emphasized that industry collaboration with stakeholders, including local businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations, is crucial for equipping students with the competencies necessary for success in the workforce. These partnerships provide valuable insights into current workplace trends and expectations, ensuring that graduates are prepared to meet the evolving demands of the job market.

One respondent noted the importance of industry partnerships in shaping students' readiness for the workplace:

“While industry partners offer insights into current trends and expectations in the workplace.” [P4]

Another respondent highlighted how collaboration with various stakeholders facilitates internship placements that align with students' career aspirations, offering practical experience and professional networking opportunities often supported by SETA funding:

“We collaborate with local businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to provide internship placements that align with students' career interests and aspirations funded by SETA.” [P6]

The value of industry partnerships in developing graduate competencies is well documented in literature. Prikshat et al. (2020) argue that employers and industry partners share responsibility for developing graduate skills, with expanded work experience opportunities, cadetships, traineeships, and induction programs playing an essential role. The findings of this study reflect this perspective, underscoring that strong industry partnerships are crucial in bridging the gap between academic preparation and real-world employment. By fostering such partnerships, educational institutions can better equip graduates with the skills and experiences necessary to succeed in the workforce.

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter has provided and discussed the findings of the data analysis employed in this study. The results were organised into two key areas: the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the thematic analysis results of the study.

Given the objectives of the study, the twenty-one themes and their corresponding sub-themes were presented and discussed. The following chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five presents the conclusions and recommendations for further research. These conclusions and recommendations are informed by the discussions in Chapter Four and the findings gathered during the study. The research aimed to critically examine the meanings and implications of graduate attributes within the South African TVET system, focusing specifically on a TVET College in the Western Cape. In this chapter, I conclude and provide recommendations based on the findings, perspectives, and experiences of lecturers and students regarding the specific graduate attributes of NATED HRM graduates, and the contextual factors affecting the understanding of graduate attributes.

Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

- To explore the various meanings and conceptualisations of "graduate attributes" within the context of the NATED HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape.
- To identify the specific graduate attributes emphasised in the Nated HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape and analyse how they are integrated into the curriculum.
- To examine the perceptions of HRM graduates and teachers regarding the contextual factors affecting the understanding of graduate Attributes

5.2 HOW THE STUDY HAS ACHIEVED ITS OBJECTIVES.

- **To explore the various meanings and conceptualisations of "graduate attributes" within the context of the NATED HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape.**

In conclusion, based on the findings of this study, I conclude that the conceptualisations of "graduate attributes" within the NATED HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape College are multi-dimensional and reflect both the practical and academic expectations of students and lecturers. The study reveals that these attributes are seen as essential for preparing students for the workforce and enhancing their employability, adaptability, and ability to navigate workplace challenges. The data indicates that graduate attributes not only contribute to immediate career success but also foster a mindset of continuous learning, providing a solid academic foundation for further studies. Thus, the study underscores the importance of aligning graduate attribute development with both professional and academic growth, ensuring that NATED HRM graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their careers and pursue advanced academic opportunities.

- **To identify the specific graduate attributes emphasised in the Nated HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape and analyse how they are integrated into the curriculum.**

In reflecting on the findings of this study, I conclude that the NATED HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape, while effectively imparting essential technical competencies in the HR field, presents a significant gap in the integration of soft skills. These soft skills, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving, while acknowledged, do not receive the same focus in the curriculum as the technical skills necessary for HR. The differing views between lecturers and students on the importance and integration of graduate attributes highlight the need for a more cohesive and balanced approach in embedding both hard and soft skills within the curriculum.

In conclusion, from the perspective of social realist theory, this study reveals a significant gap between the technical knowledge provided by the program and the broader social and professional capabilities required for success in the modern workplace. While the program lays a solid technical foundation, it does not sufficiently address the personal and social attributes that are essential for thriving in dynamic and complex work environments. This disconnects between educational content and

labour market demands suggests underlying structural barriers within the educational system.

