Employability skills of new graduates and SMEs: A case study of the financial service industry in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Omolara Eunice Abdul

Professor Eugene Kozlovski, Doctor Alex Bell

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DECLARATION SHEET

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Abstract

Little is known about how SME employers experience and understand new graduate employability in Nigeria. The word employability is a difficult concept to define comprehensively. Therefore, past studies have produced a varied list of "employability skills". Over previous decades interest in graduate employability has grown, and to benefit graduates by ensuring they are employable, many studies have produced lists and classifications of the particular skills and attributes needed to promote graduate employability. To address a gap in the scholarly literature, this study explores how SME employers in the financial sector in Nigeria experience and understand the meaning of new graduate employability from their lived experiences.

The research applied a phenomenological methodology to form descriptive themes. The study interviewed 18 SME employers in the financial sector, who were identified as having contact with new graduates. Participants were selected from five different companies in the same industry in Lagos, Nigeria. In-depth face-to-face interviews with these SME employers provided rich data.

The study findings reveal eleven themes relating to how SME employers experience and understand new graduate employability: (a) hungry for performance; (b) determination; (c) intellectual curiosity; (d) time and appearance-conscious; (e) business acumen; (f) creative contribution; (g) effective communication; (h) optimism and honesty; (i) boldness and purposeful career path; (j) coachable attitude; and (k) informative. The study reveals that employers shared impactful memories of graduates who were able to use simple english language when communicating during their interviews.

This study contributes to the development of practice and knowledge in diverse ways. The study proposes a new conceptual framework that is more direct and narrowly focused on new graduate

employability. This framework will be useful to students in a career guidance context, to SME employers, to human resource departments involved in the selection and induction of employees who wish to select highly adaptable employees, and to higher education and graduate training centres, which can incorporate this information about new graduate employability into their curriculums to deliver graduates who are highly employable.

Key Terms

Employability, new graduate employability, effective communication, the acumen for a creative contribution, the ability to be coached, potential for business acumen, time and appearance consciousness, hungry for performance, determination, optimism and honesty, boldness and purposeful career-path, intellectually curious, informative

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter describes the study overview. First, section 1.1 introduces the issue, while section 1.2 presents the rationale for researching SMEs in Nigeria. Section 1.3 discusses the gap that exists in the literature. Section 1.4 provides the study's aims and objectives, and section 1.5 presents an overview of the research methodology. Finally, section 1.6 shows the thesis structure.

According to Quek (2005), finding employment in the current challenging economic environment is no easy feat when compared to previous years. There has been a tremendous change in work structure (Baruch, 2004), technologies have improved in leaps and bounds (Onuigbo & Eme, 2015), the interfacing of human knowledge with new technologies is becoming commonplace, and the conditions of employment are becoming more flexible (Quek, 2005). In light of these factors, it may be concluded that these trends in the global market require graduates to hold the right skills, and at the right time. Clearly, a fair degree is needed, but is not sufficient for employers (Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). Similarly, the UK government has recognised that an individual's employment security depends not only an attachment to a single employer but also on their having skills attractive to a range of employers (DfEE, 1997c).

There is collective agreement about the contribution of SMEs to efficiency and economic competitiveness in both developed and developing countries. SMEs are recognised not only for the creation of jobs and wealth; they also bring "innovation, competition, market diversification and are the bedrock" of future business activities (Stevenson, 1993: Etuk, Etuk & Baghebo, 2014;

Aluko, 2014, p. 88). Consequently, there is a range of established evidence confirming that SME development plays a vital role in stimulating economic growth, helping economic development by looking beyond the government to create employment for graduates (Hart & Barratt, 2009; Kewin et al., 2010). There is also evidence around the impact of graduates on business and economic growth at the macroeconomic level.

Similarly, Hanage et al. (1994) suggest that graduates employed in SMEs make a significant contribution to the organisations' success. However, statistics show that the recruitment of graduates to SMEs is proportionally low compared with the net contribution of the SME sector to the economy (Hart & Barratt, 2009). This is due to SME employers undervaluing the skills and attributes that graduates can bring to the business, as well as graduates placing less value on the benefits associated with working in SMEs (Hanage et al., 1994; Archer & Davison, 2008; Kewin et al., 2010).

The theoretical framework for this research is founded on the definition of employability according to the empirical work of Bridgstock (2009: 35), which implies that graduate employability is an adequate preparation for transition to the world of work, and maintaining employability once there involves activities such as the clarification of personal aims and abilities, understanding the requirements of the labour market, and the ability to actively engage in the career-building process. She argued that employability goes beyond the possession of an endless list of generic skills identified by researchers. Graduates must be able to navigate the work environment and self-manage the process of building their career. Therefore, this study will explore the meaning of new graduate employability and what SME employers should look out for in their new graduate employees.

1.2 Rationale and basis of the research

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are viewed as the bedrock of industrialisation globally (Al-Mahrouq, 2010: 89–90), due to the fact that most of them possess extensive knowledge of resource demand and supply tendencies, and they also serve as primary customers to larger firms by providing all sorts of products such as clothing, recreation, entertainment and education. They support the development of the economy through the industrial disposal and production of prime and intermediate products. They also serve as suppliers of materials to larger firms. Generally, SMEs establish important "sources of local supply and service provision to larger corporations" (Ebinringa, 2011: 87-88)

In the case of Nigeria, a healthy and managed SME environment creates significant sources of employment opportunities and wealth to the benefit of citizens, while the government also benefits by "generating revenue in terms of taxes" (Odubanjo, 2000: 73-75). Meanwhile, not all SMEs are in the formal sector; some of them occupy the unofficial labour market, a proportion varying in size from an estimated 4–6% in developed countries to over 50% in developing nations. According to a Finance Corporation report (2006), there is a positive relationship between a country's general level of income and the number of SMEs per 1,000 people. The support of SMEs to the economic development of a country is significant enough that it must not be ignored (Etuk, Etuk & Baghebo, 2014).

The importance of SMEs lies in their role in growth at diverse phases of economic development. These operations not only contribute to output, fulfil social objectives and attract foreign investors into a country; they also have an evident role in offering employment at a low investment rate,

which means they form the backbone of the private sector worldwide (Al-Mahrouq, 2010: 89–90). The majority of firms worldwide are SMEs, and they serve as breeding grounds for young entrepreneurs and provide a solution to resolving unemployment. The importance of SMEs in economic evolution is globally established and recognised in emerging as well as developed countries.

According to Muller, Devnani, Julius and Marzocchi (2016), SMEs make up 99.8% of all enterprises in the European Union, and account for more than half of total employment. Similarly, the Chinese economy was transformed due to the formation of about 50 million SMEs creating 500 million jobs, which led to vigorous development and scaling among SMEs (Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikuenomore, 2012). In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, SMEs have been the main foundation of job creation. In particular, SMEs form a majority of all Nigerian enterprises. According to Nigeria's small and medium-sized enterprise statistics (2015), SMEs account for over 97% of firms and 50% of the GDP (Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). Regardless of the uniqueness of SMEs, however, the development of viable SMEs in Nigeria is faced with the harsh economic conditions of the Nigerian business environment.

An empirical study by Etuk, Etuk and Baghebo (2014) identified free sources of finance, a lack of entrepreneurial skills, poor management, and weak infrastructural facilities as the challenges facing Nigerian SMEs. Similarly, Enwegbara (2006) noted that the gradual process of any economic development requires the education of young persons in job-enhancing education such as science and technology. Furthermore, Oghor and Ikhimokpa (2005) noted that the main challenge faced by SMEs in Nigeria is a lack of entrepreneurial education, which makes them less competitive in the foreign market. Enu (2005) highlighted factors responsible for the weak performance of SMEs in Nigeria compared to other developed and developing economies as a low

level of entrepreneurial skills, poor management practices, a shortage of skilled human resources, constrained access to capital, and poor infrastructure as reasons responsible for the low performance of Nigerian SMEs when compared to other developed and developing economies. According to the reviewed literature, it is clear that most of the challenges faced by SMEs in Nigeria can be attributed to a lack of entrepreneurial skills or education, poor management, and shortages of skilled manpower.

Lack of entrepreneurial skills

Poor management

Shortage of skilled
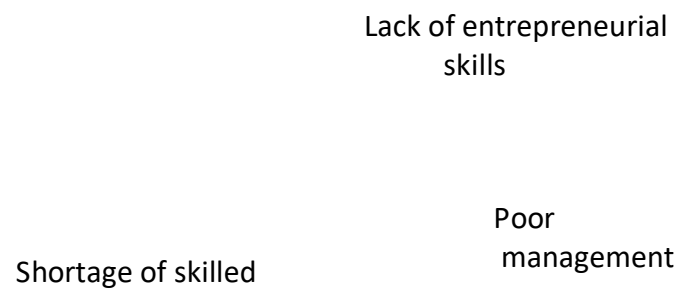
Figure 1.1: SME challenges in Nigeria

Source: Enu (2005; Aluko 2014; Oghor and Ikhimokpa, 2005)

The success of economic ventures such as SMEs relies on entrepreneurial skills (Stamer, 2005). Operators of SMEs the capacity to manage and acquire the basic skills of planning, coordinating, organising, leadership and communication. Innovative and creative abilities are acquired through work experience in enterprises or practical and managerial training systems. Conversely, Nigerian

SMEs' high failure rate is mostly attributed to poor managerial and entrepreneurial skills needed for the attainment of results (Essein, 2001). Furthermore, some of the challenges confronting SMEs are directly affecting entrepreneurs, due to the relationship between SMEs and entrepreneurship. For example, many businesses remain small for a long period based on the owner's mindset, e.g. poor entrepreneurial spirit. Aluko (2014) points out that many Nigerian business owners are in business not because it is their passion but merely to meet their daily needs. Thus, they lack a basic understanding of managing their enterprise beyond the survival level, and this affects their global competitiveness. Obor and Ikhimokpa (2005) concur with the above view and state that the economic system in Nigeria is very good at producing contractors and middlemen who flourish in an informal business sector. However, the notion of entrepreneurship is interpreted as individuals pursuing profit through unnatural or illogical means, rather than through a "strategic management process" (Obor, 2005: 6-8). As a result, the researcher concludes that Nigerian business owners lack entrepreneurial education.

As globalisation advances, most firms in developing countries are driven by competition towards high-quality markets, and into service and knowledge-based industries which rely on higher levels skill and knowledge in their workforce (Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). According to Nigeria Vision (2020: 20), in the future there will be more small firms but with a higher level of skills and knowledge bases. In other words, this suggests that there will be a need for a link between the SME sector and learning institutions, where new knowledge is disseminated and high-level skills are developed. Conversely, research has been done on the development of the SME sector and the importance of technology transfer between higher education (HE) institutions and industry. However, less focus has been placed on the role new graduates can play in boosting the

development of enterprise, or on how HE and graduates can contribute to the knowledge and skill base of the SME sector (Yahya, 2005).

This study therefore aims to fill the gap between SMEs and HE outcome expectations in Nigeria, to make Nigerian SMEs more competitive and a tool for poverty alleviation and thereby creating an atmosphere whereby SMEs and HE can work together in the recruitment and emergence of skilled staff, as they do in most developed countries. Furthermore, the research hopes to improve the performance and sustainability of SMEs and local entrepreneurs who serve as the backbone of global economic activities. There is a need for change in the mindset of business owners, and a necessity for them to nurture graduates who will become future entrepreneurs so that the world can benefit. The study will draw on the research of Akinyemi, Ofem and Ikuenomore (2012), which indicates that SMEs have helped many countries, especially in Europe, the Americas and Asia, to build a strong competing business economy. However, in Africa, and specifically in Nigeria, research has not explored the importance of this sector, nor contributed much to its growth (Onah, 2001).

1.3 Current gaps in the literature

Most of the existing research on employability has come from within the area of business studies, and it is becoming repetitive; a Google Scholar search on employability skills since 2010 yields about 16,900 results. However, there is no agreed evidence-based consensus on the description of employability, or what employers regard as the most important employability skills (Bridges, 1993; Bridgstock, 2009). However, there is a missing area that needs investigation from both a conceptual and a practical view. The meaning of what employability is, and whether the concentration on skill and attribute acquisition is actually correct, are both absent from this largely instrumental approach (Bridgstock, 2009).

Evidence from reviewed literature shows that researchers have done a considerable amount of study on graduate and employability skills within diverse enterprises in both developed and developing countries over the last fifteen to twenty years (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). These studies have focused on different HE sectors, employers in large private organisations and government-owned institutions respectively (e.g. Ball, 2003; Cotton, 1993; Davies, 2000; Ranasinghe, 1992; Raybould & Sheedy, 2005; Umo, 2001; Boateng & Ofori-Sarpong, 2002; Idaka, 2013; Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikuenomore, 2012). Leaving aside the debate on the relationship that could exist between graduates and SMEs, past research on employability basically relates to the skills that employers perceive or expect graduates to possess before entering the graduate labour market.

As a result, research findings have produced an endless list of "employability skills". Another vital theme that has emerged within the employability debate has been factors that impact on graduate employability, which have been explored mainly quantitatively (Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Blasko et al., 2002). While most of these studies are attentive to skills and employability, various studies have noted the importance of graduates possessing transferable skills before starting a job (Atkins, 1999; Evers, Rush & Berdrow, 1998; Robinson, 2000). Graduates themselves perceive that many of the employability skills needed by employers are more important than their main ability to perform said skills (Radhakrishna & Bruening, 1994). As a result, to resolve the ambiguity and repetition, there is a need to move the debate forward and find the missing part of this sizeable contributory approach, to find out what employability means and whether the previous emphasis on skills acquisition is actually correct.

Furthermore, the findings from previous research on employability skills have mainly examined the set of skills that employers perceive or prefer in graduates. There is a variety of diverse

conceptual frameworks that describe those skills, which maybe misleading in understanding the concept of employability (McLarty, 2001). These skills are variously classed as generic skills according to Olivier et al. (2014), key skills (Washer, 2007), core skills, transferable skills or employability skills (Bridges, 1993; Bridgstock, 2009; Bennett, Dunne & Carré, 1999). Olivier (2004) synthesises the skills into six categories as analytical, oral communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, information technology skill, and adaptive capacity, suggesting that these are an employer's expected competency needs. However, there is disagreement as to the particular skills that are best for a workplace and which promote graduate employability.

An empirical study by Tymon (2013) noted the discrimination that exists between employers' demands for skills and the methods used in most studies. According to a study by Hesketh (2000) on the skills that employers preferred, among the nine skills listed in their survey, communication, learning, writing, and problem solving were considered relevant, while numeracy and IT skills were less relevant. In contrast, a similar study by Aluko (2014) highlighted IT skills, managerial skills and entrepreneurship skills, among others, as preferred graduate employability skills. Hesketh (2000) and Bennett (2002) noted that employers will only identify with the specific skills they need. Thus, regardless of the quantitative or qualitative methods employed and the use of a short or long list of skills, it will be unrealistic to expect broad agreement between employers' preferences (Washer, 2007). Therefore, it is significant to understand why there is disagreement about the required skills for graduates.

Also, in a similar argument Sattar (2009) suggests that unemployment among many graduates is due to the weakness of their non-technical skills, such as communication, leadership, and cognitive skills in making decisions. Similarly, Groon (2014), Aluko (2014) and Idaka (2013) also noted that a lack of employability skills is a significant reason for graduate unemployment. In contrast,

however, some employers have reported that graduates are not hired due to their poor ability to solve problems (Groon, 2014), a lack of teamwork experience, and being nonresponsive to technologies (Queck, 2005). It is interesting to note the disagreement in employers' perceptions of the required graduate skills; these gaps in the literature informed the decision to carry out research on the meaning of graduate employability skills in SMEs.

Several recurring themes emerging from past research conducted in Nigeria and the UK (Sear, Scurry, Swail & Down, 2012; Aluko, 2014) relate to the lack of recognition of a need for graduates within SMEs. The owners of most SMEs do not see graduates as a natural source of recruitment, as they often have concerns about the need for graduates in their establishment. This doubt about the need for graduates seems to arise from numbers of factors, such as a low level of pay since most owners do not see graduates as possessing any special qualities, "poor working conditions, and lack of career progression" (Onuigbo & Eme, 2015: 38). As a result, most SMEs are not developed compared with larger firms (Uzor, 2004). Correspondingly, Candy and Crebert (1991) imply that many small and medium-sized businesses face barriers to progress and competitiveness because of a lack of high skill levels, both practical and managerial. According to Gilleard and Reichwald (2008), graduates can contribute technical expertise and knowledge to SMEs. Similarly, a preliminary report about graduate recruitment to small and medium-sized enterprises in Europe in 2012 concurs that the hiring of new graduates into SMEs can increase their skill levels and enhance the performance of the sector (Pittaway & Thedham, 2005; Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). Although a few published studies are available on graduate employability skills in Nigeria, they fail to develop the concepts that might explain or deepen our understanding of the importance of graduates in the development of SMEs.

In summary, the issue of new graduate employability and SME development is not a popular topic. Most researchers focus mainly on larger firms, ignoring the fact that graduate recruitment into SMEs has the potential to increase management capability and enhance the growth of these enterprises. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring and understanding the meaning of graduate employability to SME employers within the financial service industry. This this will help SME managers to understand the value of graduates to the development of the sector. According to Sear, Scurry, Swail and Down's (2012) study of graduate recruitment to SMEs in the UK, the recruitment of graduates into SMEs will enhance their growth. Relatedly, Gilleard and Reichwald (2008) suggest that graduates can fill future and present skills gaps, as well as give fresh and innovative views and contribute technical expertise and knowledge to the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.

1.4 Research aims and objectives

The extensive literature review on new graduates, employability, skills and SMEs highlights gaps in the literature, providing the basis for the aims and objectives of this research. The overall aim of this study is to contribute to the fast-growing body of research on graduate employability by examining what employers in small and medium-sized enterprises consider to be graduate employability, based on their past experiences. Thus, the objectives of this research fall into two broad areas:

A) The research aims are to investigate the meaning of graduate employability to SME employers – specifically, to employers within the financial service industry in Lagos State, Nigeria. Thereby, the study will examine the meaning of employability in this area by looking at employers' experiences in Nigeria

B) To identify those factors that make graduates employable, and/or the attributes/skills that employers value most in their graduates and which have contributed to the success of their business sector. This will help to:

- Develop a framework that will explain the importance of graduates to the future development of small and medium-sized enterprises

- Sensitise policymakers of the need to build or regularly revise a strategy for improving youth employment competencies.

1.5 Overview of methodology

The proposed research is founded on a qualitative approach to discovery that appropriately frames the effort within an interpretivist philosophical standpoint primarily focussing on the experience and understanding within the employer's world. Creswell (1998: 99) defined this as "an inquiry process of understanding based on discrete methodological traditions of investigation that explore a social or human problem. Researchers build a complex, complete picture, analyze data, report the views of participants, and conduct the study in a natural setting". The emphasis is on how an individual builds meaning and knowledge within a social context, which appropriately aligns with this research's interest in investigating how employers understand the meaning of new graduate employability.

Phenomenological enquiry is adopted to develop the quantitative frame further. This methodology helps in discovery and understanding within the data environment, developing from the lived experiences of the employer participants. Some methods strive to make generalisations through formulating hypotheses; however, a phenomenological approach seeks to explore contextual meaning through the knowledge of the situation by those being researched (Creswell, 2009). The study begins its investigatory interest in an area that is not well understood. The researcher looks

to SME employers to describe how they understand the meaning of new graduate employability based on their rich experience. With only a few existing research studies illustrating the interactivity between employers and graduate, the study attempts to develop understanding through the lived SME employers' experiences and open an avenue to continuous discovery.

The phenomenological approach may add to the literature and fill the gap that exists as a result of a lack of available research (Creswell, 2009). Further insight comes from setting aside assumptions. This gives room for a less impeded search for intuitive meaning, which guides the research beyond current thinking and into a richer area of understanding (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). The perspectives of the scholar are derived from emerging themes reduced through a process of preceding reflection, constant reflection, and descriptive reduction (Husserl, 1931). This study involves research relating to SME employers, new graduates and the interactivity between the two groups, and therefore the study's main focus centres on how employers experience and understand the meaning of graduate employability.

This study followed a phenomenological guideline as described in Moustakas (1994), where the researcher performs the role of generating a written description of an individual's external observations and their core process of understanding. Creswell (1998) suggest that the researcher should first describe the lived experience of interest, working to disregard fixed judgements, acknowledging the realities of this awareness, and accepting the reality that evolves from an individual's experience. This process is extensively defining in Chapter 4, integrating extra information. Moustakas (1994) suggested bracketing; this safeguards the study design to remain methodologically linked to the objectives while the researcher compiles the personal stories of the lived participants' experiences. The next step involved assigning equal value to each developing section of meaning. The analysis of the data took place via coding, where related clusters develop

into an experiential theme (Moustakas, 1994). This led the study to seek a point of saturation regarding the phenomenon under study.

The total sample for this study involved up to eighteen SME employers chosen from five different companies in the same sector in Lagos State, Nigeria. Justification for this sample size is given in the methodology section in Chapter 4. At first a purposeful sampling method was used to select respondents who were likely to have shaped some meanings around new graduates. Criterion sampling, as suggested by Creswell (2007), involves further focusing the subject population by incorporating participants who had had the opportunity of interacting directly with new graduates from their first day of work onward. The data collection for this study took place through an in-depth face-to-face interview aimed at exploring how employers experience and understand new graduates' employability.

The five-step approach, described by Hycner (1999) as a commonly used phenomenological practice, was used to organise my research thoughts. Data gathering was through interviews, and my own note-taking and memoing in the field assisted with navigating the developing themes. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction ensured my preconceived judgements were suspended and allowed me to focus on my respondents' experiences. Two separate coding phases helped me to negotiate the data analysis. Describing the units of meaning first helped me to shrink verbal and nonverbal communications as I attempted to find the essence of meaning in the data. Clustering then helped to create data groupings that congregated to form ideas linked with the research objectives. After that, I began to extract insights from the interviews, which were later condensed into themes. The themes were composed into a composite summary of the findings, and were directly related to how employers experience the phenomenon in the study.

1.6 Thesis structure

This research is designed and structured in five chapters. Chapter 1 provides a developed foundation for discovery and an overview of the key methods and considerations. The second chapter presents a comprehensive literature undertaken for this research, on graduate employability skills and issues related to changes in employability concepts. The significance of graduates in SMEs is discussed, and likewise existing theories on employability. Justification and description are provided for the key themes and concepts used in this study, and various studies on the approach adopted are discussed. Chapter 3 provides the framework which the present study builds upon. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology for this study and the justification for the research method chosen, as well as various philosophical research issues. The sampling strategy, unit of analysis, participant profiles and interview guidelines are all discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 presents the data analysis techniques used for this research. After collecting the data and conducting the interviews, this explains the process and strategy used in data analysis, and presents the findings. The final chapters give a theoretical discussion and conclusion regarding employers' experiences and understanding of new graduate employability.

Phenomenological research is a promising design aid and provides an organisational map, while also shaping all the parts of my thesis planning. My commitment to the methodology guided the process of my data collection and analysis. Although a semi-scripted plan approach is provided in qualitative research, the findings emerged through patterns of discovery where I strove to understand meanings as they were represented in participants' voices and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter 2 offers the building blocks from which the phenomenon develops in terms of the interactivity between new graduates and employers, but the data collection and analysis were emergent, and I, as the researcher, had an important role throughout the findings. The

methodological process pilots analysis and joins sampling to the discovery and demonstration of a phenomenon through data outlining and the extraction of meaning.

1.7 Chapter summary

The issues that are addressed in Chapter 1 highlight the insufficient connection between SMEs and graduate employability, which is reflected in the gap in the existing literature. It is necessary to investigate the meaning of employability based on employers' experiences because of the rich data in real-life experiences. The meaning of employability is becoming uncertain in this era of technologies; employers' focusses are not fixed in terms of the actual skills they seek in their graduate or employees. As a result, graduates are unsure whether employers desire their skills or attributes. This uncertainty in the labour market will continue and result in graduates lacking what it takes to compete in the labour market. Therefore, a deficit in the scholarly literature connecting these two groups has been outlined as a researchable area, with a focus on Nigeria and wider interest for the world at large.

Chapter 1 is introductory to this study. It includes the background to the study, the problem to be addressed by the study, the study's purpose, the significance of the study, the objectives and aims of the study, gaps in the literature and an overview of the methodology, and concludes with a chapter summary and a description of how the thesis chapters are organised. The foundations from which future chapters will frame how SME employers understand the meaning of new graduate employability are laid in this chapter. This investigation has implications for everyone involved in youth employment competencies, such as researchers, trade unions, training centres, human

resources experts, student professionals, policymakers, and students. Through this investigation, the researcher hopes to bridge the empirical gap between SMEs and new graduates. This study may pave the way for future discovery by qualitatively acknowledging SME employers' stories relating to their experience of new graduate employability. It will be useful for academic professionals in preparing graduates for the world of work, and will bridge a gap in understanding between universities' provision and employers' needs.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter presents a summary review of past and present literature on areas such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the benefits of graduates for SMEs, changes in employability concepts, past and recent arguments about employability, and employability theories. Additionally, as the research aim is to investigate the meaning of graduate employability to SMEs employers, the literature review gives a brief background to the industry, the challenges, and the benefit of graduates in the sector.

2.1 Small and medium-sized enterprises

The classification and definition of SMEs may be different between scholars, countries, and continents. Nevertheless, they may all have similar features that are unique to these enterprises, regardless of their differences. Agreement on the definition of SMEs was explained by Carter and Jones-Evans (2006) as the diversity of the businesses they carry out. In 1971 Bolton made an earlier attempt to define the term 'small businesses' by pointing to specific factors which an SME may be identified with. First, it has to be independent (that is, not part of a larger organisation). Second, the management structure must be a simple one, mostly managed by the business owners (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2006). The size of the business based on the number of employees or annual turnover has been used by a majority of published studies as a method to identify SMEs.

Table 2.1: SME definition by regions

United Kingdom	Definition:according to Carter and Jones-Evans (2006), the UK government outlines SMEs as: Micro: 0–9 employees Small: 0–49 employees (including micro) Medium: 50–249 employees SMEs "accounted for 99.9 percent of all enterprises, 58.8 percent of private-sector employment and 48.8 percent of private-sector turnover" (Carter & Jones-Evans, 2006: 22)
Europe	Definition: the European Union (EU) divides SMEs into: Micro firm: employee numbers of not more than 10 and a turnover of not more than 2 million euros Small firm: not more than 50 employees and turnover of not more than 10 million euros Medium-sized firm: not more than 250 employees and turnover of not more than 50 million euros The twenty million SMEs in the EU represent 99% of trades and make a significant role in "economic progress, invention, employment and social integration" (Verheugen, 2008: 13)

United States	In the USA SMEs employ less than 500 employees. Those employing from 1–100 are considered to be a small firm, and from 101–500 are medium-sized firms (Hammer et al., 2010). Small and medium-sized businesses in the US economy are considered popular, and account for about half the gross domestic product (GDP) (Hammer et al., 2010)
Worldwide	According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), SMEs account for over 90% of enterprises in the world, and between 50% and 60 % of employment (UNIDO, 2002). "SMEs are being supported on the fact that they make some significant influences on output and, thus, competitiveness and collective growth of the economy. Besides, SMEs are believed to be especially useful in creating jobs and have a status for generating income and training prospects as well as imperative essential services for disadvantaged people" (Altenburg & Eckhardt, 2006: 4).

The table above shows a variation in the definition of SMEs from research in different countries. This study follows the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2013), the Central Bank of Nigeria guidelines and the Bank of Industry (2017) in its classification and description of SMEs in Nigeria.

This study considers the number of staff as a factor in determining the eligibility of a firm to be classified as an SME. Small enterprises employ between eleven and fifty people and account for about 68,168 Nigerian businesses, while there are 4,670 medium-sized businesses employing fifty-

one to 200 employees, making a total number of about 72,838 SMEs in Nigeria, and with the highest number (11,663) in Lagos State. As at December 2013, the total number of persons employed by SMEs stood at "59,741,211, representing (84.02%) of the total labor force" (SMEDAN, 2013: 8).

2.2 Characteristics of SMEs

A significant body of literature has investigated the characteristics of SMEs (e.g. Simpson and Docherty, 2003; Byrd, 2009). Generally, in terms of many characteristics, there are numerous differences between small and large businesses, starting with specialisation in a specific product or service compared with larger businesses. SMEs mostly have a small market opportunity, or in other words they often produce a single product and have a single buyer; what is more, they make continual attempts to reduce the cost of production (Storey, 1994; Simpson & Docherty, 2004). Still, SMEs are inclined to support creativity, usually starting with a single person or a group of people (Byrd, 2009). Curran (1996) reported that small businesses usually concentrate on their survival and independence rather than their growth. SMEs have relatively slow growth, but nevertheless it tends to be incremental and stable (Bridge et al., 2003).

With respect to the style of management within SMEs, small businesses tend to have a small management team and a centralised style of management. Murphy et al. (1996) pointed out that SME management and operation is mostly by the owners, so that the manager has a strong influence on every business decision. According to research findings by Dwivedi et al. (2009), their ownership and management structure inspires SME owners to learn and create new knowledge. Therefore, owners can adjust their business culture to enact values other than profit (Fassin et al., 2011). The challenges encountered by SMEs in term of restricted finance (Pollard, 2003) and reduced resources (Reid et al., 1998) are another quality associated with this firm type.

SMEs reflect more features like "centralized power, small management team, multifunctional management, flexibility, limited range of products, lack of adequate organization planning, and lack of enhanced skills level related to core business function" (McLarty, 2000: 31).

According to an empirical study by Storey and Skykes (1996), small firms are riskier and more uncertain than large firms. However, Durrani and Boocock (2006) argue that such a description is questionable, because in general that motivations, restrictions and uncertainties differ not only between SMEs and large firms, but also between small and medium-sized businesses. This idea was further supported by Leyden and Link (2004), who noted that small businesses own ordinary capital that is controlled virtually entirely and directly by the owners, in addition to an unexceptional asset base. In light of this, SMEs are more risk-averse compared to large businesses. The table below present a synopsis of SME characteristics.

Table 2.2 SME Characteristics

SME Characteristic	Source
Initiative: small businesses mostly start with a single person or group of people, and hence, this kind of business inclines to new initiatives.	Megginson et al., 1994
Specialism: most SMEs specialise in the production of a single product and have a single buyer. Also, they tend to have a small market opportunity, and are always trying to	Storey, 1994; Simpson and Docherty, 2004

reduce the cost of production.	
Growth: small business usually concentrate on their survival and independence than growth. SMEs have relatively slow growth, but it frequently tends to be incremental and stable.	Curran et al., 1996; Bridge et al., 2003
Resource availability: SMEs have an ordinary resource base and are liable to have narrow disposal of resources in relation to time, money and expertise.	Wymer and Regan, 2005; Bharati and Chaudhury, 2006
Organisation: SMEs typically have partial formal preparation and control process tools in the company.	Chell et al., 1991; Bharati and Chaudhury, 2006
Control mechanisms: SME management and operation are mostly by the owners; the manager has a strong influence on every business decision. Therefore, they have centralised control methods.	Chell et al., 1991; Murphy et al., 1996

2.3 Value of graduates for SMEs

Several reports have outlined the impact and value of graduates on the progress of SMEs since the mid-1990s. Hanage et al. (1994) claim that the employment of graduates into SMEs has a major influence on the success of the organisations. Therefore, they propose that an increase in the numbers of graduates employed in SMEs would lead to more success in SMEs, as well as guaranteeing economic growth and the personal improvement of graduates. Similarly, a survey conducted in London on one hundred businesses that have provided work placements to graduates claimed that there was an impact on business performance. Also, other evidence from research undertaken by Yorkshire graduate shows an indication of the potential contribution of graduates to the performance of smaller businesses (Artfield et al., 2009). However, there is a limited amount of research in Nigeria which explicitly explores the value of graduates for SMEs.

Many reports written from a qualitative point of view equally suggest that recruiting graduates into SMEs is a means of enhancing skill levels and SME performance, since graduates add value in a diversity of ways (Gilleard & Reichwald, 2008; McLarty, 1999). These include:

➢ Skills level: such as the introduction of higher-level skills linked to main business functions like financial management, marketing, and person development (McLarty, 2000).

➢ Organisational culture: they contribute a new perspective on business structure and processes (McLarty, 2000)

➢ Productivity: Haskel (2005) noted that businesses that employ highly educated staff tend to be more industrious

➢ Innovation: for example, graduates introduce new ideas and ways of doing things (Archer & Davison, 2008)

➢ Growth: by providing an extra resource to tackle business development objectives (Lowden et al., 2011)

Agreement has been established that the recruitment of graduate to SMEs has the possibility of increasing management and leadership ability as well as enhancing the growth of the sector (Lowden et al., 2011). However, Duan et al. (2002) noted that skill and knowledge deficiencies in SMEs are significant constraints to their development. Similarly, Bloom and Van Reenen (2010) and McLarty (2001: 254) state that unfledged management skills and capacities are substantial constraints on SME growth and performance.

Hence, several studies conducted in both developed and developing economies have attributed the poor survival and growth rate of SMEs to a lack of sufficient management capability for long-term strategic thinking (McLarty, 2001; Onuigbo & Eme, 2015). A number of reports have suggested the possible contribution of graduates to the development of this sector as a means of boosting the economy. Harris and Reid (2005) claimed that graduates' contributions to SMEs come in the form of "human capital". This is seen to add value by enhancing skills, which leads to increases in performance within SMEs (Gileard & Reichwald, 2008; McLarty, 1999). Similarly, Hogarth et al. (2007) and Atfield et al. (2009) suggest that the value of graduates can be derived in terms of three stages, namely immediate, intermediate and long-term benefits.

Table 2.3: Graduate benefits to SMEs. Source: adapted from Atfield et al. (2009: 43)

Immediate benefits: acquisition of skills needed in the workplace
Intermediate benefits: increased organisational capability in areas where graduates are used, increased levels of output, increased levels of innovation
Longer-term benefits: improved business performance, higher levels of productivity, increased profitability, growth
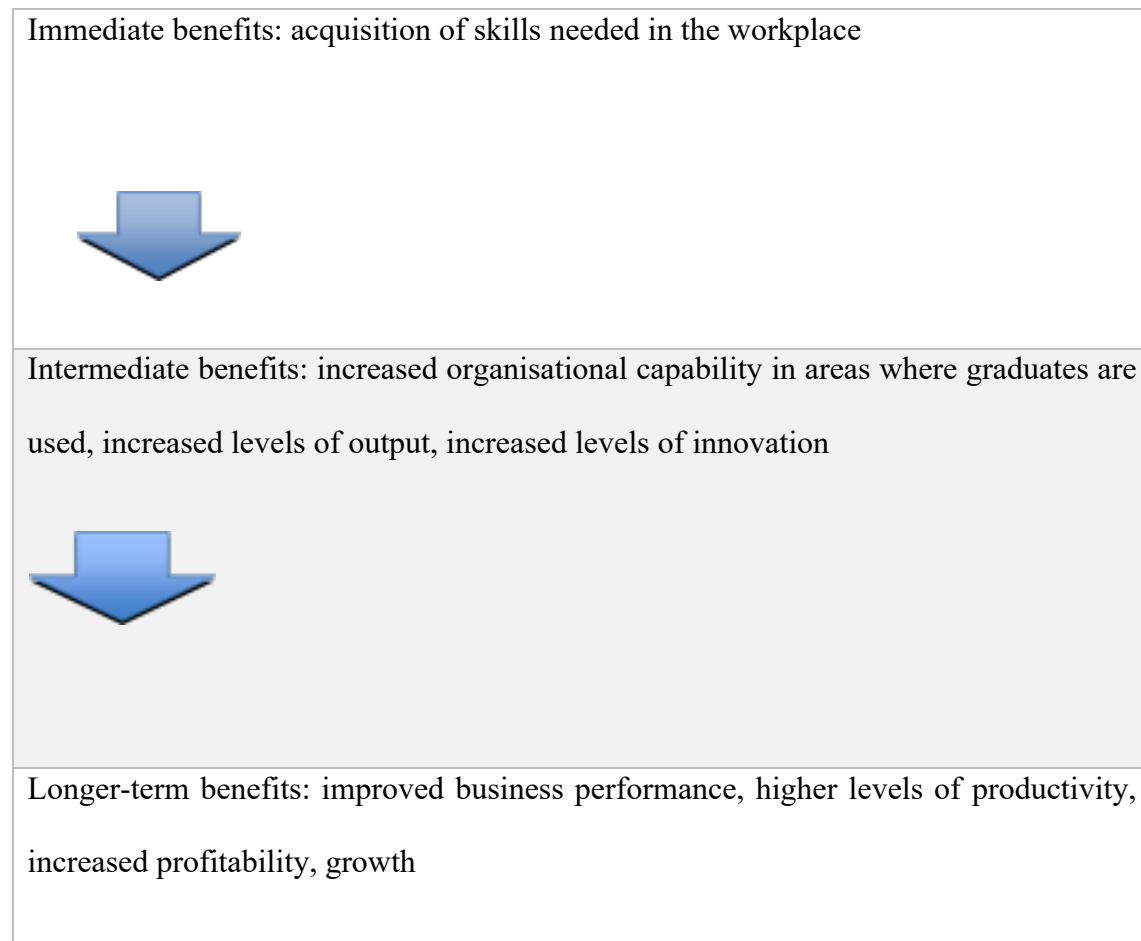
2.4 SMEs and graduates

The debate around employability, particularly in relation to skills and attributes, has to treat the business as a single entity without differentiating between sectors or organisation types (Capelli, 1999). Many of the lists of graduate skills or attributes come from studies done in big firms. However, evidence reveals that most graduates undertake their first employment in SMEs (Arnold et al., 2002; Venkatarman, 1984). This poses a series of questions, such as: are the skills needed for SMEs the same as those for big firms? Are graduates prepared to undertake a successful transition into SME jobs?

