

THE EXPERIENCES OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)
GRADUATES' TRANSITION INTO A LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME ECONOMY'S JOB

MARKET:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

David Twum-Barimah

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

Graduation Year

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Abstract

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the information communication technology graduates' perceptions and lived experiences as they transitioned into the workforce in Grenada (a low- and middle-income economy island state). The theories guiding this study are Goleman's theory on emotional intelligence, Knowles' self-directed learning theory, and Becker's human capital theory. These theories represent the skill sets that help individuals adapt to new environments, acquire new skills, and become efficient in the workplace. The study used twelve Grenadians with degrees in information communication technology and sought employment in Grenada. The data collection was conducted through individual interviews, focus group interviews and a questionnaire through online platforms. A thematic analysis process was used to analyze the data collected, which included coding and categorizing them into themes. The emergent themes that were discovered through this study were the importance of (a) emotional intelligence abilities, (b) self-directed learning abilities, (c) adaptability to non-information communication technology fields, (d) difficulty transitioning, and (e) easy transitioning into the job market. The findings revealed that ICT graduates from a low to middle-income economy with a small population could easily transition into the workforce by having (a) high emotional intelligence, (b) good self-directed learning skills, (c) prior relevant working experience, and (d) a network of relevant working contacts. The participants suggested a more practical approach to education within their field. They also noted that emotional intelligence had a major role in their employment and overall performance.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, self-directed learning, information communication technology, human capital, self-efficacy

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David Twum-Barimah

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without him, all my achievements would not be possible.

To my mother, Marcella Campbell Twum-Barimah, who believed in and encouraged me to aim high and always do my best. Thank you for your love, care, and support.

To the memory of my father, Dr. Daniel Twum-Barimah, the first person to challenge me to earn a doctorate, and for his inspiration to do this degree.

To my wife, Alana Twum-Barimah, with whom I share my life and everything. This degree is yours as much as it is mine. Thank you for your love, loyalty, encouragement, and motivation.

To my children, Isabelle and Elijah Twum-Barimah. Thank you for being the people that you are. Your father loves you just because of who you are.

To my siblings: Bernice Twum-Barimah Jones, Daniel Twum-Barimah Jr., and Dari Twum-Barimah thank you for your support and encouragement.

Finally, this manuscript is dedicated to all my family, friends, and mentors I have had in my life. Your input into my life has helped me to reach where I am today. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Dedication.....	5
Table of Contents	6
List of Tables	12
List of Figures.....	13
List of Abbreviations	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	15
Overview	15
Background.....	15
Historical Context.....	16
Social Context	18
Theoretical Context	19
Problem Statement.....	20
Purpose Statement	21
Significance of the Study.....	22
Theoretical Perspective	23
Empirical Perspective.....	23
Practical Perspective.....	23
Research Questions	24
Central Research Question	24
Research Question One	24

Research Question Two.....	25
Research Question Three.....	25
Definitions	26
Summary.....	26
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	29
Overview	29
Theoretical Framework	29
Theory of Human Capital	30
Theory of Emotional Intelligence.....	30
Theory of Self-Directed Learning	31
Related Literature	32
ICT and the Job Market.....	33
Education that Reflects the Job Market.....	33
Skill-based Education.....	34
Collaboration between Industries and Universities	34
Mentorship Opportunities.....	35
Finding Employment in a Developing Economy	35
Human Capital and Higher Education.....	37
Networking Opportunities	38
Transition into the Workforce	38
Forming Human/Soft Skills in the Classroom.....	39
Development of EI	40

Challenge of EI in Higher Education	40
Early Career and the Impact of EI on One’s Salary	41
Career Success and Satisfaction Concerning EI.....	42
Career Decision-Making and EI.....	43
Employment Gaps and EI.....	44
EI and Entrepreneurship (Alternative to Job Searching).....	45
Career Adaptability and EI.....	46
Potential for Leadership and EI.....	48
EI and ICT	51
Best Practices to Develop EI	52
Student Learning and SDL	54
SDL for the Future.....	55
SDL and ICT	56
SDL and Caribbean Students.....	58
Entrepreneurship and SDL	58
Summary.....	59
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	61
Overview	61
Research Design	62
Research Questions	65
Central Research Question	65
Research Question One	65

Research Question Two.....	65
Research Question Three.....	66
Setting and Participants	66
Site (or Setting).....	66
Participants	67
Researcher Positionality	67
Interpretive Framework	68
Researcher’s Role	70
Procedures	71
Permissions.....	72
Recruitment Plan	72
Data Collection Plan.....	73
Individual Interviews.....	73
<i>Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan</i>	77
Focus Groups.....	77
<i>Focus Group Data Analysis Plan</i>	79
Questionnaire.....	80
<i>Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan</i>	81
Data Synthesis	81
Trustworthiness	83
Credibility.....	83
Transferability	83

Dependability	84
Confirmability	84
Ethical Considerations.....	84
Summary.....	86
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	87
Overview	87
Participants	87
Results	92
Theme 1: Importance of EI Abilities.....	94
Theme 2: Importance of SDL Abilities	95
Theme 3: Adaptability to Non-ICT Fields	96
Theme 4: Difficulty Transitioning into the Job Market	97
Theme 5: Easy Transitioning into the Job Market	100
Outlier Data and Findings	102
Research Question Responses	103
Central Research Question	103
Sub-Question One	105
Sub-Question Two.....	106
Sub-Question Three.....	107
Summary.....	108
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	110
Overview	110

Discussion.....	110
Interpretation of Findings	110
Summary of Thematic Findings	111
Emerging Theory.....	115
Implications for Practice or Policy	117
Theoretical and Empirical Implications	119
Limitations.....	120
Delimitations	121
Recommendations for Future Research.....	123
Conclusion	124
References	126
Appendices	152
Appendix A: Permission to contact.....	152
Appendix B: St. George’s University’s IRB Approval Letter	156
Appendix C: Liberty University IRB Approval Letter.....	157
Appendix D: Verbal/Phone Script to Potential Participants.....	158
Appendix E: Email Follow-Up Correspondence.....	160
Appendix F: Consent Form	162
Appendix G: Individual Interview Questions.....	164
Appendix H: Focus Group Interview Questions	165
Appendix I: Questionnaire	166

List of Tables

Table 1. ICT Graduates Participants.....	91
Table 2. Emergent Themes with Textural and Structural Elements.....	92
Table 3. Frequency of Related Words from Data Collection.....	93

List of Figures

Figure 1. Twum-Barimah's Emotional Intelligence Working Skills Adaption Theory.....116

List of Abbreviations

Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Human Capacity (HC)

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter one provides a framework for my research study. It examines the information communication technology (ICT) students' perceptions and lived experiences of their transition into the job market. This chapter justifies why this study is critical and highlights the growing need for educational institutions to help prepare students to meet the job market demand. This chapter also provides information concerning the purpose of this study and the need to examine information communication technology students' perceptions of their transition into the job market. The research questions are presented within this chapter, which guided the examination of these students' experiences and how they impacted them as they entered the job market. Furthermore, the research plan for this study is also provided within this study.

Background

Students enroll in their respective higher education institutions, hoping their education will help their career goals and financial status (Bryce et al., 2021). According to Cannizzo and James (2020), higher education is promoted as a way for individuals to enter the job market of their choice at an acceptable salary level and succeed in their careers. Pigden and Moore (2019) also suggested that graduates will have a better chance of getting a higher salary within their entry-level jobs with a higher education degree. Furthermore, it is also noted that the compensation difference will be significantly different than if they did not have a higher education degree. Ahmad (2019) has pointed out in his research that gaining a higher education degree does not guarantee success, nor does it mean the graduate will not encounter any problems adjusting to the labor force.

Dutta and Islam (2017) highlighted that the job market's demands change occasionally. However, educational institutions do not always observe these demands coming from the job market. Consequently, Dutta and Islam (2017) suggested that the job market should have a more significant role in shaping higher education. If higher education is responsive to what is taking place within the job market, it may situate its graduates in a position to transition into the job market more efficiently. Dutta and Islam (2017) also noted that the job market is known to have sudden changes, which can leave many higher education institutions uncertain about how to address these fluctuations.

One of the fastest-changing industries on the global market is the information communication technology (ICT) sector, which will grow by 12% within the coming decade (Krutsch, 2021). The rapid pace at which this industry moves will require close observation, especially if the educational institutions intend to address its growing yet changing human resource demands (Bayón Pérez & Arenas Falótico, 2019). Furthermore, it has been noted that due to the increase in ICT, 75 million jobs will become obsolete or drastically changed (Bayón Pérez & Arenas Falótico, 2019).

Historical Context

ICT education encompasses artificial intelligence, human-computer interaction, database, web design, system design, and analysis. The benefits of ICT have impacted every area of the modern individual's life (Rawat & Sood, 2021). This incorporation of ICT into everyday life has made employees with ICT skills marketable. For example, with an ICT degree, an individual can work with a financial institution dealing with cyber security and workflows or work within media production (Kinsella et al., 2022). Many countries worldwide started experiencing a shift

in the type of in-demand job vacancies beginning in the 80s (Yi et al., 2021). The change in employment demand was for more non-routine jobs since the routine-based jobs were being taken over by ICT-based capital, whether the hardware and/or software in nature (Yi et al., 2021). Such a shift indicated that ICT had become invaluable in multiple industries worldwide. Although there has been a shift in the job market's demands, it should be highlighted that there have been some critical driving forces within different labor commissions. For example, European Parliament and United States Labor laws ensure that despite technological advancements, specific jobs should remain secure. Such resolutions ensure that corporations strive to improve their operations despite technological progress, as ICT enhancements must complement human workers (Shim & Yang, 2018). Such decisions have ensured that ICT does not cause a decrease in the number of jobs but improves the process and outcome expectations.

Different industries have endeavored over the years to include elements of ICT within their production, operation, and communication. Individuals with ICT skill sets are in demand within production and service-based companies. The term "ICT jobs" has developed into various categories of jobs over the years. Today an ICT job may require an individual to work in networking, database management, graphic design, social media, and telecommunication (Mata-López & Tobón, 2018). Then there are ICT jobs focusing on hardware, while others concentrating on software. Nevertheless, many higher education institutions are aware of this reality and, for the most part, would have decided to create a broad ICT degree instead of focusing on a specific ICT field. With the diversity of the ICT support needed within the job market, it should be noted that such a broad label will have the potential to be misleading.

The response of potential students to the demand for employees with ICT skills in the job market has come with mixed reactions. Prospective students have expressed disinterest in the field because they believe it is difficult to understand and function within such a technical field (Mata-López & Tobón, 2018). Another factor is that some higher education institutions are not offering the relevant education that matches the required ICT skillsets in demand (Mata-López & Tobón, 2018). This lack of satisfying the educational needs of ICT students from these institutions has led many to seek out training among more advanced classmates or alternative sources to gain the necessary ICT skillsets to make themselves marketable (Kindsiko et al., 2020). Obtaining the required skillsets is vital when seeking to transition into the workforce, especially where opportunities are scarce within the job market.

Social Context

In economically challenged countries, such as some Caribbean Island states, the goal for young people who have the opportunity through family and friends to travel abroad is to obtain an undergraduate degree or higher (Baldwin & Mortley, 2016). However, higher education has become more accessible to everyone in recent years. Therefore, with more individuals who have higher education within such countries, there has been an increased struggle to ensure that there will be enough jobs for these graduates. It is an outstanding achievement for those who can find and keep their jobs. However, for those who cannot find a job, it has created a source of stress, frustration, and disappointment in the idea that education can assist individuals in improving their lives (Olaniran & Mncube, 2018).

Many potential ICT students within countries like Grenada (a Caribbean Island state) have high expectations about their future within their industry of choice. These expectations have

been encouraged by the growth within the ICT sector on a global level. Unfortunately, these job creations and development statistics only include small populations in countries like Grenada with low- and middle-income economies. As a result, there seems to be a disconnection between the graduates' education and the job market demands (Brink et al., 2019). It is also noted by Brink et al. (2019) that potential employers of these ICT graduates have been noticing that many of these same graduates do not possess the required skillsets needed to fulfill the vacant job requirement. Such skills are considered hard (technical skills) and soft (human skills).

It is also suggested that socio-economic roadblocks and a lack of new ICT jobs play a significant role in the struggles of ICT graduates to find work (Brink et al., 2019). These struggles have led graduates to make career changes or migrate to another country that may provide them with the employment expected from the start of their educational journey. However, even if they can migrate, the issue of marketable skill sets will be a factor for them, particularly if they still need to expand upon the education they received within their undergraduate education.

Theoretical Context

The human capital theory has been used to explain graduates' transition from universities to the job market. Becker (1964) described the hypothesis suggesting that education's benefit is only sometimes seen or experienced immediately. As individuals eventually join the workforce and gain experiences, combining their experiences and education will result in a financial increase in their market value. Becker (1964) also suggested in the human capital (HC) theory that measuring time and money spent on education encourages individuals to make this lifelong investment.

With all the changes taking place in the job market and within the area of ICT, it has become more critical that students adopt self-directed learning (SDL) approach to their academic and career pursuits. Knowles (1975) described SDL as the individual's initiative to recognize and pursue their learning needs. Another critical element noted in potential employers is the need for employees with emotional intelligence. According to Irlbeck and Dunn (2020), emotional intelligence (EI) is vital for individuals to function well with their co-workers and generally have positive interactions. It can be suggested that a mixture of these theoretical elements may guide how ICT graduates might have a better experience transitioning into the workforce, despite the different obstacles that this transition may have given the workplace environment.

Problem Statement

The problem associated with this study is that upon graduation, ICT students in Grenada go through a difficult transition into the job market before becoming valued contributors to the workforce. The graduates' SDL, HC, and EI skills often facilitate this transition into the job market. Llorens et al. (2013) asserted that their study indicated that the required ICT-based skills were transferred to the students within higher education institutions from the instructors' point of view. However, their study was limited in evaluating the workforce's human interaction / soft and personal skills needed by the graduates. This study assessed the transfer of ICT-based skills in the context of higher education institutions located within an economically developed society and maintaining a solid connection with ICT trends and development (Llorens et al., 2013).

It is a challenge to find a job in countries categorized as low- and middle-income economies since they tend to have low levels of job creation (Baah-Boateng, 2016). Studies have indicated it is common for critical skills in demand within the job market to be lacking among

recent university graduates (Somers et al., 2019). Depending on the university of the student, specific ICT skills may or may not be taught (Drossel & Eickelmann, 2017). This lack of instruction may be linked to the need for more faculty members who can transfer such information and skills to the students.

In other cases, it may be due to a disconnect between the job market skills in demand and the education being provided by higher educational institutions (Baah-Boateng, 2016). The findings from the proposed research study could reveal how ICT students feel about their experience transitioning into the workforce and to what degree they believe SDL, HC, and EI would have improved their careers in hindsight. By improving the educational process, students will be better prepared to join the labor force and effectively influence and contribute to the workplace while being a better match for their desired ICT careers (Brahma et al., 2020).