I conclude that there is the need for a more comprehensive understanding of "job readiness," which should encompass not only technical skills but also attributes such as adaptability, resilience, and proactive career management. These attributes are vital for navigating the challenges of the contemporary workplace. Therefore, it is crucial to revise the curriculum to integrate both hard and soft skills, ensuring that graduates are not only technically proficient but also equipped with the interpersonal and organisational capabilities required to succeed in their careers.

Moreover, the study points to a gap between academic learning and its practical application in the workforce. To address this, I recommend enhancing the curriculum with more practical experiences, such as internships, work placements and stronger collaboration with industry partners. By bridging this gap, educational institutions can better prepare HR professionals who are versatile, adaptable, and capable of responding to the evolving demands of their careers.

In conclusion, a more holistic approach to graduate attribute development, informed by both the realities of the workplace and the broader social context, is necessary. By emphasizing not just technical proficiency but also personal and professional growth, the NATED HRM programme can better equip students to navigate the evolving demands of the workplace and sustain lifelong career development.

- **To examine the perceptions of HRM graduates and teachers regarding the contextual factors affecting the understanding of graduate Attributes**

Student Background

The study reveals that student background significantly influences the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs), shaped by factors such as educational, racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Students with strong foundational education are often better equipped to comprehend abstract concepts related to GAs, while those from

under-resourced educational environments may encounter challenges due to limited prior exposure.

Racial and cultural diversity plays a pivotal role in shaping perspectives on GAs. Inclusive curricula that integrate diverse viewpoints help bridge gaps in understanding, fostering equitable learning opportunities for all students. By incorporating culturally relevant teaching strategies, institutions can connect course content to students' lived experiences, enhancing engagement and academic achievement.

The study emphasises the importance of designing pedagogical approaches that reflect diversity across race, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds. I conclude that these approaches promote inclusivity and enable all students to effectively engage with GAs, regardless of their social or educational starting points.

This study also underscores the value of creating an educational environment that recognises and addresses the varying social contexts of students. Such inclusivity ensures that students are better prepared to internalise and apply GAs, ultimately supporting their holistic development and readiness for the workforce.

Institutional Factors *Curriculum Design:*

The study reveals that curriculum design significantly influences students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs) by embedding these attributes into learning outcomes, assignments, and projects. A well-structured curriculum ensures that students develop practical skills such as problem-solving, teamwork and communication through real-world applications. Additionally, aligning curriculum content with diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts enhances engagement and inclusivity. This approach ensures that students connect with the material while preparing for the demands of the modern workforce.

Practical Application and Learning

The study reveals that practical application and hands-on learning are crucial in helping students understand and apply Graduate Attributes (GAs). Assignments,

projects, and internships that provide real-world exposure significantly enhance students' development of essential skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and teamwork. These experiences bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, equipping students with the competencies required for workplace success.

Collaborative and Learner-Centred Curriculum Development.

The study reveals that collaborative and learner-centred curriculum development is instrumental in fostering the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Curriculum designs that incorporate input from students, educators, and industry stakeholders enhance the relevance of the educational experience. This participatory approach equips students with essential communication and interpersonal skills, aligning their learning with workplace demands and ensuring they are better prepared for professional environments.

Skills Development and Integration

The study highlights the significance of embedding both technical and soft skills within the curriculum to prepare students comprehensively for the workforce. An effective curriculum integrates graduate attributes such as critical thinking, leadership, and digital literacy into the learning journey, ensuring students are equipped with a balanced skill set. This holistic approach fosters adaptability and competence, enabling graduates to excel in diverse professional contexts.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Pedagogical approaches and teaching methods

The study underscores the importance of inclusive pedagogical approaches and teaching methods in addressing diversity and promoting equity in the understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Effective teaching practices involve connecting course content to students' diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. This approach promotes critical thinking

by encouraging students to examine social structures and power dynamics, deepening their comprehension of GAs.