Although this study's focus is to explore the contribution of graduates to SMEs from the

employers' experience, it is also imperative to explore the value that SME employment holds for new graduates. Evidence suggests that graduates' expectations of small business employment are often surpassed in terms of the high level of autonomy given to them on a day-to-day basis, the constant skill growth through learning by doing on the job, and the opportunities for development in their career that SME employment opens for them (Arnold et al., 2002). Additionally, Gibbs (1997) records a number of possible benefit like hands-on experience within the organisation, often reflecting the absence of hierarchy within many smaller firms.

Second, progression is built on accomplishment, as opposed to a position in an existing organisational hierarchy, and graduates have the opportunity to work closely with people at all levels, including the managers and business owners. Capelli (1999) claims that graduate in SMEs are provided with opportunities to make an impact on the business which would not be possible in a large firm. Despite these possible benefits of graduate employment, however, SMEs and graduates are normally "reticent beneficiaries" of the likely chances available to them (Bowen et al., 2004: 385). This may be result of graduates being under-represented in SMEs, which leads to graduate under-rating jobs in SMEs, regardless of the evidence stressing the possible influence they can have on the performance of smaller businesses. Walmsley et al. (2012: 368) suggest that there may be a letdown on both sides of the market, described as "ignorance and market barriers".

2.5 Changes in employability concepts

The concept of employability has continued to change in line with constantly changing career and employment models. In the 1800s jobs were considered as activities, allied to changing task rather than the particular position, which defines clear boundaries (Bridges, 1994). Artisans were responsible for their employability, which meant moving around searching for jobs where they were available to update their skills as necessary (Garavan, 1999). At that time contracts tended to

be for the duration of a particular project or piece of work. The situation changed with the "industrial revolution employment model" (Bridges, 1994:130). Progression in the manufacturing and finance sectors brought the emergence of the organisational profession. Jobs in organisations became more structured and roles were well-defined (Bridges, 1994). Contracts in these organisation became long-term, and employees expected the organisation to offer them a job for as long as they wanted it.

However, remaining employable in this environment means having specific knowledge, skills and behaviour, as well as loyalty towards the organisation (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996: 4). Employees give their time to the organisation and the organisation in return provides job and professional security, as illustrated by "Whyte's organization man" (Whyte, 1956). Employers mainly managed careers, mostly in bigger establishments. In the 1900s employability measurement tended to focus on tangible and quantifiable criteria, such as having the right qualifications, a particular job title, identifying with a reputable organisation that is expert in hiring and training, or years of experience in a company or in a specific field (Capelli, 1999).

However, employment patterns changed in the twentieth century as organisations underwent widespread (Capelli, 1999) and ongoing downsizing and restructuring in reaction to competitive pressure in the labour market (Casio, 1993). As a result of these changes, organisations that offered long-term ranked careers were no longer able to promise job security, and lifelong employment was replaced by shorter-term contracts (Capelli, 1999). Sudden changes in written contracts were reflected in changes to psychological contracts, which are defined as "employee beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization" (Rousseau, 1995: 9). The old psychological contract implied that hard work and being loyal to the organisation would be rewarded by job security, training and promotion. In

contrast, the focus of the "new" psychological contract was more on "transactional features or monetizable obligations entailing limited connection of the parties" (Morrison & Robinson, 1997: 229).

This sudden transition in careers and organisations has led to an increase in scholarly interest in employability. Continuous downsizing, restructuring and outsourcing in organisations have brought a growing stress on flexibility and employability over long-term job security. Most employers are hunting for individuals with the capacity to make an immediate and short-term contribution, rather than individuals with aspirations for long-term development in a single profession. Garavan (1999:10) states that the typical advanced skills that describe the new employability have become "the basis of an organization's competitive benefit". Correspondingly, organisations that have the advantage of employees with generic skills compete more successfully than those that focus on retaining employees with firm-specific skills. Therefore, the major concerns for organisations at present lie in how to attract people with a high level of employability skills, and the role to adopt in enhancing individual employability. However, Rajan et al. (2000: 23) note that employers are unsure of this intermediate stage of the meaning of employability, and are unclear about how it should be measured.

In a way, the view of employability seems to have moved back to a pre-industrial model (Ackah & Heaton, 2004; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Individuals and graduates are expected to look within themselves and examine whether they have current and marketable skills as a precondition for career success (Baruch, 2004). Therefore, this raises a vital question as to what forms employability and how should it be evaluated in the twenty-first century, due to continuous changes in ways of working and a lack of understanding as to the best skills that graduates should possess.

Having examined this debate, it would seem that careers are in a state of flux, and that in the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries we are likely to see the continuous emergence of more new ways of working. These changes are an indication that there is a need for further research into employability. The emphasis is more on what individual is responsible for, and engagement with employability is a precondition to a successful career (Baruch, 2004). Individuals are forced to look inward for their ongoing job security by ensuring they possess current and marketable skills. They are expected to "take control and manage their own career to enhance their employability and attain satisfaction and enjoyment" (Bates & Bloch, 1996: 29). This raises the question as to what constitutes employability and how it should be evaluated.

2.6 Employability concepts

The concept of employability is difficult to define comprehensively, and therefore it has been theorised (Lees, 2002). Kumar (2009) similarly implies that the components of employability are difficult to define, measure and access. Therefore, definitions overlap, and some lack precision (Quek, 2008). Hillage and Pollard (1998) concur that employability is a term used in a range of contexts with a selection of meanings, and it can lack clarity and accuracy. Many discussions of research have examined the concept of employability over several years. However, over recent decades the interest in graduate employability has been growing, along with interest in ensuring that graduates are employable. Many studies have produced classifications of the particular skills and attributes needed to promote employable graduates, such as "key skills; common skills; functional skills; essential skills; skills for life; generic skills; core skills; transferable skills and enterprise skills" (Quek, 2008: 86). However, the concept of employability continues to be applied within different contexts, i.e. both in work and seeking work.

The idea of employability has developed over the last century, and a study by Gazier (1998, cited in McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) identified three waves of employability studies. In the 1950s and 1960s employability was viewed as the ability and willingness to work. In the 1980s and 1990s, the concept was refined to refer to individual responsibilities to maintain transferable skills due to persistent changes in the world of work (Hall, 2004). In the twenty-first century the focus has shifted again, to defining the difference between employable and unemployable based on whether an individual is able and willing to work (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). As business becomes more flexible and the rate of innovation accelerates, job descriptions are constantly changing. This makes it exceptionally difficult for employers to define the concept of employability. Instead, Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) propose a conceptualisation of employability based on the possession of certain abilities. Table 2.4 gives an overview of the definition of employability and indicates how authors have clarified the concept in different ways.

Definitions	Authors	Year
Individual possesses knowledge, attitude and skills	Beveridge	1912
A synergistic compilation of individual characteristics	Ashford	1990
Set of hard and soft skills	Dench	1997
The skills and abilities needed to move self-sufficiently within the labour market	Hillage and Pollard	1998
Ability to think critically and reflect	Harvey	1999
A set of graduate attributes, qualities, skills and understandings	Bowden et al.	2000
An institutional achievement rather than the capability of individuals to gain a job	Harvey	2001
A synergic combination of personal attributes, various skills, and subject understanding	Knight	2001
Ability to find a job	McLeish	2002
Ability and willingness to be appealing in the	Saunders; De Grip and	2004

job market	Loo	
A set of skills, understandings and personal attributes	Yorke and Knight	2006
Ability to get a satisfying job	Harvey	2007
Set of attributes, skills, and knowledge	CBI	2009

Table 2.4: Overview of employability concepts

Employability is an age-old but contested concept (Gazier, 1998) which comes up frequently in policy and theoretical debates at local, regional, national and international levels. In policy terms, employability formed one of the four original pillars of the Nigeria National Employment Policy 1998, and also the European Employment Strategy of 1997 (Europe 2020 Strategy, 2010; International Labor Organization, 1998). Despite its critical importance in the labour market, employability remains a difficult concept to measure (Apel & Fertig, 2009). The use of different definitions has caused confusion because of the lack of consensus on an accepted definition or how the concept should be applied; significant ambiguity surrounds the term (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

The term employability was introduced by one architect of the British Welfare state, William Beveridge, in his book *A Problem of Industry* (Beveridge, 1912). The notion was developed in the United States, and the objective was to differentiate between employable and unemployable. Gazier (1999: 39) termed this "dichotomic employability", defining seven stages. These seven stages are "dichotomic employability, socio-medical employability, manpower policy employability, flow employability, labor market performance employability, initiative employability, and interactive employability". However, these stages are relevant in the twenty-

first century. For instance, manpower policy employability underlines the gap that exists between individuals possessing knowledge and attitudes, and the skills that employers require (Gazier, 1999). This concurs with the Confederation of British Industry's (CBI) view that employability is a "set of attributes, skills, and knowledge that everyone should possess to ensure they are capable of being effective in the workplace to the benefit of themselves, employer and economy" (CBI, 2009: 22). In light of the above, it is clear that the changing world of work requires employees to take the initiative and be self-directed.

Saunders; De Grip and Loo (2004) outline employability as the ability and the willingness to be and stay appealing in the labour market, by anticipating changes in task and responding to these changes in a proactive way. Harvey (2007: 104) defined employability as the "ability to get a satisfying job", while Garavan (1999: 1) implies that "employability is a form of psychological contract between employees and employers". Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004: 16) argue that employability is "a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize job opportunities". Employability can also refer to an individual's willingness and capacity to be successful in a wide range of jobs (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). Fugate et al.'s (2004) approach to employability implies that an individual's employability is a result of their own readiness and work motivation. Rothwell and Almond (2007) fall in line with this view, asserting that employability is a social construct, and that to see it as a one-sided issue is to miss important aspects of the concept. Thus, employers determine employability. This attempt focusses on individual level employability and the relevant factors that makes a person employable in the world of work.

McLeish (2002) defines the term as individual's ability to find a job, keep a job and move between industries if necessary. Hillage and Pollard (1998: 2) state that "employability is the ability to

move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment". It may simply be described as the skills and abilities needed to find employment, remain on the job, and change jobs when needed. McLeish (2002) and Hillage and Pollard (1998) define employability by suggesting that it is less about techniques or experiences, and more about the ability to learn and meet needs in an organisation. Meanwhile, Yorke (2006: 44) defines "employability as a set of skills and knowledge that makes an individual more likely to secure a job and make them successful in their chosen career to the benefit of themselves, workforce, community, and the economy". In other words, graduates with some set of hard and soft skills which are highly valued by employers will possibly be employable (Dench, 1997). This implies that if employability is about sets of hard and soft skills valued by employers, then employability issues should be static.

However, Harvey (2001) criticised this view. According to Harvey, employability measurement should not be based on outcomes, as these may be reached through internal improvement by encouraging students to engage in reflective learning (Harvey, 2001). He proposed an employability model called the "magic bullet model". This emphasises developing and enhancing students' employability skills by embedding them into the curriculum. He also stressed the importance of constant employability audits for a better outcome. To Harvey, employability should be viewed as an institutional achievement rather than the capability of individuals to gain jobs (Harvey, 2001). Fugate et al. (2004) argue that employability symbolises a synergistic combination of career identity, personal adaptation, and social and human capital. They asserted that employability encompasses the conceptual commonalities of these three factors, and it influences active adaptability at work.

Bowden et al. (2000) argue that employability is a set of graduate attributes, qualities, skills and understandings that a university community agrees that its students will develop during their study time at the institution, consequently shaping the future contributions that they are able to make to their professions and as citizens. The study further stresses that employability should not just focus on preparing graduates to be successful in the labour market, but should also prepare them to contribute to their society as a citizens. For Harvey (1999; also Lees, 2002), employability is the ability to think critically and reflect, as this is required for innovation and leading change successfully. Meanwhile, according to Yorke and Knight (2006), employability is a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that allow graduates a likely opportunity to gain employment and be successful in their job in order to benefit them, their organisation and the wider economy. Employability is less likely to be about developing attributes, skills or experiences just to aid the students in securing a job; it is also about learning, with less stress on employment and more on ability (Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002; Knight & Yorke, 2002). According to the above definitions, employability is therefore not fixed. It relates to individual differences and readiness to embrace new learning.

Baruch (2001) gives a straightforward description of the individual assuming the primary responsibility for getting a job, while the employer provides an opportunity for development for as long as the individual is needed. The definition above describes critical thinking and reflection as a tool for change. Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002: 43) imply that employers value graduates who are proactive and who can use higher level skills such as "analysis, critique, synthesis and multi-layered communication to facilitate innovation teamwork in catalyzing the transformation of their organization". This definition emphasises discipline-specific and generic skills which are constantly changing.

Little (2001) recommends that the concept involves several dimension, and there is a need to differentiate between factors that are relevant to the job and preparation for work. Morley (2001) stated that employability is just not about students banking lists of skills, while Knight (2001: 271) refers to the notion as "a synergic combination of personal attributes, various skills, and subject understanding". Kellard et al. (2001: 97) view "employability as gaining, sustaining and progressing in employment". This supports the idea of sustainable employment, and implies an upward employment trend in the long term, and that a focus on getting people into work as such is insufficient (McCollum, 2012). Yorke (2006: 96) "describes employability as a set of skills and knowledge that makes an individual more likely to secure a job and make them successful in their chosen career to the benefit of themselves, workforce, community and the economy". This study will employ the definition proposed by Fugate et al. (2004), who argued that employability symbolises a synergistic combination of career identity, personal adaptation, and social and human capital. They asserted that employability encompasses the conceptual commonalities of these three factors, and it influences active adaptability at work.

In summary, the literature reviewed above emphasizes the vital role of an individual's character in adapting to work, which corresponds with the work of Ashford and colleagues (1990, 1996) who claim that individual factors are important and often understated in studies of effective adaptation at work. Therefore, they claim that employability is a synergistic compilation of individual characteristics that are invigorated and directed by an individual career identity. Employability is such a fuzzy concept that it cannot be easily understood. However, as discussed above some schools of thought imply that individual attitudes and attributes determine employability (Knight, 2001; Harvey, 2003; Knight & Yorke, 2002), while some emphasise the possession of the right skills (Yorke & Knight, 2006; Yorke, 2006). As a business grows and innovation rates accelerate,

job demands are always changing. An endless and variable list of skills is inappropriate to define employability, and this study accordingly focusses on identifying what makes new graduates employable or suitable for employment within SMEs. Understanding employability requires deliberation on its various components and the ways in which it is described. These components will be explored in Chapter 3.

2.7 What are employability skills?

Graduate employability skills are sometimes referred to as "professional, core, generic skills, key and nontechnical skills" and they are seen as "essential to boosting graduate work readiness" (Yorke & Knight, 2004: 10). Employability skills are skills that relate directly to procuring and maintaining work (Harvey, 2001; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). By contrast, Bridgstock (2009 34) argues that they include generic and discipline-specific skills needed for functioning in a work situation, and "[c]areer management skills, divided into two classes of competence: self-management and career-building". Career management skills and knowledge are key to graduate employability such that they play a large role in determining which, to what level, in what way, when and where generic and discipline-specific skills are learned, displayed and used when applying for a job (Bridgstock, 2009: 36).

An empirical study by Coleman (2000: 12) divided these skills into three categories. The first is job skills, which are needed for a specific job. For example, an automobile mechanic should be able to fix a car brake, and an accountant needs to know how to draw up a balance sheet. There are also adaptive skills, which help graduates to function in a new situation. These include flexibility, honesty, enthusiasm, and the ability to work with others. Finally there are transferable skills, which are personal abilities, including the communication skills that are used in group work while studying and which might be used successfully at work. Transferable skills are essential at

work. Burkitt (1996: 271) divided individual skills into two categories, namely cognitive and behavioural, and each of these categories is further divided into sub-groups. Cognitive skills include "technical skills, analytical, and appreciative skills", while behavioural skills are sub-divided into personal skills, interpersonal, and organisational skills. Rothwell and Kolb (1999) state that the most important skills needed to cope with changes in markets and technology are credibility, the ability to work with others and interpersonal skills, which refer to sufficient knowledge and expertise to help solve daunting business problems. Parry (1998) argues that employers struggle to find graduates with skills such as initiative, self-esteem, time management, problem-solving, listening, and being action-oriented.

Nabi (2003) implies that graduate employability is about graduates possessing the right skills and attributes, and being able to use them to benefit from and continue in suitable employment. Harvey (2001) defines graduate employability from individual and institutional perspectives. Individual employability is defined as the ability to show the attributes to obtain a job. Institutional employability refers to the employment proportions of university graduates. However, Harvey (2001: 99) argues that "employment endings of graduates are not a pointer of institutional employability". Graduate employability is the tendency of the graduate to display attributes that employers predict will be needed for the future and success of their organisation (Harvey, 1997). Similarly, Billing (2003: 34) adds that employers want employees who can "communicate effectively, solve problems, and think critically, and can work well within a team".

From the human resources view, employability is a term that began to be used in the 1990s in conjunction with a growing belief that employees cannot count on employers for a long-term contract. So, graduate employability here means that employees must have the skills to find another job if their current job ends unexpectedly (Baruch, 2001). In contrast, Jackson (2013: 271)

argues that measuring graduate employability by the numbers of graduates securing a job within a few years of their graduation is not accurate, because it does not display clearly what the graduate has gained. He further states that we need to know whether the graduate is using the acquired abilities and the knowledge gained in their degree studies. Therefore, graduate employability is multi-faceted and encompasses academic performance, career management skills, and awareness of labour market needs.

Jackson's view is supported by the work of Pool and Sewell (2007), who suggest that graduate employability goes beyond gaining employment. Hillage and Pollard (1998: 2) propose that graduate employability is the ability of the graduate to secure a jobs in the labour market, and whether they are equipped with most of the skills employers want and the ability to participate and contribute to the knowledge economy by applying their learning from higher education to improve their social standing. However, Lees (2002) implies that this complexity makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact definition of the term "employability skills". It can be argued that it is where various employers' needs and individual attributes meet. Therefore, if graduate employability is described as the "Burkitt (1996: 207)", then it is worth exploring the attributes that make graduate employable.

2.8 Employability attributes

Much of the research work largely explains employability attributes as "key, core, generic, personal transferable skills, [and] work/employment-related skills" (Holmes, 2001: 105). Bowden et al.'s (2000: 1) commonly cited definition states that graduate attributes are "the qualities, skills, and understanding agreed by the university community that its students should develop during their time at the institution, and consequently, shape their contribution to the social and professional careers". Thus, it seems clear that Bowden et al.'s (2000) description of graduate

attitudes encompasses two types, which are: 1. those that pertain to an individual's capacity for citizenship (involving commitment in democratic procedures, social cohesion and human rights and environmental sustainability) and thus their capacity to give towards a well-functioning society (Rychen & Salganik, 2005); and 2. those which relate to an individual capacity to get and maintain work (Harvey, 2001; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) and so add to economic productivity.

According to Barrie (2004) and Nunan (1999), few attempts have been made to identify commonalities between various lists of attributes produced by research studies, or identify deficiencies, in part because of dissimilar understandings of what is meant by the different categories of attributes included. Harvey et al. (1997) report that employers themselves want graduates who can quickly adapt to organisational culture and apply their abilities and skills to bring about novel collaboration and contribute to the success of the industry. In the current economic downturn with problems of downsizing and redundancy, graduates will need to be equipped with relevant skills and attributes to survive with flexible and possibly short-term jobs (Neill, 2005).

The CBI (2008) underlines the importance employers place on the "softer skills" that make people employable. This means that being a good team player, a good communicator and an effective problem solver is crucial, and the possession of acquired work experience goes a long way with employers. Similarly, studies by Boateng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002) and Akerele and Opatola (2004) on labour markets and graduates in Nigeria and Ghana respectively found that apart from qualifications that graduates may hold, there are other attributes which employers stress as being vital, such as excellent managerial skills, social, technical and personal skills.

Dacre, Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that they employability of graduate relies on having a set of skills, knowledge, understandings and personal attributes that makes a person likely to choose and secure jobs in which they can be satisfied and successful. It is broadly recognised that lifelong learning by acquiring new skills advances employability (Neill, 2005). Notwithstanding, however, there are different concepts to analyse the makeup of employability. Martins (1997; 2007) states that employers with an employability focus are seeking individuals with potential to be realised, rather than a suitable set of skills. A range of cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural sub-skills might not be sufficient on their own, but these abilities will have to be integrated into the challenges faced (Martins, 2007).

Yorke (2001) therefore supposed that self-efficacy or capability will form a vital part of career choice and personal progress. In turn, this is important in the employability of an individual. The self-construct characteristic of self-confidence gives an individual a positive, realistic view of themselves in a given situation. This quality means the individual's belief in their ability to achieve, a leading factor in confirming personal potential, is achieved (Stevens, 2005). This implies that a person with high self-confidence has a rational opinion of themselves and their abilities, which gives them tenacity in their efforts. According to Neill (2005: 311), "self-esteem and self-efficacy" when combined are what form self-confidence. Therefore, self-esteem is a general feeling of self-worth or self-value (Neill, 2005). Self-esteem is a personal evaluation of an individual's self-worth or a personal judgement of one's own capabilities (Lyubomirsky, Tkack & Dimatteo, 2006; Rosenberg, 1965). A study by Coetzee (2008: 12) defines self-esteem as relating to self-evaluations that individual makes and maintains, including the extent to which individuals feel capable, worthy, effective and important compared with others within their social group. Individuals with his self-esteem individuals are, among other things, optimists, extroverts, open to

criticism and respectful of differences, while those with low self-esteem have low self-confidence, are inflexible, and are afraid to make mistakes (Oztas, 2010: 321).

Self-esteem has been connected to employability by different authors (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Business Council of Australia, 2002: 8; Clark, 2008; Coetzee, 2008; Pool & Sewell, 2007). According to Pool and Sewell (2007: 287), it is important for an individual to believe in his or her capability to succeed, and reflect on the beliefs of others.

Bezuidenhout (2011) proposes eight core employability attributes that are important for increasing the possibility of securing and sustaining job opportunities. The first of these is career self-management, which involves the ability to reflect on one's career aspirations and develop clarity about what to achieve in one's career, and recognise the requisite skills and the actions one needs to take to realise these goals. Career self-management is an evaluation that an individual makes of themselves regarding their self-worth. It can be seen as an individual's beliefs about their own potential (to control their life) and their competence (to perform, survive, succeed and endure), and a positive belief that life will turn out well for them. Individuals with higher levels of CSM are inclined to be positive when evaluating situations, they have higher levels of motivation, and they have greater assurance in their capacity to impact positively on the world around them (Judge, Locke & Durham, 1997).

The second core employability attribute is self-efficacy, which refers to the ability to function independently and make one's own decisions, achieve one's goals through one's own effort, and enjoy the discovery of solutions when challenges are encountered. The concept of self-efficacy is based on social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1998), which defines it as an individual's confidence in his or her ability to handle different level of challenges and stressful situations. Self-efficacy

has been linked to examination of the self and the environment (Taylor & Popma, 1990), applied to the steps involve in career decision-making (Betz, 2000), and found to be related to career development (Hackett & Betz, 1981) and career satisfaction (Punnett, Duffy, Fox, Gregory, Lituchy, Miller, Monserrat, Olivas-Lujan & Santos, 2007). General self-efficacy is relevant in this situation, as a person's self-belief in his or her ability to manage in a variety of career environments is important in order to be employable. Efficacy beliefs have been linked to employability by a number of authors (Bridgstock, 2009; Clark, 2008: 266; Fugate et al., 2004; Knight & York, 2002: 265; Pool & Sewell, 2007; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006: 453). Pool and Sewell (2007: 286) argue that graduates who possess the belief that they can do whatever is needed are more successful in attaining a position and being successful in any occupation they choose than a graduate without such a self-belief. The adaptive role that general self-efficacy plays in changing environments and how it links to employability are therefore confirmed.

Bezuidenhout's (2011) third core attribute is career resilience, which refers to being able to adjust to changing situations by welcoming job and organisational changes, looking forward to working with new people, having confidence in oneself and being willing to take risks (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). Career resilience brings flexibility, self-confidence and a high degree of adaptability, regardless of contrary career circumstances (Bezuidenhout, 2011). Resilience means the ability to swiftly recover from difficult circumstances, and to be able to tolerate adversity with a positive attitude (Walker, Gleaves & Grey, 2006), while Luthens, Luthens and Luthens (2004: 47) imply that it is the ability to "bounce back" from difficulties in the unstable modern work environment. A resilient individual is optimistic and has a good self-evaluation, they display confidence in their ability to handle situations, and they have positive expectations of future events (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Resilient individuals can cope with career disruption within an uncertain

work environment (Clark, 2008). According to Schreuder and Coetzee (2004: 36), career resilience is the ability to adapt to changing situations by "welcoming job and organisational changes, by anticipating working with new and different people, having self-confidence and being willing to take risks". This definition indicates that individuals with high resilience within the career environment will be more prepared to adapt to constantly changing work environments. Career resilience therefore characterises an individual's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, even when the situation seems discouraging (Chiaburu, Baker & Pitariu, 2006: 623).

Career resilience has been connected to career success, so that individuals with career resilience are more likely to take part in developmental activities that will help them exploit opportunities (London & Smither, 1999). In fact, Chiaburu et al. (2006: 627) found a link between "proactive personality and self-management behaviours to be mediated by career resilience". This implies that career resilience has a vital role to play in career self-management – an important aspect of employability. Interestingly, career resilience has been connected to employability by different authors (Baruch, 2004; Luthans, Vogelgesang & Lester, 2006; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007: 28). Similarly, Fugate and Kinicki (2008) identified career resilience as an important concept in their model, owing to the fact that it signifies an active orientation, and is supported in the literature as relating to adaptability and career framework.

The fourth core attribute is sociability, which is the ability to socialise and build friendships with people who can advance one's career, welcome feedback from others, and use the network to seek job opportunities. Mayrhofer et al. (2005: 42) describe sociability as comprising of networking and being open for social contacts. Networking behaviour means displaying social behavior in which a person seeks business contacts which can spread across a person's private life. Forret and

Sullivan (2002: 252) argue that successful networking can influence career outcomes such as improved job chances, income, promotion and satisfaction in one's career, as well as gaining information, friendships, career advice and social support.

Sociability relates to the idea of social capital, which refers to networks of contacts that provide support and information to individuals (Fugate et al., 2004). It can also be described as the size and quality of the support network that one is able to put in place and rely on, thereby improving employability (Gazier, 2001: 10). Social capital is significant for graduates as they need to seek out and capitalise on diverse formal and informal relationships if they want to find out about a particular career, company or possible employment. Furthermore, graduates that have appropriate connections are more likely to find out about opportunities that will advance their marketability to employers. Who individuals know and their relationship quality with other individual is a valuable and nonreplicable asset which gives them planned competitive benefit. Sociability comes with other benefits like job opportunities, promotion, influence and venture capital (Forret & Sullivan, 2002: 251). Sociability is also connected with proactivity, in that someone with a proactive disposition is usually good at socialising with others, and is more likely to be "likeable, trusting and easy to cooperate with and … expected to adapt easily to new work environments" (Wahat, 2009: 283, 287).

The fifth core attribute defined by Bezuidenhout (2011) is entrepreneurial orientation, which refers to the act of being curious and always venturing into new business prospects. The entrepreneurial model states that individuals are able to create employment by benefiting from their connections and skills, which may improve their employability (Sanders & De Grip, 2004). Florin, Karri and Rossiter (2007: 21) identify five attitude constructs related to entrepreneurial activity that are

important to the student population. These are nonconformity, proactive disposition, self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and innovation.

According to Hall (2002), increased self-employment and entrepreneurship are examples of hallmark careers in the modern job environment. While some people are self-employed as a result of a shortage of employment, others believe that self-employment is a positive career choice that is pursued due to market niches or recognised opportunities (Moreland, 2006: 6). Entrepreneurs must have the capacity to respond rapidly to widespread changes in a broad range of external circumstances in the swiftly changing world of work (Baron, 2008).

Entrepreneurship is additionally regarded as a unique graduate career choice, and it can therefore be seen a vital aspect of the graduate employability model (Nabi, Holden & Walmsley, 2006: 378). Research has linked entrepreneurial orientation to employability (for example, Moreland, 2006). Hartshorn and Sear (2005: 36) give an introductory classification of employability skills as a set of entrepreneurial skills and competencies related to the entrepreneurial model described above. The authors add that such competencies "form part of how graduates engage in the modern knowledge economy". Likewise, Gow and McDonald (2000) suggest that graduates that have entrepreneurial abilities can easily network in order to generate new business, can assess markets, and can market their business ideas and themselves. These abilities are closely related to the idea of employability.

The sixth core attribute, proactivity, means taking responsibility for one's own decisions and identifying opportunities before others, and the ability to improve one's skills and abilities to enhance career advancement. Proactive behaviour is linked to anticipatory activities that individuals engage in to influence their environments or themselves. The sole quality of proactive

behaviour is that individuals act in advance (Grant & Ashford, 2008: 8–9). According to Crant (2000), proactive behaviour means taking the initiative to improve current circumstances or creating new ones; it also includes challenging the current situation rather than passively adapting to present conditions. The author also adds that some proactive employees take an active approach towards their work and initiate favourable situations for themselves, instead of waiting for an opportunity to surface. A proactive personality is deemed to have a stable disposition that relates to taking the initiative in a diverse situation (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). A proactive individual is efficient in looking for better ways of doing things in a workplace, such as proposing new ways to achieve goals and enhancing the quality of the service provided by an organisation (Kim, Hon & Crant, 2009: 95). An active disposition may lead to behaviour like developmental feedback-seeking, which is vital for creating career networks, coping with changes as they arise, and adjusting to existing circumstances, among others (Mirvis & Hall, 1994).

A person with a proactive disposition who is attentive to and prepares for future demands can manage their careers instead of reacting to sudden changes in the workplace (Mihail, 2008). Veldhoven and Dorenbosch (2008: 113) imply that proactive workers are likely to be continuously productive in a changing workplace by: (i) engaging in solving problems that occur within dynamic work processes, and (ii) "scanning new work contexts for developmental needs and searching for opportunities to learn and attain new skills and knowledge to enhance their future employability". Proactivity is thus an "action orientation", and it can relate to new ways of doing work and solving problems, setting challenging goals, looking for situations to enhance knowledge and skills, as well as assessing knowledge and skills that will be needed for the future (Van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008: 119–120). Based on a wide literature review, Crant (2000) relates proactivity to leadership, organisational innovation, team performance, entrepreneurship, seeking

feedback, innovation, coping with stress, career management, and career success. The link between proactive personality and career success was supported by Byrne, Dik and Chiaburu (2008) and Erdogan and Bauer (2005). Similarly, proactive personality has been connected with employability and networking, and it is firmly rooted within the employability framework (Mihail, 2008). The empirical research of Fugate and Kinicki (2008) provides additional evidence that dispositional employability should be included within the employability model. The authors argue that employable individuals seek information relevant to their work role and career, and proactivity help in recognising work opportunities. It is therefore very important for graduates and individuals to be proactive when managing their careers in today's environment, so as to ensure they will be employable and adaptable to the constantly changing world of work.

Bezuidenhout's (2011) seventh core attribute is emotional literacy, which refers to the extent to which an individual is able to accept and express a range of affect, established on the idea that a range of emotional responses assist career behaviours in making career decisions (Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003; Coetzee, 2008). Emotional literacy is based on the concept of emotional intelligence, a notion which was first pioneered by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and defined as a person's capacity to recognise, use, understand and manage their own and other people's emotions in order to adjust behaviour and define solutions to problems (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; cited in Brackett & Salovey, 2006: 34). It therefore includes the ability to reason accurately about emotions, and use one's understanding about emotion to improve one's thoughts (Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008: 511). Emotional intelligence is thought to consist of four abilities, namely: (a) "the ability to perceive and identify one's own emotion and others'"; (b) "the use of emotions in cognitive processes"; (c) "the ability to understand and appreciate emotions"; and (d) "the ability to manage emotions in oneself and others in order to enhance understanding and growth" (Brackett

& Salovey, 2006: 35). Outlining the work of others, Coetzee (2008: 12) reports that emotional literacy boosts individual behavioural adaptability and assists in increasing self-confidence in the ability to perform a certain task effectively. Knowledge about emotions and the ability to manage emotions play a vital role in the development of employability. Interesting, Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that a graduate will need emotional intelligence competencies to reach their true potential and become employable. As a result of diverse studies on emotional intelligence, these authors think that it will be difficult for graduate employability to be complete if this is missing (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 284).

According to Bezuidenhout (2011), attributes such as career self-management, career resilience and cultural competence are vital personality attributes that impact people's ability to sustain their employability, while other attributes promote the ability to sustain employment and the probability of achieving a successful career. Cultural competence enables graduate to know the customs of their culture, understanding their value and beliefs, it gives them the confidence to communicate interculturally and maintain relation with diverse people from different cultural background (Bezuidenhout, 2011). Career self-management seems to act as a drive for developing one's employability by engaging in activities to update one's marketable skills, for example building secure professional networks for reaching personal set goals (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Bridgstock, 2009; Reitman & Schneer, 2008). Bezuidenhout (2011: 86) states that people with specific personality traits may adjust better, and be more successful in different cultural situations.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual overview of the skills and attributes that underline employability
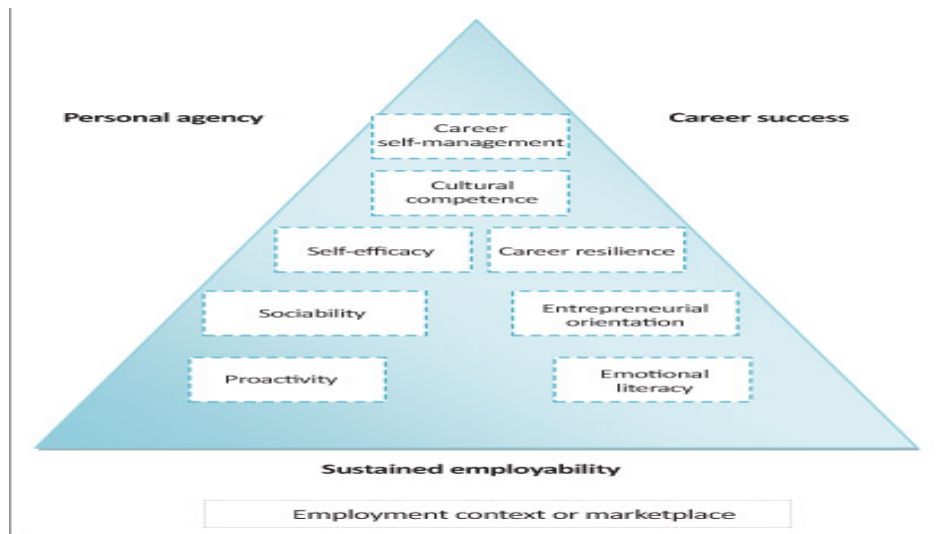
FIGURE 1: Conceptual overview of the skills and attributes that underlie people's employability.

Source: Bezuidenhout (2011)

2.9 Theory review

The view of employability and what the concept should include has widened over the years. For this study, the definition of employability will take an individual perspective, while still including a broad definition of the concept. Scholars generally accept that employability is based on various individual attributes (Clarke, 2008; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Gow & McDonald, 2000; Kluymans & Ott, 1999; Knight & Yorke, 2002; McArdle, Saunders; De Grip & Loo, 2004; Scott, 1995; Yorke & Harvey, 2005). This section will focus in depth on a number of employability models that consider the demand-side point of view. These models will be used as a framework for the development of a model of graduate employability.

2.9.1 Fugate, Kinicki and Ashford's (2004) model of employability
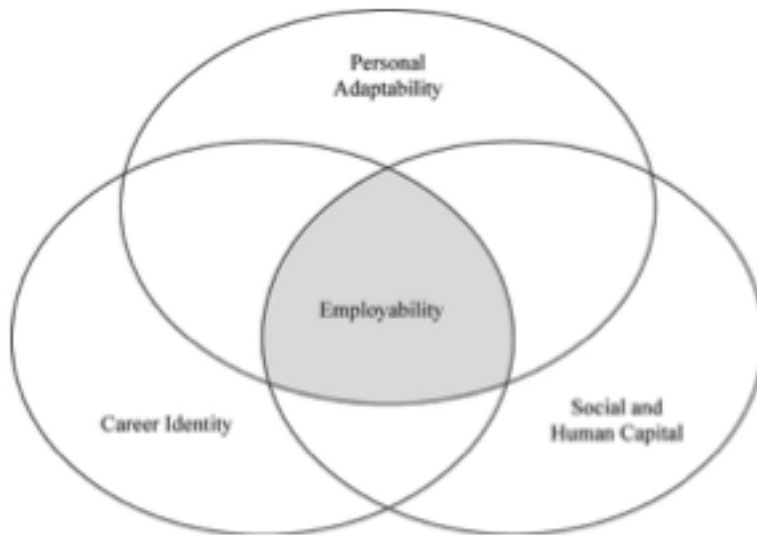
Figure 2.2: Narrow framework

The narrow framework of employability proposed by Fugate et al. (2004) implies that employees need to acquire "knowledge, skills and abilities" and other characteristics that prospective employers value. They argue that employability is a psycho-social construct that represents individual characteristics, which helps individuals to recognise and leverage career opportunities. Therefore, employability does not ensure employment; rather, it improves the likelihood of gaining employment (Fugate et al., 2004: 16).