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study explored ICT graduates' perceptions and lived experiences concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in this transition. The ICT graduates' perceptions of their transition into the job market will be generally defined as how they felt about the process of becoming employed and the level of preparation they believed they had for the job market's demands. The theories guiding this study are self-directed learning, human capital, and emotional intelligence (Becker, 1964; Goleman, 1995; Knowles, 1975). They were also given the opportunity to explain the additional skillsets recommended for a successful career within various employment sectors they encountered.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to further the research on the transition into the job market by information technology students. Researchers of other studies have explored the changes within the ICT industry in regards to the different job markets (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020; Marbach-Ad et al., 2019; McClure, 2018). Some research studies have examined the perception of ICT students and their transition into the job market (Brink et al., 2019; Younus & Sajjad, 2019). However, a gap exists in the research on the perception of ICT graduates finding work in a small population categorized as a low- and middle-income economy, especially given that such an environment does not always facilitate job creation that matches the graduates' education (Datzberger, 2018). Therefore, candidates who can find employment and eventually become valued employees are worth examining.

Given the hardship of the economic environment, this study also examined the graduates' dependency on emotional intelligence and self-directed learning skills and how these elements have impacted their transition into the job market sector. Understanding the different perceptions of their transition into the workforce may allow higher education institutions to alter the learning elements or objectives that revolve around SDL and EI at the undergraduate level. This change could aid future students in preparing for life after their higher education. Such factors may better equip graduates to find employment and craft their ideal careers. It could also help create the need to manage career expectations and planning (Ireland & Lent, 2018). This study also sought to understand the importance of SDL and EI within a challenging environment, which may force the individual to adapt quickly and strive or fail (Shafait, Yuming, et al., 2021).

Theoretical Perspective

SDL theory addresses the need for the graduate to have a mind frame for lifelong learning. This theory connects to the HC theory, suggesting that the market value for these graduates and their experiences and skills will increase as they focus on self-development (Schulz et al., 2013). As graduates are employed, they must engage in diverse relationships within the workplace. Therefore, the EI theory suggests that if their EI is high enough, they will have a more successful experience within the workplace (Aydogmus, 2019). This research positioned itself to help guide future ICT graduates as they transition into the workforce.

Empirical Perspective

Much of the available studies surrounding the transition of ICT graduates into the workforce focus on large nations and more developed countries (Goaied & Sassi, 2019). Such literature needs to explore how students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds are experiencing the same phenomenon. Furthermore, there is some limitation in the literature that promotes EI skills specifically for ICT students, especially in diverse backgrounds or settings.

Practical Perspective

Small countries like Grenada are constantly looking for meaningful ways to improve their educational system to be both economical and impactful on their society (Rosenberg, 2018). Additionally, the study will help inform students and instructors on how to avoid common pitfalls within the workforce connected to EI, SDL, and HC. With the relevant information, students could be better prepared to meet the job market's realities that await them.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research of this study. The intended purpose was to better understand what has helped ICT graduates improve their chances of employment within an economically challenging environment.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of information communication technology graduates and the perceived impact of HC, SDL, and EI skills on their transitions into the job market?

As graduates from the ICT field join the job market, they will depend on the skills and knowledge they have acquired at this point of their self-development to present themselves as ideal candidates for vacant positions (Vilapakkam Nagarajan & Edwards, 2014). Through this central question, a better understanding of whether the skill sets found in HC, SDL, and EI have benefited these graduates' careers (Kumar Chand et al., 2019; Lejeune et al., 2021). As the research participants recounted their experiences of gaining employment, they reflected on how these skills helped them transition into the workplace and allowed them to stand out as desirable employees (Mittal, 2021).

Research Question One

How did ICT graduates' HC, SDL, and EI skill sets contribute to their self-efficacy in the workforce?

Self-efficacy hinges on the skills and traits highlighted within HC, SDL, and EI (Bandura, 1986; Becker, 1964; Goleman, 1995; Knowles, 1975). As ICT graduates enter the workforce, they will depend on the information and training they have received to help them be

productive employees within the job market; therefore, how they perceive their higher education training is essential (Vilapakkam Nagarajan & Edwards, 2014). For the sake of the study, it was crucial to document the impressions that graduates have about their transition into the workforce despite the information they have received within higher education (Chillas et al., 2015).

Research Question Two

How do ICT graduates describe their educational preparedness for transitioning into the job market?

As graduates begin looking for employment, the issue of preparedness must be addressed. One's level of readiness for the workplace will enhance the chance of having a good job interview and eventually performing well within their given employment (Marciniak et al., 2022). Through these graduates' feedback, a fair assessment was made of the level of job preparedness these education institutions offered their students.

Research Question Three

How do ICT graduates feel about their emotional and mental preparedness for the job market after graduation?

Anxiety, fear, and uncertainty are negative emotions a graduate may feel when looking for a job (Constantin et al., 2021). By being emotionally and mentally prepared to transition into the job market, they may be able better to endure the transition (Eull, 2020). As the graduates reflected on their emotional state in this transition, an examination was made of the most prevalent emotions among them. This information will help guide future graduates on the emotional and mental tools needed to move from the classroom to the workplace.

Definitions

1. *Emotional intelligence* – a person’s ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions (Goleman, 1995).
2. *Human capital theory* – the theory that suggests that as individuals invest in themselves through education, they will eventually reap the value of their investment with time. It also suggests that if the sacrifice of gaining an education does not surpass the potential financial benefits of a promising career due to that education, then the idea of gaining an education will be aborted (Becker, 1964).
3. *Self-directed learning* - is the process of an individual taking the initiative to identify their learning needs (Knowles, 1975).
4. *Self-efficacy* is a person’s judgment of their ability to organize and implement appropriate courses of action needed to attain designated types of performance with the individual's skills (Bandura, 1986).

Summary

This chapter provided information regarding the study of the transition into the workforce by graduates with ICT degrees. It highlighted that this qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of ICT graduates concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in aiding them in this transition. It should be noted that there is yet to be a study from a phenomenological approach among graduates from small and economically challenged countries. Additionally, this study examined the perception of these graduates’ transition into the workforce and how SDL and EI have aided them. Many researchers have focused on ICT growth in job creation within

developed countries (Goaied & Sassi, 2019). This particular growth suggests that ICT jobs should be found within every sector and that it is one of the fastest-growing fields of work (Michaels et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the field of ICT is vast. There is a wide range of careers that are categorized as ICT careers. As a result, there may be an assumption that an ICT degree will match these ICT job vacancies. The research that has been done indicates that higher education institutions need to work closely with the different sectors (public and private) to fulfill their ICT human resource needs (Cheng et al., 2020). These findings seem consistent throughout many of these researchers' conclusions despite the economic background of the country.

However, as for the researchers who have focused on developing nations (or low- and middle-income economies), none of these countries fell in the context of a small (island-size) nation (Vilapakkam Nagarajan & Edwards, 2014). Nevertheless, they have indicated that the same job creation issue was present in their societies. Those studies focused on what governments, business establishments, and higher education institutions should do to facilitate job creation. For this reason, the study did not focus on how the private and public sectors assisted these graduates. However, it did pay attention to how the graduates succeeded within such an environment despite its many obstacles.

This study highlights how higher education institutions could better equip their graduate to succeed within economically challenging societies through their education (Bryce et al., 2021). It is common for individuals to prevail in difficult situations. However, this study does note the required tools and skills needed to address the potential obstacles that graduates may

face. It provides both the individuals and the educational establishments with insight into the skills that would offer graduates the best chance to succeed despite their environment and associated issues.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter offers a systematic review of the literature, which explores the problems of ICT university graduates from countries with low gross domestic product (GDP), which can be described as struggling economies, and how their graduates successfully transitioned into the workplace. This chapter reviews the current literature related to the topic of study. The first section covers the essential theories for graduates' success in the job market: human capital, emotional intelligence, and self-directed learning.

The second section combines the literature regarding changes in the job market and the collaboration between industries and universities. Lastly, the literature surrounding how forming soft skills in the classroom can lead to a successful career. In the end, a gap in the literature is identified, presenting a need for this study.

Theoretical Framework

With all the changes in the job market and within the area of ICT, it has become more critical that students adopt a self-directed learning (SDL) approach to their academic and career pursuits. Knowles (1975) described SDL as the individual's initiative to recognize and pursue their learning needs. Another critical element is the growing demand among potential employers for employees with emotional intelligence.

According to Irlbeck and Dunn (2020), emotional intelligence (EI) is critical for individuals to function well with their co-workers and generally have positive interactions. A mixture of these theoretical elements may guide how ICT graduates may have a better

experience transitioning into the workforce, despite the different obstacles that this transition may have given the workplace environment (Shafait, Yuming et al., 2021).

Theory of Human Capital

As universities continue to form their strategic plans, they should strongly consider how human capital is taking shape within the economies in which they find themselves. Human capital refers to a collection of character traits, personality, soft skills, and knowledge that empower an individual to labor, yielding an economic value (Becker, 1964). The human capital theory comes into play as an individual decides to pursue further education (higher education or special training) or seek employment and the direct working experience that comes with it. Individuals must examine the financial benefit and losses when deciding which decision to make.

To obtain an undergraduate degree, an individual must devote themselves to a four-year degree as a full-time student. Additionally, they will incur tuition costs and forfeit a salary because they use their time to study. However, if the individual's education does not improve their financial situation, the sacrifice to acquire this education is of little value (Becker, 1964). With the rapid changes within the job market, particular skill sets need to re-evaluate in the current educational system to provide such skills (da Silva et al., 2019).

Theory of Emotional Intelligence

According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is an ensemble of emotional/human skills and competencies fixated on four facets: sensing, recognizing, managing, and influencing. Goleman (1995) suggested that sensing is the ability to identify and label feelings, followed by recognizing, which is the ability to associate behaviors with emotions. Then there is managing,

described as controlling one's emotions. Finally, influencing is the term Goleman (1995) used as the ability to guide the feelings of others.

Irlbeck and Dunn's (2020) research also suggested that emotional intelligence (EI) is a form of intelligence that can assist individuals with their ability to form connections with others on an emotional level. In addition, Irlbeck and Dunn (2020) highlighted through their research that workers who function with EI tend to perform better within the workplace than their co-workers. This difference in operation has followed such workers to excel within function and, in some cases, quickly rise through the ranks and take on leadership positions (Irlbeck & Dunn, 2020).

Theory of Self-Directed Learning

Knowles (1975) described self-directed learning (SDL) as an individual taking the initiative to identify their learning needs. Knowles (1975) went on to note the six steps of SDL. The first step is climate setting, where learners can arrange their study environment. The second step is the individual assessing their learning needs, called diagnosing learning needs. The following step formulates learning goals, whereby learners set goals within their studies. In the fourth step, the learner would be able to identify human and material resources for learning, which involves how and where to get learning material and/or support from other individuals.

Following the previous step is the learner choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies for them. In the final step, the learner evaluates their learning outcomes. They accomplish this task by being able to review and assess what they have learned and how it matches the expectations within the classroom. SDL is essential for students and working adults (du Toit-Brits (2020). Through the research of Robinson and Persky (2020), it was suggested that

with the increased demands of higher education and rapidly changing operational requirements, SDL is a skill that must be considered.

Related Literature

Each theory needs to play a role in improving the chances of these graduates to excel in their careers. EI describes in detail the human skills the individuals will require to increase their value in the workforce (Irlbeck & Dunn, 2020). The theory suggests improving individuals' chances of being better team players. Therefore, they can efficiently work with or for various personality types. Based on the individual's EI, it can be suggested that they can perform better in an interview setting and, if given a chance, within the workplace.

SDL theory suggests that individuals with SDL skills would have an easier journey to acquiring new skill sets. Within universities that may not offer all the ICT skill sets or knowledge required in the workplace, an individual with SDL may quickly adapt and acquire the necessary skills (Robinson & Persky, 2020). As this study examines ICT graduates transitioning into the workplace, it suggests that the individuals that are the most adaptable and quick to learn may represent themselves as the ideal candidates. The transition for such individuals has been easier than for others who may need to gain SDL skill sets.

HC theory promotes the idea of individuals reflecting on their education and where they would like to work in the future (da Silva et al., 2019). In the case of ICT jobs, individuals would need to take a careful look at the job market and consider the education that will be required to thrive in that market. This process would also require a careful consideration of the practical skill sets that are in demand.

ICT and the Job Market

According to Bayón Pérez and Arenas Falótico (2019), the constant improvement of technology within the workplace is a moving goalpost with no end in sight for the near future. These technological advancements do serve the workforce. They also represent additional learning agendas that aim to improve these workers' productivity and output. Bayón Pérez and Arenas Falótico (2019) also noted that automation and other innovations reshape specific jobs and create new employment. However, the concern is whether the workforce can quickly learn and adapt to these quick and often dramatic changes.

However, McClure (2018) noted that many researchers must know about these future technological changes. The greatest fear McClure (2018) reported is that many jobs will dramatically change, which means unemployment and financial instability for many people. Although these fears may not fully materialize as some project, it is also essential to recognize that remaining current with labor market demands would require consistent research to stay updated on rising trends.

Education that Reflects the Job Market

In his research, Ahmad (2019) noted that obtaining a higher education degree does not mean instant success or that the graduate would not have any issues adjusting to the labor force. Many students enroll in higher educational institutions, hoping their education will improve their financial status. Higher education is usually promoted as a means for these potential students to eventually enter the job market and excel in their respective careers at a significant entry-level that considers their education.

Dutta and Islam (2017) indicated that the job market's demand should shape higher education. If higher education is responsive to the job market changes, it will place its graduates in a better position to be hired. However, Dutta and Islam (2017) also noted that this adjustment within the educational system would mean the curriculum would follow a different direction. The constant changes and readjustment suggest that the education system or higher educational institutions adopt an agile approach to meeting the job market's demands.

Skill-based Education

Tarrant and Thiele's (2016) research noted that John Dewey's approach to skills-based sustainability education was still valid today. Tarrant and Thiele (2016) highlighted that Dewey's teachings indicated that certain skill sets were significant regardless of the student's career. These skills are critical thinking, systems thinking, communication, and collaboration.

Although these skills are none specific to a career, their competency within these skills should indicate their holistic educational progress. Bentley-Gockmann's (2020) research suggested that encouraging students to have competent skills that can translate to their desired careers would mean they are better placed to excel. In addition, Bentley-Gockmann (2020) raised the point that the development of skills does not only need to be a task within the curriculum, but it can also come in the form of competition and other forms of student engagement.

Collaboration between Industries and Universities

Based on Marbach-Ad et al.'s (2019) study, there needs to be a match between employers' expectations and the education received within the classroom that takes place from time to time. One of the educational elements that need to be matched, according to Marbach-Ad et al. (2019),

is students' need for strong collaborative skills. Marbach-Ad et al. (2019) also noted that most of the students and their faculty members in their study valued knowledge over people skills.

In contrast, this study indicated employers' appreciation of people's skills over knowledge. Cheng et al.'s (2020) analyzed the collaboration efforts between the industries and universities within China. Cheng et al. (2020) noted that this collaboration resulted in a spike in innovation and institutional transformation within these industries. Therefore, it is suggested that greater collaboration between these two sectors would result in more significant development and progress within organizations and, by extension, nations (Cheng et al., 2020).