I conclude that ensuring equitable participation is supported through clear instructions, accessible learning materials, and teaching strategies that accommodate varied learning styles. Additionally, using historically contextualised examples enhances students' awareness of diversity and inclusion, enriching their understanding of GAs. These practices collectively create a supportive and fair learning environment tailored to the needs of all students.

Student Support and Development

Student Academic and financial support

Student academic and financial support plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs) by creating an environment that nurtures success and addresses barriers to achievement. Support initiatives focus on fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring that students are connected with the resources they need for their educational journey. Adapting teaching practices to reflect students' needs ensures that the support remains relevant and effective.

Financial assistance programs, such as NSFAS funding and SETA bursaries, alleviate the financial burdens faced by disadvantaged students, covering essential expenses like tuition, textbooks, and transportation. Moreover, facilitating internships and job placements further supports students by providing them with practical experience and professional networking opportunities that align with their career aspirations. This combination of academic, financial, and career support helps students develop the competencies required for successful entry into the workforce.

Peer and Social Support

Peer and social support play a critical role in enhancing students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). The importance of peer support networks was highlighted as a key practice in promoting collaborative learning and teamwork. These networks

encourage students to work together, share knowledge, and develop interpersonal skills.

The value of diversity within these networks was also emphasized, with racially diverse teamwork seen as a means of fostering both personal and professional growth. Exposure to different perspectives encourages inclusive collaboration and enriches the educational experience, allowing students to approach problems from multiple angles. By promoting peer interactions and diverse group work, these practices help create a supportive learning environment where students can collectively develop skills that align with GAs, enhancing their overall learning and growth.

Institutional Culture

Students and Institutional Commitments

Institutional culture plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs), with the active commitment of both students and academic staff being central to this process. The importance of collaboration in curriculum design was emphasized, where the involvement of academic staff is essential for effectively embedding GAs into the learning experience.

Equally important is fostering student participation in practical projects and teamwork, which enhances problem-solving skills and encourages active engagement with the curriculum. A strong institutional commitment to both personal and collective development reinforces this culture, creating an environment where GAs are integrated into everyday learning.

Active learning approaches, such as debates, real-life scenarios, and group projects, were also recognized as key practices for ensuring that students engage deeply with GAs. This collaborative and inclusive institutional culture fosters a dynamic learning environment, equipping students to develop and apply GAs across a variety of contexts.

Assessment Practices

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and feedback practices are critical in enhancing students' understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs), fostering inclusivity, and supporting personal growth. These practices play a central role in addressing diversity and promoting equity in the development of GAs.

Self-reflection and self-assessment were highlighted as vital strategies, enabling students to evaluate their progress, recognise their strengths, and identify areas for improvement. Offering flexible assessment options was also emphasised to cater to diverse learning styles and preferences, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to effectively demonstrate their competencies.

Timely feedback and support were seen as essential in meeting individual student needs, allowing them to make necessary adjustments and continue their learning journey with clarity and confidence. These assessment and feedback practices contribute to creating a responsive and inclusive learning environment, helping students deepen their understanding of GAs while addressing their varied needs.

Presentations

Presentations were identified as a key method for assessing and recognising the development of Graduate Attributes (GAs) among NATED HR graduates from the TVET college. Through presentations, students can showcase their ability to communicate effectively, present information clearly, and demonstrate confidence in public speaking—skills that are essential for success in the modern workplace.

Presentations offer a platform for students to display their presentation skills and selfconfidence. They allow for the assessment of how students present themselves, the level of confidence they portray, and the clarity and informativeness of their content. Additionally, presentations were often integrated with other forms of

assessment, such as written assignments and practical demonstrations, to evaluate students' understanding and application of key concepts.

Moreover, presentations provided students with opportunities to engage in real-world scenarios and case studies, further enhancing their problem-solving abilities through group discussions and practical exercises. This approach not only supports the development of technical knowledge but also fosters essential soft skills, which are aligned with the key attributes needed in today's workforce.