There are some similarities between the categories of skills and attributes suggested in the narrow concept and those proposed by human capital theory (Becker, 1975). Employability represents a form of work-specific "proactive adaptability" that allows people to adapt to fresh situations. Therefore, employability is presented as a social construct consisting of three dimensions, which facilitates the identification and recognition of career changes within an organisation. The first dimension is career identity, which includes goals, hopes, fears, personality traits, values, beliefs,

interaction style, and time horizon. Together, these signify "who I am", which makes sense of one's past and present, and leads directly to the future (Fugate et al., 2004: 20).

Career identity looks similar to concepts such as role identity, occupational identity and organisational identity, in that they all denote how people define themselves in a work context. Similarly, Meijers (1998: 200) records that "career identity" is not the number of work experiences but the adaptation of experience into a structure that is significant. Arthur and Rousseau (1996) suggested that because of the concepts of boundaryless careers and protean workers (Mirvis & Hall, 1994), the range of potential career routes is nearly unlimited. Likewise, the dynamism of the world of work means that there are less career pattern or role models that one can emulate (Meijers, 1998). Career identities help to provide a direction for the individual, thereby representing a motivational component of employability (Mirvis & Hall, 1994).

Career identities narrate the story that people create to frame and give sense and continuity to their "past, present and future career experiences" (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001). Similarly, career identity narratives serve impression management functions (Stokes, 1996). Career identity is also revealed in person identity style. Berzonsky and Adams' (1999) study on identity style revealed that people are different in their openness to the potential effects of their activities for the identities they possess. The study further explains that individuals with an information orientation are more proactive and use relevant information, whereas a normative orientation individual agrees with others' expectations and those with avoidant orientation dodge self-reflection. Therefore, employees with an information oriented identity are more likely to seek and adopt information that improves their career and job (Ashforth, 2001), and are more likely to cope better with diverse employment stress (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992).

The second dimension of Fugate et al.'s (2004) framework is personal adaptability, which covers an individual willingness to change knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics to meet the demands of the current situation. Ashford and Taylor (1990) and Chan (2000) argue that adaptable people are keen and able to change personal factors such as disposition, behaviour, and many other things to suit the demands of a given situation. Crant (2000) implies that personal adaptability contributes to both career success and performance within an organisation, while according to Pulakos et al. (2000) it enables people to maintain their productivity and attractiveness to employers in a continually changing labour market.

Researchers have spoken about the importance of adaptability for overall career development (Savickas, 1997). To be theoretically consistent with employability, an individual difference that contributes to personal adaptability needs to be compatible with the information active orientation explained above (Fugate et al., 2004). The tendency to learn is also a foundation for adaptability (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). For example, an employee with high employability frequently engages in active efforts to learn more about environmental threats and opportunities. In turn, the results associated with these actions serve as feedback, which is important in decoding a well-adapted effort (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). Therefore, some high employability individuals should be able to scan the business environment to learn what jobs are available, and the experience and skills required to obtain them. The key determinant to career success is continuous learning (Hall & Mirvis, 1995).

Openness is another essential factor in personal adaptability. Openness to change and fresh experience underpins constant learning and allows one to recognise and realise career chances. An open individual will be flexible when faced with challenges in an uncertain situation (Digman, 1990). Openness promotes good individual attitudes towards change actions at work (Miller,

Johnson & Grau, 1994).

Social and human capital is the third dimension, encompassing "social network and work experience, training and skills development" (Fugate et al., 2004: 23). Organisations and individuals invest in social and human capital while anticipating future returns (Dess & Shaw, 2001). Importantly, an ability to recognise and realise these resources greatly influences career advantage. The benefit of social capital and its effect on employability are shown in the job search conduct of individuals (Higgins & Kram, 2001). People with well-developed social capital tend to utilise informal as well as formal job search systems – for example, "contacts of a friend" and "company sponsored advertisement". According to Flap (1991), top managers mostly find jobs through informal networks, and this social capital has a more beneficial effect on salary than human capital. Social capital accordingly is a notion connected with sociability, which refers to networks of contacts that provide information to an individual (Fugate et al., 2004). Social capital is a person's ability to connect with others and maintain supporting and satisfying relationships (Baron, 1997).

The benefits of network ties in offering access to information and resources are nevertheless the primary offer that underpins social capital theory (Liao & Welsch, 2005: 349). Graduates with proper networks are quicker to find out about various opportunities that will advance their marketability to employers. Who individuals know, and the quality of their relationships with others, is a unique, valuable and nonreplicable asset, which in return gives them a strategic competitive advantage. It provides several benefits, such as job opportunities, promotions, influence, and venture capital (Forret & Sullivan, 2002: 251).

Human capital influences the ability of employees to realise an opportunity in the marketplace.

This capital refers to factors that affect a person's career progression, with variables such as age and education (Wanberg, Watt, & Rumsey, 1996), work experience and training (Becker, 1995), emotional intellect, job performance and institute tenure, and mental ability (Therenou, 1997). Education and experience are found to be the strongest determinants of career progression out of many human capital factors (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). Some level of education is preferred for most employment, and is often compulsory for a particular job. Human capital adds to both individual and organisational adaptability. Therefore, investing in human capital denotes an adaptive orientation and a commitment to continuous learning, which will boost employability (Becker, 1975; London & Smither, 1999).

In conclusion, the empirical research of Fugate et al. (2004: 16) suggests that employability is a "form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities". Their narrow framework focusses on person-centred factors by acknowledging the lack of control that individuals have over the criteria used by employers when hiring new employees. McArdle et al. (2007) support the argument of Fugate et al. (2004), suggesting that this approach is advantageous since it mainly focusses on employability in a specific context. In other words, a person-centred approach can provide insight into the attitude and actions that can make a person employable, irrespective of whether they are employed or not. Further, the model stresses the linkage between three identified elements. That is, social capital will impact career identity as a particular social connection may shape and filter an individual's choice of career. At the same time, a change in one's career identity will mean changes in the social network within which one operates. However, this model may not be relevant to a different economic climate (McArdle et al., 2007)

2.9.2 Hillage and Pollard's (1998) framework of employability

In contrast with the narrow viewpoints outlined above, broader frameworks take account of context. For example, in developing an employability framework for policy analysis, Hillage and Pollard (1998) proposed four elements. One is "employability assets", with a difference between baseline, intermediate and high-level assets, all of which together make up a set of necessary skills, generic skills, personal attributes, teamwork, and critical skills. The second element is "presentation of assets" through a CV, while the third is "asset deployment" by job search and career management skills. The fourth element is "context", which was added in the framework since it involves the ability to interact with personal circumstances and the labour market (Orton, 2011).

The Hillage and Pollard framework of employability is the most in-depth to date, due to its continuous emphasis on the supply side (Lindsay et al., 2003). Three key factors of employability identified by Hillage and Pollard, which are assets, deployment and presentation, operate at the individual level, while every other aspect outside individual control is categorise into a single class of "context factors". However, context does not necessarily refer only to labour market conditions, but can also include a class of other external factors.

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) advocated the adoption of a broad employability framework, an example of which was explored in the literature and includes individual circumstances, personal circumstances and labour market factors. The individual circumstances and labour market factors that may limit or enable individual gain and sustain employment are assessed in the literature. These factors include skills, demographic characteristics, health and well-being adaptability and mobility as individual factors, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this research. Individual circumstances relate to variables such as work culture, household conditions, and access to resources which might

impinge on an individual's potential to remain operative within the workforce. Labour market factors comprises market rules and organisational factors that support employability.

Nevertheless, Shuttleworth et al.'s (2005) labour market analysis concurs with the adoption of a broad framework for examining employability, on the grounds that the role of labour demand, and changes in the labour market context, are essential to gain an insight into the concept of employability. Others take a contrary view, contending that broad definitions of employability contain all the factors that affect gaining employment, and that the ability to sustain employment contributes little. Creighton (2007: 166) argues that combining the demand-side factors within an employability context clouds discussion about problems and solutions in the labour market

Individual factors	Individual circumstances	Labour market factors
Employability skills and characteristics • Essential attributes • Self-efficacy, motivation • Personal competencies • Basic transferable skills • Key skills • High level transferable skills • Qualifications • Work experience	Household circumstances • Direct caring responsibilities • Other family responsibilities	Demand factors • Macroeconomic factors • Vacancy characteristics • Recruitment factors

• Labour market		
Demographic characteristics • **Age** • **gender**	Work culture • The existence of a culture in which work is encouraged • Under-employment (working time and skills)	Labour market rules and institutions
Health and well-being • Health • Disability	Access to resources • Access to transport • Access to financial capital • Access to social capital	Enabling support factors • Employment policy factors (e.g. job matching technology, active labour market policy, incentives for work) • Other enabling factors (e.g. labour market intermediaries and support services facilitating take-up of employment)

Job seeking • Ability to use formal and informal information sources and networks • Ability to fill in a CV, perform effectively at interview • Labour market opportunities awareness • Realistic approach to job targeting		
Adaptability and mobility • Geographical mobility • Occupational mobility		

Table 2.5: Source: McQuaid and Lindsay (2005)

2.9.3 Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) dispositional model of employability (DME)

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) take a dispositional approach to employability by employing a supply-side focus on the concept. Their models build on studies by Fugate et al. (2004) and Fugate (2006), which define dispositional employability as a collection of individual differences that prompt employees to proactively adapt to their work and career environments. Employability is a disposition that includes individual characteristics that raise "adaptive behavior and positive

employment outcomes" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 504). The authors further argue in favour of a need for a dispositional employability approach, particularly considering the fast rate of change in labour markets, leading to high uncertainty which makes employees adapt proactively. They further argue that other researchers assume that the needed knowledge, skills and abilities for a given job are known and static. However, Fugate and Kinicki contend that these assumptions seem to constrict and do not represent the modern employment scene (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 505).

Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) model of employability extends beyond the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for employment, and suggests a broader and higher trait that helps proactive adaptability to take place (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). The disposition of employability includes both reactive and proactive characteristics of an individual, which suggests that individuals high in dispositional employability can not only adapt reactively to environmental demands, but also have a readiness for change – that is, they can identify with various opportunities. Dispositional employability is seen as an essential multidimensional psycho-social construct which covers the dimensions of: (i) openness to changes at work, (ii) work and career resilience, (iii) work and career proactivity, (iii) career motivation, and (iv) work identity. The table below provides these dimensions and their definitions.

Dimension for employability	Definition
Work and career resilience	Individuals with work and career resilience have a mix of the subsequent attributes: "optimistic about their career opportunities and work, feel that they have control over the destiny of their careers, and/or they feel that they are able to make genuinely valuable contributions at work" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 528)
Openness to work changes	"Individuals that are open to changes at work are receptive and willing to change, and/or feel that changes are generally positive once they occur" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 528)
Work and career proactivity	Proactive career people have the tendency and ability to gain information affecting their jobs and careers
Career motivation	"Individuals with career motivation tend to make specific career plans and strategies. People in this category are inclined to take control of their own career management and set work/career-related goals" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 528)

Work identity	"Work identity reflects the degree to which individuals define themselves in terms of a particular organisation, job, profession, or industry. Work identity is characterized by a genuine interest in what one does, how well it is done, and the impression of others" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 528)

Table 2.6 Dimension for employability. Source: Fugate and Kinicki (2008: 528)

The empirical research of Fugate and Kinicki (2008) in relation to their employability model is valuable in the present research in that it goes beyond the specific graduate skills needed for employability, thereby making it applicable to a broader range of situations. Dispositions are also critical in constantly changing situations and are more likely to affect behaviour and performance in such situations (Mischel, cited in Fugate & Knincki, 2008: 504). The authors' model pays attention to the proactive and reactive characteristics of an individual, which gives an essential personal dimension to the concept. Individuals do not only react to environmental demands, but they also generate their own opportunities at work.

A possible downside of this model is that it focuses only on dispositions exclude the model the focus on the aspect of social capital dimension such as networking behavior to acquire related information to employees. Employability moreover should concentrate on skills needed to build a relationship as these are an essential part of the interconnected world (Parker, 2008, p. 4). Resilience is an integral part of graduate employability as graduates need to be in control of their career with an expectation of success. Fugate and Kinicki (2008) another vital element mention by the model is openness. Kinicki's (2008) dispositional employability has, therefore added much value within the employability study.

2.9.4 Knight and Yorke's (2003) model of employability

A study by Knight and Yorke (2003) developed a model of employability that can serve as an outline for working with students in higher education to develop their employability. This model is particularly relevant given the current concern with the employability of young people, including graduates, by considering what they need to take from their degree into the workforce. They suggest that a close relationship exists between employability and enjoyable learning. Furthermore, employability is a blend of achievement in four areas, which are represented in their model. USEM is an acronym for these inter-related components of employability:

- Understanding
- Skills
- Efficacy belief
- Metacognition (awareness of what you know)
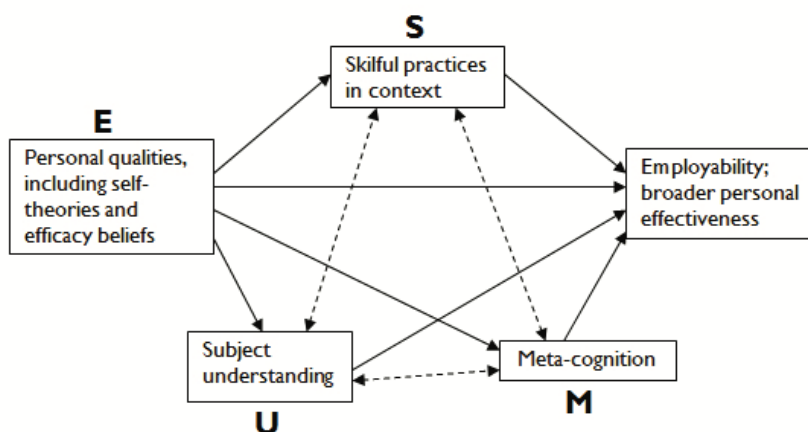
Figure 2.4: USEM model of employability

This model allows an easy explanation for students, parents and academics. Thus, it allows people involved with employability promotion within higher education institutions to do this without clouding employability issues with additional complexity. The model is also a valuable tool for knowledge transfer activities (Johnes, 2006). According to Pool and Sewell (2007), it is possible to adapt this model for use at any life stage – for example, with mid-life changes in profession or people dealing with redundancy. Thus, this model is useful for diverse groups as well as new graduates and students. The USEM model provides a framework for thinking about incorporating wider context into the curriculum, while acknowledging the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders. The relevant strengths of this model have been acknowledged by the work of Dacre, Pool and Sewell (2007). These authors argued that the model's strength could be perceived as a weakness, in that it is not accessible to non-experts (students and parents) in explaining the precise meaning of employability, which their model Career Edge seeks to address.

2.9.5 Pool and Sewell's (2007) key to employability model
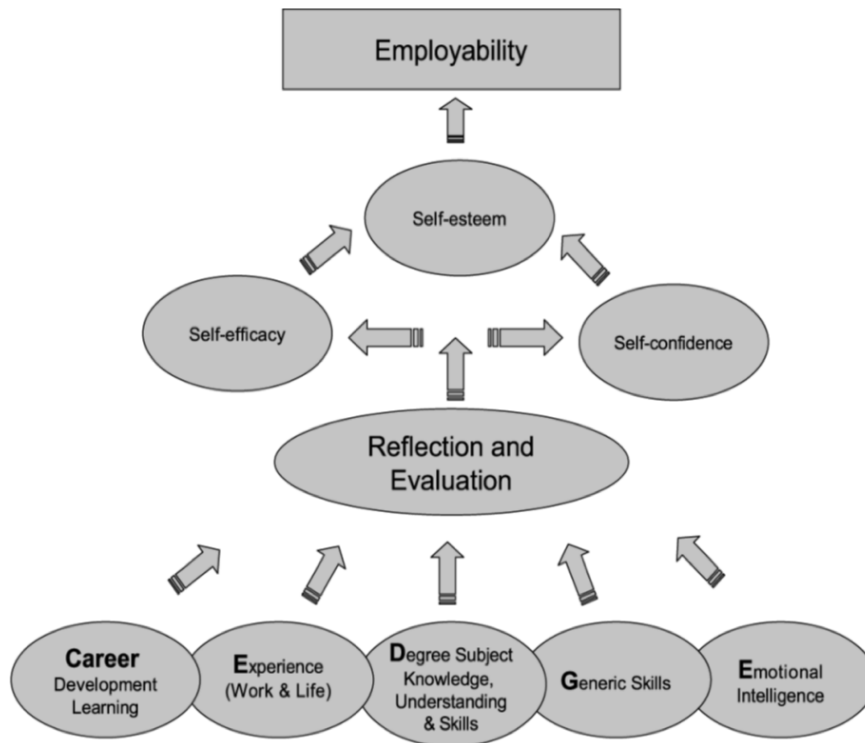
Figure 2.5: Key to Employability model

This model is sufficiently broad to include many of the aspects recognised in the literature as relevant to employability. Career development learning is a vital part of the context of graduates, as they need to be able to identify job and career opportunities as well as network and make themselves marketable to employers. Graduates need to build on their emotional intelligence competencies in order to realise their full potential as individuals with higher emotional intelligence and be successful in their career, relationships and life (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 283). According to Pool and Sewell (2007: 280), "[e]mployability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful".

The authors focus on individual facets that will allow a graduate to adapt to the demands of a new work environment and yield better prospects for career satisfaction and success. This five-element

generic skills, degree subject and understanding skills, experience and career development can be utilized in diverse contexts; career development learning; and experience of work and life. The next level, involving reflection on and evaluation of one's experiences, is key to helping students assess their experiences, which will lead to the development of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Together, these factors are seen as key to choosing and securing occupations in which the graduate has the opportunity to attain satisfaction and success. This model is useful, and constitutes a practical way of explaining the concept of employability; therefore the model components are explored below.

Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills

The motivation to enter a higher institution of learning is based on the perception that gaining a degree, studying a particular discipline in depth and getting a higher level qualification will lead to getting a good job afterwards – in other words, the belief that being better qualified will lead to greater employment opportunities (Johnes, 2006). According to Graduate Prospects (2005: 17), two thirds of graduate vacancies are open to graduates in any discipline, which means that subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills are very important for the remaining third. It is important to note that employers will judge graduates on the grounds of their success in the completion of their degree course, because this remain the sole gauge available to them. The case remains the same, whether they are entering an occupation with direct significance to their degree of study or not. So, this particular element is very important to note in graduate employability. Conversely, despite the extreme importance of subject-specific knowledge, understanding and skills, these alone are not enough to secure an occupation with which the graduate will be satisfied and successful (Harvey et al., 1997).

Generic skills

The term "generic skills" has led to several debates in the literature. Generic skills are skills which can support study in any discipline and can theoretically be transferred to a series of situations, in "higher education or the workplace" (Bennett et al., 1999: 77). Knight and Yorke (2002: 2) discuss the value placed by employers on generic graduate skills, and interpret the employers' message as: "Give us a bright and engaged graduate, and we will build specific expertise for this organization." In other words, employers want graduates with applicable subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding. Additionally, they want well-developed generic skills in a number of areas (Harvey et al., 1997). In a rapidly changing information and knowledge-based economy, workers must be immediately and sustainably employable. To achieve this, they must not only maintain and develop the required knowledge for their own discipline or occupation, but must also possess "generic skills" dispositions and attributes that can be transferable to many occupational situations. These generic skills as defined as "transferable skills essential for employability at all levels" (Kearns, 2001: 2). Generic skills are also known as 'core skills', 'key competencies', 'transferable skills' or 'under-pinning skills' (Mayer, 1992). This has led to a considerable number of lists of the generic or transferable skills that employers seek. A list was presented by the Pedagogy for Employability group (2004: 5), derived from studies carried out over the last twenty-five years and suggesting that employers expect to find the following skills in employable graduates:

- Imagination/creativity
- Willingness to learn
- Adaptability/flexibility
- Independent working

- Teamwork

- Ability to manage

- Ability to work under pressure

- Good oral communication

- Communication in writing for various purposes

- Time management

- Numeracy

- Attention to detail

- Planning, coordinating and organising

- Taking responsibility and making decisions

- Ability to use new technologies (mentioned in several studies)

- Enterprise and entrepreneurial skills (in the most recent literature)

Employers assume that graduates with entrepreneurial skills will have most of the other listed skills and will be imaginative and creative (Jaeger, 2003). Thus, they will be valued in any business settings, whether profitable, large or small.

Emotional intelligence

Moynagh and Worsley (2005) propose that in the future knowledge-based economy, emotional intelligence will become more relevant because of the forecast increase in customer-facing careers, in which human interface plays a vital part. Emotional intelligence is the ability to think about emotion, and the use of emotion to enhance thinking. It includes the ability to accurately observe emotion, to recognise emotions and to control emotions in others in order to promote emotional and intelligent growth (Mayer et al., 2004: 197). Goleman (1998: 317) gives a simpler definition

of emotional intelligence as the "competence for recognizing our own feelings and others', motivating ourselves, and managing emotions well in ourselves and relationships".

Accordingly, in order to for graduates to achieve their true employability potential, they will need well-developed emotional intelligence competencies. Findings from past studies have shown that people with high levels of emotional intelligence enable themselves and others to attain impossibilities (Yorke & Knight, 2002). They achieve career success, build stronger personal relationships and have better health than people with low levels of emotional intelligence (Cooper, 1997).

Emotional intelligence can be "improved through teaching and learning in higher institution of learning and is positively linked with academic success" (Jaeger, 2003: 634). She implied further that improving emotional intelligence is a required outcome for students, employers and employees. Similarly, Tucker et al. (2000: 336) stated that educators will want their students to graduate with good knowledge and the skills they will need to be productive managers and effective leaders. This can be achieved by implementing emotional intelligence theory and exercises, so that students will become well-rounded graduates. Goleman (1998: 7) implied that since emotional intelligence is not fixed genetically, and neither does it develop in early childhood, it is something that people can learn, which means that it is something that can be taught at successfully (in HEIs). Moynagh and Worsley (2005) propose that in the potential knowledge-based economy, emotional intelligence will become more critical, and any model of graduate employability will be incomplete without emotional intelligence (Qualter et al., 2007).

Career development learning

Education in career development learning is vital for a graduate to stand the best chance of securing a job in which they can be satisfied and successful. Agreeing with Watts (2006), it is clear that career development learning has not been as well represented in higher education institution strategies for employability as it ought to have been. However, Watts does not give evidence that this is changing. DOTs (Career development learning framework) suggests that career development learning should include activities that help students to become more self-aware, to enable them to give real attention to the things that they enjoy doing, are attentive to, which motivate them and which will suit their characters (Law & Watts, 1997). They also need to learn how to search job markets for available opportunities, present themselves efficiently to prospective employers, and make decisions about their careers. According to Foster (2006: 5) at the end of the day there is a no gain in employability development if a student is unable to identify a market in which to advertise their newly-developed employability.

Experience – work and life

According to the Pedagogy for Employability Group (2004), work experience is a contributory factor to graduate employment. Also, a wider range of life experience, particularly the experiences that mature students bring with them to an institution of learning, is considered important. There is a need to give informed advice to students on the role that their life and work-related experiences, either courses, voluntary activities or part-time employment, can have on their level of employability.

Reflection and evaluation

Giving students the opportunity to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes is obviously important, but so is providing them with the opportunity to reflect and evaluate the learning experiences that have taken place. These opportunities will allow students to consider how far they have come in developing their employability, and what needs to be done to develop it further. Kolb and Kolb (2005) recommend four important stages in learning, the fourth of which is that reflection will bring an improvement in new ideas which are applicable in real life. Moon (2004) discusses the role of reflection in the context of employability. This element of reflection and evaluation is also key to the expansion of the three Ss, discussed below.

Self-efficacy/self-confidence/self-esteem

The three inter-related "Ss" of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem provide an essential connection between knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes and employability. According to Bandura (1995: 2) efficacy beliefs influence how people think, and perceived self-efficacy is the belief in one's abilities to organise and execute a course of action required to manage a certain situation. Bandura (1995) further proposes a number of sources of efficacy beliefs. Among these are factors related to employability: mastery experience, vicarious experience offered by social models, and social persuasion.

Mastery experiences arise when someone is given the responsibility to try a particular task. Examples of these within the context of employability are work experience, realistic work environments where students have the opportunity to get involved in activities as student assignments, and some career improvement learning activities such as completing job applications.

Mastery experiences are an effective means of creating a strong sense of self-efficacy, and therefore they are important within the employability context. Vicarious experience happens when students have seen others who have achieved success. An example of such a situation is when an ex-student who has gone on to have a successful career returns to his or her university to give a talk on how his or her goals were achieved.

Social persuasion happens when people are convinced that they have the ability necessary to master a particular activity. This encourages them and gives them the strength to stay motivated in order to attain success in their aims. The tutor's role is important here as they need to provide feedback to their students. Bandura (1995: 17) argues that the main goal of formal education should be to equip students with "intellectual tools, efficacy beliefs and intrinsic interests" to educate themselves throughout their lifetime. Therefore, providing the opportunity for experiences and encouraging reflection, and assessing the experiences, can improve self-efficacy. If self-efficacy is considered to be the belief that one has the required ability in a certain situation, then self-confidence can be described as the way in which the belief is projected to the outside world (Owen, 1993).

Thus, self-confidence is something that can be perceived from a person's manner and behaviour. Goleman (1998: 68) stated that "people with self-confidence are able to present themselves with self-assurance". He suggested further that self-confidence can be either a trait or something that is particular to certain situations. Norman and Hyland (2003) note that if self-confidence is considered a trait as personality theorists suggest, and that it is relatively stable over time, then anyone who lacks self-confidence is most unlikely to develop it through formal education. Conversely, it might be easier for students to develop their self-confidence in particular situations if it is viewed as a "situationally specific concept" as assumed by the Career Edge model (Owen,

1993: 96). An increase in self-efficacy will result in an increase in self-confidence.

Increased self-esteem is a main aspect of the key to employability (Lawrence, 1996). It is therefore important to have belief in one's power to succeed and be able to show this belief to the world; by achieving a high level of self-esteem a graduate will be realistic about their achievements and will remain committed to lifelong learning. As noted by Steinem (1992: 26), "self-esteem isn't everything; it's just that there's nothing without it".

In conclusion, Pool and Sewell's (2007) model of employability attempts to unite elements from Knight and Yorke's (2003) USEM model of employability, and it clearly articulates the theoretical meaning of employability in a simple manner for practitioners and students. The framework also enables the development of tools to assess the impact of diverse employability interventions (Pool & Sewell, 2007). Moreover, Dalce and Sewell (2007) imply that this model may be adopted at any stage of life such as when starting a new career, or in mid-life and redundancy situations. However, regardless of the definitions of employability, they seem too complex to be used practically. Also, these models ignore factors that have practical importance in most situations and influence the chances of graduates getting jobs, such as demographic characteristics, e.g. age, gender and social class, as explored by broader frameworks. More importantly, the ability to deal with sudden changes in the job market is not considered by this framework. This model is similar to Bridgstock's (2009) model, but includes an emphasis on self-confidence and self-esteem, and a focus on career satisfaction.

Reflection and evaluation are also important in developing oneself by constantly investigating what is needed to succeed, what one is good at, and the areas where one requires improvement. This is particularly important in becoming reflective practitioners and being able to apply theory

to practice in the workplace. Individuals will become more self-confident in their abilities and will build on their self-efficacy and self-esteem, which will, in turn, enhance their employability as a result of reflecting and evaluating. Reflection will also enable an individual to identify his or her own shortcomings and proactively take measures to gain the needed competencies, so as to adapt in a changing work environment and build a successful career

2.9.6 Consensus theory (notion of employability)

Consensus theory views employability as a function of one's educational level and skill-set, which can be matched to different areas of the economy. It is followed by the idea that the more educated a workforce is, the greater the number of highly skilled jobs that will be created by the economy. Therefore, employability is understood to be an issue on the supply side, and education is a route to mobility and prosperity in the globalising world (Acemoglu, 2003). For supporters of this theory, development in technologies has led to job-related upskilling (Bell, 1974), increasing productivity (Palacios, 2011). Similarly, Clark (1962) argues that prolonged periods of education and training are required to carry out the roles needed by the economy, as it is believed that the use of technology has brought a need for formal training because more jobs are becoming more technical, and as a result unskilled or semi-skilled work will decline.

Thus, globalisation creates a high wage economy with more highly skilled individuals. Companies who are not reluctant to invest in the skills and education of their workers are developing their human capital (Palacios, 2011). Governments are thereby encouraged to adopt a long term skills agenda (Leitch, 2006) in other to achieve the skills and level of education necessary for comparative opportunities among other countries (Keep & Mayhew, 2001). The consensus view of employability can be linked to the definition of employability according to Hillage and Pollard (1998: 2): "employability is the ability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize

potential through sustainable employment." Thus, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed, and the ways in which they are used and presented to employers when seeking jobs (Hillage & Pollard, 1998: 2).

For Hillage and Pollard, investing in skills and knowledge are directly related to employability. Whilst they recognise other factors that determine employability, such as personal circumstances and labour markets, these are categorised as secondary to educational level. Their recognition of employability as how assets are used reflects conflict theory (Brown et al., 2003). Furthermore, Brown et al. (2003) argued that the description of employability according this model is conceptually rich, but leaves some questions unanswered; for example, the knowledge, skills and attitudes valued are not defined or relevant to the proponents of this theory.

The consensus idea of employability concentrates on the entire aspect of employability and ignores concerns about the labour market. A number of questions are being asked of the knowledge-centred economy in relation to its ability to deliver a highly-skilled labour market with global competition from graduates in rapidly-developing countries (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Milburn, 2009). This has implications for the understanding of the kind of competition in the graduate labour market, particularly when higher education has expanded more quickly than the number of graduate positions on offer (Felstead et al., 2002; Brynin, 2002). There is rising proof of congestion in the labour market and declining returns on education (Walker & Zhu, 2010; Wolf, 2002). Combined, this body of evidence raises serious questions about collaboration between education, employability and the economy, that cannot be sufficiently answered by the consensus method. Hence, it appears that the consensus approach is a one-dimensional understanding of the phenomena under study.

2.9.7 Human capital theory

Human capital has been defined as an individual's productive skills, talent, and knowledge (Thurow, 1970), with a focus on employability skills as the capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an integrated way (Employability Skills for the Future Project, 2002). Human capital theory stresses education as a primary economic enabler (Bridgstock, 2009), in which labour is considered a factor of production (Mohr & Seymore, 2012). In the framework of human capital theory, the term means labour quality, the skills, knowledge and health of employees (Morh & Seymore, 2012). Accordingly, it can be deduced that the term 'human capital' is related to the employability skills definition, which mentions the knowledge, skills and commercial understanding of labour (Omar et al., 2012). The human capital notion is applicable at the individual and organisational levels. There are growing signs that individuals focus on their capital worth and employability (Baker & Aldrich, 1996). Changes in the structure of an organisation have created conditions of job insecurity, with the consequence that individuals are responsible for managing their careers. Bates and Bloch (1995) suggest that education, skill and expertise need to combine with a structured career plan, and career management is more important than ever. Also, Weick (1996) and Sullivan et al. (1998) support the idea that modern careers require an individual to concentrate on been employable in more than one organisation. Progressing in an organisation require graduates to display competencies such as teamwork (Feldman, 1996), the need to acquire knowledge, and learning capacity (Baker & Aldrich, 1996).

Since the initial development of human capital theory, researchers have maintained the opinion that education and training are highly influential in improving productivity and boosting the ability of a population. Almendarez (2011), Mustapha (1999b) and Xiao (2002) have all confirmed the

particular utility of education and training in imparting knowledge and skills for private and social benefits. According to their studies, individual who obtain knowledge and skills increase their possibility of dealing with sudden changes in economic conditions. Knowledgeable and highly skilled workers improve their opportunities to earn more salary and for salary increments in their career. Therefore, education is important for transferring knowledge and skills. Investing in education and training will increase employment potential among job seekers (Mustapha, 1999b).

Human capital theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964) claims that education increases individual productivity, which therefore develops job performance. Becker (1993) also states that individuals acquire capital through their education and training. Education provides skills and abilities that are marketable and relevant to job performance, thus the more education an individual acquires, the more successful they will be in the labour market in terms of work opportunities and income (Yuzhuo, 2013: 459). Becker (1993) further argues that education is an investment from which both the individual and organisation will gain a return. For the organisation the return might be in the form of an increase in investment, effective production or better performance, while it may mean higher wages or improved employability to an individual.

According to Schultz (1961), knowledge and skills are the vital elements in developing human resources. Through education and training, people gain important knowledge and skills as a form of capital. Also, Schultz argues that going to school expands the choice of job opportunities available in the workforce, enhances wages, improves social and economic aspects and increases productivity. Thus, education and training are investments that produce returns in the expansion of the workforce. Similarly, Mincer (1962) and Bowman (1969) describe human capital as a means of investment in education and training. They also believe that education and training contribute to the growth of the economy, improve workforce quality, and raise private and social proceeds.

They extended the idea of human capital theory by seeing human resources as similar to the physical property used in production, such as factories and machines, and suggesting that one can invest in human resources through education, training, social and health services. The idea of human capital theory can be applied to any aspect of society – individuals, organisations, communities and countries at large (Strober, 1990). Human capital is likewise needed to sustain a competitive benefit in society (Banco, 2014).

This theory is increasingly appropriate as a result of changing employment relationships (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003). It is progressively expanded in human resource studies, and it has proved fertile in management research (Nyberg et al., 2014). Although human capital theory is widely used, (Dobbs et al., 2008; Kessler & Lulfesmann, 2006), it has also received several criticisms. Strober (1990) argues that human capital theory offers a central insight into the supply side of the labour market, but it has failed to engage with the demand side which plays the main role in defining earning and employment. Relatedly, human capital theory is based on a neoclassical framework, and does not consider some of the societal factors influencing the labour market (Loewenstein & Spletzer, 1999). This theory does not place emphasis on the acquisition of generic skills to succeed in the workplace; rather, it concentrates on the educational knowledge gained through higher education to be effective in work.

2.9.8 Bridgstock's (2009) model of graduate attributes for employability

Bridgstock's (2009) model of graduate attributes for employability provides a slightly different view of graduate employability, stressing the importance of career management skills. She argued that employability goes beyond the possession of an endless list of generic skills identified by researchers. In a continuously changing economy, graduates must be able to navigate the work environment and self-manage the building process of their career. Her model stresses the

importance of career management skills and knowledge to employability, in that they play a part in "defining which, to what level, in what way, when and where, generic and discipline-specific skills are learned, displayed and used" (Bridgstock, 2009: 36). This is a conceptual model of graduate attributes for employability, including career management skills.

Career management
Intentional management of work, learning and other aspects of life through reflective, evaluative and decision making processes

Career management skills

Self management skills

Appraisal and knowledge of self
e.g. values, abilities, aptitudes, interests, work/life balance

Career building skills
Skills necessary to navigate and advance in the world of work
e.g. finding and using information about labour markets , locating and applying for work and learning opportunities, creating professional relationships

Acquisition, display and use of

Discipline specific skills
Skills necessary to performance at work which are specific to certain occupations or fields

Generic skills
Skills necessary to performance at work which are transferable to multiple work situations e.g. working with technology, written and verbal communcaitoon

Underpinning traits and dispositions
Precursors which underlie the successful development/application of career management skills e.g. openness to experience, intrinsic career motivations, career self-efficacy

Figure 2.6: Graduate attributes for employability.

Self-management skills relate to the perceptions of an individual, and their appraisal of themselves in relation to their values, abilities, interests and goals (Bridgstock, 2009). These abilities are somewhat related to the idea of career identity (Jones & deFillippi, 1996), which is interpreted as the similarity between phases of the individual and their career roles. Day and Allen (2004) in their study of mentoring found that the career identity subscale of the career drive scale they used absolutely forecast salary levels, career success and job performance. Meanwhile, Eby, Butts and

Lockwood (2003) revealed that graduates who have a well- established notion of their career goals and a positive appraisal of their own abilities can report themselves as having higher levels of employability than other graduates.

Career building skills are the skills that relate to finding and using information about one's career, labour markets and the world of work at large, and then locating, securing and maintaining work, as well as exploiting career opportunities for the benefit of advancing desired outcomes (Bridgstock, 2009: 37). According to Watts (1999) and Mayston (2002), the outcome of the acquisition of these kinds of competencies will be a more realistic expectation of the labour market and fewer mismatches between labour market supply and demand, which often leads to poor employment outcomes. Thus, a student who is aware of a high unemployment rate in a particular occupation or geographical location can use their self-management and career building skills to create a substitute career situation involving different locations, training options, or occupational choices through the route of proactive career management. The career building skills listed by Bridgstock are:

- Familiarity with one's industry – this has to do with a knowledge of the "rules of the game", including the structure within an industry, beliefs, norms, culture and value, and also information about the labour market such as rates of employment and salaries, as well as identifying existing opportunities and threats and factors that are critical to success.
- Understanding the terms of a role, when to use a new employment training opportunity and the ability to act quickly once a new opportunity comes up.
- The ability to effectively identify and choose between the best opportunities for advancement with regard to projects and roles.

- Being able to apply for and obtain work; expressing one's skills and abilities in an attractive way to potential employers.

- Creating social capital through creating a strategy that encourages personal and professional relationships with those who have important resources.

These skills have proven to have a direct outcome on perceived (Eby et al., 2003) and "actual employability" (Brown & Konrad, 2001; Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002).

Despite the clear notional connection between career building skills and employment outcomes, it is surprising that an empirical examination conducted in the context of college graduate reviews suggested that individuals who engaged in work exploration behaviours tended to be more active in the process of searching for a job, and experienced more success (Webels, 2000). Similarly, Saks and Ashforth (1999) showed that traits of graduates such as job-search "self-efficacy" have a positive association with employment results.