Mentorship Opportunities

Based on Hamilton et al.'s (2019) study on the results of a mentorship program to train undergraduate students for the workforce, the mentees were helped as a result of the program. Hamilton et al. (2019) also highlight that mentorship programs are among the most effective methods to prepare students for the job market. The program taught the students several skills and provided them with more insight into the industries and careers of their interest. The study revealed that the mentored students could find jobs faster. In addition, they outperformed their counterparts who needed to be mentored in the workplace. Therefore, awareness of their employees' different industries' realities and expectations should be considered an essential part of higher education (Hamilton et al., 2019).

Finding Employment in a Developing Economy

Obtaining a job can be a difficult task for many worldwide. However, this task can become a more significant challenge in a struggling economy due to limited job opportunities. Within these economies, it is common for individuals to look for jobs in other country areas. For

example, a young person in the United States of America may decide to go to a different state for a better job opportunity. However, in the case of a small country with limited job opportunities, the individual will need to leave their homeland to search for better opportunities. This process will include obtaining a work permit to get a job in these foreign countries. Even in this scenario, there is no certainty that they will succeed within these countries or that the transition to these countries will not pose challenges (Elveren & Toksöz, 2019).

Finding employment often requires individuals to utilize job search engines and vacancy advertisements online and in print. It should be noted that some of these publications of vacancies are done out of protocol when a new position is opened or created. These positions may have internal candidates within the advertising organization earmarked to fill these same positions (Keller, 2018). Additionally, not all available job opportunities in these countries are advertised to the general public. This practice is manageable for the Human Resource Department and the potential employer with job applications. Therefore, these companies will tend to depend on key individuals within the company to suggest possible candidates.

However, networking can be valuable in obtaining employment (Wanberg et al., 2020). However, in the case of most young people who have recently completed their first degree, the chances are that most of them need a network of influential/insider individuals whom they can call upon to help them to get a job. Nevertheless, mentorship has been proven to be the most effective means of assisting individuals to gain employment.

This reality is connected to the fact that it guides individuals through their profession's industry and introduces the recent graduate to the mentor's network of professionals, managers, and business owners (Hamilton et al., 2019). Unfortunately, such mentorship programs are very

few in these countries or nonexistent since these programs are challenging to form and sustain within these economic environments. Given the number and level of difficulty placed on recent graduates to find a job within these challenging economies, much emphasis must be placed on the character of the graduate and the different elements they could bring to their potential employers. These graduates need to stand out to rise above the obstacles they face.

Human Capital and Higher Education

In the context of a developing nation or economically challenged country, the cost of education becomes a more significant sacrifice (Bohra et al., 2021). Access to funding for education becomes difficult because of the requirements needed to be met to gain access to a bank loan. Unlike countries like the United States of America, students in these countries do not have access to Federal Loans. However, several scholarships could be available from local government and international scholarships that international non-profit organizations and governments offer. Unfortunately, these scholarships are sometimes politicalized and will be given to supporters of the ruling party in power.

With the difficulties in gaining a higher education, many individuals are discouraged before beginning. This reality is especially true when there is no guarantee that the education sought will immediately improve one's financial status. Universities need to consider the value of their degrees within the context of the lives of their potential graduates (Shelton & Yao, 2019). However, education is known to improve the individual. Nevertheless, in some cases, families and communities are looking to their youth to further their education for financial prosperity (Datzberger, 2018). All these elements put pressure on the graduate to seek and obtain a job that matches or supersedes the sacrifices made within their educational journey.

Networking Opportunities

Based on Lanford and Maruco's (2018) study, interactions with employees from key industries are helpful for students. These interactions are geared toward helping students to transition into the workforce. Nevertheless, Lanford and Maruco (2018) also noted two main issues connected to these programs that facilitate these interactions. First, many firms recognize the importance of their employees' mentorship to these students. Unfortunately, the reality is that the employee would need to use their working hours to participate in these programs. As a result, many employers would prefer to avoid covering the cost of these programs. Therefore, Lanford and Maruco (2018) suggested that these mentorship programs should be held outside of working hours and that the program should be done to give back to society. Another issue that troubles these programs is that many students see these programs as additional work for school. Therefore, they tend to be disinterested, leading many volunteers to be disinterested.

Transition into the Workforce

Many graduates will encounter vacancies requiring prior working experience (Schlossberg, 1981). This demand for expertise is essential for organizations because they search for individuals familiar with the workplace environment and the different expectations and relationships they would need to manage to perform their duties effectively. Therefore, transitioning from the classroom to the workforce can be challenging for an individual, especially if they have little to no prior working experience.

Transition can be described as the reframing or altering the assumption of oneself, environment, behaviors, and relationships resulting from a new experience (Schlossberg, 1981). In this case, the experience of being a part of the workforce. However, work placements and

internships do offer a solution to this concern. Both refer to gaining working experience within a set timeframe. Work placement may last up to a year, while an internship could last one to four months. In both situations, employment is temporary.

Nevertheless, experience is provided to the individuals. These opportunities may offer financial compensation, but the main reward is the experience and mentorship provided within that timeframe to better acquaint oneself with their chosen profession (Jaime et al., 2020).

Organizations do sometimes hire individuals as full-time employees after these work experiences. The rate of these hires may range from 33% to 56% of all individuals on a work placement or internship, depending on different countries (Inceoglu et al., 2019).

Forming Human/Soft Skills in the Classroom

Based on Thompson et al.'s (2020) quantitative study, students of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program have displayed an increase in their psychological competencies, emotional intelligence (EI), self-efficacy (SE), and locus of control (LoC). Their education in the MBA program made this improvement in the mentioned areas. Therefore, this development of skill sets such as EI can be effectively improved through education received with a higher education program.

Thompson et al. (2020) noted that the program taught EI through scenario-based teachings and assignments. Thompson et al. (2020) suggested that skill sets such as EI, SE, and LoC can be incorporated into the educational system. Such skill sets can be infused within various courses throughout the students' academic journey. Such themes and subject areas can inform the student about workplace operations. Based on the research already done, there is a possibility of developing EI among the student population.

Development of EI

Numerous papers have been written on the importance of higher education and incorporating social/emotional skills development within the educational system. However, the failure to include this universally accepted skill set in the classroom has been mainly due to the need for more implementation of a systematic framework (Luzuriaga, 2018). Therefore, a clear strategy would be required, especially if the goal is to ensure that this skill set is taught in the distant future.

Furthermore, suppose EI is in demand from the job market. Universities have the potential can consistently produce graduates with both the knowledge and social/emotional skill set that will eventually become the institution most favored by potential employers (Luzuriaga, 2018). By not following through with the growing indications of the importance of EI within higher education and the continuous request from employers, there is a possibility that universities can diminish the level of importance they play within society.

Challenge of EI in Higher Education

Some challenges in promoting EI within higher education can be narrowed down to two main elements: academic achievements and incorporating EI into certain classes (Pertegal-Felices et al., 2017). First, there is pressure to ensure that students acquire high academic achievements. Many universities are judged based on their student's academic performances. This reality indicates that many believe good grades will automatically equal a promising job/career.

Secondly, many topics taught within higher education require more work to embed EI within its curriculum. Based on the research of Pertegal-Felices et al. (2017), the effort to

incorporate EI into such complex topics led to some courses being more prolonged than usual. Additional time would be given for group problem-solving projects and the incorporation of EI interventions.

Early Career and the Impact of EI on One's Salary

De Haro et al. (2020) research findings suggested that character qualities can indirectly anticipate EI. The Big Five model can estimate such character qualities (Grumm & von Collani, 2007). The pay was expected by neuroticism (both emphatically and adversely), extraversion (decidedly), and openness (emphatically). Furthermore, it was discovered the benefits of utilizing EI measures as a supplement to more dispositional measures, for example, capacity or character standards, for staff choice and individuals' advancement in associations and have given genuine practice clear ideas for further developing HRM (De Haro et al., 2020).

A predictor of higher salaries can be traced back to subdued openness and advanced emotional control. Therefore, emotional management ability is a critical factor in the final stage of enhancing job performance (De Haro et al., 2020). Kluepfer et al. (2013) also suggested that the ability to manage emotions (both of oneself and others) is one of the most significant indicators of workplace performance.

According to Rode et al. (2017) research, there is no barrier to the likelihood that EI may improve after an individual's post-undergraduate life. However, it does recommend that having EI at the beginning of one's profession is a significant indicator of longer-term vocation achievement. For professors in higher education, this stresses the requirement for a proficient arrangement that reaches out past the dominance of the academic branch of knowledge content. Likewise, organizations are encouraged to look for prospective employees with socio-emotional

abilities and mental capacities within the hiring process (Rode et al., 2017). The ability-based model of EI gives an authenticated evaluation instrument that limits the inclination and different traps usually connected with self-report characteristics or trait-based processes of EI (Landy, 2005).

Career Success and Satisfaction Concerning EI

Urquijo et al. (2019) investigated the role of EI in both extrinsic and intrinsic professional success in the early and later phases of one's professional life. While examining outside career achievement, regression analyses uncovered that segment factors, for example, orientation, age, area of study, vocation stage, and the variable of proactive characteristics, were connected with one's salary (Urquijo et al., 2019). This study suggests that EI is a significant addition to direct the accomplishment of one's professional achievement (De Haro & Castejón, 2014).

Urquijo et al. (2019) suggested that those with high levels of EI tend to work in groups, giving them a competitive advantage and a sense of added motivation. Furthermore, people with high levels of EI can adjust their inner sentiments and passionate reactions and, this way, experience more work fulfillment. Urquijo et al.'s (2019) research also showed a substantial negative relation between neuroticism and compensation and occupation fulfillment.

EI can be utilized as a viable instrument to impact the properties of one's professional achievements. Such achievements include but are not limited to work fulfillment, acquiring new skill sets, balancing one's professional and personal life, and pleasure in their work (Singh et al., 2017). Workers tend to have a sense of empowerment and wellness that are appropriately dealt with by their respective organizations.

It is vital to learn and apply EI skills within the working environment. According to research findings, it can help employees with their effectiveness. It is also noted that it can lead to a better and more helpful way of life by keeping one's vocation in a positive direction, according to Singh et al.'s (2017) research findings.

McAndrews and Ha-Brookshire (2020) conducted a study of the apparel work environment to review 135 employees, which were divided into two groups (creative workers and analytical workers), to determine how their EI impacted their job satisfaction (JS) and career satisfaction (CS). The study revealed that employees that operated with EI had higher JS and CS. Even so, there needed to be more between the analytic and creative employees. In particular, when the analytical employees had high EI, the immediate impact of EI on JS and CS was higher than the inventive gathering had on high EI.

EI appears to assist this group with their JS and CS, while the creative group gets the more aberrant advantage of JS and CS (McAndrews & Ha-Brookshire, 2020). Few examinations have shown why and how workers might acquire their JS and CS, which could further develop the working environment climate. However, McAndrews and Ha-Brookshire's (2020) research suggested that EI and analytic/creative knowledge could assist current and future workers in exploring their satisfaction in their positions and professions.

Career Decision-Making and EI

Career decision-making self-efficacy is associated with EI; a proactive character controls the connection between EI and professional dynamic self-viability (Darmayanti & Salim, 2020). By and large, Darmayanti and Salim's (2020) research findings showed that when young adults' EI is higher, it causes their career decision-making self-efficacy also be heightened similarly. On

the other hand, low levels of EI tend to lead to lower career decision-making self-efficacy. According to Darmayanti and Salim (2020), unsound passionate states, such as profession-related uneasiness, can make young adults less persuaded of their capacity to settle on their vocations. Genuinely emotionally steady young adults are strategically set up to realize their outlook and trust their career decision-making capabilities.

It is suggested that EI characteristics assist individuals with disentangling the emotional burden they associate with various choices. Furthermore, they tend to have more confidence in their decisions, diminishing the sensations of disarray, delay, and self-doubt, which are tendencies that are often experienced by ambivalent people (Farnia et al., 2018). Low EI could ultimately bring about a sense of powerlessness to take control and increase one's hesitation in decision-making (Saka et al., 2008). Heightened positive feelings and managing negative emotions can help individuals to be more adaptable, comprehensive, open, innovative, and have more variable thoughts. As a result, one's usefulness and career decision-making could be enhanced (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007).

Employment Gaps and EI

Upon graduation, there is no guarantee that every graduate will immediately find work, even when moving from one job or career to another. Dust et al.'s (2018) research note that EI assists with decreasing employment gaps through its impact on confidence. Hypothetically, more elevated levels of EI work with additional useful self-assessments, prompting an increase in identity worth and self-skill. Korman's (1966, 1967) research showed that highly confident specialists manifest perspectives and ways of behaving consistently with positive self-awareness, which should decrease the probability of employment gaps.

Dust et al. (2018) state that EI mitigates the negative connection between employment gaps and fit. Gohm et al. (2005) noted that the capacity to segregate one's feelings and understand where these feelings are coming from works best with emotional control. Andrade and Ariely (2009) proposed that individuals with low EI come up short in their capacity to address emotionally driven information to improve their reasoning and make associations among feelings and circumstances. Subsequently, such individuals are more responsive to the pessimistic emotional states provoked by employment gaps and often use less-than-ideal reemployment choices based on their negative emotional state. Interestingly, individuals with high EI usually perceive and understand their emotions related to their current joblessness and proactively participate in good survival techniques until they can find work (Dust et al., 2018).

EI and Entrepreneurship (Alternative to Job Searching)

A positive relationship exists between self-emotional examination and innovative goals and an affiliation between others' enthusiastic evaluation and entrepreneurial focus (Kanonuhwa et al., 2018). Kanonuhwa et al. (2018) also suggested a positive connection between EI and entrepreneurial aspirations.

University students tend to have a moderate degree of management of their emotions, interactive abilities, compassion, and self-awareness (Othman & Tengku Muda, 2018). The research indicated that emotional control helps develop a career in entrepreneurship by demonstrating that the individual in question can address situations that require the management of emotions (of their own and others). Research also indicates that stressing emotional control in higher education may increase the desire of graduates to pursue a career in entrepreneurship (Othman & Tengku Muda, 2018).

Although hypothetical models of entrepreneurship recommend that a person's aim to create a new business endeavor is an indicator of possible enterprising activity, uncertainty resides in recognizing the variables that impact the probability of innovative vocation goals (Sequeira et al., 2007). Research shows that EI and enterprising self-adequacy positively correlate with creative entrepreneurial endeavors. Additionally, an elevated level of EI prompts an improved probability of an entrepreneurial vocation decision, as does self-adequacy

Effective entrepreneur ventures take an extended amount of time. It is a long and challenging excursion for new enterprises to arrive at an authenticity threshold and develop into an endeavor encouraging profit margins (Rutherford & Buller, 2007). The association between EI and entrepreneurial goals is intensified within long-term-oriented cultures. Within these cultures, there is an appreciation for investments in the future, as such cultures believe in establishing a better future for themselves (Miao et al., 2018).

