

Universities, Employability and Human Development

Melanie Walker • Samuel Fongwa

Universities, Employability and Human Development

palgrave
macmillan

Melanie Walker
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein, South Africa

Samuel Fongwa
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein, South Africa

ISBN 978-1-137-58451-9
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-58452-6

ISBN 978-1-137-58452-6 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016959603

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2017

The author(s) has/have asserted their right(s) to be identified as the author(s) of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover illustration: © Nikita Kozin, © Gregor Črešnar / Noun Project

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

PREFACE

This book has its genesis in a research project commissioned by the British Council in 2012 on *Universities, Employability and Inclusive Development*, led by Tristan McCowan at the UCL Institute of Education, with Melanie Walker as the South Africa Lead Researcher and Sam Fongwa as the Research Assistant (assisted by various PhD students in the Centre for Higher Education and Human Development). The project had been preceded by a seven-country scoping study in 2011 which had identified various challenges in the sub-Saharan Africa region that could constrain the potential contribution of higher education to development and specifically, to producing employable graduates. An underpinning worry was increasing talk (not always substantiated with robust evidence) of graduate unemployment on the one hand, and on the other hand, whether or how universities might contribute to addressing this apparent problem. The research project was proposed to help identify what universities were already doing and what else they could do to enhance the employability of their graduates. As the project unfolded, the South African study emphasis on human development and capabilities advanced by Melanie was more widely adopted in the project so that inclusive development was understood as advancing well-being, quality of life and agency. We introduce these ideas in [Chapter 1](#) and develop them further in [Chapter 3](#).

The project as a whole involved five countries – the UK, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya – and it ran for three years from 2013 to 2016, with a focus on undergraduate education and case studies of universities in each country, 14 universities in total. A cross-country comparative perspective was seen to hold possibilities for understandings and explanations of

graduate employability. A comprehensive final report, including chapters on each participating country, was prepared by the research team and recommendations drawn out to contribute to discussions about the direction and practices of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa (British Council 2016).

Melanie felt as the end of the project approached that the South Africa study was sufficiently rich to be worth publishing in more detail than the project report allowed for. While not wanting to claim South African ‘exceptionalism’, there were striking regional differences which she felt could be addressed in a book on the South Africa case study. The project had found that employability is not a dominant discourse in South African higher education where concerns with quality, equity and redress, as well as economic development and skills prevail. There is now more discussion about ‘graduate outcomes’, ‘graduate destinations’ and ‘graduate pathways’. Yet it seemed important to bring employability as a discourse and ways of framing the issue to the attention of researchers and policy-makers, given its increasing global and continental grip in ways which may not play out well for the equity concerns still evident in South African higher education policy.

For the South Africa study, we were especially concerned to understand employability as a matter of justice inside universities – what universities could do to reduce injustice – even while recognizing the real constraints imposed on universities by the broader economy and labour market. We did not expect universities to be able to do everything in the face of inequalities but we did want to know if they were doing all they could to enhance the opportunities of talented young people who manage to access higher education and who hope for decent work, jobs and career pathways. Melanie wanted to build on her earlier work on universities and development to develop a capabilities-based theoretical frame and see how it worked for student and lecturer perceptions of employability and university practices, graduate aspirations and commitments to democratic citizenship and what employers seem to want in graduates. We do this in the chapters which follow.

Ideas developed and gestated over project and stakeholder meetings in South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and the UK, and at various seminar and conference presentations. We firstly wish to acknowledge our appreciation to the British Council for funding the project and our South Africa case study. The East Africa director of the British council Tony Reilly was extremely helpful and supportive, as were Nan Yeld and Carol Radiki in the final stages. The project was ably – and patiently – led by Tristan McCowan as the director of the project and we were immensely privileged

to work with our African colleagues – Eric Ananga in Ghana, Ebrahim Oanada in Kenya and Segun Adedeji and Stephen Oyebade in Nigeria. It was a delight for the University of the Free State (UFS) to be able to host all our colleagues for one of the project meetings in Bloemfontein. In addition, the British Council offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg efficiently organized two stakeholder meetings in Johannesburg on our behalf and a final meeting in Cape Town in November 2016. Pauline Gangla from the British Council Nairobi office was enthusiastic, diplomatic and helpful at all times.