Generic skills are sometimes referred to as "graduate skills, meta-skills, character skills or learning skills, core skills, key skills and transferable skills" (Bridgstock, 2009). Transferable skills such as good leadership qualities, oral communication skills, personality development, working with technology flexibly, problem solving, and creative thinking skills are all required abilities to undertake many task (Webels, 2000). In investigating the connection between generic skills and employability, researchers have investigated employers' preferences, and few findings have shown that well developed generic skills can lead to enhanced graduate employability (Garcia-Aracil, Mora, & Vila, 2004). Discipline-specific skills are a skill type that is included in most university curriculums. These skills begin in a specific field, discipline or subject area. For example, a

graduate from a science background should be able to apply principles specific to his or her area of practice.

The model includes most of the identified variables that have been discussed thus far, and it comprehensively focusses on graduate employability. It is essential for graduates to have self-management skills, particularly in the modern work environment where individuals need to manage their careers. This model also considers generic skills, which are seen as important to any employability model; this is widely accepted in the literature. With regard to underpinning traits and dispositions, Bridgstock's (2009) model, like every other model, identifies openness, sociability, initiative and self-confidence, among other attributes, as important for graduate career success and actualising full potential.

2.9.9 Summary of different employability models

Based on definitions of employability and its different concepts, it is possible to compare the models discussed above. This will aid in classifying the commonalities and differences between the models, in other to clarify the contributions of the models to the employability literature.

Employability model	Concepts of employability	Dimensions of employability	Focus of the model
Fugate, Kinicki and Ashford's (2004) model of employability	A "psychosocial construct that represents the individual characteristics that foster employability"	Personal adaptability Career identity Social and human capital	Individual characteristics

Hillage and Pollard's (1998) framework of employability	"The capacity to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if necessary" (Hillage & Pollard,1998)	Asset, deployment, presentation, and context factors	Individual and external factors
Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) dispositional model of employability	A collection of individual differences that prompt employees to (pro)actively adapt to their work and job environments (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 503).	• Work and career resilience • Openness to changes at work • Work and career proactivity • Career motivation • Work and career identity	Individual dispositions
Knight and Yorke's (2003) model of employability	Employability is a blend of achievement in four areas which is represented in their model	• Understanding • Skills • Efficacy beliefs, and • Metacognition: awareness of what you know	Personal characteristics

Pool and Sewell's (2007) key to employability model	Employability is having a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Pool & Sewell, 2007: 280).	• Degree subject knowledge, experience and skills • Generic skills (e.g. enterprising) • Emotional intelligence • Career development learning • Experience – Work and Life	Personal characteristics
Consensus theory (notion of employability)	"Employability is the ability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment" Thus, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed and the way they are used and presented to employers when seeking jobs	• Educational level • Skills set	Individual attributes

	(Hillage & Pollard, 1998: 2)		
Human capital theory	Human capital is related to the employability skills definition which mentions the knowledge, skills and commercial understanding of labour (Omar et al., 2012).	• Capacity to apply knowledge and skills in an integrated way	Applicable to individual and organisational levels.
Bridgstock's (2009) conceptual model of graduate attributes for employability	"Adequate preparation for transition to the world of work, and maintaining employability once there, involves activities such as clarification of personal aims and abilities, understanding the requirements of the labour market and the ability to actively engage in the career building process" (Bridgstock, 2009: 35).	• Career management • Self-management skills • Career building skills • Generic skills • Discipline-specific skills • Employability skills • Underpinning traits and dispositions	Graduate attributes
Disposition framework of new graduate	new graduate employability is a personal	o Acumen for creative	Applicable to graduates and

employability	disposition which is concerned with how graduates communicate effectively and fit into the work environment.	contribution ○ Effective communication ○ Time and appearance consciousness ○ Business acumen ○ Coachable ability	group of people (such as Non graduates, entrepreneurs and employers)

It is interesting to see the commonalities within the above models. The other models have in common a focus on individual attributes and are mostly applicable to individuals. The latter model differs from the other models as it approaches employability from a broad perspective. From this perspective, employability is something found in an individual qualities.

2.10 Chapter summary

The aim of this chapter was to conceptualise the notion of employability, in order to provide an underpinning for the development of a new graduate employability framework. The framework provides the background for developing a measure of new graduate employability. It is interesting to understand how various conceptualisations of employability have evolved over time, so as to appreciate the increased complexity behind the concept. Emphasis was placed on a discussion centred on graduate employability, as this study focusses on the employability of new graduates from the point of view of employers. Various individual-level models of employability were discussed, including those of Fugate et al. (2004), Fugate and Kinicki (2008), Pool and Sewell (2007), Bridgstock (2009) and Knight and Yorke (2003). These model stress the variables that are essential to employability, and provid a push for conceptualising the new graduate employability

framework. Finally, the different employability models were briefly compared in order to conceptualise the new graduate employability framework within the existing literature on employability, and to highlight its significance in order to better understand employability within the SME sector at this time.

In addition, the literature demonstrated the significance of graduates to the performance of SMEs, and also differentiated SMEs as a sector that not only contributes to economic development but also serves as a training ground for new graduates globally. This niche is not yet fully recognised in Nigeria, and therefore conducting research like the study in this thesis is important to consider and useful in general, both for SME employers to think about these factors and the value of graduates in their organisations, and for graduates to understand the expectations of them.

To investigate further the attributes required for employability, various models of employability will be studied to further determine the core features of employability. Also, the above discussion highlighted various models of employability and how they relate to this study. The variables that are essential when considering employability will be highlighted in the following sections. Based on a wide review of the literature, a model of employability can now be conceptualised that will provide a theoretical foundation for exploring graduate employability.

Chapter 3

Conceptual framework

3.1 New Graduate Employability Conceptual Framework

Attitude and behaviour

Formulating career goals

Employable new
graduate

Individual circumstances

Figure 3.1 Conceptual framework

Employability in this context can be viewed as a psycho-social construct representing the characteristics of an individual that promote adaptive cognition, behaviour and affect, and improve

the suitability of an individual for appropriate employment (Fugate et al., 2004: 15; Yorke & Knight, 2007: 158). This will increase an individual's likelihood of gaining employment and being successful in their chosen career (Yorke, 2006). Within this framework, employability can be specifically defined as follows. Employability denotes a psycho-social construct representing a blend of attributes (characteristics, values, attitudes and skills) that promote flexibility in changing environments and boost the suitability of an individual for employment and the likelihood of obtaining career success. Therefore, employability is conceptualised similar to the work of Fugate et al. (2004) and Fugate and Kinicki (2008), as a form of active flexibility that helps the individual recognise and realise career opportunities in a practical manner. Someone high in employability is expected to easily adapt to a constantly changing world of work, and as a result achieve success in their profession. According to O'Connell et al. (2008: 248) adaptability is viewed as a key competency for career success, and it is seen as a foundation of employability.

The importance of adaptability to employability is well supported by research (e.g. Fugate et al., 2004; Knight & York, 2002: 273; Martin & Healy, 2008: 10; McArdle et al., 2007: 249; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005: 209). Thus, it relates to individual willingness and ability to change feelings, behaviours and thoughts that relate to the demands of a work environment (Fugate et al., 2004). Fugate et al. (2004) propose optimism, ability to learn, openness, and internal locus of control as aspects of adaptability. Employability also consists of diverse personal dispositions which combine to promote adaptability. A disposition can be defined as the enduring and stable tendency of a person to display specific behaviour in a wide range of situations. It relates to terms like traits, "abilities, habit, motives and temperament" (Reber & Reber, 2001: 208), forms part of a person's personality, and refers to the ways a person will usually act in situations as opposed to temporary actions. Without dwelling too much on traits, to further conceptualise employability, the extensive

literature reviewed here suggests that the graduate employability model should consist of dimensions such as attitudes and behaviour, individual factors such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, risk-taking or adaptability, skills and abilities, openness to change, locus of control, career goals and action plans, individual circumstances, and labour market factors.

3.2 Attitudes and behaviour

An employable person is often described as someone with a flexible attitude towards work and their career (Hall, 1986). Thus, this flexibility is an attitude that is expected to lead to adaptive behavior, which in turn will enable individuals or graduates to remain attractive to current or potential employers, and will aid easy transitions between jobs in other organisations or within the same workplace (Fugate et al., 2004: 16). Though employment may not be guaranteed, flexibility and adaptability greatly improve the prospect of becoming employed (Seibert, 1996a). Nevertheless, it seems that flexibility and adaptability are equally as important as possessing a range of marketable skills. Flexibility and adaptability tend to be reflected in attitudes towards career self-management and behaviour that backs future employability (Meister, 1998). "Career self-management is the ability to keep pace with the speed at which change takes place within the organization and the industry and to prepare for the future" (Meister, 1998: 26).

Possessing the right numbers of skills might have been enough for graduate employability in the past. Nowadays, however, the rate of change within jobs and establishments means that employability is about planning and preparing for an uncertain future by advancing more in an area such as setting realistic goals, proactive change management, personal advocacy and networking, constant learning and team-working (Bagshaw, 1997: 188). An employable person needs to respond to environmental changes, and anticipates future changes with an open mind. The work of Hall (1996a) and Seibert (1996a) argued that employability is mostly linked with a range

of appropriate behaviours such as an evaluation of one's personal strengths and weaknesses, constant monitoring of the labour market to identify opportunities and threats, regular skills updates to match current market demands, planning and networking. It may also include studying the markets, listing a range of abilities, and determining a specific market (Asley, 1998).

Similarly, Truty (2003) suggests that to succeed in the changing environment of employment, qualities like self-directedness, good marketing skills and possession of entrepreneurial spirit are essential for future employability. Pascale (1997: 244) identifies "self-starters, entrepreneurship and the right appetite for social isolation that goes with being a professional agent". Taylor (1990) argues that employability encompasses "pro-activity, and person-centered active adaptation. Employees' adaption to change at work is an active process, such that an employee who is active in their effort adapts successfully" (Taylor, 1990: 162).

In contrast to the qualities related to the "old psychological contract" such as hard work, loyalty and specific knowledge related to a particular job, current research indicates that a proactive person with proactive behaviour tends to seek career opportunities (Seibert et al., 1999). Likewise, Crant (1995: 532; see also Taylor, 1990) describes a proactive personality as a stable trait which is characterised as "one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change". Such people adjust easily to changes in their job environment and are likely to be responsible for their own career progression (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Therefore, to be successful in the new job environment, a graduate will need to possess a proactive nature or be able to embrace a proactive attitude (Quigley & Tymon, 2006).

Additionally, an individual's attitude towards learning is another factor in maintaining employability (Hall, 1996). The capacity to continually learn and familiarise oneself with new

knowledge and skills has become significant in the dynamic environment in which employees now work (Tamkin, 1997, and life-long learning is now seen as an "effective survival tool" (O'Donoghue & Maguire, 2005: 439).

Therefore, with an appropriate skill set and the display of required attitudes and behaviours, a graduate may meet the criteria for being employable. However, reality suggests that even if these qualities are in place an individual may still experience difficulty in finding a job or maintaining the right employment (Taylor, 1990). Therefore, employability goes beyond factors within the graduates' or the individual's control; rather, it is determined by two external factors that are outside of their control, namely individual quality and labour market features (Fugate et al., 2004).

3.3 Individual factors

Career research in the literature has often defined individual factors in terms of personality variables, such as "self-efficacy, self-esteem, risk-taking or adaptability" (King, 2004; Fugate et al., 2004). The factor covering individual characteristics contains a person's employability skills and attributes. As such, these variables have an impact on employees' motivation and job success, and therefore may have a notable impact on individual employability (London, 1983; London & Noe, 1997). However, individual characteristics may also be defined based on variables such as age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, family responsibility, adaptability, mobility, health and well-being (Holmes, 2001). Most definitions of employability pay less attention to variables such as demographic or physical characteristics, but they are essential in determining a person's ability to get or keep a job (Hillage & Polland, 1998: 2).

Over time these characteristics might change, but in general they are beyond individual control. For example, a graduate might update his or her skills, broaden their experiences, or change their

attitudes or behaviour but they cannot alter characteristics such as age, or ethnicity. Similarly, personality factors may change due to individual actions such as undergoing a training programme to improve adaptability, but they may not be able to alter their physical abilities with the same training. Age is an individual feature that has a high impact on employability. Although most employers deny they recruit selectively on the basis of age, research suggests that older workers are seen as less flexible, and less physically capable to learn new things (Patrickson & Ranzijn, 2003). Also, Clarke (2005) recognised that older workers are most at risk of redundancy during periods of downsizing, and employers are reluctant to provide organisational training to them as it is not seen as a good return on investment (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Employment data has shown that "the degree of employability decreases with the age of an employee, especially where it concerns transitioning to a new job field or higher job" (Van der Heijden, 2002: 58).

Health and well-being are other factors that may impact on graduate employability. Someone with high-level skills and abilities but physical limitations may be considered less employable by an employer than a person who has lesser skills but is physically competent (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Thus, these limitations will reduce a person's ability to undertake a range of jobs and their overall employability.

Finally, mobility and adaptability refer to a job seeker's awareness of his or her own strengths and weaknesses (Bloeman & Stancanelli, 2001). Consequently, having competence or the willingness to be "flexible and adaptable" may boost employability, but it is not a guarantee of employment success (Kings, 2004). Gaining or retaining employment is more dependent on whether or not a graduate's or individual's character matches up with the employer's anticipations and requirements.

Having considered these variables, the difficulty is that graduates are constrained by their characteristics in two ways. First, most of these characteristics cannot be changed. Second, what determines employability is based on the employers' perceptions of how individual characteristics might impact on performance, regardless of whether these perceptions are based on stereotypes or not.

3.4 Openness to change

Openness measures how far an individual is open to novel ideas and change (Van Dam, 2004: 32). Within the graduate employability framework, it relates to the extent to which an individual pursues new experiences and is willing to embrace new ideas. Openness to change and openness to new experiences are interchangeably used, and both are related to positive attitudes towards change. Openness to new experiences describes individual workers who are able to survive successfully, and who are open-minded and insightful in the world of work (Vakola, Tsaousis & Nikolaou, 2004: 92). According to Rothman and Coetzer (2003: 69), openness to experience includes "active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, a preference for variety, intellectual curiosity and independence of judgement". Openness to experience also means the degree to which individuals are creative and unconventional (Ng et al., 2005: 374). Indeed, the constantly changing employment environment requires the necessity to constantly learn new skills and the willingness to consider new and unconventional ideas (Eby et al., 2003: 691). It is this curiosity about new ideas that will enable individuals to see new opportunities around them.

Openness to change and new experiences thus allows individual to gather information frequently, which enables them to identify and realise career opportunities. Such an individual is said to be adaptive to a changing work environment, which eventually improves their employability (Fugate

& Kinicki, 2008: 507). This variable has accordingly been linked to employability, and forms part of the dispositional model of employability developed by Fugate and Kinicki (2008). Openness was found to be related to career success. In the light of this, Eby et al. (2003) found a meaningful connection between experience and perceived career success. This is different to previous research, which found that openness did not predict any aspect of intrinsic success, but had a small influence on job satisfaction (Boudreau, Boswell & Judge, 2001). However, it is quite possible that different levels of job require different levels of openness, which may have an effect on career success. Openness has also been linked with performance and creativity (Rothman & Coetzer, 2003), career fulfilment (Lounsbury, Loveland, Sundstrom, Gibson, Drost & Hamrick, 2003) and decision- making performance (Le Pine, Colquitt & Erez, 2000). Ang et al. (2006) also found openness to experience to be an important characteristic for individuals to successfully function in varied cultural settings. Openness is therefore fundamentally entwined within the businesses literature, and is seen as critical to personal adaptability (Fugate et al., 2004: 22). It is therefore clear that openness to change is important when considering employability in general.

3.5 Locus of control

This refers to a person's perceived control over events in their life. According to Rotter (1966), locus of control was defined as individual's general expectation of perceived internal and external control, or the level at which an individual views events to depend on his or her own actions. The author gives a clear distinction between people with internal and external locuses of control. People with an internal locus of control believe that they are in control of their own actions and they rule their environment through their efforts, skills, capabilities and characteristics. People with an external locus of control think otherwise – that they do not control their own fate. Such people believe that outcomes depend on external forces such as chance, fate or powerful others (Rotter,

1966).

There is a link between locus of control and variety of career success and adaptability measures. An internal locus of control was found to strongly link to career satisfaction (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005; Turban & Dougherty, 1994; Wallace, 2001) and self-reported promotional opportunities (Turban & Dougherty, 1994; Wallace, 2001), as well as job performance (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Someone with an internal locus of control is more apt to be seen by senior employees and is likely to attain better career progression (Philips & Bedeian, 1994). Research findings also reveal that people with an internal locus of control feel that they have control over their lives, which reduced their likelihood of being job insecure (De Witte, 2005). According to Blickle and Witzki (2008), the flexibility of employment relationships is increased by internal locus of control or taking an active part in one's vocational life. Therefore, the role of locus of control in employability is important and clear.

3.6 Formulating career goals and action plans

A career goal means a preferred career-related outcome that is aimed to be achieved by an individual (Geerhaus et al., 2003: 30). Setting a practical purpose is significant for career decision making (Dik, Sargent & Steger, 2008: 23), and achieving new career goals can enhance success in someone's career (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006: 43). A career action plan refers to chains of actions that help an individual to achieve a career goal (Greenhaus et al., 2003: 31). Examples of such activities are acquiring new skills by attending workshops, finding a mentor (Anakwe et al., 2000: 575), seeking career guidance, and creating career opportunities. An individual needs to have career goals and action plans for how to reach them if they are to engage in employable activities. Formulating career goals and action plans guides people to envision their potential future clearly,

directs their career-related options and helps them work out how to achieve their career goals. It helps them to fully reflect on how well their employability is developed and what they can do to make it better. People with clearly articulated career goals and action plans know what they must do to make a success of their chosen careers (Anakwe et al., 2000: 575).

3.7 Skills and abilities

An empirical study by Knight and Yorke (2004) defined skills as a set of achievements, understandings, and personal attributes that makes an individual more likely to gain employment and be successful in their career. Leckey and McGuigan (1997: 44) discuss the minimum "generic skill level or competencies" needed by graduates to enter the labour market. The term 'employability skills' is given different names in current and past research from different countries, such core skills, key skills, essential skills, skills for life, employability skills, generic skills, transferable skills, and enterprise skills (Thomasson, Cleary & Flynn, 2006). An Australian Education Council Report (1992) identified seven key competencies that should be included in the National Education Framework, including skills like "collecting, analyzing and organizing ideas, teamwork, problem-solving, communication and using of technologies" (Eric, 1992: 68).

Employers, government and higher education institutions (HEIs) have suggested that skills which have an impact on a lifelong learning are critical for employment and career success in the labour market. Similar generic skills were identified in the UK, Canada and the USA as numeracy, literacy, communication, problem-solving, technical and interpersonal skills. See Table 3.1 below for the key generic skills identified in an Australian, UK and US study. According to Curtis and Mckenzie (2001), the concept of skills provides a link between work and education. Many developed economies like the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada and

Australia have developed a framework for the competencies needed for the labor market. Although each project/framework has a different name, they have a wide base of agreement with respect to the skills required for the national and international labour markets. The US named their framework the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), in the UK it is called the National Council for Vocational Qualification (NCVQ), while Canada named it Employability Skills and Australia called it the Mayer Key Competencies (Curtis & McKenzie, 2001).

Australian key competencies	UK (NCVQ) core skills	Canadian employability profile	USA (SCANS) workplace know-how
Collecting, analysing and organising information Communicating ideas and information Planning and organising activities Working with others and in teams Using mathematical ideas and techniques	Communication Communication skills Personal skills: improving own performance and learning Personal skills: working with others Numeracy: application of number Problem solving	Thinking skills Communication skills Responsibility skills Thinking skills Positive attitudes and behaviour Work with others Adaptability Understand and solve problems using mathematics	Information Foundation Skills Resources Foundation skills: personal qualities Interpersonal skills

Solving problems	Information technology	Problem-solving and decision-making skills	Thinking
		Learning skills	Technology systems
		Use technologies.	
		Communication skills	
		Manage information.	
		Use numbers.	
		Work safely.	
		Participate in projects and tasks	

Table 3.1 Comparative table of employability skills country. Source: Australia Education Council

Most universities in Canada, the UK, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand have introduced some form of skills profile into their degree curriculums or via a compulsory course that focusses on skills development (Cranmer, 2006). Nevertheless, employability goes further than just having the right skills to enter a workforce. It also entails having the abilities and skills to move forward within the establishment, in other to achieve one's potential and contribute to the success of the enterprise (McLeish, 2002). Also, employability is linked with an individual's capability to demonstrate a range of "soft skills and personal attributes" such as reliability, commitment, enthusiasm, adaptability, and up-to-date technical competencies (ACCI, 2002: 67). Dench (1997) argued that employers are seeking an individual who possesses three types of skills: personal attributes, personal skills, and technical skills. Technical skills are gained through education and

experience. Personal skills are thing like communication, teamwork, taking responsibility, decision making and problem-solving. Personal attributes encompasses honesty and integrity.

A report by Clarke (1997: 70), carried out for forty different companies in the UK, found that employers see employability in terms of "[c]ommunication, problem-solving and decision making skills". However, there is an expectation for graduates or employees to "demonstrate an appreciation for business and commerce, a customer-focused approach and a commitment to the highest quality" (Clarke, 1997: 177). A Scottish report stated that employers were more attracted to qualities like honesty, general abilities, value fit, adaptability, experience, drive, and knowledge of the job than qualifications (Scholarios & Lockyer, 1999).

The primary focus of most employers is no longer on graduates' qualifications. A similar study was done in Australia and reported that "punctuality, competence, adaptability, communication skills, ability to meet deadlines, politeness, hard work, initiative and being a team player were rated more highly than official qualifications" (Ranzijn et al., 2002: 45). It may be unrealistic to expect an average employee or graduate to possess all these mentioned qualities, but employability may be defined as having the skills and the abilities necessary to find employment, remain in employment and move into new employment if need be (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Hence, employability refers to present job status and the ability to find substitute employment should the need arise. Nevertheless, skills and abilities are not a guarantee of employment, but rather a mix of attitudes and behaviour. A study by Danson (2005; see also Lindsay, 2002: 630) suggests that some "highly skilled people struggle to obtain and maintain employment while some less skilled people experience continuous success in the labour market".

Communication is a social skill that is essential for business growth (Hergie, 2007). Communication skills have been identified as a primary skill required of graduates of HEIs globally (Pitan & Adedeji, 2012; Sodipo, 2014). Scholars in the employability field have investigated employers' perceptions and demand for generic skills (Lee & Edwards, 1997; Lim, 2010; Akanmu, 2012), and studies have reported cross-sectoral preference for communication skills as being among the top priorities. According to the communication model, there should be an excellent information network to ensure successful communication (PMI, 2008, cited in Abdul, 2018). This primary skill will help new graduates to pass information to others through the use of words, body language and reports.

According to a study by Ward, Finke and Smith (1995), creative thinking is the building of right and new ideas. It has also been described as the ability to produce new or unique work without restrain from completing an assignment (Lubart, 1994). Deducing from these descriptions, it is obvious that creative thinking is intentional, based on the results of one's conclusions. Creative thinking is considered an important element in higher education (Halpern, 1993), and it also links to both education and social engagement.

3.8 Individual circumstances

The element of individual circumstances includes a series of socioeconomic contextual factors interrelated to individual social and household conditions. These circumstances may affect the ability or willingness to take up an employment opportunity, and they may be divided into "direct caring responsibilities, emotional or time commitment to family members or other household situations" (Scandura & Lankau, 1997: 88). Another element added by Brown and Konrad (2001) is "work culture", which means the social weights affecting an individual attitudes and aims, such as the presence of a culture in which work is encouraged and supported within the family, among

colleagues and in the community at large (Levesque & White, 2001).

Access to resources, including transport/mobility issues (such as access to private transport, capacity to walk suitable distance to work) is another individual circumstances (Chapple, 2002). Others are ccess to finance (such as formal and informal sources of financial support) and access to social capital (such as family support and community systems, especially those related to job search). Social capital has been given lots of attention in the most job search literature (Stoloff et al., 1999; Brown & Konrad, 2001; Chapple, 2002). In certain local economies (like rural areas), social networks can be most significant (Hofferth & Iceland, 1998; Monk et al., 1999). In a nutshell, holding a large number of social ties (even when these may be considered weak) to higher-status operatives has been shown to be related to career advancement in the labour market (Granovetter, 1974, 1982) and, in rare cases, exit from unemployment (Le Vesque & White, 2001).

Family responsibility is another individual characteristic that also has a significant impact on employability, as it can affect the "ability or willingness to accept certain jobs" (McQuaid, 2006: 411). These responsibilities relate to children, partners or aged parents, and this variable may affect the type of job an individual is able to apply for, the location and hours of the job. Thus, this responsibility often limits an individual's flexibility in terms of relocation in taking up employment. As a result, an individual may experience "externally imposed limitations" (Lobel & St Clair, 1992: 97). Similarly, women may experience discrimination centred on gender stereotypes linked to family responsibilities. Scandura and Lankau (1997) infer that women are perceived as less committed to an organisation or their careers, and as a consequence they may be deprived of equal access to career opportunities that would help to advance their career development and employability (Lobel & St Clair, 1992).

3.9 Labour market factors

Labour market factors are external factors that are outside a person's control but which are important in determining the likelihood of a graduate getting a job, and which can influence a person employability (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Similarly, there is also a range of personal and external barriers impacting on the employability of workers and job seekers (Evans et al., 1999). These factors are labour demand conditions, level of competition for a job, location issues and recruitment factors (Adams et al., 2000). Although it might be easy for an individual to identify with what employers want, and increase their marketability, they cannot influence labour market characteristics. At an individual level, employability is regarded as the individual capacity to secure a suitable job based on their skills and experiences.

The concentration on employability as an individual construct means that employers may be inclined to doubt the reality that employability is a function of both the supply and demand sides of the labour market. Recent efforts to reach a stronger definition of the concept have stressed the need for an understanding of the interaction between individual and external factors affecting an individual's ability to operate efficiently within the labour market (Lindsay et al., 2003; Evans et al., 1999). Likewise, a number of studies in the UK have made attempts to amend this imbalance; for example, the studies of Danson (2005), Gore (2005), Lindsay (2002) and McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) show that employability is subject to circumstantial factors as much as individual factors. That is, having the right level of skills and experiences, or the willingness to work and the mobility to do so, will only lead to employment if there is a match in demand from employers. Another study done in Europe by Buchmann (2002: 217) found that the link between employment and underemployment is due to mismatch between "skill supply, and skill demand in the labor market with employers' interest in specific functions, tasks, and activities to be performed on the job"

rather than with specific skill needed for a job.

Therefore, it is clear that employability is not determined merely by individual-level factors. To a certain degree, employability is the result of a complex interaction between individual factors and internal factors (individual characteristics) and external "labor market factors" (McQuaid, 2006: 219). It is easy to find employment when jobs are plentiful, but in a situation where there are fewer jobs employers can afford to be more selective in their demands for a set of skills, qualifications, and experience to determine whether an applicant is employable or not. Hence, "employability can be described as relative and absolute" (Brown et al., 2003: 110). Possessing the right "qualification, skills, experience, attitudes and behavior does not establish relative employability or guarantee a job" (Brown et al., 2003: 322). In fact, a person with the identified variables may still find it extremely difficult to find a job in an unfeeling labour market.

This is even more apparent in areas where basic changes to the labour market have had significant effects on certain groups of employees. One example is the shift towards short-term contracts, casual and agency employment which is gaining popularity in almost every part of the world. Some sectors within the USA and EU countries are made up entirely of temporary workers (Golden, 1996), while in Australia almost all of the workforce is in temporary or part-time jobs or fixed term contracts (Connell & Burgess, 2006). Meanwhile, a similar situation is developing in Africa, especially in Nigeria. Therefore, employability in this context is dependent on the number of suitable jobs available and the capacity of graduates to meet the requirements in terms of the skills and experiences specified by the potential employers.

Additionally, employability is not only influenced by the number and type of available jobs, but also the location of the jobs. A job seeker's level of employability diminishes when a suitable job

is at a location that is not easily accessible and the job seeker has a low level of mobility (Lindsay, 2002). This factor is most important for low-skilled workers seeking employment in low-paid positions. Physical relocation or commuting long distance may not be an option considering the economic viewpoint, thereby rendering an otherwise employable person unemployable due to physical and financial constraints (Danson, 2005). Internal labour markets are another factor that influences employability (Soeters & Schwan, 1990). Strong internal labour markets affect employability when organisations choose to use internal promotion rather than external recruitment, prefer to retain staff with existing skills, or are limited by cost factors related to the training of new employees (Soeters & Schwan, 1990). Meanwhile, internal labour market factors tends to be weaker where firms are able to access qualified, external candidates with transferable skill, or where the need for flexibility is greater than the need for stability.

Throughout the twentieth century organisations operating in a bureaucratic style have tended to have strong internal labour markets. Employees enjoyed specific rights and privileges that are associated with being part of an organisation, such as training for career development, and were treasured for their specific skills. Generally, employees could expect to remain part of the internal market as long as they were able to perform effectively. However, over the last two decades internal labour market structures in traditional organisations have undergone notable changes as they have downsized, restructured and outsourced (Piore, 2002). Also, job losses have been extensive in many industries as organisations have exchanged older employees with firm-specific skills for employees who are flexible and possess transferable skills (Kets De Vries & Balazs, 1997).

The reality is that most individuals have very little influence over either the internal or external u markets. Only highly specialised people or rare skills and experiences, as well as flexibility and

mobility of the highest degree, are in a position to control labour market outcomes. However, a person may not be able to get or keep a job due to personal factors like a lack of the right skills, institutional infrastructure such as transport ,or demand factors such as choice of employers. Hence, these factors may have a high impact on graduate employability. This broad range of factors allows us to identify the key barriers that are actually preventing graduates from getting a job, rather than detecting a subsection, like their employability skills which might only be part of the issue.

3.10 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed relevant literature to guide the foundation of the conceptual framework to be presented in the next chapter. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study originates in this review of current and past literature. According to Creswell (1994), a conceptual framework explains the links and connectedness between variables in a study. Skills such as ability to communicate, reading, writing, thinking, teamwork, time management and listening are not the only factors that impact graduate employability; there are other important factors such as personal circumstances, labour market factors, abilities, behaviour, locus of control, individual factors, attitudes and skills. Therefore, technical skills and academic knowledge are not sufficient to seek employment (Fallow & Stevens, 2000).

The twenty-first century requires young adults to be work-ready before entering the world of work, to be employable, and to sustain their employability (Marock, 2008; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Employers (particularly SMEs) demand graduates who are equipped with unique skills and attributes, and this demand will continue to increase. The chapter concludes with a final integration and summary of labour market factors and how they impact on employability. The next chapter

will discuss the research methodology and the steps involved in developing the new graduate employability measure.

Chapter 4

Methodology

The primary focus of this chapter is to discuss and explain the methodology employed in this research with the aim of meeting the objectives of the study (Section 1). This chapter sets the stage for presenting the results of the findings, which will follow. This chapter introduces the study methodology and how it helped in collecting data, the analysis, and the development of the study framework. The subsequent sections define the data collection steps for the research, which included an unstructured interview.

4.1 Research design

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to explore and understand the meaning of graduate employability from SME employers' experiences, investigating the factors that make graduates employable, and or the skills/attributes that employers value in their employed graduates. The current literature is devoid of studies describing the meaning of new graduate employability in SMEs in Nigeria. The employer's voice was at the core of this investigation, as their lived experience gives significant insight into this phenomenon. A qualitative approach was chosen to direct the investigatory effort; how a researcher views knowledge purposefully motivates the research and guides all aspect of the study (Crotty, 1998; Broido & Manning, 2002). This section gives an outline of the study's ontological, epistemological and philosophical views.

4.2 Research philosophical approach

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers make certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality. Ontology is the claim made by researchers regarding knowledge, epistemology is how that knowledge is arrived at by an individual, and methodology is the process

of studying knowledge. Epistemology believes that who we are and how we understand the world are essential parts of how we comprehend ourselves, the world and others. Therefore, this research is designed with an ontological view that assumes the phenomenon under investigation is complex where contingencies are unavoidable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Creswell (2007) noted that the idea of multiple realities is embraced by a researcher when they conduct qualitative research; this is known as the ontological assumption, while the epistemological assumption in qualitative research denotes that researchers try to move closer to the participants reviewed.

I agree with the empirical research by Crotty (1998: 42) that suggests all knowledge and meaningful reality is dependent upon social practices, constructed in an interaction between humans and the world, and developed and transmitted within a larger social context. I believe that humans respond to their social environment based on their perceptions, and meaningfully affect future actions and collaborations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These assumptions helped to emphasise the importance of the lived experiences of the SME employer respondents, and further unite my epistemological learning with this study. Also, this approach will help this study to provide a full account of lived experiences from which "general or universal meaning are originated" (Creswell, 1998: 53).

4.2.1 Epistemology

We cannot separate ourselves from what we are aware of. A fundamental belief that motivates this study comes from my own link with research of a constructivist character. While an objectivist view espouses that knowledge happens in objects free from awareness and experience, my constructivist epistemology asserts that knowledge is a product of social context, whereby meaning comes from interactions with others (Crotty, 1998). Support for constructivism is evident in the aim of this project, which is to explore the way participants, namely "employers", create and

understand meaning through their social constructions (Charmaz, 2006). An empirical study by Guba and Lincoln (1989) implies that a constructivist study should show the value of the researcher, the respondents, the research site, and the underlying theory.

Also, the framework recognises that reality is "multiple, compound, and not easily measurable" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 83). As a result, the eighteen participants were interviewed in their offices and through telephone calls after they had agreed to participate and information had been given to them. A constructivist approach seeks to describe and discover the unique nature of those being investigated (Broido & Manning, 2002). This epistemological leaning was right for my research because it meant that the employer's voice was placed at the centre of the findings. The detailed descriptions of participant experiences guided my data analysis and revealed an honest memory of experience, rather than opinions (Moustaka, 1994). The research design guided this interactive experience, with importance placed on the unfolding story told by the participants. I attempted to shed light on how the interviewed SME employers experienced and understood their new graduates.

4.3 Philosophical/research paradigm

The constructivist epistemology assists the study to approach this research project with an open mind for discovery. According to Broido and Manning (2002), the interactive relationship between a constructivist researcher and their participant is subjective and guiding where multiple realities existing, creating complexity. Therefore, to best explore from the interpretive standpoint this study needed to engage respondents in the constructivist foundations of shared history, language, and activities (Locke, 2001). The research seeks to explore the phenomena surrounding how employers experience and understand their employed new graduates.

This investigation is established on the belief that action and interaction create meaning. The study assumes that human knowledge is a build-up of experiences that combine to form a basis for the continuous evolution of thought (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study also believes that truth is new knowledge that is useful in changing and developing what was formerly identified as reality. Therefore, the study's aim was to investigate the essence of how SME employers experience and understand their new graduates. The voice of the employer-respondents helped to navigate this truth. The relived experiences aim at achieving a profound understanding of the nature or meaning of participants' daily experiences (Crotty, 1998: 25). This approach shows how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience (Merriam, 2002: 7). This method helps me to identify the meaning behind human experience as it relates to an experience or notable collective occurrence (Creswell, 2009). Also, participants' relived experiences give new meaning, and appreciation can be developed to inform how we understand the meaning of new graduate employability (Laverty, 2003).

Research methods were classified by Mayer (2013) into qualitative and quantitative approaches; another way that research methods may be classified is to differentiate between the philosophical assumptions guiding the research. Both research methods have underlying assumptions about what makes "valid "research.

4.4 Qualitative discovery

Constructive epistemology directs the research to focus on the emotional responses and perceptions of the participants, rather than on quantifiable variables. Participants' emotions give insight into the value of a description, and the nature of their experiences provides a deeper understanding of the topic under study. While quantitative research developed from earlier post-positive thinking and defines knowledge through cause and effect viewpoints, qualitative research

has evolved more recently with connections to a constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2003). This type of research claims that meaning is developed socially and historically, with individual experience holding a capacity for multiple subjective understandings. Although research involving new graduate employability skills has often focused a quantitative lens on generalisation and statistically predictable results (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Blasko et al., 2002), the inductive approach taken in this research gives an explanation of the complexity of a social phenomenon by defining patterns that arise from the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In-depth conversations between the participant employers and the researcher offered an opportunity to revisit their experiences and construct meaning through dialogue. It also gave a rich insight and detailed view of their experience, as the researcher was able to dig into the feelings behind the employers' relived experiences. This approach is different from an objectivist view, where quantitative meaning is free from consciousness and experience (Crotty, 1998). In this study the interpretive data emerged and was collected through an open-ended investigation, and then analysed in an evolving way that required the researcher to actively participate in the explanation of social meaning (Moustakas,1994). This investigative discovery process was aimed at developing a rich and full analysis that exemplified SME employers' understanding of new graduates. Quantitative methodologies seek exact measurement to help the broad generalisation of results and study repetition (Glass & Hopkins, 1996), but this qualitative research explored the depth of the phenomena to give the reader a deep understanding of the peculiarities involved with these issues (Creswell, 2007). The flexibility that comes with this effort allows the researcher, as the primary data collection instrument, to enquire about deeper meaning through continued discussion with the interviewed respondents (Creswell, 2003).