Career Adaptability and EI

According to Mittal (2021), departments within universities that offer employment to students should consider submitting some form of guidance to enhance their EI skills, which can enable them to endure the often prolonged and tiresome process of finding a job. Familiarity with EI will allow one's career versatility as a major component influencing career success. EI could also help career advisors better understand the needs and anxiety of students as they endeavor to look for employment and provide more appropriate and coordinated career guidance that might lead them to an ideal career decision (Mittal, 2021).

Celik and Storme (2018) researched whether EI could add value to one's educational fulfillment and investigated an expected component to make sense of this impact. The findings

of this study revealed that EI is a positive indicator of scholarly satisfaction and that career adaptability intervenes in this relationship. These outcomes propose that the influence of EI on a student's scholastic fulfillment is somewhat because of an expanded impression of career adaptability (Celik & Storme, 2018).

Harry and Malepane's (2021) research also noted no difference between genders in using EI to adapt to one's career. It, therefore, suggested that one gender does not have an advantage over the other, with EI being a concern. Both EI and career adaptability are significant meta-competencies that cultivate the versatile way of behaving that works with transformation to challenges within the workplace and enables the individual's sense of well-being (Parmentier et al., 2019).

Vashisht et al. (2021) suggested that emotionally controlled students who display characteristics such as being receptive, honest, pleasant, confident, and optimistic are better prepared to develop their career adaptability further and are therefore expected to be hired and remain employed. By being mindful of their EI, students will be able to enter the labor force with an appreciation of their assets and shortcomings, which can assist them with being more versatile while experiencing different career changes (LaGree et al., 2021).

In addition, LaGree et al. (2021) also suggested that since career adaptability is so diverse, it should be noted that the different traits of EI would be needed to address the various career difficulties in one's journey. Therefore, training in EI should be considered necessary in one's career training.

Communication is a significant aspect of working in a team, and research also dedicated that those with high levels of EI communicate better with others (Raelin, 2011). Consequently, a

higher EI would most likely lead an individual to partake in group-type exercises, like extracurricular activities. Research showed that extracurricular activities facilitated the connection between EI and career adaptability. There is a straightforward and critical relationship between EI, career adaptability, and extracurricular activities, which implies that universities should prescribe student organizations' inclusion to students as a strategy for their career development (LaGree et al., 2021).

Potential for Leadership and EI

Individuals may find themselves in leadership positions as they grow in their careers. Leadership positions, evaluations of workplace situations, and the feedback from those around them may be based on an emotional state (Côté, 2017). For this reason, leaders benefit from monitoring their feelings when they lead others and their assessments of others. This reality indicates that their feelings could predispose these decisions. Positive emotions make individuals make excessively great assessments and decisions, and negative feelings make individuals make poor assessments and decisions. Critically, Côté's (2017) research showed that leaders who accurately distinguish the emotion they are experiencing within their decision process quickly correct themselves if their feelings negatively influence the decision-making process.

Studies have shown that EI and Transformational Leadership (TFL) are connected. Furthermore, TFL decidedly sways followers' mentalities and executions (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Görgens-Ekermans and Roux (2021) state that EI skills impact TFL mannerisms. They might be valuable in the growth and training of leaders through direct training to enhance EI capabilities to improve upon the effectiveness of one's leadership.

Halliwell et al. (2022) suggested a positive relationship between high levels of EI and leadership self-efficacy. Notwithstanding, their research displayed no profound support for leadership self-efficacy as connective tissue between EI and the task-oriented leadership style. Furthermore, Halliwell et al. (2022) noted that coaching leaders on improving their EI skills could help expand their mindfulness and self-adequacy and encourage improved behavior of task-oriented leaders.

A large assemblage of research demonstrated that the capacity to perceive and deal with EI is related to the performance of leaders (Alotaibi et al., 2020; Van Oosten et al., 2019). However, according to Boyatzis et al. (2013), conventional leadership-building programs have a small impact on improving EI skills within leaders. Based on this trend, it is highly encouraged that tried and proven training related to the improved EI may be able to provide the required assistance needed to enhance the skill sets of these leaders (Bar-On et al., 2007).

The higher the EI of the leaders and followers, the better their organizational communication, execution, dependability, residency, and subsequently, the lower the turnover (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017). Additionally, the higher the EI of both leaders and followers, the better the social connections inside the workplace, the higher compassion, and the more significant levels of norming. Next, these same high levels of EI are usually associated with an elevated sense of responsibility, decision-making process, responsibility, and proficiency. Maamari and Majdalani (2017) also noted that EI benefits the organization by supporting sustainable growth and overall performance. It has been suggested that EI enormously impacts the leadership style, influencing the followers'/employees' feelings about the organization (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017).

Miao et al. (2021) study distinguished a positive connection between EI and those with a servant leadership style of managing others. This connection is more robust for less-educated followers in low power distance societies than in high institutional cooperation societies. Holt and Marques (2012) suggested expanding the number of ethical leaders in corporations by training these potential leaders while they are still in universities in sympathy and by hiring empathic individuals for leadership positions. Since compassion is a vital element of EI, it is strongly recommended that recruiters enlist leaders with high empathy and EI.

EI is a significant indicator of servant leadership with an average corrected correlation of .57. Hence, enlisting leaders with EI might increase ethical servant leaders in an establishment (Miao et al., 2021). Miao et al. (2021) also noted that the cost of training leaders to have EI might be high and time-consuming for these different organizations. It was therefore proposed that recruiters deliberately hire an individual with high levels of EI in both the leadership and the regular employee positions, who might eventually find themselves in a leadership position within the organization (Miao et al., 2021).

Leaders with high EI tend to positively impact their employees by rousing them, empowering their quest for intellectual ability, and taking care of their unique requirements (Kim & Kim, 2017). Hence, human resource development (HRD) experts are encouraged to integrate EI elements into practices for administration advancement. Specifically, they are urged to investigate other qualities for leadership improvement from such open doors as EI evaluation, self-reflection and contemplation, mental wellness programs, and others that include emotional intercessions (Kim & Kim, 2017).

According to a functional point of view, leadership is regarded as a significant empowering agent of performance and sound culture of an establishment (Moss, 2009). According to the interpretational point of view, it is a driver of individuals' learning and commitment (Shuck & Herd, 2012). These are the primary reasons why the HRD field worries about the adequacy of current and possible leaders and why consideration should be paid to both points of view (functional and interpretational) (Kim & Kim, 2017).

EI and ICT

Regarding EI, there are some implications within the IT sector for leaders and employees. The IT sector should precisely enlist leaders who exhibit transformational leadership characteristics through a more thorough selection process. This leadership approach is ideal for innovation and change within a company (Lee, 2005). Next, IT establishments ought to orchestrate instructional courses to work on the transformational abilities of employees at an administrative/leadership level (Jain & Duggal, 2018).

Research has shown that transformational leadership prompts the mental strengthening of the employee, which develops the employee's imaginative way of behaving. Khan et al. (2021) studied the connection between innovation and EI. Within this study, it was concluded that EI does not impact employees' innovative tendencies. This study's outcome also perceived that the EI of leaders is not an indicator of employees' behavior toward developing creative skills or behaviors (Khan et al., 2021).

Kumar Chand et al. (2019) study showed that EI is the primary facilitator in the relationship between employability traits and the satisfaction of employers in the context of hiring graduates with degrees in IT within India. The study also noted disconnections between

higher education institutions and the IT sector in what they would identify as employability traits that graduates need in the workplace (Kumar Chand et al., 2019). However, within the current generalized trend of organizational expectations, IT experts are expected to have EI and communication aptitude (CA) (Hendon et al., 2017).

According to Hendon et al. (2017), interpersonal abilities constantly appear as prerequisites for jobs; IT experts frequently need more practical interpersonal skills. Additionally, IT experts are introverted characters type in this way, emphasizing their absence of interpersonal abilities. Be that as it may, as indicated by Hendon et al.'s (2017) research suggested a huge positive connection between EI and the CA of IT experts. This study's results proposed that IT experts who connect EI and CA can positively impact their establishment, especially in collaboration/relationship building.

Best Practices to Develop EI

EI is divided into four categories, varying from standard to more complex: observing and articulating emotions; emotional enablement of thinking; understanding of different emotions; and controlling emotions (Mayer et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2007). It is suggested that one must use assertive communication to observe better and articulate emotions. This communication style enables one to gain the respect of others without being perceived as aggressive or passive in their behavior. Individuals who operate with EI must practice directly communicating their thoughts while displaying respect for others.

Developing thinking that empowers one's emotions is vital in enhancing one's EI. One way to achieve this goal would be to learn to respond instead of reacting to conflict. Emotional flare-ups and negative feelings may be the natural response during a disagreement. However,

individuals need to practice remaining calm during these emotionally intense situations. This practice will enable them not to make any reckless or thoughtless decisions that can, in turn, create a more significant issue (Al-Hamdan et al., 2019). When conflict occurs, the person using EI seeks a solution. Their words and deeds must reflect this internal decision.

As individuals set out to enhance their EI abilities, they would need to understand the different emotions expressed by others. This understanding can be achieved by working on one's active listening skills. Individuals with EI listen for understanding rather than waiting for a chance to speak (Ebrahimi et al., 2018). They must take the time to understand what the other person is saying before attempting to respond. While listening, they would also need to take note of nonverbal communication.

Another essential element in understanding others' emotions is by empathizing with them. Individuals who practice EI realize that empathy is a characteristic that displays emotional fortitude (Lyashevsky et al., 2020). Empathy enables such individuals to connect with others fundamentally. It also allows respect for one another and understanding among different people, especially if they have opposing points of view.

In pursuing developing one's EI, learning how to control emotions is essential.

Individuals can practice different ways to stay in a positive state of mind. A negative state of mind has the potential to impact others. People with EI have a consciousness of the temperaments of others and can consequently safeguard their emotions. By doing so, such individuals can maintain a positive outlook on their situation (Liu et al., 2021).

In improving one's EI, practicing self-awareness and intuition is essential. Enhancing this skill by paying close attention to one's emotions and how they impact others is necessary. With

time one can be able to identify the feelings of others by their body language, choice of words, and tone of voice (Iqbal et al., 2022). With this information, they can improve their communication with others.

Student Learning and SDL

While accomplishing learning objectives, controlling one's emotions is significant to supersede various enticements and momentary attractions that might prompt interruption and delay in objective coordinated conduct (Zhoc et al., 2018). Aside from this, the course of self-directed learning (SDL) is agonizing as students need to encounter cynicism, disarray, disruption, and disappointment with their learning experience when they enter other teaching situations. According to Zhoc et al. (2018), people with a more significant level of self-directedness will generally acquire more intellectual and non-scholarly.

Throughout the time consumed by learning, self-directed learners typically take it upon themselves to self-manage, which drives them to show productive behavior. This behavior includes adopting a profound learning strategy, defining higher learning objectives, and having more conversations and coordinated efforts with personnel and friends. These behavioral trends can assist them in accomplishing more intellectual and non-scholarly goals (Zhoc et al., 2018).

According to Shafait, Khan et al. (2021), many experts agree with EI's research findings. Additionally, higher education institutions should esteem SDL and knowledge management processes (KMP), which help develop one's learning results. However, Shafait, Yuming, et al. (2021a) did not show a significant association between EI and learning results, which contradicted the findings of Zhoc et al. (2018); be that as it may, the two studies do agree with research that has gone into this subject matter. Goleman (1998) addresses the disagreement

between studies, who suggested that if someone cannot self-manage their feelings and emotional circumstances, sympathy, and influential connections with others, all endeavors to learn are invalidated, regardless of the individual's intelligence.

Shafait, Yuming, et al. (2021) research also showed that EI drastically improves SDL, subsequently improving learning results. These findings correspond with Zhoc et al. (2018), affirming that the capacity-based hypothesis of EI and self-determination theory are positive benefactors in higher education. Furthermore, research suggested that learning results (social, mental, self-development results, and fulfillment with college experience) are fundamentally instrumental to innovative execution (imaginative self-viability and initiative help) of the scholastic and managerial workforce (Rogaten & Moneta, 2016).

SDL for the Future

Education continues despite the individuals' completion of their years of studying in higher education. Upon entering the job market, an individual would notice that specific processes will change due to best practices discoveries or even with the introduction of new technology. Therefore, the individual must guide their education process, especially as they seek to improve their human capital value (Lejeune et al., 2021). Thus, the goal is for each individual who desires to increase their human capital value to exercise a measure of SDL in their development plan (PDP) to improve their competency level.

The PDP of individuals seeking to improve their competency would involve understanding their career and the industry's current and future state. Such a plan would also motivate individuals to be achievement-oriented, especially in their self-efficacy. This reality indicates that higher education may not be placed in a position to address all of the individual's

educational needs for their career. However, SDL and the ability to form one's PDP could be incorporated within higher education at the undergraduate level (Grosemans et al., 2020).

If SDL is learned at this level, it would be easier for university graduates to continue their education according to their respective careers (Mohamad Nasri et al., 2020). Work-related learning should come quickly to those who would have mastered SDL in university. Those who have mastered SDL are expected to have a high level of self-efficacy (Grosemans et al., 2020).

SDL and ICT

Within Lemmetty and Collin's (2020) study on workplace learning, it is noted that there are some intense challenges, particularly within the area of information and communication technology (ICT). These challenges are connected to the reality that technology is constantly changing. ICT represents significant competition among organizations, nations, and even employment graduates (Cheng et al., 2020). In the context of higher education, these changes also pose particular challenges within the curriculum.

An approved curriculum within an ICT course could be ineffective for students' education development if the technology changes before or during the completion of the course. Important programming languages and software programs taught to students can quickly become obsolete upon graduation. This unique situation is not as common in the other disciplines within higher education as in ICT.

Therefore, the difficulty facing universities as they focus on preparing their students for the job market would be following the technology trend closely. Even with the help of networking with industry leaders and career mentors for students, it is difficult to predict the evolution of ICT and how different industries will react to these changes. However, given these

unique challenges, SDL may represent a reliable response to these repaid changes (Cheng et al., 2020). Instead of having courses focused on changing technologies, it may be best to empower students to focus on ICT trends and direct their learning objectives. It is suggested that the emphasis should be placed on the student's adaptation to the new information and required skills (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020).

Establishments might benefit from empowering employees in a state of learning to help their professional sustainability by planning work jobs that cultivate workers' learning and advancement and their physical and emotional well-being (Parker, 2014). Doing so can lessen the expenses of withdrawal behaviors, such as delays, absenteeism, and turnovers, and undergoing the innovation and efficiency that comes from a wholly engaged and healthy team (Pfeffer, 2018).

According to Lemmetty and Collin, K. (2020), the changes in technologies and rivalry from similar establishments in the IT sector encourage the learning of individual employees and teams through work. Establishments require employees to execute agile tasks with minimum hierarchies. Learning is progressively the obligation of the individual employee and project team. This trend happens without the establishment's control. Along these lines, the multi-layered idea of self-directed learning is fundamental concerning learning in the workplace (Heslin et al., 2020).