We would especially like to thank the four universities who assisted us with obtaining ethical clearance and in making contact with students and staff for interviews and for the survey. Helen Garnett and then Tari Gwena undertook the administration of the project, Lucretia Smith sorted out financial matters while Helen, Oliver Mutanga, Faith Mkwanzani, Patience Mukwambo and Ntimi Mtawa all assisted with interview data collection. Faith, Patience, Oliver and Tendayi Marovah helped with coding qualitative data after Melanie had analysed all the transcripts, and Anesu Ruswa provided invaluable assistance with analysing the survey data. Elmarie Viljoen-Massyn as always provided excellent support in preparing the manuscript. We are very grateful to everyone for their help.

Colleagues in the higher education and development research group at the UFS provided a collegial working environment, while Monica Mclean and Alejandra Boni on visits to the UFS also provided helpful comments – and encouragement when it was most needed – to persevere with the book. Our ideas were also shaped by discussing the case study with colleagues at Bath University in the UK; at the REAL symposium on Education and Work in Johannesburg; the HELTASA conference in Bloemfontein; the HDCA conference in Georgetown, USA; the BAICE conference in Bath, UK; the UKFIET conference in Oxford; and the CIES conference in Vancouver, Canada. This, together with the vibrant conversations inside the project group, has been immensely valuable. We were generously funded by the British Council and through Melanie's South African Research Chair (NRF grant number 86540) to attend these various events.

Finally, Melanie thanks her partner, Ian, for his support – as always – not to mention the gas heater he bought for her as she worked on drafts of the book through freezing cold winter weather in Bloemfontein! Her appreciation also to Vicki just for being there and to Milo and Lexie for light relief. Sam thanks Rolline, Nathan and Esther for love and support.

REFERENCE

British Council. (2016). *Universities, employability and inclusive development: repositioning higher education in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa*. <http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/>. Accessed 1 July 2016.

CONTENTS

1	Contextual and Policy Conditions	1
2	Graduate Employability, Global Shifts and Local Realities	29
3	A Human Capabilities Conceptualization of Graduate Employability	53
4	Employability and Conversion Factors	79
5	Access and Participation	109
6	Democratic Citizenship and Employable Graduates	133
7	Employers and Graduate Opportunities	159
8	Aspirations, Capabilities and Navigating Future-Forward	181
9	Human Development, Capabilities and Graduate Employability	215
	Appendix A Policy Environment for Graduate Employability in South Africa	229

Appendix B Graduate Attributes	235
---------------------------------------	------------

Index	239
--------------	------------

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Learning-scapes	19
Fig. 4.1	Conversion factors shaping graduate employability	80
Fig. 4.2	Background profile of students (per cent), qualitative data	85
Fig. 4.3	Preferred employment sectors by race, survey data	96
Fig. 4.4	Skills that were less well developed at university, survey data	97
Fig. 5.1	Student participation in careers support services, survey data	127
Fig. 5.2	'The career development service was very effective', student survey	128
Fig. 8.1	Realizable aspirations	187

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Headcount enrolment by race for selected years	16
Table 1.2	Participation rates by race	17
Table 1.3	Qualitative interview participants	23
Table 4.1	Cross tabulation of race and employment prospects, survey data	86
Table 4.2	Cross tabulation of perceptions of employment prospects by social class and race, survey data	87
Table 4.3	Students' perception of employability, survey data	90
Table 6.1	Institutional vision and mission for citizenship	140
Table 6.2	Institutional values	142
Table 8.1	Wits students	189
Table 8.2	UFS students	196
Table 8.3	Univen students	201
Table 8.4	NMMU students	206
Table 8.5	What Rebecca and Tumelo have reason to value	209
Table 9.1	Graduate employability and intersecting conversion factors	219
Table 9.2	Graduate employability capabilities and functionings	223