4.5 Phenomenology approach

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 3), methodology "is a way of thinking about and studying social reality", while "method is a set of procedures and systems for gathering and analysing data." I was careful about selecting a research methodology that best supports my research interest, and which gives a rich description that can enlighten the lived world (Smith et al., 2009). A phenomenological analysis "is an attempt to deal with inner experiences in everyday life" (Merriam, 2002: 7). I chose this method as it helped in identifying meaning behind the human experience, linking to a phenomenon or a collective occurrence (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenon of interest was how SME employers understand the meaning of new graduate employability.

The modern phenomenological method is credited to Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), a German philosopher and mathematician whose work changed during the ideological chaos of the First World War. In his research Husserl advocated that objects occur independently and that observations and experiences involving these objects are reliable, suggesting that an individual's insight gives us a true representation of their consciousness (Fouche, 1993). The phenomenological foundation of this study "aims at attaining a deep understanding of the nature or meaning of our daily experiences" (Crotty, 1998: 25). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) and Kensit (2000: 104) argue that "doing phenomenology" signifies capturing rich accounts of phenomena and their settings. Also, this methodology was adapted from the studies of Greonewald (2004), Davidson (2000) and Jones (2001).

Phenomenology is used broadly in research originating from sociology, psychology, health, and education (Creswell, 1998). This method aroused my "interest in showing how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience" (Merriam, 2002: 7). I choose phenomenology to

help provide a broad record of participants' lived experiences, from which "general or universal meanings are generated" (Creswell, 1998: 53). After I decided that a phenomenological method was suitable for this research, the following plans as offered by Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) were embraced in the design, and served as a map for my study which explored how employers experience and understand new graduates:

- Identify the phenomenon of interest to study

- The researcher recognises and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology

- Data collection is from the individual participants with experience of the phenomenon under study

- The participants are asked two broad, general questions (Moustakas, 1994): what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? what context or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?

- Analysis of data takes place through organised "clusters of meaning", and from these clusters develops both "textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences" which later leads to a composite description that presents the "essence" of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007: 60–62)

4.6 Data collection

To build a strong foundation and collect appropriate data for my research, my sampling method and the way I was able to reach out to my respondents was important to this thesis. My sample is grounded on a number of factors. First, I needed to reach the financial sector within the service industry; second, I needed to get in contact with employers who are involved in or have knowledge

of my topic, and who could introduce me to other employers with similar experiences. The respondent must be an expert and have a good knowledge of the topic. The research site was chosen as a result of research past experience in the banking industry. I had an opportunity to apply for a senior position in the banking industry in another bank, and was told that I had done well in a three-man panel interview. Additional consideration was used for determining this type of site based on my experience in my last job and in the interview. The criterion used for selecting the research site included choosing SMEs where the employers have had the opportunity to work with and interview new graduates, as well as working within an organisation that employs between eleven and fifty people (small businesses), or from fifty-one to 200 employees (medium-sized businesses).

I investigated the phenomenon by exploring the lived experiences of the employer respondents as they linked to my study objectives. I purposefully created a sample size on the basis of a thorough saturation of developing ideas. Gradually moving through a sample can help to develop theoretical clarity until no additional ideas surface (Locke, 2001). For Myers and Newman (2007: 123), a more "vital issue than the number of interviews in qualitative research is ensuring the people interviewed represent various voices". Appropriate saturation happens when "no new data emerge regarding a category, the category which is well developed in terms of its dimensions, and the interaction among categories that is well established and validated" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 212). The total sample for this research could have been up to twenty participant SME employers or more, but I stopped collecting data when no new data emerged. I sought consent from the employer participants via email, and a follow-up phone call took place utilising the key points from the previous email as a script for the request in situations where no response was received within seven days.

Qualitative researchers seek interpretive information from their respondent sample, which can be as small as one individual, up to everyone within the organisation (McNabb, 2002). According to Boyd (2001), research saturation can be reached with two to ten participants. Creswell (1998: 65) mentions that a phenomenological study involves "long interviews with up to 10 people". As a result of the study's single occurrence face-to-face interview design, the study started with an intended sample size of approximately 10 participants. Once the first sample was determined, the researcher was prepared to increase the sample up to twenty SME employers if needed to clarify further emerging data until the point of information saturation was reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The idea of a large population prevails in quantitative research, but it is difficult to determine the sample size at the outset in a qualitative study. Glaser et al. (1968) suggest "theoretical saturation", where the researcher stops data collection when no new concepts or themes emerge from the data analysis. This argument was adopted; after interviews with eighteen participants no new data was emerging, so the researcher stopped further data collection.

4.6.1 Participant welfare

Participants' welfare guided the study at all stages. Participants were sent and acknowledged by signing a document which described both the scope of the study and defined the available avenues in case they felt they had been harmed by the process. The document stated the participants' ability to cease their involvement at any point without any reason. The researcher abided by a strict code of confidentiality and stored the data in a lock-protected environment. Information given by the participants was coded with an alias from the beginning of the project. Ethical values connected

to academic discovery through autonomy, beneficence, and justice helped in promoting the trustworthiness of the process, and guided my subjective efforts throughout the study.

The total sample for the research study was made up of eighteen SME employers from the financial services industry in three local government areas in Lagos State, Nigeria. In addition, criterion sampling, as suggested by Creswell (2007), assisted me to further focus my subject population and promote the probability of the identified participants' interactivity. Three criteria were used to determine whether potential participants were qualified to be chosen as respondents for the research. I included participants who: (1) had recent experience in interviewing new graduates (in the last three years); (2) had worked and interacted with new graduates from their first day onward; and (3) had worked in small and medium-sized companies. The first two criteria increased the probability that employer respondents had some experience with new graduates and had developed an understanding of the phenomenon. Initially the study used a purposeful sampling strategy to select organisationally involved employer respondents. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) suggest that purposive sampling enables the researcher to make a rational comparison about the study purposes, rather than aiming at statistical generality. This approach sets out to develop a sample where numerous views will offer depth and diversity (Creswell, 2007), and where the respondents selected were likely to give information relative to the phenomenon being studied (Maxwell, 2005). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012: 85) imply that purposive sampling aids the researcher to make a balanced "comparison about the study purposes and not for making statistical generality".

The selected employers were professionals with more than five years of experience in interviewing and working with new graduates. The study hoped to discover employers who could speak to their understanding of the new graduates. The research next chose complementary snowball sampling

to further connect with likely participants. The selected participants were asked to refer and introduce me to other employers who met the criteria but might not be easily accessed otherwise. Additionally, the identified employer participants were asked to forward the researcher's email to other potential employers. The email message defined the scope and the reason for the investigation, and also included a statement informing respondents about their consent to take part in the study (Appendix A). The researcher responded via email to those respondents that agreed to participate and sent back the completed, signed form. An email was later sent to arrange a convenient time and place for an interview (Appendix B). Participants received two reminders a week and a day before the interviews via email and telephone respectively. The researcher scheduled interviews over thirty days of visits to the research location. Informed consent was provided to the participants as an introductory step to the interview, which stated the purpose, eligibility, involved commitment, and related confidentiality of the experience. The documents were read over to ensure the participants' understanding, and any raised questions regarding the process were answered. A signed authorisation was obtained acknowledging the conditions of participation. Timely response to any subsequent enquiry made by the participant was prioritised to safeguard their connectivity to the research process.

This study posed minimal risk to those who took part as the data was collected and communicated via the anonymity of their alias. The selected respondents invested time to engage in the interview as well as reviewing the subsequent transcripts, a process which is referred to as member checking. Respondents did not receive any form of payment or service as compensation for their participation in the research. Participants may have benefited from an understanding that they were adding to a body of knowledge that further informed concepts linked to new graduates' experience. All the participants' identifiers and responses were strictly protected with a high level of confidentiality.

Pseudonyms were assigned immediately when consent was given to replace personal identifiers, and respondents were asked to use their alias to replace their name at any point. All data was stored in a locked computer and environment in the investigator's safe. Documents linking specific participants' information to their aliases were securely stored in a separate folder and only reviewed by the investigator. All data collected from individual participants were narrated in either summary format, or their alias name if the data was a direct quote.

4.7 Methods of data collection

In order to provide an answer to my research objectives, I needed to select a sample. Since the research is explorative, non-probability sampling was chosen (Saunders et al.: 295). There are different types of non-probability sampling. The study has not tried to sample research participants randomly, and therefore the study used purposive sampling. The goal of this sampling method is to gather participants in a strategic way; the purpose is to bring relevant participants to the research study (Bryman & Bell, 2011: 442). Since the purpose of my study is to understand and explore how service industry businesses understand graduate employability, this method was chosen. However, since purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling, it does not allow me to generalise to a population and cannot be statistically illustrative (Bryman & Bell, 2011: 442; Saunders et al., 2016: 301). During the sampling, participants referred the researcher to others with knowledge of the topic, and the study use these people to find more participants (Saunders et al., 2016: 303). This is called snowball sampling, which is an example of purposive sampling in qualitative enquiry.

Data for this project was collected through interviews designed to explore the lived experiences of SME employers in the financial sector in Lagos State who had interacted with new graduates.

Participants were asked to attend an interview that was scheduled to last for about 45 to 60 minutes. According to Van den Berg (2005), interviewing is an effective method for collecting data about the lived experiences of respondents. Myers (2013) claimed that the interview gives the qualitative researcher the opportunity to gather rich data about various roles and situations, and rich data connects life to the human beings that are at the centre of social science research. This interview approach is different from other forms of data collection as the researcher engages in a face-to-face conversation with participants (Schultze & Avital, 2011). Interviews were conducted using an unstructured approach and open-ended questions, so as to allow participants free rein to share their experiences. The open-ended questions gave an opportunity to listen to participants' lived experience as they shared their stories. Also, the unstructured interview provides an open, flexible exploration and allows the examination of a complex interactive situation in the research context (Mason, 1996).

The researcher prepared a set of open-ended interview questions with prompts to guide the experience; the exact wording and order was left flexible to allow the researcher to best navigate the interactive experience with the respondent (Merriam, 1998). The researcher field-tested the survey protocol with three SME employers in the financial industry in Lagos State, Nigeria to ensure the clarity of the questions and interview guide. This process prepared the researcher for the larger interviews, and the researcher was able to make any significant changes to the enquiry. The interview times and dates were determined by the participants to establish the respondents' availability and convenience. The interview setting was in the participants' offices and meeting places, where they felt relaxed in sharing their experiences without distractions. Interviews were recorded on audio tape for later transcription and analysis. Participants were provided with an

electronic copy of their transcribed interview in other to verify correctness, inconsistencies and allow any further questions about the enquiry.

4.8 Data analysis approach

A phenomenological analysis of the interview transcript was conducted to develop a textural description of the participants' experiences in terms of what they experienced and how it was experienced. This description conveys the overall essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the systematic data analysis followed psychological phenomenologist guidelines according to Moustaka (1994) and Smith and Osborn (2003). The following steps guided my data analysis:

- I read each interview transcript separately to get the essence of the participants' lived experiences. I read the interviews several times until a sense of absorption in the material had been achieved. I identified quotes that provided an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomena, and these were highlighted by line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2006)

- An interpretive meaning was developed for each of the strong statements. The researcher read the research protocol over again to ensure the original description was manifest in the interpretive meaning

- Meanings were arranged into clusters, which led to emergent themes. The researcher sought validation and avoided repetitive issues during this process

- The themes were integrated into a full story and the researcher produced a brief statement of the full description which was the overall essence of the experience

I needed to immerse myself in the data as a researcher, by constantly reading the material as I prepared for the analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My data collection, note-taking, coding

and memoing took place concurrently from the inception of the research, and the process of sorting helped the project organisation to achieve categorical saturation (Locke, 2001). McNabb (2002) suggests building a map for assisting qualitative analysis, which influenced my thinking about data collection using the phenomenological method. Subscribing to this method, my data examination for this study was guided by the following phases prior to moving into the phases of clustering and coding. First I reflected on the data by stepping back to think about the big picture as I reviewed the dialogue, and then I moved fully into reading the whole material from beginning to the end. Second, the step of questioning required that I made notes and read all the material over again so as to begin the development of a structured interaction with the data. As mentioned previously, my study was phenomenological in nature. Since it is qualitatively based, phenomenology gives me the privilege of discovering the lived experiences of the employer respondents. From the participants' stories, I searched for comparisons in how they experienced the phenomena, as meaning finally developed from relationships in the data (Colaizzi, 1978). The figure below is a caption of relationship that exist in data.

He studied Estate management in the higher institution, but he wrote on the CV that he is open to employment in other industries and he is adaptive to any situation and ready for a change. So since that is his desire and he's also willing to test discipline different from his study he should be given the opportunity

What do you mean by adaptive?

That just at an intuitive stage you can really lay your hands on it. After engaging since he said he was open to challenges because ordinarily you will want to say since he studied him estate management he should look at his area of study. Actually I think he worked with a reputable name in the estate management but maybe factors like bonuses, compensations or reward are behind the change. But since he wanted to work in the bank and he is open to any change that will come along with that.

And then what happen after you met him?

Well, the guy is from the eastern part of Nigeria and he showed a lot of enterprise in his assignment. When he was employed, he was deployed straight to sales and then he stood out really. He had this curiosity around him and he was also hungry for the fact that most of his kinsmen are known for business. He had business acumen and he was applying that to the assignment that was given to him. Business acumen in the sense that he was able to manage the resources around him to achieve the ultimate goal, so in his own case I will say the fact that he was willing as a sales person to get deposit into the bank and sell most of our products to prospective customers so he was able to use a lot zeal and never say never attitude in so many

Omolara Olugbemi (1502791)
Flexibility, adaptive

Omolara Olugbemi (1502791)
adaptive

Omolara Olugbemi (1502791)
enterprise

Omolara Olugbemi (1502791)
curiousity or hungry to perform

Omolara Olugbemi (1502791)
Business Acumen

Omolara Olugbemi (1502791)
enthusiastic, ambitious

Data collected through the interviews provided a rich depiction of how SME employers in the financial sector in Lagos State understand new graduates. According to the data analysis process by Hycner (1999), I first chronologically bracketed the commentary and began phenomenological reduction. Bracketing is a fundamental methodological belief within the phenomenological framework, in which researchers set aside their experiences and attitudes as far as possible to be able to adopt a fresh perspective on the investigated phenomenon. The data reduction process starts with open coding and interpretive memoing, where I identified words that best represent the emergent topics that might serve to form categories of meaning (Appendix C). This helped me to set the direction for further analysis.

Moving forward, I connected directly to the data to check and revise emerging topics and redirect those ideas to significant units. The last stage required me to think deeply about the growing categories and explore for other understanding, prior to embracing the emergent categories, sorting them into thematic units and using the themes to combine my descriptive report. Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers search for patterns by "pulling the data apart and putting them back together in some meaningful ways" (ibid.: 163). Through this strategy, I hoped to discover how employers in SMEs experience and understand new graduates. Reaching the final stage of confirmed themes involved summarising, validating, and sometimes modifying ideas before settling on the general and unique themes to form the composite summary.

4.9 Triangulation method and research rigour

Credibility and Reliability

A triangulation method was used to ensure the credibility of this study. This approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings that emerged from the unstructured interviews with participants, which is not a suitable method for generalisation. Triangulation helps to control bias and underpin theoretical justification (Chan & Ngai, 2007, Golafshani, 2003). Credibility is crucial to qualitative research to ensure participant representatives are precisely identified and represented (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Creswell (2007) suggests that various techniques can ensure effective validation for researchers who take parallel approaches. Credibility was established in my study through the adoption of a good qualitative research design. As discussed above, emails were sent to participants and I created an interactive atmosphere to help establish social rapport before the interviewing commenced. The purposeful and snowball selection of research respondents was aimed at the financial services industry in Lagos State, Nigeria, across different companies in the same sector. Shenton (2004) suggests that when similar results come from different sites, the findings may have greater credibility for the readers. Participants were told about their right to withdraw or cancel their appointments without giving a reason. The pilot study helped me to familiarise myself with the culture of SME employers, which was not known to me before the main study. Thus, participants introduced me to other human resources experts in the same industry who might be willing to participate in the study.

Discussions and resulting commentary from the research supervisory team were noted and compiled for further reflection. Discussion with the supervisory team widened the vision of the researcher as they shared their insights. These meetings also provided an avenue for the researcher

to test and interpret their developing ideas, and probing from the research team helped the researcher to recognise biases and preferences.

Member checking enabled participants to check their transcripts for any inconsistencies and to serve as an avenue for further clarification. This process helped the researcher "check my own subjectivity and ensure the trustworthiness of my findings" (Jones, 2002: 469). Findings were later communicated through thick-rich textural descriptions. The unique voice of the employer participants was at the centre of my research process, and gives future researchers an opportunity to determine the transferability of my findings to new settings (Creswell, 1998). My expectation was to fill a void in the employability field by providing a clear understanding of the meaning of graduate employability to SME employers.

4.10 Chapter summary

This chapter described my intentions in determining all the aspects of my research design. My ontological, epistemological and philosophical beliefs were stated to clearly reveal my interest in investigating meaning, which is developed through social contexts while truth is experienced from the current worldview (Moustaka, 1994). I align myself with constructivist leanings. My decision to embrace qualitative discovery, steered by a phenomenological method which provides for research concentration on the lived experiences of the employer participants, was justified. My choice of interviews was discussed as the right course for collecting data, with numerous key considerations defined as steps to ensure accuracy and validity. I created a spreadsheet that enables me to track participant information that relates to the research (Appendix G). A total of 18 SME employers in the financial sector, from different companies, took part in the research. Employers that have experienced the phenomenon were purposefully chosen from three small and medium-sized companies in the financial sector, and they referred me to other employers with similar

experience. The purposeful decisions surrounding the sample, access, subjects, and setting were listed to show the interest of the project in professional experience, and also the aims of adding to the empirical knowledge base. Participants' wellbeing and the integrity of the process directed the effort reported in this thesis. The process and procedures used to analyse the data were presented for future review and possible research duplication. Finally, this chapter presents a discussion of the approach I used to uphold both credibility and reliability, as I explore the meaning of new graduate employability from the point of view of employers' experiences. The next chapter discusses the data analysis process for this research.

Chapter 5

Analysis of findings

5.0 Data Analysis

This study explores how employers understand and experience new graduate employability in the financial setting. A gap in past studies and literature explaining this experience sparked the researcher's interest in investigating the employer's experience of the phenomenon. Studying the underpinnings of how employers experience and understand new graduate employability revealed the importance of having a clear meaning of employability. My study is designed using a qualitative framework. Phenomenological research methods guided the data collection and analysis. The results are a culmination of the employers' voices, and provide an in-depth textural and structural description of their lived experiences – textural because it gives a clear insight into what the participants' experiences are, and structural because it shows how they were experienced (Creswell, 2007). To study how employers experience and understand new graduate employability, I established my research framework grounded on two primary objectives:

A) To investigate the meaning of graduate employability to SME employers, specifically, to employers within the financial service industry in Lagos State, Nigeria. Thereby, the study will unfold the meaning of employability in the twenty-first century based on employers' experiences' in Nigeria, and contribute to this field more widely

B) To identify those factors that make graduates employable, and/or the attributes/skills that employers value most in their graduates that have contributed to the success of their business sector

Chapter 5 presents findings from the data collected through interviews with a total sample of 18 involved employers, selected from five small and medium-sized enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. The interview protocol gave a room for a rich representation of how employers experience and understand the employability of new graduates. A careful analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed me to identify words and experience patterns which built up to the emergence of themes (Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). After reading each transcribed interview multiple times, I commenced phenomenological reduction by allocating units of meaning. This was accomplished by noting patterns in the ways that employer participants described experiencing and understanding the graduates they had encountered. I then clustered the meanings to support theme formation. Ultimately, *numerous* clustered meanings were established from this effort, which later led to the emergence of eleven themes.

5.1 Participant summary

The results for my phenomenological study come from data collected from eighteen face-to-face in-depth interviews with employers from five financial SMEs in three local government areas in Lagos State, Nigeria. Criterion sampling helped to focus on my study population and increased the probability of reaching employers who had experience of interaction with a graduates. Strategically, I included participant employers who had had an opportunity to interview new graduates or someone who had graduated less than five years ago, as well as employers who had working interactions with new graduate from their first day onwards. The participants were experts in their field with years of experience; fourteen of the participants were branch managers, marketing manager or zonal coordinators, while four were fund transfer officers. The sample was well represented, and it involved employers with a diverse range of experiences. The selected frequency data and participant demographics are presented below.

	Variables		N
	Acedemic class	First degree	6
		Masters degree	8
		Chartered accountant	3
	Position	Branch manager	7
		Marketing manager	4
		Fund transfer officer	2
		Zonal Coordinator	4
	Years of experience	5-10 years	7
		10 and above	11
	Organisational type	small and medium sized	18

Table 5.0 Participant Data Frequency

5.2 Participant narratives

Qualitative enquiry allowed me to engage with these involved experts in their field as I investigated how they experience and understand new graduate employability. The following descriptions are summarised and designed to enable readers to glimpse of the essence of their stories. One of the questions I asked was for employers to take me through the first time they engaged with a graduate, and to describe their experiences of working with the graduate from then on. Their responses and each participant description below offer actual voices.

5.2.1 Mrs. Aji: The experience of graduates for Aji related to when a graduate was to be interviewed. She shared:

"So I got to meet her on a personal level and I asked what are her expectations from the job. She was a lot bolder than when I started work and she is more outspoken with the clarity of what she wanted from the job."

"She enticed me because she seems to have an idea of where she wants to be in the next two to three years, and she was able to discuss it realistically. So it was not like when we joined the job, blindly thinking everything will be fine."

"She has an idea of how things should work, and it was actually an opportunity for me to get feedback on how we can improve. She does not want so much control, set a time for her and allow her to deliver the result. You cannot supervise her the way I was supervised, when there were so many rules, because too many rules destroy people's ideas.*"*

"She had a plan for her future, what she wanted to achieve next on a personal level and on a professional level. She came out to me like that, she is a lot more forward."

"From day one she was able to throw us some questions that I have to really address and explain. To some extent modify the way we do things; she was actually a mirror for me. She was better than when I started, I was not able to communicate my ideas like her."

"When she came in she was like a breath of fresh air, she queries why we need to do this, and actually technology has made that process irrelevant, but we were in the system, we don't reflect as much. She made us reflect in her short time with us."

"She has a routine, she wants to resume at a certain time and leave work at a certain time. She struggles with punctuality. She told us what people think of our poor customer service and how competitors have changed to better their services."

5.2.2 Mr. Chuk's experience of graduate employability started the first day he met Lilly, a new graduate at the interview centre:

"She turned in late on and it was like a normal thing to her, as she saw nothing wrong. Although she was lucky that it was not her turn to be interviewed."

"Issues of punctuality at work are very important because you need to come in on time to get briefs from your superiors. She dressed as if she was going to a party and that makes her appear as if she was not ready for official life."

She was lucky enough to be employed, but "she was not showing enough interest in what she needs to know", and instead "she has the expectation to be told before she will complete a task."

She was talking around the office so that she could understand the work and her colleagues, but she kept to herself for months.

After a while he got better because she was more familiar with the office, and "she started volunteering to perform responsibility like typing and making copies for the office, and a picture of her right now is the ideal staff in less than three months."

The quality of her ideas is very impressive in terms of the way she thinks ahead pertaining task to be done and she has been promoted based on her surpassing her target within two years. Currently "she is better at coming early and communicating easily with clients and colleagues. Even her clients had a lot to say about her in terms of her relationship with them."

5.2.3 Mr. Daily is an employer with twelve years' experience in the business sector. Mr. Daily's experience of graduate employability is with a cousin of a colleague who studied Estate Management in a higher institution but was willing to search for a job in the financial sector.

"Since he desires a change and he's also willing to test a discipline different from his study, he should be given the opportunity." He studied Estate Management in the higher institution, but "[h]e wrote on the CV that he is open to employment in other industries and he is adaptive to any situation and ready for a change." He was positive about getting the job since he said he was open to challenges, because ordinarily one would say that since he studied estate management he should stay within his area of study. "This guy was very positive and knew what he wanted."

This graduate was from the eastern part of Nigeria. and "he showed a lot of enterprise in his assignment." He was deployed straight to sales, and "his previous experience speaks volumes about his performance. He was always curious and also hungry to perform a task owing to the fact that most of his kinsmen are known for business."

"He had business acumen and he was applying that to the assignments that were given to him. He understands the importance of profit making to a business."

"He was able to use a lot of zeal and never-say-never attitude in so many instances, and he was able to make breakthroughs around some relationships in the banking sector, as well as selling banking products to difficult customers."

"He has this 'I will go again' attitude. I have seen instances of him bringing and sharing good ideas. He always shares ideas on how to go about difficult situations, so I will say for his level and wealth of experience he stood out above his colleagues."

Daily described that the graduate adapted his course of study along with the work in instances where he was able to "view and review customer's property for collateral based on his knowledge in estate management".

"He mostly does the estimates of the worth of a customer's property and gives value to the property. So, we were able to put his experience to use in getting things done."

"Also, I remember he is the type that socialises well and hardly misses his customers and colleague's engagements when invited."

5.2.4 Mrs. Obi: "I met these graduates in 2016, they had just graduated from school and I think they both went to one of the universities in Nigeria, so they were employed. They both studied science related courses, but they are the ones with a focus."

"They swept me off my feet by telling me deep things about my organisation. Things like, our old ways of banking structure and ways of attending to customers. They have good knowledge of the industry even before joining and from someone coming from a science background."

"However, due to a lack of senior vacant posts in my branch at this time, they were employed as tellers instead of a customer service person, which of course, in my bank most tellers are not really graduates from university, and this displeased them."

"So I noticed that from time to time they kept having one excuse or another not to be at work. The guy eventually resigned, but during his stay I discovered that he did not like to be pushed to do certain jobs that he is not cut out for. He was always on his toes trying to do one thing or the other for the benefit of the industry."

"The lady stayed and later was moved to be a customer service officer and she was coping well and doing the job, but her mind was somewhere else."

"She did not want to remain at the branch level, instead she preferred to be at the head office and at the IT department. She eventually found her way there by constantly applying internally. Immediately she moved to that department she changed and worked so hard, because in that IT department they do shifts, and staying awake at night and all sorts. This lady is happier despite her busy working schedule."

5.2.5 Mr. Apo: "This graduate was brought to my office and introduced to me as a new staff. I discovered he was too naïve and not bold with his level of education."

He gives a picture of fear of the boss: "This guy's response to questions shows a real lack of confidence and boldness, that could display he was not really ready for the challenge or task ahead."

"I made him realise that I don't know everything myself so if there is any need for him to ask questions he should feel free. I remember that for the first few days, I am not sure if it was up to a week, but he was behaving like someone that is blank. There was an office where they are seated, like five or more of them, they are mostly seated with the notion of what am I supposed to be doing?"

"So, I was like, I need to give a job description each time to this guy. Mostly, I have to go and ask him for things that I need or give him a format for documents I want him to write. I monitored him by checking if it is what I wanted, and if not, asking him to go back and correct it."

"He did not complain and was happy to learn. The only thing is that he might be stuck along the line and he will ask for clarity."

"I remember I gave him and his colleague a task that involves working outside the office with a commercial bank and closing accounts that have been there for years, which was a big challenge. They all went, but actually he was the only one that came back to give a record of what was done and clearly reported. When you have staff like that it gives you room to concentrate on other things. But if you are having divided attention, you won't do much.."

"This guy has the capacity to deliver with good outcomes. Presently he has been posted out of my office because of his good ways of working. I saw his boss and I said I wanted him to be reposted, and he said no, you can take another person but not this guy."

5.2.6 Mrs. Ma: "I met this fresh graduate who was basically new and knew nothing about the banking industry. He was posted to the customer service section and he was meant to learn from his colleagues to understand how the department worked. While he was on probation and learning,

he learned very fast and was able to handle customers without problems. So I put him through the requirements to open an account."

"While I was teaching him, I expected him to make notes which he did not, so I advised him to do so because his head is not a computer."

"In no time customers were recommending his timely services. He started in December 2014, and till now he is okay and has gotten two major promotions which should have taken him six years."

"His promotion came as a result of his ability to learn, and he is trainable. He makes sure that if a complaint comes that he cannot handle he shoots it to his supervisors, and he has customer-centric behaviour where he understands that he needs to attend to his customers, which is the basic thing the bank wants – customer first. He applied that, and whenever customers come to him he believes they always should be happy and satisfied, and that behavioir led him to be promoted twice."

"He was given a very good recommendation from his supervisors. This guy does not care that his immediate supervisor was not a graduate officer. He was humble and he was able to acquire the experience needed to start his career in the industry."

5.2.7 Mrs. Bibi is an employer who has worked in the financial industry for over fifteen years. According to her experience of graduate employability, she was interested in a graduate based on "his ability to be calm and he did not try to impress us during the interview process."

"He was honest about his limited ability and decision to take on new challenges, which was a rare attribute. So, I became more interested in this graduate because he was honest about his lack of experience in the business sector but was able to communicate it."

"Interesting that this staff was a graduate then, but with few words on his CV. While he was talking I noticed he emphasised more his ability to learn new things, despite a lack of management background."

"During the last phase of the interview, I discovered that he did not just sell himself but have the capacity to deliver. I knew that because he was open about his ability and accepted that, though he has no practical working experience, he was positive that he can learn fast."

"This made me develop an interest in him because he admitted that he has no background in the banking sector, unlike some other people who claim to know everything just because they have gone to University."

"I discovered that he did not just sell himself but also had the capacity to deliver. I knew that because he was open about his ability and accepted that though he has no practical working experience he is willing to learn fast and take on new challenges."

"He always looks for tasks to carry out regardless of challenges. For every unclear task assigned to him he asks questions or instructions on how to go about it which makes him different from the others. He is someone that always likes to know."

"Some of the other graduates just sit and wait for the manager to push them before they come for clarifications on how to effectively do their jobs. While this particular staff is not, he carried on with his task and most times he delivers without anyone supervising him."

He is not lazy mentally and he always looks for tasks to carry out regardless of challenges. For every unclear task assigned to him he asks questions or for instructions about how to go about it, which makes him different from the others.

5.2.8 Mrs. Moo: "I have a fresh graduate who just joined us. I remember he wanted to impress us during the interview by speaking in complicated textbook language. Anyway, he pulled through and got the appointment and when he joined my team he tends to want to bring the best."

This graduate was "ready to learn but does not understand the easy way to communicate with customers."

"His supervisor called him and explained to him that these customers cannot understand the big words you are using, so next time your words should be simple and clear, and he was able to adjust immediately."

"After, one year of working with him, I can say he has turned out to be a good professional and he understands that a high network individual (HNI) should be spoken to privately and by the senior supervisors. I meant the way he now relates with customers and work colleagues in simple English, than when he just started and was trying to impress us by speaking vocabulary, is amazing."

Peter is another graduate that was brought to the branch after he received his deployment letter. He was so excited and has zeal because he has a lot of opportunities awaiting as he was redeployed from another bank and from an operations department.

He believed that having had experience in that department and with his background in selling, he would be able to surpass expectations in the marketing department. Peter is someone that is "passionate and confident, and up for competition". "He was someone that has worked for himself as an entrepreneur as this runs in his family, as he came from the eastern part of `Nigeria and they are known for business. He refused to go straight into his own business and decided he was going to work for an employer."

"After two years of working very hard and meeting targets by getting more customers, his frustration began as he had not been recognised despite his hard work. But that did not discourage him in any way, he carried on with his job. This guy has good customer relationships, he understands his customers and is ready to please them. Peter's time with me gives me a lot of rest and time flexibility, because I was sure that someone is doing a good job and he was able to put his past experience to use for us."

5.2.9 Mr. Bob: "I met this graduate in 2009 and his name is Paul. He presently works in the treasury arm of the Bank, he had just graduated from the university when I met him. Though he was not reporting to directly to me at first, he came to me and said, boss, I want to be your boy."

"I was so surprised by his courage. So, we became friends and I began to train him, pushed him a lot while he was with me."

"Most times I will ask him to go and study people in a department where he does not know anyone, and he does not complain, knowing that he was building his career."

"I remember he never complained while I was pushing him to do difficult things, he endured as he discovered he could not opt out of this uneasy friendship. I encouraged him to go, and he started working for other people in a different department, and I provided direction for him for six months but he did not really settle. But he listened without giving up."

"Then a big project happened that required me to travel all over Africa. I could not do everything by myself and I needed to delegate. So I trained him and sent him to travel to places for my department. He did a good job and received an award for outstanding performance for my bank among other named banks."

"About a year later some of the directors spotted him and moved him to another department, and within the last nine years he has gotten about six promotions."

5.2.10. Miss Loly: "I met this graduate in 2010 during the interview process. On that day I remember a lot of them came in and we had like a classroom section with all of them. During the section I for someone to stand and tell me the most important day of his or her life. It was funny that at first no one show any sign of saying a word – perhaps they were thinking what should I say. Suddenly, this young lady just broke the silence and said, 'The most important day of my life will

be the day I will get married to my fiancé.' Everyone was interested in what she had to say, and she went on describing her imaginary day."

Similarly, "during the training, some of them were pretending to understand the whole process and the computer package they were meant to use. This particular lady, Ela, was very funny and was the only one that stood up and said to the IT trainer, 'I don't understand this thing very well', and the whole class started laughing with the way she said it. Ela came again to us and said, 'sir, I hate to be over confident and that is why I ask questions from people who know better'. Her statement was very insightful and I was interested in her at that stage based on her belief that she can do everything by herself while she can get help."

"I remember Ela asked as many questions as she could and cares to look for help. She came to me one day and said, 'sir, this file room needs rearrangement and a modern way of filing'. I was like, 'and who is going to sort that out considering CBN targets will need to be met?' Then she volunteered to take on the challenge with some other staff. She gave her time to the extent that she said, 'I will come in on Saturdays'. I made her realise that we do not have money to pay for weekend banking at the moment, but she said to me, 'it is my contribution to the branch and myself'."

"She also gave us an idea on how to rearrange the file room, and that was a task that ordinarily we would outsource for someone to carry out at a price. Her idea for sorting the store and file was used, and I was proud that it worked."

"We did not have to spend money and we all worked together as a team. She got a recommendation for surpassing her target and presently she is a big woman in this industry."

5.2.11 Mrs. Gory: "I met Tony 10 years ago during his interview. He came on time and was ready to answer questions cheerfully. Let me say he came before the office was meant to open. An

interesting thing that I remember about him was that he was ready to learn, I asked some questions that he was unable to give a straight answer. He did not try to pretend as if he knew the answers; rather he made a note and said I will look up for the future."

"I was impressed by his patience and willingness to learn. So, he got the job on that account."

"I was interested in him because of his past business ideas. As a student, he was trading and this helped him to understand the importance of getting a realistic result. He understands the importance of customers and profit to business and what it takes to achieve that."

"After weeks of training I assigned his first task, and as a medium business, we can't afford to make our staff idle. So, his task was to chase up customers that collect credit facilities and have not paid as required. It was a stressful job and much was not expected of him."

"He took on the task and was chasing them up politely. At first I was like, this guy cannot do this job and maybe we will have to substitute him. Surprisingly, there was a customer whose loan was on a bad debt list, but before I knew it he approached us and said, 'I wish to settle my debt; your staff Mr. Tony has structured an easy way for me to pay up without further defaults'."

"Then, I was amazed, because we had made several moves with this customer and it did not work. But this new graduate came and recovered our losses. In general, this customer describes Tony as a polite young man."

5.2.12 Mr. Jonny: "Dolly came to my office for an interview, she graduated two years ago and had just a year of work experience with a similar industry. She was to be interviewed as an expert level officer, so she arrived very early, such that she was in the office before me, the interviewer. I was told by security that someone had been waiting since early in the morning for me; I was impressed when I realised she was the one. So I asked her to keep on waiting, and to be honest I kept her waiting for more than five hours before I could ask her to come in. Though that was an

intentional act on my part. When she finally came in, she was so calm and did not show any sign of frustration."

"I asked her to sit and asked her how she got here. Then we started chatting and we moved from one topic to another. I noticed that she was relaxed and was able to hold a conversation with simple language. She did not try to show off by speaking or saying what could disrupt our conversation. She got the job based on her ability to hold a meaningful conversation, and that was something I was looking for, because she will be working as a marketer for my branch."

"I like her for her zeal, she put her past experience to work with us. The first day this graduate came she said, 'I learn very fast and will deliver the best after learning on their job'. While coming to join us, she believed that because of her prior experience in banking and business world, she will do more."

"She started officially weeks after that, and she did not stop her habit of coming early to work or for an appointment. The reports I get about her after a year are still very good, and that she communicates with customers based on their level. She understands customers' language and that has gotten us a lot of credit facilities, which means more profit for us."

Most times when employees don't perform as a team, they receive unpleasant feedback from the management. They sometimes revolt, but Dolly did not; instead "she kept looking out for customers and ensuring customers paid back their loans. It all worked out for her at the end."

5.2.13 Mr. Babe: "I remember the interview day with this graduate and lots of others, she seemed unsure of the answers to my questions while I was asking, but she never let that discourage her. She still told me how she would contribute more to the organisation when she finally started to work with me. I was amazed considering her performance, and she got the job based on her hopeful ability which others lack."

"In her first month at work she walked up to me and said, 'sir, I would like to suggest something that will make our work very easy'. She gave me a vital idea, and it was something that I had never thought of, but was very simple and costs less. That single idea brought about a positive change in our customer services."

"She encouraged us to ignore head office rules and try to do something to challenge our competitors within our locality. That worked for us, and my Branch received an award for it."

"She told me what people think of our old ways of doing things and what our competitors have changed to better their services."

"She got promoted within a short time based her performance, but left us because she was not satisfied with her salary. I remember she mentioned that some big financial institutions pay more than we do; I encouraged her to stay and said that her pay will be reviewed. She did not listen, and now she would have been getting almost double her salary."