Jyoti et al. (2021) proposed that the more employees independently deal with their careers, the more probable they are to obtain better employment inside or outside their respective establishments. While the ideal person-to-job fit could encourage an employee to experience expanding potential benefits inside their present establishment, it is similarly prone to make the

employee less motivated to see other open doors for professional success outside their establishment. Jyoti et al. (2021) have also noted that the person-to-job fit unequivocally impacts how employees see opportunities inside and outside their career portability.

SDL and Caribbean Students

Choi (2017) warned that SDL in education is often used to pass an exam and does not always translate into other aspects of one's growth and development. This tendency indicates that many students might not employ their SDL skills outside their educational pursuits. Furthermore, in the context of the Caribbean, SDL is not emphasized until the graduate level of education.

SDL is known for helping individuals solve problems that may require them to think beyond normal expectations (Choi, 2017). Transitioning SDL into the workplace for Caribbean students can become difficult for those who have been directed throughout their entire education. The result has been that many have found it difficult not to get specific orders about what they should do to resolve problems.

Entrepreneurship and SDL

According to Morris and König (2020), the vital job of SDL lies in empowering people to control their learning, re-arrange themselves and obtain new information and abilities on a case-by-case basis. SDL capabilities are essential to continuous improvements on behalf of the entrepreneur (McLaughlin, 2019). These individuals need to change drastically and sometimes suddenly within the business environment.

Morris and König (2020) also noted that without SDL capability, learning-by-doing comes up short in the direction that aims at new systems and practices. In following this path,

there is an expectation of experiencing the results of inadequate techniques in one's attempt to obtain the desired results. Simultaneously, experiential learning can give SDL a persuasive premise, which drives this inspiration by distinguishing proof of issues or opportunities when entrepreneurs experience real entrepreneurial situations (Samwel Mwasalwiba, 2010).

Summary

A degree from a higher education institution is an achievement that is worthy of praise. Many students sacrifice their time and financial resources to obtain this achievement. However, after making such a sacrifice, students must match their education with jobs relevant to their degrees. On this point, the theory of human capital indicates that if the sacrifice of students does not prove to be financially beneficial, then there will come a time when individuals will be more reluctant to make the sacrifice. It is still being determined how higher education institutions can effectively keep track of the state of the job market or quickly adapt to these changes.

Furthermore, employers have been suggested to favor emotional intelligence and self-efficacy graduates. Graduates with emotional intelligence and self-efficacy tend to work better as a team, settle differences quickly, and, when the time comes, would make ideal leaders. Even though it has been suggested that EI can be taught, more research would need to take place to understand how to incorporate such lessons into all the other programs within higher education.

As a result of new changes within the workplace and the demands that come with it, such as new information technology developments, individuals must learn to be self-directed learners. Studies have shown that self-directed learners adapt quickly to change and constantly improve themselves. This constant self-improvement will lead them to steadily increase their value in the job market, which is also a significant factor within the human capital theory. Nevertheless, more

research is required to understand whether students' academic journeys should be incorporated or if SDL drives higher education.

Research has suggested that collaboration between these institutions and industry leaders can produce a vital partnership. Through this partnership, guidance can be provided on the current state of the job market and its future. Additionally, this partnership would empower universities to improve their curriculum. Research also indicates that mentorship and networking programs greatly benefit students. It has been suggested that one of the best transitional tools for these students is to move them from the classroom to the workforce. However, there needs to be a clear understanding of ensuring these relationships remain self-sustainable in the long term, especially in a capitalist nation.

Through the research that has been done, we understand the importance of EI and SDL within higher education. The study noted that higher education institutions tend to produce better-prepared graduates when they partner with industry leaders through curriculum consultation and mentorship. The gap that needs to be addressed is how these elements can help Caribbean-based educational institutions, especially in ICT, and how this region's culture, economics, and environment would impact the relevant stakeholders.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The focus of this chapter is to describe the methods and structure used within this study. The chapter highlights the characteristics and procedures used to comprehend the observations of ICT graduates' perceptions of their transition into the job market. The research study is described in the following sections by defining the research plan, its participants, and the data collection methodology. Additionally, an analysis of the data and a description of the trustworthiness of this study is offered.

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore ICT students' perceptions and lived experiences concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in aiding them in this transition. A phenomenological approach was the ideal methodology for this study. Since this study's purpose was to focus on examining the experiences of each participant and document how those experience has shaped their perceptions of the higher education they have received, therefore highlighting the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2014).

The study involved the engagement of twelve ICT graduates from Grenada as its participants. The participants had received between zero to three years of formal working experience before graduation and thus would have depended primarily on their experience within higher education to obtain a job. The gathering of data from every participant was in the form of an individual interview. As soon as the data was collected, recurring themes were classified. Respect and confidentiality throughout the different discussions were given to each participant.

Research Design

The type of study used for this research was qualitative research methodology instead of quantitative. The quantitative research methodology involves obtaining quantifiable data, which is then computed to understand the phenomena (Chu & Ke, 2017). However, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research requires assembling, investigating, and understanding non-numerical data. This study aimed to understand better the lived experiences of the ICT graduates in Grenada as they transitioned into the workplace. Therefore, more than the quantitative research methodology would be needed to address this objective. By allowing the graduates to express their lived experiences freely, the study captured unexpected impressions and potential unexplored perspectives on this subject.

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of information communications technology students concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in aiding them in this transition. This study's phenomenological approach supported the gathering and analyzing of the data to describe the core of each participant's feelings and perceptions of their shift into the workplace. Transcendental phenomenological research was used because there was an exploration of how and why each individual in this study has formed their perception of the surrounding phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Within this study, the perception of the participant's collective experiences (education received, steps taken to find a job, and initial performance in the workplace) was documented and examined. This shared experience and understanding of the phenomenon were analyzed through this interpretation. Therefore, I used

the responses and experiences of the participants to explore and interpret the phenomena (Van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Moustakas' (1994) phenomenology referred to the science of recounting what one perceives, senses, and knows or lived experiences. A phenomenological research study examines a trend within a social and cultural context and summarizes the trending elements found in one collective experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There are different forms of phenomenological studies. However, transcendental phenomenology was employed in this study. Transcendental phenomenology highlights the lived experience of the participants of the study. Within this study, the researcher did not consider their own experiences, points of view, or personal beliefs. Instead, the focus was on the participants' experience to capture their experience as if it had recently occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Within a transcendental phenomenology study, it is assumed that there is a preexisting structure within the shared experiences of its participants. This research method seeks to understand what was experienced and how it was experienced from the participant's point of view (Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological design is ideal whenever research aims to understand the collective human experiences or examine concepts from a new point of view (Lin, 2013). It was essential that within this study that a group of individuals with similar experiences was employed to conduct the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher of the phenomenon study identified the group's collective noteworthy testimonies, interpreted the testimonies that represent their intentions in giving their testimonies, and defined them in detail.

Before deciding on using the phenomenon research design, other qualitative research designs were considered. The narrative research design recounts individual experiences specific to a location and situation. It is used to analyze using different strategies, and its stories are interpreted by the researcher, highlighting the consequences within these stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study was not concerned about one individual's experience but rather the shared experience of a collection of individuals.

Grounded theory research design is the root or birth of a theory. It explains a particular practice or framework. It also offers a broad description of a process that has been experienced by many individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design is inappropriate, given that the aim was to observe and note a phenomenon. Ethnographic research design seeks to recount and understand a culture or social group. It focuses on the observation of individuals, and the research is conducted through immersion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study did not focus on culture or social group, as many of these individuals live very different lives and may need more interaction. A case study research design analyzes a particular case(s). It is assertive, descriptive, and provides an in-depth understanding of the subject matter (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design would not be suitable because the research was concerned with a trend that may be taking place in different individuals' lives.

This study intended to obtain information that described provided a reduction and captured the essence and intentionality of the phenomenon. In describing the phenomenon, the research study must refrain from explaining it (Klaskow, 2018). Therefore, it included rising phenomena like feelings, thoughts, and human reactions. Thus, the research avoided prejudices or assumptions about the examined phenomenon (Chojnacki, 2019). This act prevented any form

of pollution to the observation description. The core of participants' individual experiences was captured as they were presented (Priya, 2017). As the phenomenon was explored, essential themes and key relationships were deemed critical. Intentionality was employed in this research, which refers to interpreting the participants' experiences. The objective statements of their experiences and their subjective reflection on their experiences were considered (Kim, 2017).

I used the theoretical framework of Knowles' self-directed learning theory and Goleman's emotional intelligence theory with the component of self-efficacy to guide this study (Bandura, 1986; Goleman, 1995; Knowles, 1975). The graduates' self-efficacy included how they perceived their ability and confidence to perform their job requirements. Grosemans et al. (2020) and Irlbeck and Dunn (2020) agree that there is a relationship between SDL and EI regarding better job performance by employees.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research of this study:

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of information communication technology graduates and the perceived impact of HC, SDL, and EI skills on their transitions into the job market?

Research Question One

How did ICT graduates' SDL EI skill sets contribute to their level of self-efficacy in the workforce?

Research Question Two

How do ICT graduates describe their educational preparedness for transitioning into the job market?

Research Question Three

How do ICT graduates feel about their emotional and mental preparedness for the job market after graduation?

Setting and Participants

This section describes the setting in which the research took place. In this case, it was in the island nation of Grenada. Next, a description of the participant's profile and the criteria for participation in this study is provided.

Site (or Setting)

This study occurred on the island of Grenada in the West Indies. Grenada is an island state with a population of about 109,000. Grenada is considered a low- and middle-income economy (Rosenberg, 2018). In 2021, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 1.12 billion US dollars, which ranks it at 186 out of 196 nations (The World Bank, 2022). The country has two universities and one community college. Approximately 150 newly enrolled ICT students are between these three institutions within each new term (International Placewell Consultations, 2017). I live in Grenada and am an administrator within one of its universities; I have chosen this island because of the country's condition, which is a small economy, and few opportunities. However, there seems to be a trend of young, educated people leaving their low-income countries with the skills, experience, and knowledge they have acquired to prosper elsewhere in developed countries (Schiff, 2017). The agenda of the study was to interview each participant over an online platform such as Zoom. Having interviews online ensured each candidate was protected against COVID-19 infections on the island and facilitation

transportation. It also increased meeting flexibility and encouraged participation at various times ideal for them.

Participants

Twelve participants were volunteers from a pool of ICT graduates who have gained their higher education in Grenada and work in Grenada. These participants had zero to three years of working experience in ICT before graduation. This decision was made to determine how much higher education helped these graduates to find and excel in their chosen profession.

Furthermore, how much self-development played a part in their journey from their perspective. Graduates from financially and socially influential families in Grenada's society were avoided. There may have been a chance that this influence in the community may have played a role in their job market transitions (Sarpong & Maclean, 2015). In the case of Grenada, with its small population, such individuals are easily identified based on their family names.

Researcher Positionality

I graduated from one of the universities in Grenada. However, despite being a top student, it took me nine months and one hundred hand-delivered job applications before finding employment. Soon after, it came to my attention that other elements of the job market should have been taught to my fellow students and me, namely self-directed learning and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, I noticed that for some of the skill sets the job market was looking for, the learning institution had very few courses established to address the market's demands. In speaking with my classmates, most seemed to experience the same trend. About seven years later, the opportunity to work in higher education as an administrator came my way after multiple attempts. Unfortunately, the same problems that confronted my classmate and me upon

our graduation were still reoccurring among the recent graduates I had the opportunity to encounter. Through this study, I hope to invite higher educational institutions to take a better look at the job market and how it can teach the skill sets that will facilitate the transition of its graduates into it.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework of the dissertation was based on pragmatism. The research aimed to discover a process that would work best for an individual within the same phenomenon (Balliau, 2021). In this case, it aimed at future higher education ICT graduates to achieve their goal of finding employment. Establishing a successful framework that other graduates can follow may increase their chances of successfully transitioning into the workplace. It also suggests certain skill sets that should be focused on within the educational system. Although universities may be unable to remain updated with all the latest technologies or trends in the job market, if such skill sets are encouraged within the students, they will adapt to the needs of their respective workplaces.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions for this study are grounded in the self-directed learning theory and emotional intelligence theory. Knowles' self-directed learning theory suggests that self-directed learning will lead to the continuous development of the individual regardless of if they are in school or have graduated (Collin et al., 2021). Emotional intelligence theory suggests that emotional intelligence can assist the individual with being a better collaborator, subordinate, and one that could connect better with others, such as clients (Singh et al., 2017). Both theories

suggest that collectively, they can lead the individual on a path that will empower their level of self-efficacy.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption within a research study focuses on the universal pattern of things as they are (Blaikie, 2018). This research focused on how different graduates can successfully transition into the workforce within the context of Grenadian society (a small population with a low- and middle-income economic environment). Graduates with similar degrees in more extensive and developed economies may have different experiences due to their access to more job opportunities and resources. As a result of the small economy and the large number of ICT graduates entering the job market, graduates may need to have desirable skill sets that employers demand.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption suggests that knowledge can be obtained through research by collaborating with the researcher and the participants who have lived experiences (Soggiu et al., 2021). Within the field of ICT, there is constant change in software and new technology. Therefore, what could have been relevant during higher education may no longer be applicable after graduation and entering the workforce. Therefore, SDL would assist in staying current on what the graduate should know to remain marketable. Some studies suggest that even with the correct level of knowledge, employers desire employees with EI, which is effective in teamwork and customer care (Miao et al., 2017). Therefore, individuals with SDL skills and a high level of EI will be desired by potential employers.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption is the ethical element that needs to be addressed whenever a researcher is planning to conduct a study since their values, perception, and predispositions may inform the interpretation of the gathered data (Finnis, 1980). The axiological assumption of this research is that graduates with high SDL skills and high EI will indicate that they had more effortless experience transitioning into the job market. However, it assumed they would have found a job faster than their counterparts. Gustafsson (2020) stated that the axiological assumption points to established values. However, it considered the fact that subjectivity could be misinformed.

Researcher's Role

As the researcher of this study, I am currently an administrator within one of the higher education institutions in Grenada, a post I held for about five years. In addition, my bachelor's and master's degrees have been completed within the same institution. In that capacity, my role has been to provide students with non-academic and academic guidance. Guidance to students is provided before and after graduation regarding their careers and securing employment. However, the interviewed graduates were screened to ensure they had never interfaced with me within my administrative capacity. Furthermore, participants who graduated before the fall of two thousand and seventeen will be classified as preferred participants to participate in these interviews because their graduation would predate my start date and current employment. It should also be noted that the majority of participants in this research may come from the same institute where I am employed, given that it is the leading higher educational institution on the island of Grenada.

Within this qualitative study, I played the role of a human data collection instrument (May et al., 2022). Therefore, the collected data were reconciled by me. Considering my personal and work history connection to the institution from which most students would have graduated, *bracketing* would need to be employed.

Bracketing is used in a research study to formulate a non-prejudiced state of mind and a disregard for pre-knowledge or beliefs about a subject or participants (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). I ensured that the setting for the engagement with participants was a neutral setting that was convenient for them. As previously mentioned, using an online platform allowed them the freedom to participate in these interviews at locations and times that would make them most comfortable and safe to express themselves. By having these participants express themselves freely without any concerns, there was a high probability that the answers were as honest as possible.