Societal factors

Cultural Context

Cultural context plays a pivotal role in shaping the assessment of Graduate Attributes (GAs) by emphasising inclusivity and representation, which are essential in acknowledging the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Incorporating multiple cultural contexts into course materials and assessments ensures fairness while enhancing student engagement by reflecting on their lived experiences.

Integrating culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum was highlighted as a means to not only acknowledge but also build upon students' cultural knowledge and experiences. By connecting course content to real-life situations, this approach aims to enhance motivation, academic achievement, and overall student engagement.

Furthermore, the cultural diversity present in problem-solving and group discussions enriches the learning environment. Recognising and valuing different cultural perspectives influences how students understand and interpret issues, especially in collaborative settings, thereby fostering a more inclusive and engaging academic atmosphere.

Economic and labour market demands

Economic and labour market demands play a crucial role in shaping the development and understanding of Graduate Attributes (GAs). Respondents emphasized the

importance of enhancing employability and adaptability as key factors in preparing NATED HR graduates for success in the modern workplace. Graduate attributes are regarded as essential in equipping students with skills that employers highly value, thus increasing their competitiveness in the job market.

The study highlighted the direct connection between graduate attributes and employability, noting that these attributes help students develop key skills that are critical for success in the workforce. Adaptability was identified as a vital attribute that enables graduates to adjust to evolving roles, technologies, and work environments, ensuring they are well-prepared to thrive in dynamic and changing professional settings.

Community Engagement

Community engagement, particularly through industry partnerships, plays a pivotal role in the development of Graduate Attributes (GAs). The study reveals that collaboration between industry and various stakeholders, including local businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organisations, is vital in equipping students with the competencies needed for success in the workforce. These partnerships offer valuable insights into current workplace trends and expectations, ensuring that graduates are prepared to meet the evolving demands of the job market.

Furthermore, the study has revealed how collaboration with diverse stakeholders facilitates internship placements aligned with students' career aspirations. These placements offer practical experience and professional networking opportunities, often supported by SETA funding, which further enhances the employability and readiness of graduates for the workforce.

Reflection on findings

In reflecting on the study's findings, it becomes evident that Graduate Attributes (GAs) are widely recognised as critical for enhancing graduate employability. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Literature Review), GAs are intended to equip students with a blend of cognitive, technical, and interpersonal skills necessary for success in both professional

and personal contexts. However, the persistent unemployment of a significant number of TVET graduates, even in fields directly aligned with their qualifications, raises important questions about the effectiveness of current approaches to embedding these attributes within vocational education.

This concern was particularly evident in Chapter 4 (Findings), where several graduate participants expressed frustration over their inability to secure employment despite having completed the NATED Human Resource Management (HRM) programme. Under the theme “*Preparedness for Job Readiness*”, participants highlighted challenges such as limited workplace exposure, a lack of practical experience, and insufficient digital literacy—factors that contributed to a sense of being ill-equipped for the demands of the labour market. These narratives reveal that while graduate attributes may be embedded within the curriculum, their translation into employability-enabling capabilities remains inconsistent.

This observation is further supported by the literature discussed in Chapter 2, particularly studies by Powell and McGrath (2019) and Wedekind and Mutereko (2016), which underscore the misalignment between curriculum design and industry needs. Structural barriers such as insufficient industry partnerships, limited workintegrated learning opportunities, and broader economic constraints continue to undermine the potential of GAs to deliver on their promise of employability.

Traditionally, GAs have been conceptualised with a strong emphasis on competence- and employment-centred frameworks. These frameworks focus primarily on the development of individual characteristics and work-related skills, defining employability in terms of an individual's capability—such as skills, attitudes, and adaptability—to secure, retain, and progress in employment.

However, this narrow interpretation of GAs overlooks broader employability initiatives embedded within TVET institutions. These include both implicit and explicit institutional efforts, such as work experience opportunities, skills development embedded in the curriculum career-oriented activities and support services provided by Career Services.