5.2.14. Mr. Matty: "He successfully passed the entrance exam and I met him on his first day of work. This graduate was someone that is realistic; I was asking him questions during the interview about where he will be in the next five years. He said to me, 'I plan to have moved to a bigger organisation if at that time I have not been promoted to a more senior level office in this sector."

"I remember he was the one that liked to ask questions. After few months, he was so concerned with the way we sit and wait for students to come in, while our competitors have more business. So, I explained the situation to him; we could not do much as this is a university environment and our branch is so small. We are just waiting on the head office to close us down, which is sad."

"He was always ready to help most times; he would go round the campus speaking to students about our account packages even without us asking him to do it. As a result of his efforts this

branch was saved from closing down, and today we are one of the most productive branches around this area."

"I also remember that he shared the secret behind that transformation he brought to us, and he said, 'I approach those students by speaking the language they understand, which is hanging out with a few of them. A secret from my lecturer'."

5.2.15. Mrs Apart: "This graduate was deployed to my office as a trainer, she arrived at the office very calm and cautious on her first day. I took her into my office and started putting her through process and procedures of the organisation, as well as her job functions. I discovered she was eager to know everything in the same day and very curious, although most of her questions got us thinking about how we can improve our services."

"She was very attentive even when I was telling common sense things, she still was willing to learn. She was cautious in the sense that she was respectful and careful not to make mistakes in what she is learning."

"At one point, I was like, 'you might not grasp everything quickly but you can always come back and ask'. Eventually I realised that she was a fast learner to the extent that there was a particular time that I took heed. She held the branch for me and there were no issues on the table while I was away in her six months of joining us, which made her outstanding. Unlike the others, whereby you will be scared to leave your seat for them in one hour."

"This lady was actually teachable and had good professional etiquette. She easily grasped things when you taught her and took to every correction, and by the time she was ready to leave my office to go to another department she was already a guru on the job function, which is commendable."

"I remember her because she was here to take on new experiences and she did not allow the fact that she was a banker to get into her head. So much so that she was able to learn from those she met on the job."

What paved way for this young graduate was simply the fact that she was "respectful, cautious and being able to learn from anyone". "In less than three years since she joined us, she was promoted and transferred to another department."

This lady in question is also friendly to both customers and colleagues. "I cannot recall any customer complaint about her attitude or business relationship with them, unlike some other young graduates that think they are doing customers. The only shortcoming I noticed about her is that she expresses her emotions and stress by crying."

5.2.16. Mr Tom: "I interviewed Miss More, and out of the participants that came for the interview she was preferred not because her discipline is in management. Actually she had a BEd, but I noticed she was not concerned about her present salary or the size of our organisation at the time. Unlike others, she just wanted to learn and start her career."

"This particular day we had so many clients in the banking hall; as a medium sector we have one branch in each local government area. The tellers were so busy and so also some of the senior staff, but this lady just got up from her seat, pulled up a table beside the tellers, and started attending to customers."

"I was amazed because no one among my senior team ever did that. Although she kept to herself most of the time, when it came to performing tasks she ignored her post and helped. Most of our clients noticed her effort at the end of month when we usually have the branch packed."

"She was recommended for promotion by one of the influential clients of my branch; she did not know that this man knows the Managing Director, and as a result her promotion was rapid. Today she is one of our managers."

"I remember when she just joined us, she listened to every instructions since, and she acts on them without me reminding her."

"Although she was not someone very friendly even to her colleagues, I kind of encouraged her to try and associate more within the team. She was someone that is always happy to do her job."

5.2.17. Mrs Ope: "I met this guy on the interview day in November 2018 when we were recruiting for credit administrators in my department. He came in well dressed and on time. But during the interview he was too conscious of the remuneration and did not show concern for the task ahead. He made it obvious to us that he wants to know what his reward will be before his total commitment. We have a policy on remuneration, so he got a print of what his level would be per annum, and we asked him to think about it and get back in two days if he is interested."

"After he left he did a review of his performance and discovered he was quite good for the job. He was very convincing with his speech and was able to hold conversation smoothly."

"He was very confident in his ability to deliver on his job provided the salary was good. So he got back to us next day with a change of attitude toward rewards. He accepted the offer and he was posted out to my branch."

"This guy does his job and comes to work early. He has helped us to develop our website and most of the networking jobs, but he is really not interested in helping until he knows something is in it for him. He is still with us but I know he might resign if his salary is not increased."

5.3 Emerging Themes

The engagement with data in a meaningful way was an effort well rewarded. Following Richards

(2009), striving for quality by recording data happened simultaneously throughout the collection and analysis process, focusing on truth, context application, depth of description, usefulness, and an instinctive link with the data. Saldana (2013) presents a comprehensive description of the coding processes utilised in a qualitative study. This served as a useful tool as I mapped out my plan for analysis. In addition, my analysis is grounded on an ontological foundation with interest in the lived experiences of the study participants, and therefore the study adopted the method developed by Saldana (2013) for the initial coding. This study coded for emotion, value coding, and narrative coding. Each coding method brings a different look at the data. Emotion coding takes the researcher back to the notes made after observing the reactions of participants during the interviews. Value coding helps the researcher to consider and formulate the words used for gathering the data.

The essence of narrative coding gives me the privilege to step back and review each participant's story in order to completely capture the essence of the data. This method means I am immersed in the data, by learning the process of clustering, seeking feedback from others, revisiting the data constantly, revising the clustering, and going through the process several times (Richards, 2009). Memoing helped me to make sense of the input from the present research and focused the study on the coding process. A two-stage coding cycle was used in this study as proposed by Saldana (2013), using pattern coding and focused coding. Thus, pattern coding makes the researcher reexamine the original codes to find patterns and commonalities, which results in data labels. This study later vetted the developing data composition through focused coding and identified the "significance and frequency" of the codes. The researcher finally renegotiates the clusters into a more succinct illustration of the data that captures the new graduate employers' experiences and understanding of the topic at hand.

5.3 Data coding

This study identified 167 of statements through the process of analysis that are important to the study. The researcher repetitively reviewed the initial groupings of meaning via the participants' complete responses during the interviews. These groupings were organized into 11 coded clusters as presented in the table below

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Hungry for performance	2	0	5	2	3	1	1	5	1	0	0	0	1	2	5	5	0	5
Determination	8	1	1	0	3	4	2	2	2	0	0	3	2	0	6	3	1	4
Intellectually Curious	1	3	1	6	0	0	0	3	3	4	0	0	0	5	6	0	2	7
Punctuality and Professional appearance	0	10	0	5	0	0	0	0	3	0	9	0	0	0	2	7	4	5
Business Acumen	0	0	9	2	4	0	0	2	3	0	6	4	7	6	0	0	0	3
Creative ideas	2	3	4	5	2	0	2	0	7	6	0	0	5	6	0	4	3	1
Simple and clear language	0	0	1	0	3	0	2	6	0	0	0	7	4	0	0	0	1	5
Optimism and honesty	0	1	8	0	0	0	1	1	9	0	0	0	2	6	0	0	3	0
Boldness and Clear Career Path	2	0	0	4	4	2	0	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Coachable attitude	1	1	0	3	5	4	7	2	5	0	3	0	0	0	9	2	2	4
Informative	6	0	1	0	3	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	1
	Participants coded clusters																	

Table 5.1 Clustered response frequency table

As described previously, the data was further refined through many cycles of first and second coding. Changes were experienced in the developing code clusters as data was polished through a different strategic lens. The primary 20 coded clusters were further negotiated into 11 themes, each representing a developing conglomerate of meaning. This findings is significant as it helped the researcher to cross-reference whole meanings with the emerging clusters and captures how employers experience new graduate employability from the lived experiences.

5.5 Themes

Theme 1: hungry for performance

The first theme, 'hungry for performance', shows the significance that employers placed on this meaning of new graduate employability from their experiences. The essence of this theme relates to how SME employers experience new graduates. Also, it captures how employers understand their employed new graduates. Some experiences described an employable graduate as a graduate that always seeks to carry out a task regardless of how difficult it is. They mostly have a mind frame to deliver their best, since this it their first professional job, and they sometimes have a better work ethic and are motivated to perform better. According to one participant's experience of the meaning of new graduate employability, she offered that:

> "*For every job you have a description and this particular staff "graduate" based on my experience with him, most time he comes to me and asks me for what he can do. While some of the other graduates just sit and wait for the manager to push them before they can come for clarifications on how to effectively do their jobs. While this particular staff is not, he carried on with his task and most times he delivers without anyone supervising him.*"
> (Participant 7)

Also, there was a reflection that graduates seek to perform tasks within an organisation without prompts from anyone. Some of the participants shared that graduates are passionate in what they do and understand the need to keep their first job. They are said to be accountable and can take ownership in service delivery. This is highly valued by the employers, and such it is important when considering new graduate employability. Mr. Daily also offered:

"He showed a lot of enterprise in his assignment. He had this curiosity around him and he was also hungry for the fact that most of his kinsmen are known for business. So he was able to use a lot of zeal and never say never attitude in so many instances and he was able to have breakthroughs around some relationships in the banking sector. He was in the forefront of not taking no for an answer. In my engagement with him I discovered he had this I will go again attitude." (Participant 3)

Other experiences describe the level of graduate curiosity and their ability to use initiative to complete assignments based on a realistic view of what the job is like. Also, there was a perception that once a graduate is interested in their job, they will always seek more tasks and challenges. Participants also described their experience relating to graduates' duties to carry on the family reputation, which was related to their enthusiasm to perform better in their jobs. This motivates them to work hard and gives them the need to surpass expectations. Therefore, this will lead them to get involved in resolving work challenges. Similarly, other participants recollected that:

"She does not want so much control, set a time for her and allow her to deliver the result, you cannot supervise her the way I was supervised when there were so many rules because too many rules destroy people's ideas." (Participant 1)

"When you have a staff member that can work without you supervising him all the time, it gives you room to concentrate on other things. But if you have divided attention, you won't do much. This guy has the capacity to deliver with good outcomes." (Participant 5)

"He was always ready to help most times; he will go around the campus speaking to student about our account packages even without us asking him to do it." (Participant 14)

"*Eventually I realised that she was a fast learner to the extent that there was a particular time that I took heed. She held the branch for me and there were no issues on the table while I was away in her six months of joining us, which made her outstanding. Unlike the others, where you will be scared to leave your seat for them in one hour.*" (Participant 15)

Participants placed emphasis on new graduates' continuous commitment, which they demonstrated by seeking out tasks without anyone prompting them to do so. A further description of graduate employability was found in graduates' ability to do the right thing without strict supervision, and their ability to show some level of confidence while they performed a task. Similarly, participants reflected that graduates became better after a while and were able to perform with obvious outcomes. This theme established that employers appreciate graduates who are task focussed and can work with little prompting.

Theme 2: Determination

This theme emerged as participants discussed their lived experience of how they worked with new graduates. The voices of individual employers define this theme, with ideas emerging from the data analysis including new graduates' determination and passion. Participants shared that passion plays an important role in who and where graduates aspire to be. Thus, it can lead to graduate satisfaction with their job. An example was shared in the description, and participants also expressed this as an important factor relating to graduate employability. Obi captured this theme when she expresses that:

"*During his stay I discovered that he does not like to be push to do certain jobs that he is not cut out for. He is always on his toes trying to do one thing or the other for the benefit of the industry. The lady was placed as a customer service officer and she was coping well*

and doing the job with passion, but her mind was elsewhere. As in, she did not want to remain at the branch level instead she preferred to be at the head office.

"*Thankfully, there was a vacancy and she moved down, so immediately she moved to the new department the lady worked so hard even though they do shifts, and staying awake at night and all sorts. But she loved it so much, and that she actually loves to do. This lady is happier despite her busy working schedule.*" (Participant 4)

"*After two years of working very hard and meeting targets by getting more customers, his frustration began as he had not been recognised despite his hard work. That did not discourage him in any way, he carried on with his job.*" (Participant 8)

Similarities were observed as participants describe their experience of what they believed was important in their new graduates. Employers reported that it was important for their new graduates to display passion in what they did, as well as interest. The manner in which participants described determination and passion in graduates suggests that employers believe that graduates that are passionate and determined will stop at nothing to get to where they desire. Jonny offered that:

"*Most times when they don't perform as a team, they receive lots of unpleasant words from the management. They sometimes revolt in the office and some of them just give up on the job, but DD did not. Instead, he kept looking out for customers and ensuring customers paid back their loans. It all worked out for him at the end.*" (Participant 12)

Bob describes determination to succeed:

"*I met this graduate in 2009, his name is Paul and he worked in the treasury bill department of the industry. He came to me and said, 'boss, I want to be your boy', having heard about*

me from his colleagues, and I was so surprised to see that level of confidence and determination for success in a young person. I remember he never complained while I was pushing him to do difficult things, he endured as he discovered he could not opt out of this uneasy friendship." (Participant 9)

Bob's reflection highlighted the experience that a graduate's display of determination, backed with passion, will pave the way for them, and also that graduates will benefit from listening to pushes from superiors if they do not give up. This reflects the perception that graduates are not discouraged despite the challenges they encounter on their way to success.

Mr. Obi similarly shared:

"*I met this graduate in 2016, the guy had just graduated from school and I think he went to one of the universities in Nigeria, so he was employed. He read a science-related course, and after he came through banking school he was assigned to my business office. Due to a lack of vacancies then he was given a post (as a teller officer) lower than his qualification. So, that displeased him and it reflected on his job.*" (Participant 4)

"*She is good at attending to customers, her interpersonal relationship is good by winning clients, and she understands what it means to be a professional. The quality of her ideas is very impressive in terms of the way she thinks ahead pertaining to tasks to be done. Up to simple tasks like typing for the office and photocopies of the needed document of the day.*" (Participant 2)

The majority of the respondents discussed the quality of not giving up among new graduates, reporting that this contributed to their work environment and was very important to employability.

Participants experienced graduates' determination, reflecting on what they did and that it led to their success at work. A graduate's ability to persevere whatever comes their way and patiently hope for change is important. Mr. Jonny pointed spoke to the benefit of perseverance and offered that:

> "*I asked her to keep on waiting and to be honest I kept her waiting for more than 5 hours before I asked her to come in. Though that was an intentional act on my part. When she finally came in, she was so calm and did not show any sign of frustration.*" (Participant 12)

Mrs. Babe shared:

> "*I remember she mentioned that some big financial institution pays more than we do, I encouraged her to stay and said that her pay will be reviewed. She did not listen, and now she would have been getting almost double of her salary.*" (Participant 13)

Theme 3: Intellectually Curious

Participants described experiencing graduate's ability to be open-minded and ask meaningful questions were possible as an important virtue. Employers appreciates graduate's ability to ask a necessary question that can help them contribute to their work environment. Reflections of graduate's desire to learn more about their new environment. Mrs. Bibi recollected that such virtue is rare in new graduates. She shared:

> "*He always looks for tasks to carry out regardless of the challenges. For every unclear task assigned to him he asks questions or instructions on how to go about it, which makes him different from the others. He is someone that always like to know.*" (Participant 7)

"*I noticed freedom was very important to her for her success. She asked loads of questions, and from day one she was able to throw us some questions that I had to really address and explain. To some extent adjusting the way we do things.*" (Participant 1)

Most of the participants reflected that graduates need freedom to ask sensible questions, which might result in ideas to help solve existing problems. Participants' commentary often centred on graduates' confidence to question organisational strategies and approaches, and seek help where necessary without trying to be dependent. Other experiences described graduates' assessment of information by asking questions, which gave them room to allow them to spot business challenges and find ways to resolve them. Mr. Matty shared:

"*After he resumed work, he was so concerned with the way we sit and wait for students (customers) to come in, while our competitors have more business. So, I explained the situation to him, we could not do much as this is a university environment and our branch is so small. We were just waiting on the head office to close us down, which is sad. I remember after a while, he asked permission to go out into the University and bring customers. I allowed him to try, and before we knew it, we were having more students coming in to pay their tuition fees, and transact business with us.*" (Participant 14)

"*I discovered she was eager to know everything on the same day, and very curious. She was very attentive even when I was telling common sense things, she still was willing to learn.*" (Participant 15)

Miss Lola offered:

"*Ela came again to us and said, 'Sir, I hate to be overconfident and that is why I ask questions from people who know better'. Her statement was very insightful and I was interested in her at that stage based on her belief that she could not do everything by herself while she could get help.*" (Participant 10)

All the participants reflected that graduates' boldness in asking for help would not only contribute to their organisation but would also promote an environment for others to emulate. Also, these graduates are more committed to their organisations. Participants described graduates as an instrument for change when they are allowed to be curious and speak out, as this gives them the desire to contribute their time.

Theme 4: Time and appearance conscious

Participants described an inability to welcome change that goes with time-keeping, and dressing to match the occasion. Some of the participants understood that graduates find it difficult to embrace this change which is important to their career. They might struggle with leaving their university lifestyle or adjusting quickly to their new world. Chuks reflected:

"*I met this graduate on her first day at work after she got her employment letter. The first thing I noticed about her was that she turned in late on her first day, and it was like a normal thing to her as she saw nothing wrong. Issues of punctuality at work are very important because you need to come in on time to get briefs from your superiors.*

"*She dressed as if she was going to a party and that made her appear as if she was not ready for official life.*" (Participant 2)

Meanwhile, Aji shared a similar experience:

> "*She has a routine and like other new graduates joining the industry, they want to resume at a certain time and leave work at a certain time. She struggles with punctuality.*" (Participant 1)

Mrs. Ope offered:

> "*This guy does his job and comes to work early.*" (Participant 17)

Gory and Mrs. Ope experienced quite the opposite, thus he "*came on time and was ready to answer questions cheerfully*" (Participant 11). These participants described impressions evolving from punctuality, therefore they described that graduates changed their flexibility to take punctuality for granted. Also, participants reflected on the importance of dressing professionally in a graduate career.

Theme 5: Business acumen

Many of the employers described that certain people were inspired based on past achievements and experiences. The experience they had acquired in the past gave them a conscious awareness, and they could relate this to future opportunities. Participant Daily reflected that knowledge acquired through courses was useful along the line, regardless of the graduate's academic background or the industry. Participants reflected on their experience of graduate keenness to understand their new world, owing to them wishing to preserve their family reputation and their university experiences. He shared his experience:

> "*He had business acumen and he was applying that to the assignment that was given to him. Also, because of his previous business background that runs in his family. He actually adapted, and his course of study was put to use in some instances along the work, like times*

where we have to give credit to customers that require collateral for such. He was able to view and review customers' property for collateral based on his knowledge of estate management, He mostly does the estimates of the worth of customers' property and gives value to the property. So, we were able to put his experience to use in getting things done."
(Participant 3)

Gory shared that his interest in a particular graduate came as a result of his past experience:

"*I was interested in him because of his past business ideas. As a student, he was trading and this helped him to understand the importance of getting a realistic result.*" (Participant 11)

Most of the participants described an understanding that graduates with business acumen understood the essence of positive outcomes, and that graduates are confident when they have any sort of experience to share with their employers. Graduates always await opportunities to provide solutions to problems and want to do better among their colleagues, a quality which they gained from being entrepreneurs before graduating. Jonny reflected on reliance on past experience as a guarantee for future career success:

"*He believed his experience from that department and his background in selling will help him surpass expectations in the marketing department.*" (Participant 12)

Moo shared:

"*He was someone that has worked for himself as an entrepreneur as this runs in his family, he came from the eastern part of Nigeria and they know business. But he refused to go*

straight into his own business, and decided he was going to work for an employer.

(Participant 8)

Johnny offered:

"*What attracted her to me was her zeal, she put her past experience to work with us. The first day this graduate came she said, 'I learn very fast and will deliver the best after learning on the job', while she was coming to join us she believed that because of her prior experience in banking and business word, she will do more.*" (Participant 12)

"*I approach those students by speaking the language they understand, which is hanging out with few of them. A secret from my lecturer.*" (Participant 14)

Graduates' enthusiasm and past experience are important to participants if the graduate is able to confidently put them to use.

Theme 6: Creative contribution

Participants described experiencing graduates' ability to come up with ideas that promote change within an organisation. Participants also recalled that graduate boldness was backed up with outstanding results, and that they modified obsolete ways of doing things within the organisation. Most of the participants expressed that graduates conceived ideas to provide solutions to future challenges within the business sector. The majority of the participants discussed their experience by describing graduates' abilities to borrow from existing business ideas and then modify them to resolve business challenges:

"*I have seen instances of him bringing and sharing good ideas. Also, he always shares ideas on how to go about difficult situations. So I will say, for his level and wealth of*

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experience he stood out above his colleagues. A difficult situation like how to conquer difficult customers with a simple step of creating a friendly relationship first before moving on to business. (Participant 3)

Aji reflected on an impactful memory and offered:

"*She has an idea of how things should work, and from day one she was able to throw us some questions that I had to really address and explain. To some extent modifying the way we do things, she was actually a mirror for me. She was better than when I started, I was not able to communicate my ideas like her*." (Participant 1)

Most of the participants expressed the value they placed on graduates' efforts to work with others by identifying existing ideas and working to modify them, incorporating solutions to identified problems. Also, participants shared that graduates should be able to communicate their vital ideas so that they are listened to. Aji reflected on his experience that graduates are a source of reflection for an organisation if they are listened to, and also that this graduate was changing the work atmosphere with her ideas, and was able to make the business sector reflect on ways of doing things:

"*But when she came in she was like a breath of fresh air, she queried why we need to do this, and actually technology had made that process irrelevant, but we, being in the system, we don't reflect as much as we need to reflect. But she made us reflect in her short time with us*. (Participant 1)

Similarly, other participants shared that new graduates with significant ideas can create organisational change and as such, modify the ways things are done positively on their arrival into

the industry. Providing additional support for the effect that graduates can have on an organisation, one of the participants suggested that interacting with and being attentive to graduates can impact the organisation more.:

> "*She came to me one day and said, 'Sir, this file room needs rearrangement and a modern way of filing.' I was like, 'and who is going to sort that out considering the CBN target will need to be met?' Then she volunteers to take on the challenge with some other staff. She gave her time to the extent that she said, 'I will come in on Saturdays.' I made her aware that we do not have money to pay for weekend banking at the moment, but she said to me, 'it's my contribution to the branch and myself.' She also gave us an idea on how to re-arrange the file room, and that was a task that ordinarily we would outsource someone to carry out for a price. Her idea for sorting the store and file was used, and I was proud that it worked. We did not have to spend money and we all worked together as a team.*"
> (Participant 10)

Most of the interviewed employers described that graduates prefer flexibility in organisational rules. Thus, they have the confidence to challenge fixed rules that limit their ideas. There was a reflection that organisations grow through recognising graduates' ideas, and business performance is enhanced with a positive result. Therefore, organisations want a measurable performance from their graduates. Mrs. Babe shared the inspiration that evolved from her relationship with a graduate:

> "*On his first day at work, he walked up to me and said, 'Sir, I would like to suggest something that will make our work very easy.' He gave me a vital idea and it was something*

that I had never thought of, but was very simple and costs less. That singular idea brought

about a positive change in our customer services.

"*Historically banking is all about rules, the certain ways you must do things and their rules*

that guide your day-to-day activities. Meanwhile, he was able to question these rules and

point to some that are no longer relevant today." (Participant 13)

Mr. Matty reflected that continued commitment and positive results are important to graduate

employability. Therefore, an organisation wants measurable performance from their graduates:

"*He was always ready to help most times; he would go round the campus speaking to*

students about our account packages even without us asking him to do it. As a result of his

effort this branch was saved from closing down and today we are one of the most productive

branches around this area. (Participant 14)

Mrs. Babe also shared: "*That singular idea brought about a positive change in our customer*

services" (Participant 13). Therefore, the majority of the interviewed employers reflected on

graduate constructive ability as a necessary factor in organisational change. Mr. Matty shared:

"*I also remember that he shared the secret behind that transformation he brought to us,*

and he said, 'I approach those students by speaking the language they understand, which

is hanging out with a few of them." (Participant 14)

" *She gave me a vital idea and it was something that I had never thought of, but was very*

simple and costs less. (Participant 13)

"*The tellers were so busy and also some of the senior staff, but this lady just got up from her seat and created a table beside the tellers, and started attending to customers. I was amazed because that was outstanding, as no one among my senior team ever did that*." (Participant 16)

Theme 7: Coachable

Participants reported their experience that new graduates should be willing to learn on the job from colleagues' experiences, rather than matching up their qualifications against their colleagues. They should be willing and happy to learn so that they can better their performance without giving up. Participants reflect that graduates should be happy to learn from colleagues regardless of their trainer's position. Bob shared:

"*I remember he never complained while I was pushing to do difficult things, he endured as he discovered he could not opt out of this uneasy friendship.*" (Participant 9)

Bob further shared:

"*I encouraged him to go and he started working for other people in a different department, and I provided direction for him for six months, but he did not really get settled. But he listened without giving up.*" (Participant 9)

A reflection of graduates' abilities to acquire necessary experience through learning from others was important, and Participant Ma expressed:

"*He also makes sure that, if a complaint comes that he cannot handle, he always shoots it to his supervisors, and he had customer-centric behaviour where he understands that he needs to attend to his customer, which is the basic thing the bank wants – customer first.*

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This guy does not care that his immediate supervisor was not a graduate officer. He was humble and he was able to learn the experience needed to start his career in the industry."
(Participant 6)

Participants reflected on the experience that graduates should be independent and imaginative when completing a task. This will help them to add value to their organisation, and learning on the job will become easy. Furthermore, some participants shared that graduates are ready to do what it takes to improve and grow in their career. In so doing, they do not pay attention to their coach's academic status but rather their experience. Participants shared:

"*So, the other graduate came along and I had to put him through the requirements to open an account. While I was teaching him I expected him to make notes which he did not, so I advised him to do so because his head is not a computer, and that is how I myself learned from my superior.*" (Participant 6)

"*I had to go and ask him for things that I needed or give him a format of the document I wanted him to write, and I also had to monitor it by checking if it was what I wanted, and if not ask him to go back and correct it. He did not complain and he was happy to learn.*" (Participant 5)

"*I asked some questions that he was unable to give a straight answer to. He did not try to pretend as if he knew the answers; rather, he made a note and said I will look it up for the future. I was impressed by his patience and willingness to learn. So, he got the job on that account.*" (Participant 11)

"*This lady was actually teachable. She took to every correction, and at the time she was to leave my office to another department she was already a guru on the job function, which is commendable.*" (Participant 15)

Participants reflected that if graduates are not willing to learn and listen attentively they will miss promotion opportunities and fail to build their future career. Also graduates are expected to take initiative, be attentive to every little detail, and take to correction for their own self development.

Theme 8: Informative

Participants reflected on the ability of the graduate to give accurate feedback to the organisation of what people think of them. This will enable them to navigate the continually changing business world. Participants reported that graduates are tools of change if they are given an opportunity to speak and are listened to. Mrs. Babe shared:

"*She told me what people think of our old ways of doing things and what our competitors have changed to better their services.*" (Participant 13)

"*I remember I gave him and his colleague a task that involved working outside the office with the commercial bank and closing accounts that have been there for years, which was a big challenge. They all went, but actually he was the only one that came back to give a record of what was done and clearly stated.*" (Participant 5)

Participant Aji offered:

"*She told us what people think of our old ways of doing things and what our competitors have changed to better their services.*" (Participant 1)

Mr. Matty shared, "*when she came I was able to hear people's opinion of us and that inform our rebranding process*". Most participants shared that graduates are able to give useful information and update their organisation to embrace change, which will promote success.

Theme 9 Effective communication

Some of the interviewed participants described that graduates tried to show off and impress them by speaking complicated English to colleagues and customers. Participants also experienced graduates' abilities to use simple words while communicating with customers and colleagues, thereby promoting strong relationships and commercial success. Participants shared that graduates should be able to understand customers' emotions and listen. Moo recalled that "*the first time I heard him talking to a customer he was using words so big that this customer does not understand*":

> "*This graduate was ready to learn, but he did not understand the easy way to communicate with customers. His supervisor called him and explained to him that customers cannot understand the big words you are using, so next time your words should be simple and clear. I remember he wanted to impress us during the interview by speaking big and textbook language.*" (Participant 8)

Many of the employers described the impact of understanding how to communicate with customers by keeping things simple in the use of words. Mrs. Babe said that "*she communicates with costumers based on their level*" (Participant 13), and Jonny shared his experience:

> "*I noticed that she was relaxed and was able to hold a conversation in plain English. She got the job based on her ability to hold a meaningful conversation, and that was something*

I was looking for because she will be working as a marketer for my branch." (Participant 12)

Theme 10 Optimism and Honesty

Participants reflected that graduates were realistic. They were positive about their ability and taking on new challenges, which was rare in the participants' experience. Participants described experiences relating to positive and honest attitudes as essential to the world of work. Furthermore, they shared that graduate academic experience does not matter to these employers as much as graduate openness, positivity and flexibility. Mrs. Bibi shared:

> "*Interesting that this staff was a graduate then, but with few words on his CV. While he was talking I noticed he emphasised more his ability to learn new things, despite a lack of management background; though he has no practical working experience he was positive that he can learn fast.*" (Participant 7)

Also, graduate displays of sincerity in communication and understanding the need to be convincing and transparent were seen as key to gaining employment. A graduate's course of study is not necessarily as important to employers as the ability to be hopeful and have a positive mindset for the future. Mr. Daily reflected on his graduate's honest and positive attitude as a good way to guarantee employability. He expressed:

> "*He studied Estate Management in the higher institution, but he wrote on his CV that he is open to employment in other industries and he is adaptive to any situation and ready for a change. He was kind of positive about getting the job since he said he was open to challenges, because ordinarily you would say since he studied Estate Management he*

should look at his area of study. This guy was very positive and knew what he wanted.i"

(Participant 3)

Participant Matty expressed:

This graduate was someone who is realistic, as I was asking him questions during the interview about where he will be in the next five years. He said to me, 'I plan to have moved to a bigger organisation if at that time I have not been promoted to a more senior level office in this sector.'" (Participant 14)

Graduates believed they would succeed, and so they made it happen with their honest attitudes. Some of the participants noted that graduates that are realistic can visualise and discuss their future steps, and also that graduates are able to talk about the value they can bring and are excited to do it. Graduates are confident in what they can do, and they confidently discussed their value.

Participant Babe offered additional commentary on graduates' positivity:

"*I remember the interview day with this graduate and lots of others, she seemed unsure of the answers to my questions while I was asking, but she never let that discourage her. She still told me how she would contribute more to the organisation when she finally started to work with me. I was amazed considering her performance, and she got the job based on her hopeful ability which others lacked.*" (Participant 13)

Mrs. Aji described her experience by explaining the understanding of time that makes graduates different from many others. She shared:

"She interested me because she seemed to have an idea of where she wanted to be in the next two to three years and she was able to discuss it realistically. So it was not like when we joined the job blindly, thinking everything will be fine. She had a plan for her future, what she wanted to achieve next on a personal level and on a professional level." (Participant 1)

"This lady in question is also friendly to both customers and her colleagues. The only shortcoming I noticed about her is that she expresses her emotion and stress with crying." (Participant 15)

Employers expressed that graduates should be courageous in delivering their tasks, even when they are confronted with frustrating circumstances. They reflected that graduates are honest and realistic about what they can do.

Theme 11: Boldness and purposeful career path

The above themes describe employers' descriptions of new graduates' employability, while the below theme emerged from the data about what employers value in their new graduates during the interview process. Participants see value in graduates who are bold and have a realistic view of their future. Furthermore, graduates who are bold in their conversations with clear career goals tend to interest them. This reflects the perception that graduates have ambition and are able to engage in discussions pertaining to future goals in all contexts. Also, participant noted that graduates who are bold are more independent when carrying out their duties:

"I asked what her expectations were from the job, she was a lot bolder than when I started work and she is more outspoken with clarity of what she wanted from the job. She had a

plan for her future, what she wanted to achieve next on a personal level and on a professional level. She came out to me like that, she is a lot more forward." (Participant 1)

Mr. Apo reflected that most new graduates are not used to the idea of bosses. Hence, they tend to be intimidated and unsure of what to expect. He reflected that boldness in new graduates denotes their ability to face future challenges at work, and makes it easy for graduates to navigate work environments. He described his experience:

"*I remember he was introduced to me. I discovered he was too naïve and not bold with his level of education. He has a picture of fear of the boss. This guy's response to questions shows a real lack of confidence and boldness, that could display he was not really ready for the challenge or task ahead.*" (Participant 5)

"*He was very confident in his ability to deliver on his job provided the salary was good. So he got back to us the next day with a change of attitude toward rewards. He accepted the offer and he was posted out to my branch.*" (Participant 17)

Participants shared that graduates who are bold have negotiating ability and are able to discuss what will give job satisfaction. Graduates need to feel confident about the changes they can bring into the work environment, and exploit future opportunities

5.6 Connection to the research objectives

The interviewed employers are a key group within the new graduate employability environment. Investigating how employers experience and understand new graduates is the main interest of this research project. I set out to investigate this poorly explored gap in the scholarly literature, particularly in Nigeria. I posed two main objectives designed to serve as a procedural map for the

investigation, and structurally searched for meaning through the participants' lived experiences. The following relates my findings to the research objectives in an effort to describe the core of the phenomenological research by weaving in the evolving themes from my study.

5.6.1 How do employers experience and understand new graduate employability?

My first procedural question cut across the core of the interactivity between employers and new graduates. When first discussing the design endeavour, few participants showed a lack of interest in aspects relating to new graduate employability. I managed to identify a sample of involved employers who demonstrated connectivity with new graduates, either while interviewing or when working with them on their first day. I also bracketed my past experience and preconceived perceptions in order to promote accuracy in the emerging representation of the phenomenon. This helped me to obtain, analyse and describe data to accurately represent the employers' points of view (Husserl, 1931). To this end, the employers' voices in the following quotes represent how SME employers experience and understand new graduates.

Employers described new graduate employability from their experience as reflecting that graduates will stop at nothing to get to where they desire. They describe graduates as people who have an idea to modify an organisation's way of doing things. According to employers, graduates understand competition and what it takes to find a professional job, and therefore they might be flexible in accepting a modest salary based on their lack of work experience. The lack of graduate knowledge of the professional world can help employers to easily get rid of any unprofessional habits they have developed over the years, and this can make them into ideal employees for their sectors. However, participants also experienced that new graduates are more confident when they have past experience to share with their employers, i.e. from their course of study or their background. The ability of new graduates to embrace change by adjusting to timekeeping and

dressing in a professional way is important to employers. This could be as a result of their struggle to shake off the lifestyle they have been used to for years.

Employers described informally experiencing new graduates as a conduit for learning more about their competitors. Mrs. Bibi reported that her new graduate hungered for performance, and she offered:

> "*Most times he comes to me and asks me what he can do. While some of them just sit and wait for the manager to push them before they can come for clarifications on how to effectively do their jobs.*" (Participant 7)

New graduates were described as a tool for rebranding if they were listened to, and they were described in relation to their coachable attitude. They brought about business growth at a reduced cost, and they were often amenable to accepting new teaching. Because most graduates are young in age or mind, they may bring fresh contributions, and this youthful attitude is advantageous for business fitness.

5.6.2 What do employers value in their new graduates?

My second objective concerned the value employers place on their new graduates' experience that contributes to their business success. Several of the participants described their experience with their graduate as impactful. Participants reflected on effective memories with their graduates that leave them feeling important and contributed positively to their business sector. Employers reflected on graduates' boldness and their ability to hold a conversation about their future careers, which inspired them. The graduates were able to connect to target audiences based on their fresh academic experiences. Their youthfulness contributed to the fitness of most SMEs.

Employees may need to spend less money on training graduates based on their coachable ability, and this is money that SMEs might not be willing to spend, although it might require time to coach them. However, employers shared that investing time to coach graduates is a future investment which they benefited from.

Mr. Obi reflected on an encounter he had had with a new graduate during an interview. His experience conveyed the value he placed on graduates having a good knowledge of the business organisation they intend to join. He shared:

> "*They both studied science related courses, but they are the ones with a focus. They swept me off my feet by telling me deep things about my organisation. They had good knowledge of the industry even before joining, and from someone coming from a science background.*"
> (Participant 4)

Participants described the value they placed on their graduates having background information about the sector, and being able to connect with the external business world to enhance organisational change. They are more alert to educational culture, which makes it easy for them to learn fast, and they are unafraid to contribute to their new environment. Mr. Matty captured his experience and offered: "*when she came I was able to hear people's opinion of us and that informed our rebranding process*" (Participant 14).

5.7 Chapter summary

The study findings were presented, describing how employers experience and understand the meaning of new graduate employability. The study recapped its strategic aims in both design and analysis. The research decisions purposefully allied with strategies designed to investigate the lived experiences of the employers interviewed. The research provides a textural and structural

narrative from the interviewed participants. There was a discussion of the data coding cycles and

the feedback loops which directed the study effort to navigate the process.

Chapter 6

Discussion

This phenomenological study has explored how employers experience and understand their new graduate employees. My interest was in discovering how employers describe employability through their experience with new graduates. This gives insight for researchers, academic executives, graduates, human resources personnel, staff and students. This study's intent was to study and augment the body of knowledge surrounding graduate employability. The lived experiences of 18 SME employer participants from five different SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria were captured via face-to-face interviews, categorised into twenty original cluster groupings, and further condensed into eleven emergent themes. This chapter brings together the literature and findings, discusses expert-based implications, and make a case for future studies.