Procedures

I obtained approval from the various higher educational institutions' alum associations to contact their ICT graduates (See Appendix A and B). Then Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought (See Appendix C). Next, contact was made with the potential participants to inform them of the study and its benefits and encourage them to participate in the research. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, they were provided additional information or answers to any questions about the study along with a consent form (See Appendix F). Each interview and focus group interview was conducted via Zoom (online). Within these interviews, keynotes were taken on what was being said and my immediate thoughts on these critical statements. I also recorded each of these interviews using Zoom. The

audio was transcribed for additional review and analysis of the data. A questionnaire was shared with each participant at the end of the interviews, which was created using Microsoft Forms.

Once all the data was collected, vital themes were made from what the participants had to say.

Permissions

Permission was sought to interview past graduates from various alum association in Grenada. Permission was also sought from IRB to collect data for this study. Next, permission was sought to contact potential candidates through the different alum associations of the higher educational institutions in the country. Once approval was given to advertise to potential candidates, they were contacted immediately. Once the potential candidates had been selected, based on the criteria of the study, then they were given a consent form to get their permission.

Recruitment Plan

The sample size of this qualitative study was twelve participants. It has been suggested that qualitative studies should have a minimum sample size of twelve to obtain data saturation (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Therefore, a sample of twelve participants has been estimated as enough for a qualitative study. As the researcher for the study, efforts were made to contact ICT graduates within the last twelve years. The researcher contacted the potential participants from Grenada through a contact list provided by the different Alumni Affairs Associations. An initial phone call was made to chat with each potential participant (see Appendix D). Because in Grenada, most individuals prefer something other than emails as the primary form of communication, especially from an unexpected source. Furthermore, a confirmation email was sent for documentation (see Appendix E).

The criterion for these participants was that they should have had at most three years of prior ICT working experience before graduating. Their GPA and ages were not a requirement. However, any graduate with ICT certification, like C++, JAVA, etc., was rejected before graduation. The added qualification would have given these graduates an advantage over their classmates. Because Grenada is a small society (population of 109,000), graduates from influential families were not interviewed since it is common for families to set up their children with prominent jobs upon graduation (Bolívar et al., 2019). Once the twelve participants were secured for this study, they were emailed an overview of the study and a consent form (see Appendix F).

Data Collection Plan

Data triangulation incorporates several sources to comprehensively understand a phenomenon (Flick et al., 2019). Therefore, I used the data triangulation technique to understand the phenomenon this study aims to observe. I implemented three methods to acquire the data needed for this study; consequently, data were gathered through individual interviews, focus group meetings, and a questionnaire. Every participant had a one-on-one interview with me. Afterward, the participants engaged in a focus group meeting with their fellow participants and me. Each focus group had six participants, and every interview had an audio recording. In the end, the participants completed a short questionnaire about how they felt about different issues connected to their transition to the job market.

Individual Interviews

The first technique employed to collect data in this study was individual interviews. The interviews were done in a semi-structured manner. According to Britten (1999), “Semi-

structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allowed the interviewer or interviewee to diverge from pursuing an idea or response in more detail.” The flexibility of the semi-structured interview permits the detection of valuable information to participants but may not have been previously identified by the researcher as necessary (Gill et al., 2008). Each interview was given between 30 to 45 minutes. The individual interviews took place via Zoom, and they were recorded. Notes were taken during the individual interviews; the interviews were recorded to ensure that there was a backup transcript and that the data was collected correctly for verification. All recordings were stored on the researcher’s Liberty University’s OneDrive account. Once the dissertation is defended and approved, these recordings will be deleted.

Individual Interview Questions

1. What made you want to get involved in ICT? RQ3
2. Before your undergraduate studies, how much knowledge and experience did you have in ICT? RQ2
3. What steps did you take in securing a job? RQ1
4. How would you describe your job search? RQ3
5. What impressions did you receive from the different interviews with potential employers? RQ3
6. How did your self-directed learning skill sets help you transition into the workplace? RQ1
7. How did your emotional intelligence skillsets help you transition into the workplace? RQ1
8. Describe your first month of employment. RQ3
9. How comfortable were you with your tasks? RQ3

10. How difficult or easy was it for you to function alongside your fellow employees, manager, and customers at the start of your career? RQ3

Matching Individual Interview Questions to Research Questions

Individual interview questions three, six, and seven refer to research question one.

Individual interview three question refers to research question one because the steps required to find a job may need these individuals to go through a process they were never prepared for through coaching or some form of mentorship. Therefore, it is assumed that their self-directed learning skills would have to be displayed. Finding a job also requires an individual to have a sense of their job market value, which suggests that they understand the importance of their human capital (Becker, 1964). These participants would have had to be a part of a job interview to find a job. In these interviews, they would have had to present themselves (by being self-aware) well and connect with their potential employers. Self-awareness and connecting with others are elements of emotional intelligence (Côté, 2017).

Individual interview question six refers to research question one because the participants would have needed to quickly learn specific processes and/or technologies in joining an organization. Especially in the context of IT employees, they would have had to quickly adopt new technology skills to become and remain valuable to their organization. IT employees are sometimes required to be more knowledgeable concerning the different IT tools within their organization than the other employees (Collin et al., 2021). This reality often requires these IT workers to learn more about these tools beyond the essential/regular tutorials provided.

Individual interview question seven refers to research question one because emotional intelligence has been proven to help individuals to connect well with others. The ability to relate

with others is an important trait when working in a team, dealing with clients and supervisors. By having a good working relationship with the previously mentioned groups of individuals, one can experience success in the workplace. It is also proven that these traits are included in skill sets that make good leaders. Therefore, it also hints at the potential for growth in one's career.

Individual interview question two refers to research question two because it will help gauge the participants' preparedness for their desired careers before starting their higher educational pursuits. In their opinion, the question also strategically asks the participants to evaluate how much the academic studies provided educational preparedness.

Individual interview questions one, four, five, eight, nine, and ten refer to research question three. Individual interview one question relates to research question three because it should trigger the participants' initial emotions about their educational pursuits. It will also allow them to express their original expectations about their desired careers.

Individual interview four and five questions refer to research question three because in describing their job search, each participant will be able to share their experiences and how these experiences made them feel about finding a job. Additionally, the participants could express their impressions of the different interviews they had to experience before obtaining a job. Although job searching may be difficult, it is not uncommon for individuals to feel high anxiety or emotional stress/pressure in preparing and participating in a job interview (Deer et al., 2018). Individual interview eight, nine, and ten questions refer to research question three because it will help better understand the participants' emotional state and experience as they tried assimilating into the working culture of their respective organizations.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Each participant had an audible and a written description of their interview. Every participant was given a copy of the transcript of their interview for review. If they have any corrections, they will be done according to their request. This step will be to ensure that data collection is valid. Once the participants validate the data, the transcripts will be reviewed. Within the review of the transcripts, critical statements will be annotated. Next, the data will be conceptualized and segmented into different categories or themes. These themes will be analyzed to understand further and detect any underlying reoccurring patterns. Once the information is interpreted correctly, the result will be documented. The data collected using the individual interviews will be analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic method (2006).

Focus Groups

The second technique utilized in this study is the focus group. The focus groups brought the candidates together into groups based on the participants' availability. This technique was employed for additional information after the individual interviews. Focus groups were beneficial for participants to trade ideas among themselves (Flynn et al., 2018). This data collection approach helped trigger specific memories of their transition to the job market. Such a situation benefited the research by adding further information. The focus groups were formed once all the individual interviews were completed and lasted 35 to 45 minutes. The focus group sessions took place via Zoom, and they were recorded. Although notes were taken within the focus group interviews; nevertheless, recording of the interviews took place to ensure that there was a backup transcript and that the data was adequately collected for verification. Interviewees were given a choice to leave their cameras off and use fake names to hide their identities from

other interviewees. All recordings were stored on the researcher's Liberty University's OneDrive account. Once the dissertation is defended and approved, these recordings will be deleted.

Focus Group Questions

List focus group questions:

1. Which courses in higher education have helped you transition to the job market the most? RQ1
2. What key elements would you point to as to why your employer chose you for the job you have today? RQ2
3. Which skill sets were the most valuable to you in your transition into the workplace? RQ3
4. Describe the skill sets you wish you had before your search for a job. RQ1
5. If you were to relive your transition into the workplace, how would it be different with the knowledge and skill sets you have today? RQ1

Matching Focus Interview Questions to Research Questions

Focus interview question one refers to research question one because it refers to the participants' skill sets. It should be noted that the question is very similar to that of the individual interview question seven. However, the question here needs to be more generalized and focused on EI. It should also be noted that within this question and the other focus group questions, it is assumed that the interactions between the different participants will generate a deep conversation.

Focus interview question four refers to research question one because it allows the participants to reflect on all the different skill sets they had acquired by the time they graduated

and how those skills have allowed them to transition into the workplace. Taking note of any reoccurring specific skills may indicate that future job seekers should closely examine those skill sets.

Focus interview question five refers to research questions one and two because they place the candidates in a position where they had to examine their career history and the demands of the job market they had to face. This question should put the participants in a state of mind where they could reflect on the ideal skill sets they wished they had from the start of their careers. This reflection may indicate that if those skill sets were at their disposal, their job search for the best-paying jobs would have been easier or more easily accessible to them.

Focus interview question two refers to research question two because it focuses on the educational preparedness of the different participants. This question is aimed at the relevance of the education received and the expectations of the job market.

Focus interview question three refers to research question three because it refers to the impressions these participants had about what made them the best candidate for their job. The question may also give insight into the decision process of employers while hiring. It also has the potential to provide information on what makes the best job candidate.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Each focus group session was recorded audibly and transcribed. All the participants within the focus groups were given transcripts of their respective group sessions to validate the data gathered. Any correction was made upon the participants' request if required. Next, all the data from these focus groups were reviewed. Based on the statements made in the focus group, they were coded and placed within categorical themes. These themes were then presented

cohesively as findings for this study. The data collected using the focus group interviews were analyzed using the thematic method by Braun and Clarke (2006)

Questionnaire

The third technique utilized in this study is the questionnaire technique. It helped gauge these participants' feelings about moving from the classroom to the workplace. According to Groves et al. (2004), the questionnaire is an organized means of collecting data from entities to build measurable descriptors of the characteristics of the greater populace of which the entities are a part. At the end of the focus group interviews, participants were sent a link to the questionnaire via email and the Zoom chat room. The questionnaire was created with Microsoft Forms and the researcher's Liberty University account. The collected data was used, analyzed, and discarded once the dissertation was defended and approved after three years.

Questionnaire Questions

The questionnaire questions are:

1. How prepared were you to enter the job market? RQ3
2. How would you describe how your higher education helped you prepare for the job market? RQ2
3. How would you describe your SDL skills in the workplace? RQ1
4. How would you describe your EI skills in the workplace? RQ1
5. How would you describe your level of self-efficacy within your work performance? RQ1

Matching Questionnaire Questions to Research Questions

Questionnaire questions three, four, and five refer to research question one because it allows the participants to reflect on and describe their EI, SDL, and general self-efficacy skill

sets directed at HC. Questionnaire question two refers to research question two because it is connected to their educational preparation. It is assumed that their chances of obtaining a job will be enhanced with higher education. Questionnaire question one refers to research question three because it focused on the emotional and mental state of the participants when they were job-seeking. It should also indicate the level of stress and anxiety that they may have had to endure at that time. However, it also meant that some had more confidence than others, which could be linked to the competency of their skill sets.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

The answers to the questions were collected and coded based on the responses. Similar responses were placed within the same category, then analyzed to understand the reoccurring themes better. The questionnaire data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic method (2006).

Data Synthesis

Once the data was assembled from all the participants, the data was analyzed. I synthesized the different themes into a description of the experiences of each participant. Next, there was a formation of a collection of reports of the incident's various meanings and “essences” (Van Manen, 1990, 2014). The primary data source for this research was the participants and their contribution through the interviews, focus groups, and a questionnaire. The collected data were classified based on where they were collected and pooled together before the initial coding stage. Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis were used to process the data.

Thematic analysis recognizes trends or themes among data collected within a qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This data analysis method reviews the patterns in the collected

data, which were deemed vital or remarkable, and was then placed in themes to inform the qualitative research. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis summarizes and interprets the data with the aim of better understanding the data.

The thematic analysis was done in six steps:

1. **Familiarization of data:** At this stage, the data was read and re-read to ensure that the researcher was familiar with the collected data from the transcripts from the recordings of the interviews and focus group sessions, three data sources, and the result of the questionnaire.
2. **Initial coding:** An inductive analysis was used to create the initial codes, color-coded using a line-by-line process.
3. **Generating themes:** The following step required associating similar codes into central perspective themes.
4. **Validity & reliability of themes:** A review occurred among the different themes, creating a thematic map (Level One). Furthermore, consideration was given to the various themes' capability to respond to the research questions (Level Two).
5. **Defining & naming themes:** Then, the specifics of the theme were refined by providing them with names, definitions, and sub-themes.
6. **Interpretation & reporting:** Finally, a report was produced which outlined the analysis of the different themes and their results

A reflective journal was maintained throughout this process to address the choices and decision-making process through this research study. This journal audited the themes and took options (Cahill et al., 2018).

Trustworthiness

I ensured that the voices of the different participants were preserved and accurately represented (Creswell, 2013). Each participant was provided a transcript of their interview to verify if I captured all they said. Trustworthiness of the study was enforced by utilizing the triangulation of data, member checking, audit trail, and peer review techniques (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2014).

Credibility

According to Clark et al. (2020), credibility is founded on observing certain practices, which may only sometimes ensure truthfulness. Nevertheless, it can provide information that could interest the general public and give the utmost accurate facts that can be obtained. The participants' honesty was encouraged. However, the triangulation of data received (interviews, focus group interviews, and a questionnaire) was used to establish credibility. The information for their respective institutions verified the candidates as higher education graduates.

Transferability

According to Trochim (2020), transferability represents how the findings of a qualitative study can be transferred to other circumstances or situations that bear some level of similarity to the qualitative analysis in question. Transferability of research can only occur if the research is done in a valid, precise, and ethical fashion. The research findings can become transferable by generating meaningful data and descriptions for researchers and readers (Lincoln et al., 1985). For this reason, a detailed description of the methods used to conduct the study will be recorded. In addition, the researcher maintained a complete collection of data analysis and readily available

data upon request. The compilation included videos, transcripts, coding, spontaneous responses, and produced themes.

Dependability

The concept of dependability is grounded in the assumption that a study is repeated or duplicated (Trochim, 2020). The dependability of the information received hinges on the researcher and the participants. According to Bradley (1993), dependability requires consistent verification as the research occurs. The researcher addressed dependability using intra-reliability (Ary et al., 2010). This process involved coding the data, taking a break from the analysis, re-coding the data, and finally comparing the two coded materials (Ary et al., 2010).

Confirmability

According to Trochim (2020), confirmability signifies the level at which other individuals can verify the findings. The researcher reviewed the result of the research with an antagonistic point of view and carefully looked for errors and inconsistencies. Additionally, the triangulation collection confirmed consistency in the data collected.