Furthermore, curriculum development in the TVET sector remains heavily influenced by Western models, particularly those from the Global North. Given South Africa's distinct socio-economic context—characterised by diverse labour markets and systemic barriers that disproportionately affect individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds—this approach is misaligned with local needs. As a result, the existing framework fails to address the inequalities in access to employment and the specific challenges faced by South African TVET graduates.

An inclusive curriculum helps bridge this gap by incorporating student perspectives, industry needs, and local labour market demands. Actively engaging students in curriculum design ensures that learning experiences are relevant, practical, and aligned with real-world employment opportunities.

5.4 SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE STUDY AND RESEARCH GAPS

This study focused on a single case study of a TVET College in Cape Town, Western Cape. Future researchers may consider employing multiple case studies across different provinces in South Africa to broaden the scope of the findings. Additionally, future research could explore the specific impact of the identified graduate attributes on the job performance of Nated HRM graduates from TVET colleges in the workplace.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study provides a detailed identification and analysis of the specific graduate attributes emphasised in the Nated HRM program at a TVET College in the Western Cape. This contributes to a deeper understanding of how these attributes are integrated into the curriculum, offering valuable insights for curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers within the TVET sector.

By exploring the teaching methodologies employed at a TVET College in the Western Cape, the research offers insights into how these approaches support the development of graduate attributes in students. This contribution is particularly useful for educators

aiming to leverage their teaching strategies to better align with the development of critical skills needed in the workforce.

Furthermore, the study examines the perceptions of HRM graduates and educators regarding the contextual factors affecting the understanding of graduate attributes. These insights can guide educational institutions and policymakers in refining the HRM program to ensure that it aligns more closely with industry needs and prepares graduates effectively for the job market.

Lastly, the findings can serve as a foundation for further studies on graduate attributes in the TVET sector. Future research could build on this study to examine similar attributes across multiple TVET colleges in the same or different provinces, thereby broadening the understanding of effective curriculum design and teaching practices in the South African context.

5.6 FINAL REMARKS

In conclusion, framed by the social realistic and capability approach, this study underscores the critical role of aligning graduate attribute (GA) development with the diverse needs of students and the evolving demands of the workforce. The study identified key factors affecting the understanding of graduate attributes, including individual, institutional, and societal influences. These factors encompass aspects such as students' diverse backgrounds, inclusive curriculum design, practical learning opportunities, industry collaboration, and culturally responsive teaching practices.

The study reveals that students' understanding of graduate attributes is shaped by the interplay of these factors, highlighting the importance of inclusive teaching methods, equitable support systems, and relevant learning experiences that resonate with students' contexts. A well-rounded approach to curriculum design—one that embraces inclusivity, integrates practical learning experiences and emphasises adaptability—can better enhance both the understanding and application of graduate attributes, preparing graduates for the challenges of modern employment.

By continuously adapting to real-world changes and recognising the factors influencing the comprehension and development of GAs, institutions can ensure that graduate attribute initiatives remain relevant and impactful. This approach ultimately empowers graduates to succeed in the workforce, navigate complex societal demands, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

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7. APPENDICES

Addendum A: Questionnaire for Lecturers

How do you understand the concept/idea of graduate attributes in the NATED: Human Resource Management programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape?

Why do you think the development of graduate attributes is important?

What methods are employed to assess and recognize the development of graduate attributes in students?

How do you assess these in a way that takes account of factors such as language background, students' educational and social backgrounds?

How are factors such as race, class, gender, language taken into consideration in understanding the meaning of GAs and their development in your course?

Can you share practices that you adopt in your course to address these factors and promote equity in the development of GAs?

In your view, who is responsible for the development of GAs? Students, lecturers, the institution? Other?

Addendum B: Questionnaire for graduates

How do you understand the concept/idea of graduate attributes in the NATED:

Human Resource Management programme at a TVET College in the Western Cape?

Why do you think the development of graduate attributes is important?

For students enrolled in this course, what do you believe are the most important attributes to develop? And why do you say so?

How would you see graduate attributes visible? What would be signs that these attributes are in evidence?