6.0 Connection to the literature

Previously in Chapter 2 there was a presentation of the literature, positioning the study within a framework of existing research involving employability notions. Empirical studies spanning employer trends, employer expectations from their graduates, employability models, the historical underpinning of employability, and new graduate employability models will now serve as a collective lens for examining my findings. The related literature will be used to help develop meaning around the themes that have emerged from this study. Previous research has explored directly how SME employers, specifically in the financial sector, experience and understand new graduate employability, an emphasis of parallels in the findings and linking differences between examples and settings is needed in order to explore relative implications. Thus, this research will discuss the findings by looking first at employability in general. Thereafter, it will discuss the definitions and descriptions of new graduate employability in relation to the SME employers'

experiences.

6.1.0 New Graduate Employability Concepts

6.1 Effective communication

This empirical finding indicates that the description of graduate employability includes responsibility, which is included in Pool and Sewell's key to employability model. Pool and Sewell (2007) argue that employees should have the skills and abilities needed to find a job, remain employed, and change employment if the need arises. These authors identified good oral communication and communication in writing for various purposes as the most essential skills for employability at all levels. However, how good oral communication leads to graduate employability is yet to be investigated. Similarly, Harvey, Locke and Morey (2002) imply that employers value graduates who are proactive and who can use higher-level skills such as analysis, critique, synthesis and multi-layered communication to facilitate innovation teamwork in catalysing the transformation of their organisation. This study's empirical findings from the interviews with SME employers found that employers pay more attention to graduate ability to communicate and have a smooth conversion. This evidence suggests corresponding similarities with research regarding communication and the value that the employer participants placed on their graduates' ability to engage by communicating.

As suggested by Knight and Yorke (2002: 2), employers placed value on their graduates' generic skills, and interpreted the employers' message as, "Give us a bright and engaged graduate, and we will build specific expertise for this organisation." However, evidence from this study is similar to some other employability literature. The study's empirical findings under the effective communication theme suggest that employers want new graduates that are articulate at all levels,

and use simple English words while interacting with their employers and interviewers. They shared that new graduates with this ability will find it easy to communicate with customers and colleagues to promote strong relationships and commercial success. This is a result of the organisations dealing with customers who may not be educated or literate.

Several participants in this study attributed a greater sense of connectivity through communication and interaction, leading to a strong working relationship. Participants shared that graduates are able to communicate with people of all ages, listening and presenting what they want to say. This aligns with the argument of Billing (2003: 15) that employers want employees who can "communicate, solve problems and think critically, and can work well within a team". A study by Bridgstock (2009), investigating the connection between generic skills and employability, looked at employers' preferences and found that well developed generic skills like effective communication can enhance employability. In contrast, Fallow and Stevens (2000) argue that generic skills such as effective communication and academic knowledge are not sufficient to seek employment. This study connects with the lived experience of employers in this present research in suggesting that effective communication is not sufficient to seek employment successfully. However, Fallow and Stevens were inconclusive as to the type of communication that is sufficient for employability. Also, the meaning of effective communication is sometimes identified, but this is often lacking in detail in the employability literature.

Interestingly, the empirical findings from the SME employers under the effective communication theme suggest that employers want new graduates that are articulate at all levels, and who use simple English language while interacting with customers and colleagues to promote strong relationship and commercial purposes. Most of the interviewed participants in this study described how impactful it is for graduates to understand how to communicate with customers by keeping

things simple in their use of words. They shared memories of graduates trying to show off and impress them by communicating with complicated English and the use of technical terms during their interviews, but they preferred that graduates should use plain words while interacting with customers, understand their feelings and show empathy towards them. Some of the participants in this study described their interest in new graduates who think about how they say something rather than what they say. This can be related to Pool and Sewell's (2007) and Bezuidenhout's (2011) key to employability model and employability attributes, where the authors mention that the use of understanding and managing people's emotions can sustain employability.

6.1.1 Optimism and honesty

This description, optimism and honesty, was described by the respondents and did not come as a surprise. Fugate and Kinicki (2008: 528) stated that individuals that are open to changes at work are receptive and willing to change, and see changes as a positive thing when it occurs. Most of the participant employers described their graduates as realistic. One noted that their graduate was positive about his ability to take on challenges in a new business world, despite his lack of academic background in the management field. The employers emphasised that graduate education background or experience does not matter as much as openness, positivity and flexibility. This suggests a clear connection with the empirical finding of Pool and Sewell (2007: 258) that most graduate vacancies are open to graduates from different academic discipline. This claim is not in line with Bridgstock (2009: 37), who argued that discipline-specific skills form part of graduate employability. From the lived experiences of the study participants, it is clear that graduate sincerity, confidence and the ability to be transparent is key to their employability, as these attributes give employers confidence in entrusting graduates with vital information about their businesses. Pool and Sewell (2007) stressed further that graduates with a high level of self-esteem

will be realistic about their achievements. Steinem (1992) claimed that there is nothing without self-esteem, and Yorke (2001) stresses that self-confidence gives an individual positive, realistic views of their selves in a given situation.

Participants made it clear that they are interested in graduate that are hopeful and have a positive mindset in relation to the future. This can be connected to Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) dispositional model of employment, which indicates that employability orientation was linked to openness, personal adaptability, initiative, and career anchor. Similarly, Lockwood (2003) and Bridgstock (2009) revealed that graduates who have an established idea about their own career management and are positive about their own abilities have higher levels of employability than other graduates. Some of the employability models identify personal adaptability and career optimism as key to employability (Fugate et al., 2004; Bridgstock, 2009), but they pay less attention to the importance of honesty in graduates at the start of their career.

Most of the employability literature identifies honesty at a later stage of working within a team or organisation, but findings from this study suggest that employers want graduates who can honestly discuss their strengths, past training if any, academic experience and business background during their entry interview. This empirical finding from participants' lived experiences demonstrates that graduates that are honest often perform better and have an open mind in relation to their work environment. Also, the evidence revealed that graduates that are honest can positively visualise and discuss their future career steps without bias. They are not afraid to be open about their career progression if they are not satisfied with where they are. Some of the participants in this study discussed the positive ability of graduates to be responsible for their actions as an important factor that related to their employability. They shared that graduates that are honest are mostly able to say whether they are satisfied or not with their take-home pay, and this helps employers to

understand what is bothering their staff.

6.1.2 Boldness and purposeful career-path

An individual with career motivation tends to make specific career plans and strategies, and people in this category are inclined to take control of their own career management and set work/career-related goals, as stated by Fugate and Kinicki (2008) in their dimensions for employability. This relates to employers' shared experiences that bold graduates are prepared to face future challenges at work. According to Ashforth and Fugate (2001: 20), career identities tell the story that people create to frame and give sense and continuity to "past, present and future career experiences". Ashford and Fugate further stated that career identity gives direction for the future. Similarly, Pool and Sewell (2007: 279) noted that reflection on and evaluation of one's experiences will help graduates develop their "self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy".

The present study shows that graduates who are bold in their conversation, who have a clear career path and negotiating ability are employable to SME employers. Most of the employers agreed that graduates who have ambition and are bold in engaging in discussions pertaining to future goals in all contexts are suitable for the good of their sector, and thus are employable. Several of the participants interviewed shared their experience that bold graduates mostly have negotiating ability and are confident. They have knowledge of their abilities and can easily evaluate their strengths when engaged in discussion.

This relates to Coetzee's (2008: 12) statement that "self-esteem is an evaluation that individuals make and maintain, including an extent to which they feel worthy, capable, and significant, and effective compared to the other in their social group". Graduates that are bold are more independent when executing their duties. Anakwe et al. (2000: 575) imply that formulating career goals and

action plans guide people to envision their potential future clearly and know how to achieve their prospective goals. This can also be connected De Witte (2005), who argues that people of which internal locus of control feel that they have control over their lives, which reduces their opinion of job insecurity.

6.2 Disposition to new graduate employability

Dispositional employability, according to Fugate and Kinicki (2006: 27), is the compilation of individual "differences that prompt employees to proactively adapt to their work and career environments". From the empirical findings, this study identified eight aggregate themes that represent the disposition to new graduate employability. These themes will now be explained as the channel by which employability is implemented in SMEs in the financial sector.

6.2.1 Hungry for performance

This theme centred on the things that employers appreciate in their graduates based on their lived experiences. The study finding may be compared to some of the empirical literature and models of employability. The finding from the Pedagogy for Employability Group (2004: 5) on what employers expect to find in their graduates mentioned independent working as part of the generic skills expected in graduates. Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) dispositional model of employability identified work identity as the degree to which individuals define themselves in a particular organisation, profession or industry. Thus, the author argues that work identity is important to employability as it characterises what one does, how well it is done, and the impression of others.

This study's empirical findings from the interviews with the employers suggest that employers value graduates who always seek to carry out tasks regardless of how difficult they are, which is in line with Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) work identity and proactive personality. This also aligns

with Bezuidenhout's (2011) finding that graduates need the ability to function independently and make their own decisions, achieve goals through their own efforts, and enjoy the discovery of solutions when there are challenges, which are attributes that are important for increasing the possibility of securing and sustaining job opportunities. Similarly, Stevens (2005) demonstrates that this quality determines an individual's belief in their ability to achieve, a leading factor in confirming personal potential.

Participants in this study further shared that graduate initiative may lead to them always getting involved in resolving work challenges. This supports Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) notion of career motivation. Fugate and Kinicki suggest that people with career motivation tend to have control over their own career and set work goals. A study from Australia reported that initiative and being a team player were rated more highly than official qualifications (Ranzijn et al., 2002). Evidence from participants demonstrates that graduates are hungry for performance as a result of their interest in what they do. Participants' experience suggests that graduates' state of mind might be reflected in their attitude towards what they do, and boost their stress tolerance level.

The finding from this study further established that employers appreciate graduates who are task focused and can work with less prompting, which is different from work identity in the disposition model of employability (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008) or Bridgstock's (2009) self-management skills. Evidence from this study confirms that graduates seek to perform a task within an organisation without prompts from anyone by using their initiative, and they are mostly noticed quickly by their managers. Thus, this quality is highly valued by employers, and as such it is important when considering new graduate employability. Other pieces of evidence suggest that graduates are curious, consistently perform their tasks, and may have the ability to use initiative to complete an assignment based on a realistic view of what the job is like.

Also, there was a perception that once graduates are interested in their jobs, they will be driven and efficient in what they do. Contrary to Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) work identity, the stories told by the interviewed participants showed that graduates' drive is related to their mindset. Graduates are hungry to perform based on their drive, which includes interest and enthusiasm to perform better in their jobs. This motivates them to work tirelessly and gives them a desire to surpass expectations. Therefore, participants placed emphasis on new graduates' continuous commitment and their need to be impactful by seeking out tasks without prompting. Further descriptions of graduate employability involved their ability to do the right thing without strict supervision, and outstanding strengths to deliver unassigned tasks. Participants connect graduates' desire for performance with the ability to get things done without further prompting.

6.2.2 Determination

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) stated clearly that individuals with work and career resilience will have control over their careers, and they will be able to make genuinely valuable contributions at work. Fugate further noted that the disposition of employability includes both reactive and proactive characteristics of an individual, which means that individuals high in dispositional employability can not only adapt reactively to environmental demands but also have a readiness for change – that is, they can identify with various opportunities. Employers found it was important for their new graduates to be determined, and claimed that graduates that are passionate and determined will stop at nothing to get to where they desire. Also, determination gives them the ability to adjust to any sudden changes within their work environment. This supports Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) notion of openness to work changes, which implies that individuals who are open to changes at work are receptive and willing to change, and/or feel that changes are generally positive once they occur.

Evidence from the employer suggests that graduate determination plays an important role in whom and where they aspire to be, and it can lead to graduate satisfaction on the job. This is in line with Ng, Eby, Sorensen and Feldman (2005), Turban and Dougherty (1994) and Wallace (2001), who pointed out that there is a link between locus of control and a variety of career success and adaptability measures. Therefore, individuals with an internal locus of control were found to have better career satisfaction, job performance, and self-reported promotional opportunities. Similarly, Philips and Bedeian (1994) argued that someone with an internal locus of control is more apt to be seen by senior employees, and morere likely to attain better career progression.

Most of the participants said that determination can lead to successful performance on the job. Employers' reflections highlighted their experience of graduate determination as an avenue that paves the way for him or her, and also that graduates benefit from listening to directions and instructions from superiors if they do not give up. This supports the findings of Seibert et al. (1999), who pointed out that a proactive person with proactive behaviour tends to seek career opportunities. Likewise, Grant (1995: 532; Taylor, 1990) described a proactive personality as a stable trait which is characterised as "one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces and who effects environmental change". Evidence from this study shows that employers value graduates who are not discouraged despite the challenges they encounter on their way to success, and who can help to improve organisational standards. This is in line with the argument by Ashford and Taylor (1990) and Chan (2000) that adaptable people are keen and able to change personal factors such as disposition, behaviour and many others just to suit the demands of the situation.

The majority of the respondents discussed the ability not to give up among new graduates, noting that it contributed to their work environment and was important to employability. Participants experienced graduates' determination reflecting on what they do, and noted that it led to their

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success at work. The respondents placed value on the graduates' ability to persevere whatever came their way and patiently hope for change. This conforms with the argument of Hall and Mirvis (1995), who noted that people that can adjust easily to changes in their job environment are likely to be responsible for their career progression. Therefore, to be successful in a new job environment, a graduate will need to possess a proactive nature or be able to embrace a proactive attitude (Quigley & Tymon, 2006).

6.2.3 Intellectually curious

Empirical research by Ashford and Taylor (1990) identified that the tendency to learn is a foundation of adaptability. For example, the active effort of an employee with high employability is frequently focussed on attempting to learn more about environmental threats and opportunities. In turn, the results associated with these actions serve as feedback, which is important in decoding an effort that is well adapted. Intellectual curiosity relates to closely to Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) notion of work and career resilience in the dispositional model of employability. Many of the participants in this study described their graduates' ability to be open-minded and ask meaningful questions as an opportunity to learn more about their new environment. Stories commonly demonstrated that employers appreciate graduates' ability to ask a necessary question to help them contribute to their work environment.

Most of the participants claimed that this virtue is rare in new graduates. Hall and Mirvis (1995) implied that the key determinant to career success is continuous learning. According to Coetzee, (2010) and Bezuidenhout (2011), a graduate's ability to bear responsibility for their own decisions and identify opportunities before others, as well as the ability to improve their skills and abilities, will enhance career advancement. Participants' stories often described graduates who gained access to information through their curiosity, thus allowing them to spot business challenges and

find ways of resolving them. Many of the participants reflected that graduates need freedom to ask sensible questions which trigger ideas to help solve business problems.

Rothman and Coetzer (2003: 69) argue that openness to experience includes "active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, a preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, and independence of judgment". Openness to experience also means the degree to which individuals are creative and unconventional (Ng et al., 2005: 374). The endlessly changing business environment demands the necessity to constantly learn new skills and consider new and unconventional ideas (Eby et al., 2003: 691). Participants' commentary often centred on graduates' confidence to ask questions and seek help where necessary without trying to be dependent. This aligns with Gazier's (2001) idea that a person's capacity to connect with others and create and maintain mutually supporting and satisfying relationships will improve their employability.

Many of the participants reflected that graduates' boldness in asking for help would not only contribute to their organisation but would also promote an environment for others to emulate. Also, these graduates are more committed to their organisation. Participants described graduates as an instrument for change when they are allowed to be curious and speak out, which gives them the desire to contribute their time. Kinicki (2008: 19) asserts that "[i]ndividuals with career motivation are inclined to take control of their own career management and set work/career-related goals". Individuals with work and career resilience have a blend of the following attributes: they are "optimistic about their career opportunities and work, feel that they have control over the destiny of their careers, and/or they feel that they are able to make genuinely valuable contributions at work" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008: 27).

Participants further shared that graduates that are curious are quicker to discover opportunities that will make them marketable to employers. The boldness to ask intelligent questions that will prompt employers to put on their thinking caps is a valuable and nonreplicable asset which accordingly provides the strategies needed for future competitiveness. Participants in this study provided stories connecting graduate intellectual curiosity with sociability. Mr. Matty (Participant 14) shared how his graduate's social act brought about a solution to their challenges. Wahat (2009: 283, 287) asserts that sociability is associated with proactivity in that individuals with proactive dispositions are generally good at socialising with others, are likable, trusting and easy to cooperate with, and are expected to adapt easily to new work environments. The findings from this study suggest that intellectual curiosity will enable individuals to see new ideas and opportunities around them.

6.2.4 Creative contribution

Kim, Hon and Crant, (2009: 95) asserted that a proactive individual is particularly efficient in looking for improved ways of doing things in the workplace, such as proposing new ways to achieve goals and enhance performance. Crant (2000: 410) further describes a proactive person as "taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the current situation rather than inactively adapting to present conditions". Many of the participants in my study described their graduates' ability to offer an idea that will improve ways of doing things, and reflected that this is important to new graduate employability. This is similar to what Fugate and Kinicki (2008) described as openness to a new experience, which describes how individual workers survive successfully, and are open-minded and insightful in the world of work.

Stories from participants commonly demonstrated that graduates' creative contributions promoted positive changes within their organisation. Creative contributions were believed to have brought

outstanding results and modified obsolete ways of doing things within the participants' organisations. This is similar to Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) description of work and career proactivity, in that proactive career people have the tendencies and ability to gain information affecting their jobs and career. Work and career proactivity have accordingly been linked to employability, and form part of Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) dispositional model of employment.

However, Fugate and Kinicki's model, like every other employability model, has not extensively recognised creative contributions. Rather, they focus on creative thinking or openness to new experiences, which relates to a positive attitude towards change. However, the findings from the interviewed participants suggest that graduates' conceived ideas that are needed to provide solutions to future challenges within the business sector. Stories persistently reported that graduates were able to borrow from existing business ideas and then modify these ideas to resolve business challenges. A proactive personality is a core originator of proactive behaviour, and is believed to be a stable disposition that relates to taking initiative in a broad series of situations (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001: 847). Proactive individuals are particularly efficient in looking for improved ways of doing things in the workplace, such as "proposing new ways to achieve goals and enhance performance" (Kim, Hon & Crant, 2009: 95). Most of the participants expressed the value that they placed on their graduates' effort to work with others by identifying existing ideas and working to modify such ideas to provide continuous change within their business environment.

In contrast to the creative thinking which emphasises the ability of employees to come up with something new (Ranzijn et al., 2002; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001: 847), employers also shared that they wanted graduates to look for tricks to solve problems within a sector by recreating existing ideas and not necessarily by trying something new. They shared that graduates will be an ear for the organisation on how to constantly incorporate small improvements that will bring about

lasting development in the business sector. Also, evidence suggests that most graduates bypass rules that restrain their efficiency which are put in place by the organisation. They have associating links with colleagues within their organisation which give them easy access to information, and they process this information to solve business problems.

Other stories shared that new graduates with significant ideas may create organisational change and thus modify the ways in which things were done before their arrival into the industry to create a changed work atmosphere. Most of the participants reflected that organisations grow through having graduates' ideas recognised, with a positive result in terms of business performance. Therefore, employers want graduates that can challenge the rules that might limit their ideas. Also, participants shared that they appreciate graduates' small but constant improvements. They are not keen on new graduates' big ideas, because they are young and have limited exposure to the world of work. Participants shared that they prefer graduates' young and fresh techniques in contributing to business growth, rather than to strategy. Most of the participants shared that graduates who can contribute creatively will create a favourable situation for themselves, rather than waiting for opportunities to come to them. It is graduates' young creative ideas that will keep their business environment young, fresh, and up to date.

6.2.5 Coachable

The ability to continually learn and familiarise is critically important in the active environment in which employees are now situated (Tamkin, 1997), and life-long learning is seen as an "effective tool to employee's survival" (O'Donoghue & Maguire, 2005: 439). The studies by Ashford and Taylor (1990) and Chan (2000) argue that adaptable people are keen and able to change personal factors such as disposition, behaviour and many others, to suit the demands of the situation. Participants from the present study shared that graduates' willingness to learn is crucial to their

career development. Contrary to the above, evidence from this study further demonstrates that graduates should be willing to be corrected while learning on the job, not to suit the demands of the situation but to improve long-term performance, as claimed by the existing literature. This present study further demonstrates that employable graduates that are happy to take corrections without matching their qualifications against those of their coach are more productive. This conforms to Humphreys' (in Oztas, 2010: 321) statement that individuals with high self-esteem are more optimistic and more respectful of differences, while those with low self-esteem, have inter alia, low self-confidence, and are pessimistic, inflexible, indecisive, afraid of making mistakes and apprehensive of change. Also, those with high self-esteem have an enhanced ability to achieve their set goals and attempts to be successful.

Most of the interviewed participants in this study reported that employers want graduates who are open, respectful, honest, take correction and are ready to take on a new style of learning. They prefer graduates who are prepared to be humble and respect the views of their superiors, regardless of their coach's position within the organisation. Stories also suggested that coaching will help graduates achieve a level of independence and will bring out the best in them. Thus, it will help them to add value to their organisation, and learning on the job will become easy. Evidence under the coachable theme suggests that employers are interested in graduates that are willing to add more to what they have learned and change, and who have the capacity to accept faults and demands without giving up or losing focus. Most of the participants noted that graduates that listen attentively to every little detail, accepting corrections and demands, advance quickly in their careers.

6.2.6 Business acumen

According to Sanders and De Grip (2004: 75), an individual's ability to create employment by profiting from their own connections and skills may improve their employability. Markman and Baron (2003) suggest that the greater the degree to which an entrepreneur is able to identify opportunities and use their social skills, the greater their degree of success. Participants from this study support Baron and shared that graduates always identify opportunities quickly and are willing to provide solutions to problems. They mostly want to do better among their colleagues, A quality which they gained from being an entrepreneur before graduating. Participants argued that this differentiates graduates from others and guarantees their future career success.

Many of the participants in this study shared that graduates are inspired based on their past achievements and experiences. The human capital theory argues that education increases individual productivity and thus develops job performance (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). Becker (1993) argues that individuals acquire capital through their training and education. Becker further claims that education provides skills and abilities that are marketable and relevant to job performance, and thus the more education an individual acquires the more successful they will be in the labour market in terms of work opportunities and income. This is in line with the finding from this study that knowledge acquired through courses was useful along the line, regardless of the graduate's academic background or industry. It also supports the human capital theory that to succeed and be effective in the workplace an individual needs educational knowledge learned across higher education. However, evidence from this study fills a gap in the employability literature and demonstrates that employable graduates should have a manager mindset in addition to educational knowledge. This will give them the ability to understand customers and the importance of profit making to an organisation.

Employers from the study demonstrated that they value graduates who have confidence and a business mindset, and who have insight into their new industry. Graduates with business acumen were argued to understand the essence of positive outcomes, and they were confident in their experience to improve the attractiveness of their business environment. The study by McQuaid (2006: 411) mentioned family responsibility as an individual characteristic that has a significant impact on employability and affects one's willingness to accept a certain job. However, evidence from the participants reveals that graduates are keen to understand their new world of work due to them wishing to preserve their family reputation and university experiences. Therefore, this finding demonstrated that upholding their family's reputation and translating acquired experiences into a future career is important to employability. Evidence from the interviewed employers further demonstrated that the graduates' enthusiasm and past experience were important to employers if the graduates were able to confidently put them to use.

6.2.7 Time and appearance conscious

A study done in Australia on the skills that employers value in their graduates shows that "punctuality, competence, adaptability, communication skills, ability to meet deadlines, politeness, handwork, initiative and being a team player were rated more highly than official qualifications" (Ranzijn et al., 2002: 97). Similarly, Scholarios and Lockyer (1999) argue that punctuality was identified among many other qualities that employers value. Evidence from this study supports the above views and adds that graduates extend their flexibility by taking punctuality for granted. This, in turn, is in line with Fugate and Kinicki (2008), who suggest that individuals who are open to changes at work will be receptive and take changes to be positive when they occur. Most of the participants described the good impressions evolving from punctuality.

Evidence from participants also suggested that graduates were sometimes not willing to embrace changes that go with time-keeping. However, evidence from this study added a missing aspect to Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) model, in that graduates should dress for the occasion during their professional duties. Employers want graduates who can embrace these changes easily, as they shared that this is important to their career advancement. A professional appearance is vital to employers due to the organisation structure and the views of their customers. Most SMEs specialise in single products and have a single buyer (Storey, 1994), so they will want their employees to be professionally presentable to their customers.

6.2.8 Informative

Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability outlines social capital as a notion of sociability, which refers to a network of contacts that gives information to an individual. It is also thought of as one's ability to connect with others and maintain a satisfying relationship. This connects with the lived experiences of the interviewed employers. Some of the participants in this study discussed that their graduates were able to build friendships and connections outside their organisation, which enabled them to hear people's views about their brand. This led to a positive change in their business. According to Forret and Sullivan (2002: 251), individual qualities concerning relationships with others are unique, forming a nonreplicable asset which gives a strategic competitive edge.

Participants also shared that graduates should be able to give accurate feedback to the organisation about the information they acquire, so that they can easily navigate the competitive business world. This is simiarl to Berzonsky and Adams' (1999) research on identity style, which revealed that people with an information orientation are more proactive and use relevant information, and they can seek information that improves their career. Ashforth (2001) added that they can cope with

related employment stress. Many of those in my study conveyed that informative graduates are tools of change if they are given an opportunity and are listened to. Most participants shared that graduates are able to provide useful information and update their organisations to embrace change that will promote success. They shared that this will enhance graduate promotions, job opportunities and influence. This in turn supports Fugate et al.'s (2004) assertion that social capital will impact career identity as one's social connections will shape and filter one's choice of career.

In light of the above findings, this study developed a new framework as depicted below in Figure 6. The study posits new themes defining new graduate employability and dispositions for graduate employability, and these are able to fill the gaps that inspired the research. The study brings about a realisation that employers link employability to the personal dispositions of new graduates.
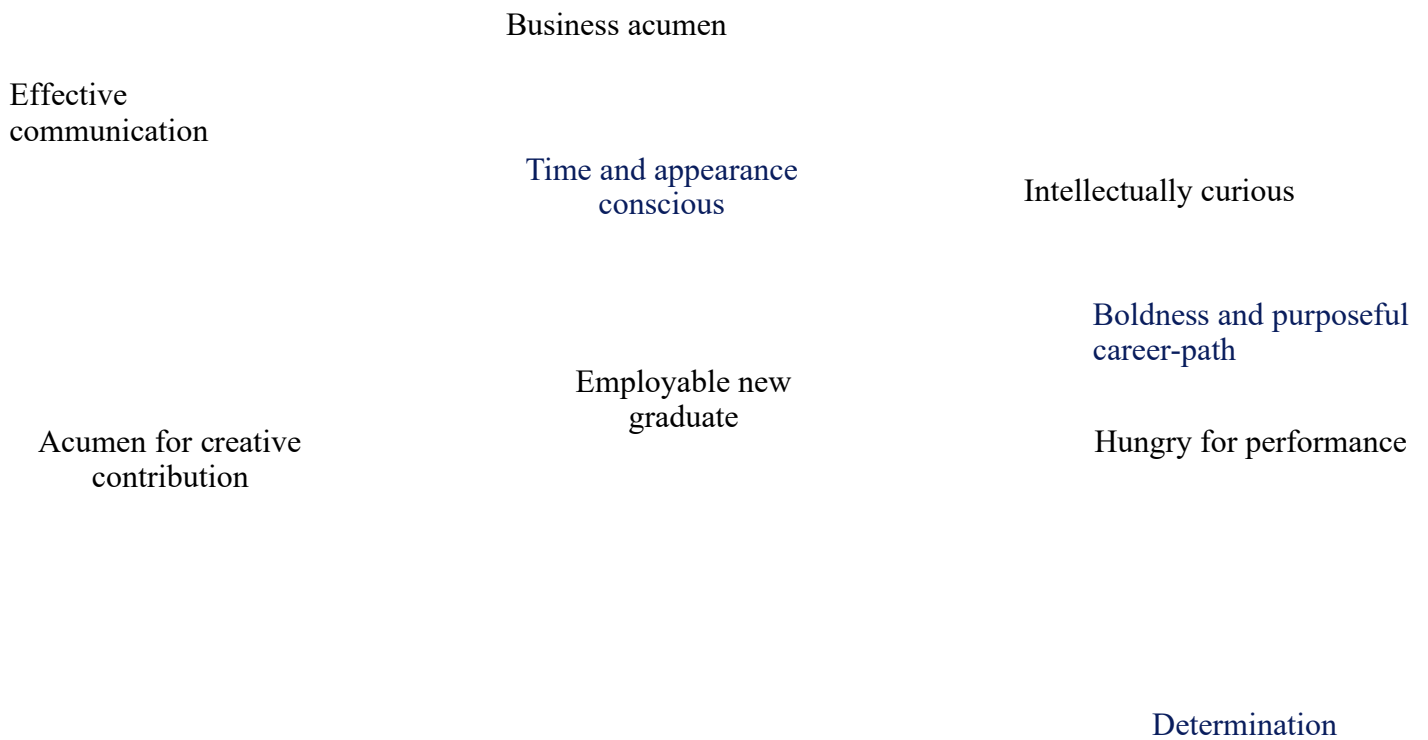
Business acumen

Effective
communication

Time and appearance
conscious

Intellectually curious

Boldness and purposeful
career-path

Employable new
graduate

Acumen for creative
contribution

Hungry for performance

Determination

Figure 6: Disposition framework of new graduate employability

The above framework is a summary based on the findings from my research in the field of new graduate employability, combined with this study's empirical findings. It formed the idea for this framework. The results of this study have contributed to the validation and extension of the dispositional model of employability (DME) framework, and helped to understand new graduate employability from the SME employers' experience in the financial sector in Nigeria.

6.3 Description of a developed theoretical framework based on empirical studies.

The study's empirical findings indicate that the employers described new graduate employability and included some terms which were not well known in much of the employability literature. This research established three main themes in terms of their definitions, based on the participants' responses. These include effective communication, optimism and honesty, and boldness and clear career path.

These themes replaced the previous themes in this study's conceptual framework captured from the most common employability models in the literatures. The difference is that this study's theme is more direct, narrowing down to new graduate employability within SMEs in the financial sector, while most employability models are broad (for example, Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). However, the definitions from this present study still capture some of Fugate and Kinicki's descriptions of employability. New graduate employability is a collection of personal dispositions that prompts them to adapt to their new work or job environment.

The study's empirical findings indicate that using simple English language while communicating during interviews with employers defines an employable graduate. Employers have the notion that graduates that can articulate at any level will be appropriate, and they will easily transfer that ability when interacting with customers of all kinds. Language and communication are recognised as important to employers. Graduates need to choose their words with care so that the intended meaning is not misinterpreted, and they must be effective at listening. In the study's framework under hungry for performance, the study also found that employers value graduates who have the ability to do the right things, remain task focussed, and be steadfast with the strength to deliver an unassigned task without strict supervision. Employers expressed a great deal of interest in new graduates who crave and strive to get their job done, and they also shared how hunger for

performance serves as a motivating force for most graduate. Most employers want graduates to demonstrate an inner drive to do tasks without being reminded. It is evident that SMEs want graduates who can take initiative without prompting from anyone, as these organisations are run by a small group of businesspersons, and they tend to need staff who will be task focussed.

This current study found that time and appearance consciousness are two factors that are important to employers when considering new graduate employability and sustained employability in general. These are two important stages of the process, and separating them might undermine their importance. Most authors, such as Ranzijn et al. (2002) in a study done in Australia, reported that punctuality was among the skills that were more important than official qualifications. Therefore, this adds to the previous theme in the conceptual framework which was adapted from Bridgstock (2009). Employers unanimously emphasised that it is important for graduates to be punctual and wear appropriate dress that matches the occasion.

Creative contributions include factors such as graduates introducing small but constant improvements in their new business environment, bringing in techniques while utilising existing ideas. Graduate are also expected to be able to find a way to work without being restrained by obsolete business ideas. Employers value graduates that are proactive not by finding new ways of doing things, as claimed by Mihail (2008), but rather by finding ways to improve things that are done within their organisation. They want their new graduates to extract ideas within the business sector and combine them innew ways. They want them to look for alternative answers, although not necessarily the right answers. It is not surprising that SME employers want new graduates who are creative in their ideas. It is obvious that small businesses usually concentrate on their survival and independence rather than growth (Bridge et al., 2003). So, with graduates' contributions the organisation will become younger in terms of its strategy. Findings from the study show that being

coachable is a factor to consider in a new graduate. Employers want graduates that listen attentively to every little detail, take correction and accept direction, while still being humble and respectful. They want their graduate employees to be submissive and easily trained to do things differently. Some of these factors are important to employers as their organisation may have a small market and a centralised control method, so it is important for them to have employees who are ready to learn.

The present study also found that business acumen is important to new graduate employability. It shows the extent to which graduates understand what it takes for a business to make a profit and keep their customers, based on their previous experience. Evidence from this study also provides a missing piece in Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) disposition for employability model. Employers conveyed that graduates should be able to build relationships and connect with people outside their business environment, in order to gather relevant information that will improve the competitive advantage of their business.

In summary, the findings from the research have confirmed the value employers place on the meaning of new graduate employability. Findings from the analysis show that graduate honesty, time and professional consciousness are important to employers. They want graduates that can honestly and confidently share their career progression plans. This is not surprising, as employers will want their prospective employees to have the boldness required to meet the challenges that might face them in their future careers.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The overall aim of this research has been to investigate the meaning of graduate employability to SME employers. The study's objectives were to examine the meaning of employability from the employers' experience, and identify the factors that make graduates employable. This final chapter discusses how the research accomplishes its purpose, the theoretical and methodological contributions of the present study, and some limitations and recommendations for further research. Previous studies had not investigated any connection between new graduate employability and SME employers' experiences. As a researcher who wondered what employability meant to employers in the SME sector, particularly in Nigeria, this absence of analysis compelled the research interest. To address the gap in the scholarly literature, this study explored how SME employers in the financial sector experience and understand new graduate employability. The study utilised a phenomenological methodology to form descriptive themes. The study interviewed eighteen employers who had first-hand experience of the phenomenon at hand. Participants were selected from five different small and medium-sized businesses in the financial sector. The in-depth face-to-face interview with employers provided rich data.

7.0 Achieving the objectives of this research

In Chapter 1, the objectives of this study were highlighted. These have been achieved, and this section discusses how these objectives have been met as follows:

7.1.0 Objective 1: To investigate the meaning of graduate employability to SME employers – specifically, to employers within the financial service industry in Lagos State, Nigeria. Thereby, the study will unfold the meaning of employability in this era from employers' experiences in

Nigeria and contribute to this more widely.

7.1.1 In response to the study's first research objective:

The extensive review of the literature made it clear that there is no consensus as to the meaning of employability. Argument has long focussed on the skills needed for an individual to be employed in the modern world of work. This aspect has been furthered explored, analysed and interpreted based on the lived experiences of participant employers, revealing three themes which employers shared that described an employable new graduate: effective communication, optimism and honesty, and boldness and purposeful career path. Employers shared information about new graduates' employability from their experiences, and expressed a great deal of interest in their graduates' communication language. To them, graduates that are mindful of their usage of words when communicating are employable, as they can effectively relate to different people who are less educated than themselves. New graduates can communicate with and relate to targeted business audiences at large. This study reports that graduates that are mindful in the choice of their language may increase their employment opportunities. A new graduate who can communicate at different levels is likely to make customers happy and feel valued. Interestingly, employers shared that this personal disposition in new graduates helps to boost good relationships with their customers and among their competitors. Therefore, they want their graduates to understand the effect of simple language in effectively communicating their views, rather than using complicated or technical vocabularies. Employers realise that they can attract more customers and make existing ones happier with employees who can relate well using simple words. Graduates are more familiar with and receptive to the institutional culture, and this can help them to understand the significance of listening to and relating with different age groups.

The answers to the first objective effectively filled the gaps that this study initially identified.

Employers within the SMEs reported that new graduate employability is a personal disposition which is concerned with how graduates communicate effectively using simple words during their interviews and beyond. Attention to time and their appearance also makes them employable. The interviewed employers also revealed that boldness and honesty in discussing their plans might give employers more confidence in their graduate employees. The majority of the employers suggested that bold graduates could be ideal for their businesses as these graduates know the competition involved in job searching, due to their experience in searching for a competitive job. As a result of this, they might be modest in their career progression and settle in better in their current employment.

It is interesting to discover from employers' lived experience that employability in the current age has shifted from a concentration on a variety of skills and attributes. Instead, employers shared that employability is more about the graduate's real actions that are displayed from their first day and onward. New graduate employability was based on the personal factors that come with learning in higher institutions. Higher institutions mostly teach graduates how to communicate, how to be bold and how to build their future careers, but the ability to learn, use simple words and be coachable is more of a personal disposition that comes through learning. The focus of SME employers has shifted from a graduate's discipline or qualifications. They are interested in an individual's desire to work, their ability to do what the work requires of them, and whether they have the right attitude to cope with situations that may arise.

7.1.2 Objective 2: To identify those factors that make graduates employable and/or the attributes/skills that employers value most in the graduates that have contributed to the success of their business sector.

7.1. 3 In response to the study's second research objective:

Findings from the lived experience of the interviewed SME employers revealed eight themes that relate to the factors that they value most in their new graduates, and which have contributed to their business sector. Because of the size of the SME business environment, it is relevant for SMEs to employ graduates that are happy to build a livelihood. Employers shared that new graduates have contributed to their business sector through their hunger for performance. It is this hunger to perform that makes graduates commit to their new organisations, and which might bring out the intelligence and creativity in them. It is not surprising that employers discussed hunger for performance as a factor they value in an employable new graduate, given that performance-driven individuals are likely to be enthusiastic and have a genuine interest in what they do (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Graduates that are hungry for performance are said to be transparent, need no prompting, and are reliable. This finding is different to the findings of Bridgstock (2009), Fugate and Kinicki (2008) and Ranzijn et al. (2002). Therefore, employers value graduates' mindset, and the fact that they might have stronger motivations and work ethics than their colleagues.