The researcher used the member-checking procedure, allowing every participant to review and evaluate their respective interview transcripts for truthfulness and correct meaning (Ary et al., 2010). Additionally, through member-checking, an appraisal and evaluation of the conclusive results of the research were presented to the participants, allowing them to voice their concerns or issues with it (Ary et al., 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Being forthcoming and honest with every participant regarding the purpose of the research study is essential in ethical considerations (Van Katwyk et al., 2020). As a result, every

participant fully understood the agenda of this study. Each participant was given an IRB-approved consent form before participating in the study. This consent form provided details on the study's purpose and offered the participant the option to decline the opportunity to participate in this research any time they choose (See Appendix F).

The researcher also protected the identity of the participants by giving each of them a pseudonym. The interviewed participants were given the aliases such as Grenadian Graduate 1 (GG1). This step was taken to protect the participants (Cascio & Racine, 2018). The researcher's Liberty University Dropbox account stored a list linking pseudonyms. Only the researcher had access to this link. This form of identifying the participants was done for all twelve volunteers. The participants were also given a copy of the research finding, including the transcripts of their interviews. This step allowed them to correct misunderstandings by ensuring autonomy over their representation in the study. The researcher provided the well-being of the participants and their maximum level of comfort in this study (Bitter et al., 2020); all interviews were conducted online at times and on days most beneficial to them. The researcher remained fair to all participants; everyone was given the same maximum time (45 minutes) for their interviews and provided the same level of protection and comfort (Bitter et al., 2020).

Their information was also stored on Liberty University's Microsoft OneDrive and backed up on the researcher's Liberty University Dropbox account. Once the study has been accepted and published, the information will be discarded after three years. Lastly, the researcher will report the data gathered honestly concerning the participants' experiences.

Summary

The main objective of Chapter Three was to define and describe the methods used in this study by examining how to improve the transition of ICT graduates into the workforce and see them excel because of their higher education experience. This chapter presented a descriptive outline of the characteristics and procedures of the phenomenological research study. A description of the research plan and design, the research questions, the participants involved, and the data collection methods were provided. A description of how the data was analyzed was also indicated. Finally, it was explained how ethical considerations were given to the study's participants. By taking all the necessary steps within this qualitative research, a better understanding of the phenomenon surrounding ICT graduates looking for jobs in a small and struggling economy will be obtained. The study provided information on how their skill sets have aided them in becoming valuable contributors to the workforce.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore ICT students' perceptions and lived experiences concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in this transition. The study used individual interviews, focus groups, and a questionnaire with Grenada ICT graduates. The data were collected, analyzed, and coded using thematic analysis. Employing ICT graduates from Grenada was necessary to understand the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of graduates transitioning into the workplace from low- and middle-income economies. The data gathered through the individual interviews, focus groups, and a questionnaire assisted in answering the three research questions fixated on understanding ICT graduates from Grenada's transition into the job market. The grouping of data into categories and themes was used to obtain the core ideas and uniformities of the participants articulated within these different data collection methods.

This chapter overviews the participants' involvement in this qualitative phenomenological study. Additionally, a detailed analysis can be found within this chapter of the data collected from the individual interview questions (see Appendix G), focus group questions (see Appendix H), and questionnaire (see Appendix I) for the ICT graduates used in the study.

Participants

A total of 18 participant consent forms were sent to the ICT graduates who have gained their higher education in Grenada and work in Grenada. Table 1 shows the number of participants by focus group and gender. A total of 12 consent forms were returned from these ICT graduates willing to participate in the study and were found to be eligible to be included in

the research study. The study called for 12 participants. Furthermore, the participants were randomly divided into two focus groups for the focus group interviews (see Table 1).

GG1

GG1 was working in the field of education before graduation. Once GG1 graduated, her employer gave them a job aligned with the education and ICT fields. Her employers were impressed with her undergraduate degree and offered the promotion/transfer upon graduation.

GG2

GG2 did an internship before graduating. As soon as she had graduated, the company where she did their internship hired her. She is currently an entrepreneur in a non-ICT based industry. However, her ICT skills are being used to enhance her business.

GG3

GG3 did not have any ICT working experience upon graduation. She seemed to have struggled for a few months before deciding to try exploring jobs outside of the ICT field. When she did find employment, her ICT skills were needed to enhance her efficiency at work. Eventually, she decided to focus on a career in education.

GG4

GG4 was not able to get any working experience before graduation. She took close to two years before finding stable employment. After graduation, she had to pursue further education in ICT by obtaining ICT-based certifications. She eventually got a start in her career by teaching beginner ICT courses. She is currently employed by the government of Grenada and is conducting projects. These projects are not ICT based, but she uses her ICT skills daily for her job.

GG5

GG5 had no prior working experience. However, she did seem to be building an excellent relevant working network of people who were aware of her work ethic and character. Therefore, upon graduation, she was offered two job interviews. She was hired for one of those jobs. The employment is not within the ICT field, but she is still looking for an ICT-based job to pursue her career goals.

GG6

GG6 had working experience, but it was not in the field of ICT. She was open to exploring a job not grounded in the ICT field after graduation. Finding employment was still an issue. However, she was able to find a job eventually. She started her ICT-based entrepreneurial business to keep her ICT skill sharp and explore working opportunities. Ultimately, she was able to obtain an ICT based job in an area that she desired.

GG7

GG7 had experience as a teacher before doing his ICT degree. While pursuing his degree, he did a series of ICT projects for companies. He also volunteered his time to help children learn to use computers. On the day of his graduation, he was offered a job. He is currently an ICT entrepreneur and continues volunteering to help children with their ICT skills.

GG8

GG8 did an internship before graduation. He decided to pursue the direction of entrepreneurship and freelance. Thankfully, he had mentors who could connect him to companies worldwide that were looking for his skill sets. He also noted that those skill sets resulted from his personal studies and self-directed learning.

GG9

GG9 was engaged in doing websites and other ICT projects as a freelancer before graduation. As a result, he was offered a job before graduation for his exceptional ICT skills. He quickly became an excellent co-worker due to his EI skills. He is currently an ICT entrepreneur who also gives higher education students internship opportunities to gain working experience.

GG10

GG10 did not have prior ICT working experience. He had intended to get a job in the ICT field but quickly realized that, based on the opportunities in Grenada, he had to consider non-ICT careers. Upon his employment, GG10 noticed that EI played a more significant role in the workplace than he initially thought.

GG11

GG11 did not have any ICT working experience. She had struggled to find internships and other opportunities that would allow her to gain experience. After a long and challenging search, she focused outside the ICT field. In making the decision, she noticed that other opportunities were available.

GG12

GG12 gained ICT working experience through projects during their time as an undergraduate student. Upon graduation, he decided to do freelance work. It allowed him the opportunity to travel and have flexible working hours. Eventually, he found a job working for the government of Grenada. He does note that EI did help him to manage his clients and work with others.

Table 1*ICT Graduates Participants*

Code Name	Focus Group	Gender	1st Job (ICT or Non-ICT based)	Current job (ICT or Non-ICT based)	Obtained further education apart from BSc.	Prior ICT working experience	Ease or difficulty getting a job
GG1	FG1	Female	ICT	ICT	Masters	Formal work	Ease
GG2	FG1	Female	ICT	Non-ICT	No	Internship	Ease
GG3	FG2	Female	Non-ICT	Non-ICT	Masters	No	Difficulty
GG4	FG2	Female	Non-ICT	Non-ICT	No	No	Difficulty
GG5	FG1	Female	Non-ICT	Non-ICT	No	No	Ease
GG6	FG1	Female	Non-ICT	ICT	No	No	Difficulty
GG7	FG2	Male	ICT	ICT	ICT certifications	Worked on ICT projects	Ease
GG8	FG1	Male	ICT	ICT	ICT certifications	Internship	Ease
GG9	FG2	Male	ICT	ICT	ICT certifications	Worked on ICT projects	Ease
GG10	FG2	Male	Non-ICT	Non-ICT	No	No	Difficulty
GG11	FG2	Female	Non-ICT	Non-ICT	Masters	No	Difficulty
GG12	FG1	Male	ICT	ICT	ICT certifications	Worked on ICT projects	Ease

The semi-formal online (Zoom) interviews were ideal for all the participants based on their location and work schedule. The participants comprised seven females and five males (see Table 1). After the individual interviews, the participants were divided into two focus groups based on availability. The focus groups were also conducted via the Zoom platform. By this time, all participants were very relaxed and used to being interviewed on this topic via the data collection method. They were also excited to hear the opinions of other participants, and they often agreed with one another's perspectives and ideas.

From the results of this study, four themes were noted. These themes were classified as: the importance of EI abilities, the importance of SDL abilities, adaptability to non-ICT fields, difficulty transitioning into the job market, and easy transitioning into the job market. These themes carefully highlighted the perceptions of the different participants.

Results

This qualitative phenomenological study explored ICT graduates' perceptions and lived experiences concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in this transition. Within the data analysis process, five emerging themes were identified. The emerging themes were (a) the importance of EI abilities, (b) the importance of SDL abilities, (c) adaptability to non-ICT fields, (d) difficulty transitioning into the job market, and (e) easy transitioning into the job market. These five themes were acknowledged as emerging themes because there were repeatedly and persistently mentioned by the study participants (see Table 2).

Table 2

Emergent Themes with Textural and Structural Elements

Themes	Codes
Importance of EI abilities:	People skills
• <i>Sub-Theme I: Self-Confidence</i>	Learning to read people
	Soft skills
	Work-related ethics
	Interact with people
	Understand people
	Manage one's emotions
	Empathetic
	Social skills
Importance of SDL abilities	Self-taught
	Personal research

	Learning outside the classroom Upskilling
Adaptability to non-ICT fields	Non-ICT job The degree did not match my job Not grounded in ICT
Difficulty transitioning into the job market	Lack of knowledge Basic knowledge Lack of experience Limited job opportunities Long delay before finding a job
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sub-theme I: Lack of practical experience or technical skills</i> • <i>Sub-theme II: Limited opportunities</i> 	
Easy transitioning into the job market	Prior ICT working experience Internship opportunities Recommendations/Good reputation Networking Additional certifications/education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sub-theme I: Networking</i> • <i>Sub-theme II: Internships</i> • <i>Sub-theme III: Prior ICT Experiences</i> 	

Table 3

Frequency of Related Words from Data Collection

Themes	Frequency of Related Words
Importance of EI abilities	86
Importance of SDL abilities	70
Adaptability to non-ICT fields	15
Difficulty transitioning into the job market	116
Easy transitioning into the job market	125

Theme 1: Importance of EI Abilities

EI abilities have been the most repetitive theme in all the responses in the different data collection sets. Based on what the participants have stated, EI abilities are highly valuable skills within the workplace. Furthermore, that is usually a deciding factor on whether or not one would be considered for employment. They have also indicated that it is the most valuable skill when transitioning into a new place of work.

GG3- It (EI) played a significant role because I learned how to understand people, adjust to the work settings, and build relationships with and get to know them. In understanding others' emotions, you can understand how to handle them if somebody has a mood swing. Because you want a productive work setting, you must learn to adjust to different circumstances and thrive despite the working environment. So I think emotional intelligence played a significant role in how I learned to manage my emotions in the workplace.

GG7- My university experience helped me to learn how to interact with people from around the world. It also helped with communication and working with others.

GG10 - I had to learn emotional intelligence from reading the room and other people.

GG11- I needed to develop some soft skills and work-related ethics. Emotional intelligence is one of the skills I had to learn to become productive in the workplace quickly.

Sub-Theme I: Self-Confidence

The study highlighted a connective tissue between SDL and EI; this connection rests within the state of self-confidence about the learned skills and how these participants felt about it. The more confident participants tend to market themselves and their skill sets. Based on the participants' comments, those with self-confidence tend to enhance their performance in the workplace. In other cases, self-confidence has aided some to venture into opportunities for themselves.

GG1- My degree gave me access to a new position, theoretical knowledge, exposure to new possibilities, and confidence due to the sense of accomplishment.

GG6- Experience and confidence, not feeling intimidated by the tasks, really did make the difference... Initially, it was challenging; there was some intimidation because I was new. Even though you don't get it right all the time, I realized that confidence is essential. I have noticed that one of the best ways to gain confidence is to keep doing the task repeatedly until you get it right consistently, which is, in my opinion, connected to self-directed learning.

FG1- Maturity and self-confidence also help to see the workplace or working experience in a different light.

FG2 - Confidence is a significant factor in what I can do today (entrepreneurship).

Theme 2: Importance of SDL Abilities

The different interviews gave the impression that new higher-education employees would need a sense of self-directed learning to perform. Another point that has been noticed was that all

of these ICT graduates claimed they had outstanding self-directed learning and had to employ their SDL skills to quickly learn a new task or process in their diverse situations. This trend indicates that they are also time sensitive with their learning structure.

GG1- A lot of things that I was tasked with, I had to teach myself. I had to go out and teach myself how to use the required platform given to me by my institution. No one else in the institution knew how to use it. So, I had to learn quickly and execute my new tasks efficiently.

GG7- My degree gave me an idea of what is possible, although it did not allow me to do it because it was very theoretical. So, I spent a lot of time learning how to do it, like programming, Linux, and how these large systems are architected... To be a software developer, I needed to teach myself more than what was offered by the degree that I got.

GG9- SDL has much to do with the drive to achieve something, which came naturally to me because I have been doing it for so long. Set a goal and work towards it.

GG12- I went in the direction of system design and implementation as well as programming, so for the most part, I had to teach myself these things... I had little experience and knowledge of the different tasks I was given. But I was willing to put in the time and effort to excel at what was given to me.

Theme 3: Adaptability to Non-ICT Fields

About 42% of the ICT graduates found themselves working in a non ICT-based field and therefore had to adapt to those different fields of employment. This trend indicates that such

graduates need a well-rounded education to help them engage with various sectors outside the ICT job market.

GG3- My degree did not prepare me for my first job that was not ICT-related. So, I had to learn the required tasks quickly, and it felt like starting from scratch again. It was a different experience than I had expected.

GG6- Furthermore, at the beginning of my career, I was not doing what my degree had prepared me to do.

GG9- I had to quickly learn to adjust my reports from the detailed approach taught in school to the concise business-like manner used in the workplace. I also had to learn several new terminologies and organizational processes quickly... Once I started working, I was exposed to different areas such as accounting, project management, public relations, marketing, and grant financing.

GG10- My first job was in Human Resources. It had hardly anything to do with ICT. My job was to coordinate meetings and design flyers.

GG11- So I gave up on a job in ICT, as I did not have a network of people to help me. Therefore, I turned to a career in operational and project management after deciding to send out applications for those jobs. With this change, I found success.

Theme 4: Difficulty Transitioning into the Job Market

Notably, 58% of participants claimed they had a problematic experience transitioning into their new jobs. However, these difficulties have been mainly traced to two sub-themes: lack of practical experience or technical skills and/or limited opportunities.