In what ways is the teaching and development of GAs integrated into your course curriculum, teaching and assessment?

What kinds of curriculum design for your course do you think aids in the development of GAs?

Addendum C: Information and consent form

INFORMATION SHEET: PROJECT MASTERS RESEARCH

I am Cornelis Retief, and I am presently pursuing a master's degree in higher education. I've finished the required coursework over the past two years, and to earn my master's degree, I now need to submit a minor dissertation. I must complete a research project to do this. My project's main objective is to critically investigate the meanings and implications of graduate attributes in the context of the TVET system in South Africa. You will have an opportunity during the interview to get clarity on what is meant by "attributes" if you are uncertain. If you agree to participate, the interview will give you a chance to think about the meaning of graduate attributes, how these are taught in coursework and how they are developed.

To take part in this research, you will need to do the following:

1. Sign the consent form that goes with this documentation.
2. Answer some interview questions.

Participation requirements

1. All data utilized for the study will be kept completely confidential and will be used only by the researcher for the purposes of research.
2. To maintain anonymity, you will be given pseudonyms so that your identity is protected.
3. I agree to have the interview audio recorded.
4. You have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the research, without there being any consequences to you because of withdrawal.
5. As the researcher, I promise to treat everyone with respect and to handle any data acquired with sensitivity and consideration for the individual.

Do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me if you have any more queries.

I sincerely appreciate your help.

Cornelis Retief

0833974371

RTFCOR001@myuct.ac.za

Supervisor's contact details

Emeritus Professor: Alan Cliff

0216505027

Alan.cliff@uct.co.za

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH PROJECT

I, the undersigned, agree that Cornelis Retief, Masters Student from the University of Cape Town may interview me for the purposes of this research.

I confirm that:

1. I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
2. I voluntarily agree to participate in the project and will not be paid for my participation.
3. I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that there will be no consequences for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.
4. I agree with the estimation that the duration of the interview will be approximate 45 minutes, and I acknowledge the researcher will schedule a suitable timing conducive my schedule.
5. I understand that if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, I have the right to decline to answer any question or I can withdraw from the interview.
6. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
7. I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about.
8. I understand that I will have an opportunity if I wish to check the transcript and amend if necessary.
9. I understand that the interview will be recorded via audio.
10. I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.
11. I give permission for the interview to be recorded and transcribed.

YES	No
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Participant:

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
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Contact no of Participant

Researcher:

Cornelis Retief	Signature	Date
-----------------	-----------	------

Addendum D: Ethics approval



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Dr. Joanne Hardman
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EDNREC20240502

21 May 2024

Cornelis Retief
(RTFCOR001)

Re Ethical clearance

I am pleased to inform you that ethical clearance has been granted by the School of Education Ethics Review Committee of the Faculty of Humanities for your academic project: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF THE MEANINGS AND CONNOTATIONS OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN TVET COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY OF THE WEST COAST TVET COLLEGE. This approval is valid for one year until 21 May 2025.

Regards

PROFESSOR JOANNE HARDMAN

ETHICS CHAIR

"Our Mission is to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society."



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES POSTGRADUATE STUDENT PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong. Plagiarism is to use another's work and pretend that it is one's own.
2. I have used the APA convention for citation and referencing. Each contribution to, and quotation in, this project from the work(s) of other people has been attributed and has been cited and referenced. Any section taken from an internet source has been referenced to that source.
3. This project is my own work and is in my own words (except where I have attributed it to others).
4. I have not paid a third party to complete my work on my behalf. I have not used any artificial intelligence (AI) programme to complete this dissertation or part thereof (e.g., Chat GPT). If you have used AI tools to complete this dissertation or part thereof, please complete the following:
My use of artificial intelligence software included N/A (specify precisely how you used AI to assist with this dissertation).
5. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.
6. I acknowledge that copying someone else's assignment or essay, or part of it, is wrong, and declare that this is my own work.

NAME: CORNELIS RETIEF

SIGNATURE:

STUDENT NUMBER: RTFCOR001