With regard to the ability to make a creative contribution, the research findings revealed that to a large extent graduates can make use of existing business ideas and transform them to solve new business problems. They bring creative contributions and introduce some level of change into an organisation, based on their alertness to education culture. This creative contribution may be a result of their fresh mindset, which is crucial to most business as it is good to have different ages with diverse perspectives in an organisation. Creative ideas help graduates to be active in their career management and the development of their business environment. Evidence from the findings reveals that this drives graduates to establish relationships that can advance their careers within their work environment.

This creative contribution extends to using techniques and introducing continuous improvements through their preference for innovation, and taking risks to find opportunities. These findings are contrary to the views of some of the previous literature on graduate employability (Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001: 847; Fugate & Kinicki, 2005) which has mostly identified creative thinking to be essential to employability. However, employers in the current environment want graduates that can challenge old rules in other to increase their productivity at work. It may be that employers want to spend less money on training their staff, but they also want to grow in terms of their budget, so they need cheap minds for growth. It seems as though SMEs want graduates that will spend less time being taught; graduates are willing to learn and can quickly adapt to changes and learn about their business environment.

The findings also indicate that new graduates who are humble can accept direction and listen attentively to their superiors. They grow as an ideal employee, fuelling conversations about solutions that might help the business grow. Employers shared that when graduates can look beyond their qualifications and pay more attention to their attitudes, they are not only employable but are likely to keep their job for longer. When graduates are coachable, they are valued by SME employers regardless of their experience or academic background; this might be a result of the sector size. Employers shared that coachable graduates have the moral capacity to accept their faults, and they are attentive to every detail, which may make them easily trainable by anyone on the job.

Interestingly, evidence from employers' lived experience demonstrates that time and appearance consciousness are related when considering new graduate employability. This study is the first to understand the connectivity between these two phrases. Employers formed an impactful memory of when their new graduates recognised the need to be punctual and dress to match the professional

occasion, rather than extending their flexibility to late arrival. Thus, graduates need to learn that small businesses may not be able to give up valuable time due to their size. It became apparent that employers are concerned about how graduates appear at work in terms of their outfit; they want them to dress professionally and appropriately, perhaps because of their various customers within different age brackets. Although graduates may find it difficult to shake off their student lifestyle or pay attention to time, employers still shared that new graduates have contributed positively to change to their sector.

Surprisingly, employers value graduates who have business acumen, with an understanding of profit and the importance of customers to an organisation. This finding is in contrast to the findings in most of the literature, where authors reported that individuals with a risk-taking propensity will enhance their entrepreneurial orientation and employability (Vecchio, 2003: 306; Sanders & De Grip, 2004: 75). These assertions overlook the fact that most of these graduates are from different academic disciplines. Thus, employers only require new graduates to have a little knowledge of what it takes to keep customers and make a profit.

This finding, which is different to most of the employability literature, suggests that employers value graduates that can respond to change by being attentive to time and their appearance, as well as shaking off their unprofessional habits. Due to changes in the world of work, structures within organisations increasingly demand a workforce with a higher work focus. Thus, employers want individuals who are responsive to change, who are humble, who work with less prompting, who contribute systematically and embrace the change that comes with their new environment. From the above reflection, it is evident that employers value graduates who have business acumen, who are easily coached, who can come up with creative contributions, and who are hungry for performance.

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7.1.4 The study framework in figure 6 is useful for the future fitness of Small and Medium-sized enterprises. Most SME will benefit from the resourcefulness of new graduates and their fresh ideas which will keep their business young. Struggling SMEs may reap the benefit of employing new graduate business acumen and ability to articulate to both young and old. Since some SMEs are mindful of the cost of training new staff, they might easily have the team to mentor their graduates.

Research Framework in figure 6

7.2 Research contributions

This research provides valuable insight into the meaning of employability and the factors needed for new graduates to be considered employable by employers in SMEs. Participants' stories formed the basis of knowledge surrounding how SME employers experience and understand new graduate employability. The research recommendations for practice are based on the rich descriptions evolving from the employers' stories. Reflecting on the early stage of this project, the researcher proposes that this study will have relative implications for researchers, employers, students, student services professionals, and policymakers. The employers' voices reporting their lived experiences were always present as the study explored and defined the phenomenon at hand. Therefore, this now serves as the basis for the research recommendations.

These results help to inform the conceptualisation of a largely theoretically and poorly formed idea, and aid in developing the meaning of new graduate employability and the factors that make new graduates employable to SME employers across a broader context. The results obtained from this study establish the existence of the meaning of new graduate employability as a personal disposition with satisfactory reliability.

7.2.1 Theoretical contributions

Previous research into employability has focussed on the HE sector, employers in large private organisations and government-owned institutions (Ball, 2003; Cotton, 1993; and Davies, 2000 respectively). There has been limited debate around the relationships that could exist between graduates and SMEs, particularly the meaning of employability and whether the concentration on skills acquisition is correct. An answer to this question is still missing from this mostly instrumental approach (Bridgstock, 2009). This research contributes to theory by concentrating on new graduate employability in SMEs. The conceptual framework (Figure 6) developed in this study extends the dispositional model of employability (DME) and provides information about the meaning of new graduate employability to SME employers. The elements of the final disposition framework of new graduate employability provide a new perspective on what should be involved in measuring the employability of new graduates, as well as employability at large. The findings of the study fill a gap in the existing literature around new graduate employability and contribute the following themes.

This study adds to the growing body of research on employability which argues that good leadership qualities, oral communication skills, personality development, working with technology, flexibility, problem-solving, and creative thinking skills are all required abilities to undertake many tasks (Webels, 2000; Bridgstock, 2009). The study adds new insight into the literature and provides a survey that narrows research on new graduate employability to the context of SMEs in Nigeria. The study suggests that employers value more than simply the skills listed within the employability literature. New graduates in the modern context are expected to have an acumen for creative contribution – that is, they need to use existing business ideas which might help them to forecast future business situations.

The current study extends the dispositional model of employability (DME) developed by Fugate and Kinicki (2005; see a;sp Bridgstock, 2009), adding the ability to be coached as a rooted quality of new graduates that makes them employable. Earlier studies have not pointed out the significance of this factor to employability. This study found that this factor is essential to SME employers when considering an employable graduate.

Previous research has identified the importance of communication skills to employability. This study, however, further suggests that graduates' ability to interact with employers, colleagues, and customers through communication might not be enough, if it is not accompanied by the ability to be simple in the usage of the English language. Similarly, past research has not differentiated between the time and appearance consciousness of employees. This study moves the debate forward from the focus of previous studies on punctuality skills (Ranzijn et al., 2002) and the understanding within employability literature that punctuality skills are more important than official qualifications (Ranzijn et al., 2002). Employers from this study shared that graduates' ability to pay attention to time and their appearance is vital to their employability.

Also, this study answers the call by (Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002; Knight and Yorke, 2002) that employability is less likely to be about developing attributes, skills or experiences just to aid the student to secure a job; it is about learning with less stress on employ and more on ability. The study reviewed that employers identified business acumen of some new graduates as what makes them employable. Therefore, the identified themes from the participants SMEs employers would be expected to apply to the majority of SMEs broadly and useful to any stage of life. This study has gone some way towards enhancing the understanding of new graduate employability by adding this new dimension to the debate.

7.2.2 Practical contributions

From employers' and career counsellors' perspectives, the dispositional framework of new graduate employability (DFNGE) can be used to empower new graduates and employees by giving them a heads-up about the factors that are important to be employable and the areas that might need improvement to increase their employability. This will help them to adapt to an uncertain world of work and prepare them for any future opportunities. The study's framework is also likely to be useful within an organisational setting to select individuals that have a real hunger for performance, do not only think creatively but can contribute creatively, are coachable, and take time and their appearance seriously. It may also give information about the developmental needs of employees that may be of great benefit to both the company and individuals. The dispositions identified by this study may also be useful in selecting individuals or employees for cross-cultural assignment or projects, given that the elements required to achieve success in such activities are incorporated within this new framework.

The study findings also have implications for higher education and policymakers. In particular, the importance of effective communication, business acumen, being coachable ability, the ability for creative contribution, and appearance consciousness provide new insight into the educational approach that should be taken to improve new graduate employability. Perhaps a more aggressive strategy will need to be put in place to instil the need for new graduates to gain industrial experience, and encourage entrepreneurial activities to make new graduates more employable. Also, they may put strategies in place to link final-year projects to ongoing employment. There is a need to concentrate on undergraduate curriculum education, to enhance employability and make graduates ready for their new work environment. Universities should seek to improve factors such as students' ideas of timekeeping, appropriate dress, and using simple English in communication.

This would be to the advantage of all their students, and would contribute to students' futures and the continuing high quality provided by institutions of learning. Organisations could use these findings to train their existing employees and change their perceptions. Thus, it will give all employees an equal chance to advance their careers.

This study also contributes to research on SMEs that doubt the need to employ graduates in their industry, providing a new understanding of the significance of graduates for a business. It will create awareness of the importance of new graduates in contributing to the future development of their business sector. The research framework will inform firms that are willing to build a strategy for growth to sustain them in their business community. Those SMEs where personal motivation relates to ideas and business motivation are likely to be interested in the knowledge of new graduates. SMEs in rural areas are more likely to provide a stimulating environment for new graduate recruitment, so the results of this study may also underpin a wider understanding beyond the financial services sector.

Human resources agents and personnel who are responsible for recruiting, hiring, direction, training, and evaluation of employees might also benefit from the research findings. Most organisations look to their new graduate employees for a balance between managing day-to-day activities and championing the mission/vision of the business. The employers in this study had a lot to say regarding the significant contribution of their new graduates and how they had brought notable achievements. SMEs need to employ leaders in the making and maintain high expectations in order to keep up their contribution to economic development. Employers who recognise that their new graduates have vision and an understanding of profit are likely to recognise them as key players in the joint process of sustaining their organisation. Therefore, human resources people can benefit by seeking new graduate candidates that aspire to engage in a meaningful way.

To student services professionals who are responsible for assisting students in their educational journey, the study framework may serve as an excellent resource to set up development programmes and services to encourage student involvement and connectivity with the business world. Recognising the meaningful impact of the student experience from the interaction with employers will enable student service professionals to strategically develop interactions between SMEs and students. Student service leaders could use the findings to help a proportion of students take a year out to gain more extensive experience, or to earn money. They could introduce an industrial scheme to students of all disciplines, as currently offered to those seeking a career in the sciences.

7.3 Limitations of the study

Some research limitations are discussed in this section. The research findings are limited to the context of new graduates that finished their studies between one to five years ago, who are predominantly employed in the financial SME sector. Moreover, the findings do not allow a definite conclusion about the methodology utilised and the explorative nature of the study. The analysis of the findings and the dispositional new graduate employability framework applies only to the participants used in this study, and therefore the study needs to be repeated including individuals from diverse sectors, different SMEs and socio-demographic backgrounds across Nigeria. Many scholars have argued that qualitative research cannot be generalised, but a triangulation method was observed here to achieve research rigour – for example, the selection of employer participants from different local government areas, using a qualitative method with justification, and the use of different protocols when interviewing and analysing the data (Myers & Newman, 2007).

Another limitation relates to the aspect of data collection, which at first yielded a low response

rate. Three participants cancelled on the interview day, which affected the number of respondents needed as the study was yet to reach saturation. However, this did not affect the overall data collection. The researcher was introduced to additional participants by previously interviewed employers with knowledge of the study. The study's purposeful sampling strategy ensured that the sample of participants matched the study purpose, which was to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning of new graduate employability to SME employers.

This phenomenological study provides a preliminary view of the meaning of new graduate employability and what SME employers value most in their new graduates. Previous research had not explored graduate employability from the perspective of SMEs in the financial sector. Limitations of the research also include limiting factors related to precise phenomenological enquiries and time constraints in data collection. While this enquiry focusses on the essence of the lived experience of a specific group, other aspects of the business sector were not explored. This study contributes to the meaning of new graduate employability; the findings can best be understood through the context of the eighteen employers interviewed for the research investigation.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

The study's findings offer a basis from which to build as future investigations will continue to explore the changing business dynamic. The areas that are suggested for further research consideration are: (a) expanding the target population to involve more diverse employer demographics and different types of organisations; (b) to include employees who graduated more than five years ago and started working in SME sectors; (c) conversely, how new graduates prepare themselves to fit into the world of work; and (d) a quantitative study to test the identified themes to see if they are been used in employing new graduates on a large scale. This study recommends

future studies to explore how new graduate are prepared for their transition into SME jobs or begin their careers in different sectors. This aspect of the phenomenon is worthy of further investigation. The interviews with participant employers indicated that some graduates' interest is in big industries. Therefore, future research could be done to explore new graduates' perspectives in relation to their efforts to connect with employment within SMEs.

Themes evolving from data from employers in different SME sectors could be compared and contrasted with this study's findings to develop a framework to further understand and describe this changing phenomenon. This research also recommends researchers in future studies to carry out a broader study involving more service industries in different countries and using mixed methods. A quantitative study could be of value since people are likely to have a different point of view. This study involved a mix of small and medium-sized companies, and it would be of interest to study companies which are bigger. This would allow for enhanced comparison and explanation.

7.5 Conclusion

This final chapter has established the novelty of this thesis by stressing its intermediate results and findings, and the accomplishment of its objectives. This research was set up to explore the meaning of new graduate employability in the modern age, especially in a developing economy. This chapter has also proposed some implications for academic research and practice. In particular, this study has generated several recommendations for industry, which SME employers may find valuable when seeking information on the value that graduates will add to their business organisations. Additionally, this chapter points out certain limitations of the study, and provides some potential ideas for future studies in areas linked to this research. To address gaps in the scholarly literature, this study has explored how employers experience and understand new graduate employability.

This investigation used a phenomenological approach to build descriptive themes. Eighteen employers were interviewed who identified as having being involved with new graduates for more than five years. Participants were selected from five small and medium-sized organisations in the financial sector in Lagos State, Nigeria. The in-depth face-to-face interviews with employers provided rich data for this study. This study revealed eleven themes relating to how employers experience and understand new graduate employability. The evolution of this study's comprehensive conceptual framework is displayed in Figure 6. The emergent themes have been added to demonstrate how SME employers experience and understand the topic at hand, focussing on the participants' voices.

Their stories demonstrate the meaning of employability and illuminate what they value in their employed graduates, which can be of benefit to SMEs interested in hiring new graduates as they may be easier to teach owing to their recent academic background. They understand the competition involved in job search, and they may be amenable to a lower salary. Most often employers are able to spend less money on their training because they are teachable, and being in their first professional jobs they may be strongly motivated to perform better and thereby build a good work ethic. Graduates also contribute by bringing creative young perspectives, and they can relate to different levels of audiences. Their young minds bring freshness and fitness to businesses. This study is step towards a better understanding of the meaning of new graduate employability in SMEs in the financial sector in Nigeria. The research implications that evolve from this study extend to researchers, trustees, students, academic advisors, SME employers and trainers, and policymakers.

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Appendix A

Participant Name ____XXX_____

*Interviewer Name*____Omolara Olugbemi_____

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT FORM

I understand that my participation in this interview is to be used for the purpose of assisting Omolara Abdul with the submission of her Doctoral thesis at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David United Kingdom and for no other purpose.

I agree to participate in the research concerning "Employability skills of new graduate and SMEs: A case study of Financial service industry in Lagos state Nigeria." I understand that the purpose of this study is to examine my understanding of my experiences of graduate employability at my organization. I understand that this will involve me in a short 30 to 1 hour interview.

I understand that this interview will be recorded and transcribed for use only by Omolara Abdul for a postgraduate study at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David United Kingdom.

I understand that my name or any reference to my identity will be kept anonymous in this study and for any subsequent publications I will be asked again for my consent. I understand that use storage of the recordings relating to this interview will be kept security not use for any other purpose than Omolara Abdul DBA thesis and will be subsequently destroyed after the use intended here.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any point with all records of my contribution removed **without reason**.

Interviewee Signature   Interviewer Signature

A copy of this agreement should be retained by both interviewer and interviewee.

Email to schedule time with participants

Hello xxxx,

Guess you are good. Thank you for giving your consent by signing the participants agreement form. I will appreciate your participation will definitely contribute to the success of this finding. I will be in Nigeria by 7th of June to commence the interview, please do endeavor to schedule a meeting for me. You can send your suitable time via text message to my Nigeria phone number below. Thanks for your help

Kind regards,

Omolara Olugbemi (Abdul)

0803xxxxxx

Appendix C

Reminder email

Dear XXX

I look forward to our interview meeting regarding your experiences of new graduates employability. This is the a first/ second reminder. The interview should be approximately 45-60 minutes.

Date ***

Time ***

Meeting place ***

I value your interest and time in this project. Please do contact me for any clarifications.

Kind Regards

Omolara Olugbemi (Abdul)

Appendix D

Voices of Participants grouped

Voices of Participants grouped	Meaning	Sub-themes	Emergent Themes
1.1 For every job you have a description and this particular staff based on my experience with him, I will say he is a mission seeker. He will most time come to me and ask me for what he can do. 1.2 Some of the other graduates just sit and wait for the manager to push them before they can come for clarifications on how to effectively do their jobs. While this particular staff is not, He carried on with his task and most times he delivers without anyone supervising him. 1.3. Also when you talk about reliability in all context, definitely you are referring to this guy. He gives accurate information, goes out to find good business and struggling SMEs which we can offer our products. 3.3 He showed a lot of enterprise in his assignment. He had this curiosity around him and he was also hungry for the fact that most of his kinsmen are known for business. 3.4. So he was able to use a lot of zeal and never say never attitude in so many instances and he was able to have breakthrough around some relationships in the banking sector. He was in the forefront of not getting no for an answer. 3.5 In my engagement with him I discovered he had this I will go again attitude 4.0.2 So she has bright ideas and translating that into a specific result that meets the organization expectation is what she struggles with and how to tailor her bright ideas. Also achieving a	A description that, this graduate was always seeking to carry out a task regardless of how difficult it is. A description that a graduate that is hungry for performance without being pushed is highly valued by the employers and such, important when considering graduate employability He has the ability to control situations and was willing to make a positive impact Description of a level of the graduate curiosity and ability to use initiative to complete an assignment based on a realistic view of what job is like. A perception that once graduate are interested in their jobs, they will always seek for more task and challenges An experience of always getting involved in resolving work challenges A reflection that continued commitment and a positive result is important to graduate employability. Therefore, an organisation wants a	**Enterprise in assignment**	**Hungry for performance**

concrete result for her was something I have to encourage, that without a measurable result your bright ideas cannot count. I think that is an area she has to develop and keep developing. 4.3 she doses not want so much control, set a time for her and allow her to deliver the result, you cannot supervise her the way I was supervised when there were so many rules because too many rules destroy people's ideas. 6.2 I remembered that for the first few days, I am not sure if it up to a week but he was behaving like someone that is blank. There was an office where they are seated like five or more of them, they are mostly seated with the notion of what am I suppose to be doing. So I was like I need to give job description each time to this guy which ordinarily by the virtue of this profession you need less prompting to do your job. 6.6 when you have a staff like that it gives you room to concentrate on other things. But if you are having divided attention, you won't do much. This guy has the capacity to deliver with good outcomes. promotions.	measurable performance from their graduates. A perception that graduates that are bold are more independent when carrying out their duties. Also, they prefer organisation to be flexible in their rules so that they can work better. **A reflection that new graduates are expected to be committed continuously by seeking out tasks without anyone prompting them to do so.** **This graduate became better after a while and was able to perform with obvious outcomes**		
1.4 Lots of time he proved to me that he is a master on his job and I am sure he will go far in this industry. He mostly gives a clear record of how he has done his task and how will do more. 5.7 During his stay I discover that he does not like to be push to do certain jobs that he is not cut out for. He is always on his toes trying to do one thing or the other for the benefit of the industry	The perception that graduate ability to give a clear feedback on task performed is essential to career self-development and employers **A description that graduate that take extra steps to get their work done are preferred to by an employer**	**Determination driven by passion**	**Determination and passion**

5.2 she was placed as a customer service officer and she was coping well and doing the job with passion, but her mind was somewhere. As in she does not want to remain in the branch level instead she prefers to be at the head office.	**An experience that passion is an important element when considering graduate's employability**		
5.3 Thankfully, there was a vacancy and he moved down, so immediately he moved to the department the guy is a changed person, working so hard because in that IT department they do shifts, and staying awake at night and all sort. But he loved it so much and that he actually loves to do, not that someone is saying go and do marketing.	**An experience that graduates that are passionate will stop at nothing to get to where they desire**		
5.4 I recall that this graduates are good but they need close monitoring to understand if they are happy on the job to get the best out of them	**A reflection that passion plays an important role in graduate employability and can develop into graduate satisfaction on the job**		
6.2 I remembered that for the first few days, I am not sure if it up to a week but he was behaving like someone that is blank. There was an office where they are seated like five or more of them, they are mostly seated with the notion of what am I suppose to be doing. So I was like I need to give job description each time to this guy which ordinarily by the virtue of this profession you need less prompting to do your job			
P11.0 I met this graduate in 2016, the guy just graduated from school and I think he went to one of the universities in Nigeria, so he was employed. He read a science-related course and after he pulled through the banking school, he was assigned to my business office. Due to lack of vacancy then he was given a post lower (as a teller officer) than his qualification. So, that displeased him and it reflected on his job	A description that graduate is motivated and are more interest in work when their qualification is recognized and not underutilized

A description that graduate is accountable. they prefer to | | |

P12.0 Most times when they don't perform as a team, they receive lots of unpleasant words from the management. They sometimes revolt in the office and some of them just give up on the job, but DD did not. Instead he kept looking out for customers and ensuring customers pay back their loan. It all worked out for him at the end	**use their initiative than being pushed** **A reflection that employers value graduate that are enthusiastic**		
6.5 He has the get it done attitude, and this speaks volume for him. Presently he has been posted out of my office because of this attitude and where he was posted to, I saw his boss and I was asking that I want him to be reposted and he said no. You can take another person but not this guy. This guy was a staff that you can rely on at any time.	Becoming more enthusiastic in new experience, once she had come to understand what working in that organisation entails.		
2.5 Her total package is encouraging like she is good at attending to customers, her interpersonal relationship is good by winning client and she understands what is meant to be a professional. The quality of her ideas is very impressive in terms of the way she thinks ahead pertaining task to be done. Up to simple tasks like typing for the office and photocopies of the needed document of the day.	Display of determination backed with graduate passion which reflect in the graduate approach. A reflection that that new graduate determination will pave way for them		
9.1 I met this graduate in 2009, his name is Paul and he worked in the treasury bill department of the industry. He came to me and said boss I want to be your boy, having heard about me from his colleagues and I was so surprised to see that level of confidence and determination for success in a young person.			
1.5. Interesting this staff though was a graduate then, but with few words on his CV. While he was talking I noticed he emphasized more on his ability to	A Perception that graduate was realistic. He was positive about his ability and decision to take on new challenges	**flexibility**	**High level of optimism and honesty** 3

learn new things, which from my experience makes a good employee and show he is honest. I remember during the Interview, he said that I have decided to learn very fast and get use to this part of business sector. This word made me develop an interest in him because he admits that he has no background in the Banking sector, unlike some other people that claim to know everything just because they have gone to the University. 1.6 During the last phase of the interview, I discovered that he did not just sell himself but have the capacity to deliver. I knew that because he was open about his ability and accepted that, though he has no practical working experience he is willing to learn fast and take on new challenges. 3.1 He studied Estate management in the higher institution, but He wrote on the CV that he is open to employment in other industries and he is adaptive to any situation and ready for a change. He was kind of optimism about getting the job. 3.2 since he said he was open to challenges because ordinarily, you will want to say since he studied him estate management he should look at his area of study. But I guess he was very optimist about what he wanted. 4.1 She has an idea of how things should work and It was actually an opportunity for me to get a feedback on how we can improve.	which were a rare attribute. Also, graduate display of sincerity in communication and understanding the need to be convincing and transparent as a key to gaining employment An experience that graduate ability to be honest is desired by employers **An experience that graduate course of study is not necessarily important to employers, but the ability to be hopeful and have a positive mind-se for the future.** Reflecting on the experience of an honest and positive attitude as a better way to guarantee employability		
1.7 He always looks for tasks to carry out regardless of challenges and for every unclear task assigned to him he asks questions or instructions on how to go about it which makes him different from the others. He is someone that always like to know 4.0.0 I noticed freedom was very important to her for her success. she	A description that graduate ability to have an open mind and ask questions were possible will enhance their commitments to organisation mission. As well as help them solve problems	**Hate over confidence**	Intellectually Curious and commitment 4

asked loads of question, and I was really ready to respond to her. 10.3 This particular lady Ela was very funny, she stood up and said to the IT trainer that "I don't understand this thing very well" and the whole class started laughing with the way she said. 10.4 Ela came again to us and said Sir, I hate to be over confidence and that is why I ask question from people who know better. Her statement was very insightful and I was interested in her at that stage based on her believe that she can do everything by herself while she can get help. That has been something I preach to my colleagues to always ask for help when they can than getting into serious trouble on he job. 18.8 John's time with me gives me lot of rest and time flexibility because I was assured that someone is doing the right job. I always remember him for his ability to believe in himself	A reflection that graduates that are curious are a game changer**.** **An experience that curiosity is important to graduate employability** **The experience that over confidence attitude in new graduate is dangerous to their employability** **An experience that graduate steadfastness is crucial to employers and their employability**		
2.1. I met this graduate on her first day at work after she got her employment letter. The first thing I noticed about her was that she turned in late on her first day and it was like a normal thing to her as she saw nothing wrong. The issues of punctuality at work is very important because you need to come in on time to get brief from your superiors. 4.0.1 she has a routine and like other new graduate joining the industry, they want to resume at a certain time and leave work at a certain time. 11.0 he came on time and was ready to answer questions cheerfully	Reflecting on the graduate inability to welcome change that goes with timekeeping and dressing formally on her first day at work A reflection that graduate extends their flexibility desire to taken punctuality for granted.		**Punctuality to work &** Have a Professional appearance 6 **5**

2.2 She dressed as if she was going to a party and that makes her appear as if she was not ready for an official life. This was also very unprofessional	**An experience that graduate ways of appearance are important to their career and self-development**		Have a Professional appearance
2.3 she was not showing enough interest in what she needs to know, instead, she was laid back meaning. I will only do whatever you ask me to do. She was not showing interest to delivers. The expectation was for her at least as a new employee to want to know who her immediate boss was. instead, she just sat somewhere expecting someone to tell her things. 2.4 After a while she got better by volunteering to perform responsibility like typing and making copies for the office. a picture of her right now is the ideal staff in less than a month 8.2 He was able to adjust immediately, and this shew that he has a teachable attitude. He was so excited and has the zeal because he has a lot of opportunities awaiting as he was redeployed from another bank and from operation department.	Experiencing the difficulty to understand the need to get a task done without been asked. Seeing the difference in showing interest towards assignment. Also becoming more interested as a result of acquired experience. **Graduate ability to foreseen opportunity in his or her career path through reflecting on path experiences**		**Interest 7**
3.6 He had business acumen and he was applying that to the assignment that was given to him. Business acumen in the sense that he was able to manage the resources around him to achieve the ultimate goal. Also, because of his previous business background that runs in his family. 3.7 He actually adapted and his course of study was put to use in some instances along the work, like times where we have to give a credit to customers that require collateral for such. He was able to view and review	A perception that certain people have inspiration based on past achievement and experiences A perception that knowledge acquired through course of study might be useful along the line regardless of the academic graduate background or industry. However, graduates with past		Business Acumen 8

customer's property for collateral based on his knowledge in estate management, He mostly does the estimate or the worth of customer's property and give value to the property. So, we were able to put his experience to use in getting things done. P11.1. what enticed this guy to me was his past business ideas. As a student he was trading and this helped him to understand the importance of getting a realistic result. 8.3 He believed that having had an experience from that department and his background of selling, he will be able to surpass expectations in the marketing department. 8.5 He was someone that has worked for himself as an entrepreneur as this runs in his family, he came from the eastern part of `Nigeria and all his kinsmen are well known for business. But he refuses to go straight into his own business and decide he was going to work for an employer. So he later decided he was going to resign and join his kinsmen in business, which he did. So as of today, He is an entrepreneur. P12.3 what enticed him to me was his zeal, which was the ability to deliver and put his past experience to work with us. The first day this graduate came he said I learn very fast and will deliver the best after learning on their job while he coming to join us, he believed that because of his prior experience in banking and business word, he will do more.	business experiences are valued by employers **An understanding that graduate with business acumen understands the essence of positive outcomes. Description of graduate confidence based on previous experiences** **An experience that the graduate always awaits an opportunity to provide solutions to problems and wants to do better among his colleagues. the quality which he gained from being an entrepreneur before graduating** **Reliance on past experience as a guarantee for future career success.**		
3.8 I have seen instances of him bringing, and sharing good ideals. Also, he always shares ideas on how to go about difficult situations. So I will say for his level and wealth of experience He stood out above his colleagues. Difficult situation like how to conquer difficult customers with a	An experience that graduate ability to give an idea that will promote organisational change is important to employers		Modifying ideas and positive result

simple step of creating a friendly relationship first before moving on to business			
4.6 She has an idea of how things should work and on my part, I had to encourage her about the demographic for customers because I work in a bank.	A description that this graduate's boldness was backed with an outstanding idea.		
4.7 From day one she was able to throw us some questions that I have to really address and explain. To some extent modify the way we do things, she was actually a mirror for me. she was better than when I started, I was not able to communicate my ideas like her.	A description that graduates that are bold and with an outstanding idea can modify organisation obsolete ways of doing things.		
4.8 To add to what I said before that if you are going to respond to the next generation of customers considering our changes in demography. You need to listen to them and this new graduate was an opportunity for me to listen to what people really think about our image and everything we do basically. I kind of encourage her to be honest and I did listen to her ideas.	An experience that graduates are a source of hearing to an organisation if they are listened to.		
4.9 But when she came in she was like a breath of fresh air, she queries why we need to do this and actually, technology has made that process irrelevant but for were being in the system we don't reflect as much as we need to reflect. But she made us reflect in her short time with us.	A reflection that this graduate was changing the work atmosphere with her ideas, and was able to make this business sector reflect on the ways of doing things.		
10.5 She came to me one day and said Sir, this file room needs rearrangement and a modern way of filing. I was like and who is going to sort that out considering CBN target will need to meet up with. Then she volunteers to take on the challenge with some other staff. She gave her time to the extent that she said I will come in on Saturdays. I made realize that we do not have money to pay for weekend banking at the moment, but she said to me "its my contribution to the branch and myself".			
10.6 She also gave us an idea on how to re-arrange the file room and that was a task that ordinarily which should outsource someone that will carry out at a price. Her idea for sorting the store and file was used and I was proud that it worked. We did not have to spend money and we all worked together as a team.	**An experience that employers value new graduate with substantial ideas on how to create organisation change and such, modify the ways things are done positively before their arrival into the industry**		

14.2. On his first day at work, he walked up to me and said sir "I will like to suggest something that will make our work very easy" he gave me that vital idea and it was something that I had never thought of, but very simple and costless. That singular idea brought about a positive change in our customer services. 12.2 Funny enough, the one I am referring to at the moment is out of the bank as I speak to you but the relationship he brought to the bank at still standing and you have instances that his customers now wish he was still around. That shows that he had value and when it comes to banking he is actually major in numbers. 13.1 Historically banking is all about rules, the certain ways you must do things and their rules that guide your day to day activities. Meanwhile, she was able to question this rules and point to some that are no longer relevant today	A perception that employer prefer graduate who are committed to the extent that they have a realistic result to show for it An experience that graduates prefer flexibility in organisations with flexible rules. Thus, this graduate tend to challenge fixed rules that limited her ideas		
I remember he is the type that socializes well and hardly misses his customers and colleague's engagement when invited. He even shows eagerness to attend functions of colleagues that do not report to him directly	An experience that being able to maintain business relationships is important to graduate employability		**Social person and ability to maintain relationships 10**
4.1 The graduate was recently employed and deployed to my branch, so I got to meet her on a personal level. I asked what her expectations were from the job, she was a lot bolder than when I started work and she is more outspoken with the clarity of what she wanted from the job. 4.2 She had a plan for her future, what she wanted to achieve next on a personal level and on a professional level. she came out to me like that, she is a lot more forward and the skill required to manage graduates like her as revolving.	A perception that graduate who is bold in their conversations with a clear career goal tend to interest employers. An experience that, this graduate has an ambition and was bold to engage in a discussion pertaining to her future goals in all context A perception that graduates that are bold are more	**Have a Clear career path 12**	**Boldness and a clear career path**

4.3 she doses not want so much control, set a time for her and allow her to deliver the result, you cannot supervise her the way I was supervised when there were so many rules because too many rules destroy people's ideas. **P6.0** The graduate was brought to my office. I remember he was introduced as a new staff, that will be working in my department. But I discovered he was too naïve and not bold with his level of education He showed a picture of fear for the boss immediately I saw him and lack of confidence, so I thought maybe because we have not interacted and for the fact that he does not what next to. This guy response to questions shows a real lack of confidence and boldness, that could display he was really ready for the challenge or task ahead.	independent when carrying out their duties. Also, they prefer organisation to be flexible in their rules so that they can work better. A reflection that most new graduate is not used to the idea of boss. Hence, tend to be intimidated and unsure of what to expect An experience that boldness in new graduates denote their ability to face future challenges at work		
4.5 During the interview section with this graduate, she enticed me because she seems to have an idea of where she wants to be in the next two to three years and she was able to discuss it realistically. So it was not like when we joined the job blindly thinking everything will be fine. 5.5 So, I discovered that he knows what he wants from day one and he was the kind of a person that did not want to be tied down to become a teller and before you know it he will remain a teller for years without a promotion. 5.6 This guy in questions was actually a smart guy which choose not to be tied down and prefer to go for his other plans.	An understanding of time that makes the graduate different from many others **An experience that graduates that are passionate have a clear carer idea. They do not want to be restricted career wise**		
4.0.2 So she has bright ideas and translating that into a specific result that meets the organization expectation is what she struggles with and how to tailor her bright ideas. Also achieving a concrete result for her was something I	A reflection that continued commitment and a positive result is important to graduate employability. Therefore, an organisation wants a		

have to encourage, that without a measurable result your bright ideas cannot count. I think that is an area she has to develop and keep developing.	measurable performance from their graduates		
6.3 I have to go and ask him for things that I need or give him a format of the document I was him to write. and I also I have to monitor it by checking if it is what I wanted and if not ask him to go back and correct it. 7.4 So, the other graduate came along and I have to put him through the requirement to open an account. While I was teaching him, I expected him to make notes which he did not, so I advise him to do so because his head is not a computer and that is how myself learn from my superior.	**A description that graduate should be at a level of independent when completing a task** **Ability to think ahead and do the right thing that one will benefit which employer find very important for new graduate employability and learning on the job**		**Ability to think ahead 14**
8.1 Meanwhile, you need to understand the kind of language you need to use around the person and how to connect with the customer. So, this graduate mode of communication with customers shows that he was ready to learn but does not understand the customer's language. His supervisor called him and explain to him that these customers cannot understand the big words you are using so next time your words should be simple and clear. 8.2 I remember he was wanted to impress us during the interview by speaking big and textbook language 13.1. **I noticed that she was relaxed and was able to hold conversation with plain English. she communicates with costumers based on their level**	**An experience that a new graduate is expected to communicate in a simple language than trying to impress by using big vocabulary** **Description that graduate should have the ability to communicate fluently with people regardless academic background**		**Simple and clear communication 15**
9.3 What contributed to his success was the ability to accept push because I push him a lot while he was with me. Most times I will ask him to go and study people in a department where he	A perception that graduate was able to Benefit from listening to superior directions and push without giving up.		**Determination and passion**

does no anyone and he does not complain unknowing that he was building his career. 5.1 He was put as a teller instead of a customer service person which of course in my bank most tellers are not really graduate from university, and this displeased him 5.2 She eventually got her way there by constantly apply within. immediately she moved to this department she is more changed and working so hard 12.1 **she was so calm and did not show any sign of frustration.**			
13.1 Listening to her was an opportunity for me to hear to what people really think about our image and everything we do basically. 4.1 she queries why we need to do this and actually technology has made that process irrelevant but for we being in the system we don't reflect as much. 5.1 He swept me off my feet by telling me deep things about my organization 14.1 when she came I was able to hear people's opinion of us			**Informative 16**
6.3 I have to go and ask him for things that I need or give him a format of the document I was him to write. and I also I have to monitor it by checking if it is what I wanted and if not ask him to go back and correct it. 6.4 The good thing is that when He eventual picked up on his responsibility, most times I have less job to give to him. So, over a time I could give him a job and go to sleep. The only thing is that he might be stock along the line and he will ask for clarity	**A description that graduate should be at a level of independent when completing a task.** **An experience that once the new graduate was used to the business environment and understand the task involved, they became productive**		**Less dependent 17**
7.1 He has the ability to learn and he is trainable. He also makes sure that, if a complaint comes that he cannot handle. He always shoots it to his supervisors and he had a customer-centric behaviour where he understands that he needs to attend to his customer which is	**An experience that new graduate should be willing to learn on the job from colleague's experiences than matching up their qualifications with the colleagues**		**Coachable attitude 18**

the basic thing the bank wants, Customer first. However, this guy does not care that his immediate supervisor was not a graduate officer. He was humble and he was able to acquire the experience needed to start his career in the industry. 7.2 So basically for me what attracted him to me was that quality of his; humility and bearing it in mind that he has to satisfy customers which is the goal of this job.	**An experience that humility is vital to new graduate employability. Also, understanding the industry principles**		