Sub-theme I: Lack of Practical Experience or Technical Skills

Lack of practical experience or technical skills is a trend among the graduates as to why their transition was difficult. Most claim that their education should have focused on hands-on experience, which they believed was needed. Furthermore, others point out that they did not try to get an internship or volunteer their time toward meaningful projects that would have given them the experience they needed before graduation.

GG3- One of my biggest challenges was competing in the job market without experience.

GG4- I never did a summer job or an internship, so I was green retrospectively. I did have friends who helped me spice up my cover letter. I sent my CV to several establishments. But I did not get a job until about two years later. So, while looking for work, I did a lot of volunteer work but not in ICT. I also did a course in PC Hardware and Repairs. Because the degree I did was not practical but very much theoretical.... I was told in one interview that I was great in the interview, but I was told that the employers did not want to hire me because I did not have any experience. Qualifications are excellent, but experience rules.

GG7- My degree gave me an idea of what is possible, although it did not allow me to do it because it was very theoretical.

GG8- I am in the software field, and the institution I graduated from provided little to no training in this area.

GG11- It was a very time-consuming and, at times, very un motivating exercise because you hit so many something blocks. I was even denied an internship in a government-based ICT department because I had no ICT working experience. So, I asked him how do I get experience if you do not hire me.

GG12- I had difficulty functioning in the work environment because the course content was too theoretical with very little application.

Sub-theme II: Limited Opportunities

The study noted that Grenada's economic state had presented a series of limitations to ICT graduates pursuing employment. This limitation is connected to the growth of the country's economy. Although there have been reports of increased ICT employment in different parts of the world, this growth in the ICT sector does not seem to translate into every economy at the same rate. This reality may be the case of Grenada, defined as a low- to middle-income economy with a small population.

GG6- When I finished, I did not do anything much. I didn't take on a project of my own. I just went out to look for a job by sending out my CV to several different places, and it did not necessarily have to be an ICT job because I knew how limited things were here. This situation came at a time when the job market in Grenada slowly understood that some businesses needed to employ a full-time graphic designer. But that first job I got was not ICT related.

GG11- I tried to get an internship before I graduated, but the organization denied my request. I looked for opportunities to learn or be trained in some business, but it didn't happen, even after I finished my degree.

GG3- It was a pain because you had to try to sell yourself what you could do, and I felt that there were limited ICT positions available. The opportunities for ICT roles were limited, and once they were filled, you're stuck waiting and looking for one

of those positions to become vacant again... Experience gives you leverage over other applicants. So, without experience, you sort of feel limited.

Theme 5: Easy Transitioning into the Job Market

There seems to be a trend throughout the data collection process concerning their smooth transition in the workplace. Each time a participant indicated that they had little to no struggle to find a job, one could trace the root of why their situation differed from their peers to three factors. These beneficial factors to the participants were: networking, internships, and prior ICT work experience.

Sub-theme I: Networking

Networking appears to be one of the main factors contributing to the easy transitioning of some participants into the workplace. Networking has helped them to connect with individuals with influence in the workplace. By having these networks, the participants had individuals who could have spoken on their behalf to crucial employers and, in other cases, could point them in the right direction for their careers. Networking has also aided others with answers to some of the problems they would have faced at work.

GG3- With my people skills, I helped develop customer relationships and rapport.

Working with employees and fellow employees was okay because I learned to network.

GG8- A lot of upskilling and networking. I never really understood the power of networking until I got into an ICT academy after graduation. Through this academy, I connected to mentors and understood what is needed to excel in the

software field... Through networking, I was able to launch out as an online ICT software contractor.

QQ2 - My higher education helped me prepare for a job through networking, career fairs, and knowledge gained at SGU.

Sub-theme II: Internships

Internships have proven to be a significant reason why the participants were hired. These participants stated that they were either employed by the companies where they did their internships or that their internship experience helped them get their first job. These internships seem to have provided the participants with the needed networking, recommendations, and experience.

GG2- I did an internship while at university. They used a very hands-on experience at the company. There was no need for a job search (or interview) because of an internship that led to full-time employment.

GG7- My company offers a three-month internship to help facilitate this training process and bring these individuals to the required skill set level.

FG1- My internship also was a great help in my career.

FG2 – I believe I was hired... because I did my internship there (with the company) and my good time management and interpersonal skills with the customers.

Sub-theme III: Prior ICT Experiences

Having prior ICT experience is a significant reason these participants were hired. From speaking with the participants, it seems their potential employers sought someone with at least some ICT experience. How their expertise was acquired does not seem to be a factor. Some gain

experience through small projects (some were free), and others gain experience through internships. The critical factor among them is that they could state that they had working experience in the field of ICT and that there were individuals who could speak to their performance.

GG7- It was made easy since the organization knew of me and contacted me to be interviewed by them. Finding job opportunities has never been my problem because I often volunteer my time to share my knowledge and skillsets with different organizations.

GG9- While I was in school, I was able to build websites and do projects for organizations before graduating. I was working a full-time job two days after graduation. When I started to do these projects, my name was already in the industry. So, I had testimonials and recommendations early.

FG2 - the key is to go out of your way to ensure that you do your self-directed learning and practice a specific ICT skill to gain practical experience is a must.

Outlier Data and Findings

In going through the questions with the participants, it was interesting to note that many had entrepreneurial ventures. These ventures were either fully ICT-based or utilized ICT as leverage to enhance their respective businesses.

Importance of Entrepreneurship

Eight (67%) of the twelve participants are either full-time or engaged in entrepreneurial activities. This trend is connected to the limitation many participants faced while trying to work in a country with limited job opportunities. By creating opportunities for themselves and, in

some cases, these participants have found a way to navigate some of these economic pitfalls associated with low- and middle-income economies with small populations.

GG7- It was not a problem because I had a clear objective for what I wanted to accomplish. So having those set goals helped me to navigate through everything else. That also helped me determine when to leave the job and pursue other opportunities and business ventures.

GG12- I did freelance work online when I graduated with my degree. I was doing everything from Web design to Programming and anything I could get my hands on.

FG1 - I would not have gotten a job. I would have made steps to be an entrepreneur.

FG2- I would have started an ICT business (entrepreneurship) on the island. I am doing my own business now, but if I had the knowledge I have now back then, and with the confidence I currently have, I would have done it earlier. Confidence is a significant factor in what I can do today.

FG2- I wish I had Entrepreneurship skills. I can convert my skills and not depend on a company to employ me. I needed help packaging my skillsets to market myself.

Research Question Responses

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of information communication technology graduates and the perceived impact of HC, SDL, and EI skills on their transitions into the job market?

The lived experiences of ICT graduates are multifaceted because of the choices that were made before their respective graduation dates. These choices revolved around working

experiences and their ability to network. These factors were impacted significantly at the commencement of their careers because they dramatically reduced the time it took to find employment and quickly gain confidence in their abilities. However, in the long term, HC, SDL, and EI skills had to be employed by all of them to be successful.

GG3- I only got one IT-related job interview. For that position, the interviewers asked, “What can you do? What can you offer? What's your program entail?” the degree was relevant to the position, but I did not get it. However, for the first job that I was able to get, my degree had no relevance. I feel like I only became ready for the interview after I got my job. You're not told how to sell yourself as an ICT graduate in discussions, and I think that would play a role if you know how to leverage your skills and highlight as well as your strengths and weaknesses. We should have learned how to tailor our interview answers to sell ourselves for a position. So, I had to grow my people skills and learn how to interact with customers.

GG4- The interviews were ok. I was told in one interview that I was great in the interview, but I was told that the employers did not want to hire me because I did not have any experience. Qualifications are excellent, but experience rules. The reason why I eventually got a job was that I was able to show that I had trained people in PowerPoint and Excel. I learned to do better interviews with time and research. As a professor told me, it comes down to your dedication to a task and work ethic.

GG5- I had to learn some new skills required for the job quickly. But I am self-motivated and self-confident, which helped me transition from school into the workplace.

GG7- My degree gave me an idea of what is possible, although it did not allow me to do it because it was very theoretical. So had to spend a lot of time learning how to do it, like programming, Linux, and how these large systems are architected... It was made easy since the organization knew of me and were the ones reaching out to me to interview with them. Finding job opportunities has never been my problem because I often volunteer my time to share my knowledge and skillsets with different organizations. So, I have built an excellent reputation for myself.

Sub-Question One

How did ICT graduates' SDL and EI skill sets contribute to their self-efficacy in the workforce?

All the participants stated that they needed their SDL skill sets to adapt to the different tasks. Often, these tasks had little to no connection to what they were taught in school. Therefore, it was up to their SDL skills to help quickly bridge the gap. These same participants credit their EI skills for allowing them to transition into the working environment as they would often mean relating to the people around them.

GG1- My degree gave me access to a new position, theoretical knowledge, exposure to new possibilities, and confidence due to the sense of accomplishment. However, a lot of things that I was tasked with, I had to teach myself. I would have had to go out and teach myself how to use the required platform given to me by my

institution. No one else in the institution knew how to use it. So, I had to learn quickly and execute my new tasks efficiently.

GG6- Initially, it was challenging; there was some intimidation because I was new. Even though you don't get it right all the time, I realized that confidence is essential. I have noticed that one of the best ways to gain confidence is to keep doing the task repeatedly until you get it right consistently, which is, in my opinion, connected to self-directed learning.

QQ5 - Although the education provided the theoretical knowledge was good, the key is to go out of your way to ensure that you do your self-directed learning and practice a specific ICT skill to gain practical experience is a must.

Sub-Question Two

How do ICT graduates describe their educational preparedness for transitioning into the job market?

All the participants stated that they had enjoyed their time gaining an education. Furthermore, the education they received helped them be open-minded and made them aware of different possibilities for their careers. However, a common complaint was that their education was very theoretical and that they wished that more practical applications were given to them.

FG1 - The ICT projects, Statistics, System Designs, and Implementation were great because these courses were beneficial... Surprisingly, the elective courses were also helpful, like Community Health and the case studies we had to do. Critical Thinking, Public Speaking, and Business Communication also fall into that

category of courses that were not core ICT courses but were very helpful in the workplace. All of them were very much focused on the area of communication.

FG2- That would be ICT ethics, Security courses, programming, and our final ICT Project, where we had to put together everything we had learned in the program. However, more ICT students and the faculty community impacted me more significantly. University is a great place for ideas to be shared and discussed.

GG8- I am in the software field, and where I graduated from, they provided little to no training in this area. To be a software developer, I needed to teach myself more than what is offered by the degree that I got. However, the concept behind programming languages was taught to me in school, which was helpful.

Sub-Question Three

How do ICT graduates feel about their emotional and mental preparedness for the job market after graduation?

Some participants have stated that the different courses in their higher education helped them to be emotionally ready for this transition. However, other participants did not interpret these same courses the same way. As a result of this different interpretation, they believed that they were not ready and felt like school did not help them on an emotional level for what they were about to face.

GG10- My first job was in Human Resources. It had hardly anything to do with ICT. My job was to coordinate meetings and design flyers. I had to learn emotional intelligence from reading the room and other people.

GG11- I did a lot of reading, which helped me understand my role better. Someone once told me that Google is your best friend because even if you don't know something, someone would have done it and made the knowledge available online. There were some soft skills and work-related ethics that I needed to develop.

QQ5 - In the beginning, I second-guessed myself a lot. I would also double-check and triple-check. But after I started learning on my own through other mediums, I became comfortable ... Over the years, it has helped me become less anxious and cope better with rarely-occurring situations.

FG2 - I was naïve when I finished higher education; I still lacked a form of inner growth. My mindset was not ready for the workplace. So, I needed personal/emotional development... (I wish I had) determination because after applying for ten jobs and not hearing back from any of the employers, I lost hope fast. I would also say communication skills because they would have made a difference.

Summary

The series of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and a questionnaire have revealed the answers to the questions sought by this study. The solutions that have been provided suggest that the education offered within the higher educational institutions in Grenada is very much appreciated and highly regarded by the different participants. However, this is a different case regarding their overall preparedness for the job market. Those who were prepared for the job market were already engaged with it before graduation; in this case, HC played a role. Those who were not engaged with it struggled the most to transition into the workforce.

The responses from the participants also indicate that EI is crucial as it has allowed them to grow as professionals, co-workers, subordinates, and even as the leaders they are today. EI has also proven to be a tool used to enhance their overall performance, as many participants have claimed self-confidence, self-control, teamwork, and management of other people's emotions. Lack of practical experience and, in some cases having to engage with non-ICT fields, which their education did not prepare them for, posed a challenge to their transition. However, SDL skills have proven as a tool that they have had to use to bridge these gaps quickly.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study explored ICT students' perceptions and lived experiences concerning their transition into the job market in Grenada and the role that SDL, HC, and EI have played in this transition. Chapter five of this study examines and interprets the findings provided in chapter four. Within the discussion section of this chapter, I justify the importance of higher education graduates' understanding of Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence (1995), Knowles' self-directed learning theory (1975), and Becker's (1964) human capital theory. Their work can contribute to a more effective means of preparing future graduates for their transition into the workforce. Next, I present the theoretical and methodological implications. Then an exploration of the different limitations of my work is examined and followed by recommendations for future studies. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary.

Discussion

This section expounds on the transcendental phenomenological study of the lived experiences and perceptions of twelve higher education graduates from Grenada. This section offers the connective tissue between the research findings in chapter four and the empirical and theoretical literature in chapter two. It will confirm that higher education graduates perceive that having the skills, understanding, and knowledge of SDL, EI, and HC facilitates one's transition into the workplace.

Interpretation of Findings

Moustakas' (1994) methodology for the transcendental phenomenological study was utilized to obtain data for exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of higher

education graduates from Grenada. Knowles' theory of self-directed learning (1975), Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence (1995), and Becker's theory of human capacity theory (1964) were also relied upon for this study. This study used thematic analysis, which recognizes trends or themes among data collected within qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All twelve participants were higher education graduates from Grenada. The design allowed participants to describe their lived experiences through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and a questionnaire. Data was collected and analyzed using a transcendental phenomenological methodology to identify themes and sub-themes.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The theme of the importance of EI includes graduates' perspectives on how their EI skills have aided them in their transition and success in the workplace. The sub-theme associated with this first significant theme is self-confidence. Theme two is the importance of SDL abilities. The third central theme is the adaptability to non-ICT fields, which details the need for individuals with this educational background to be broad in their mindset and adaptable to different sectors. The next theme focuses on the difficulty transitioning into the job market and includes sub-themes of the lack of practical experience or technical skills and limited opportunities. The last theme focuses on the ease of transitioning into the job market and is supported by the sub-themes of networking, internships, and prior ICT experiences.

Interpretation #1: Early Career Preparation

In the study, it was discovered that some had a challenging experience transitioning in the workplace. The participants' difficulties were generally connected to the limited job opportunities in the economy (Baah-Boateng, 2016). This reality is a fact that seemed out of the

control of the participants. However, many faced another difficulty: their lack of practical experience and technical skills, making it difficult to find employment upon graduation (Somers et al., 2019). They all eventually found work, but the time to find a job was long and stressful compared to the other graduates.

On the other hand, the participants who had an easy transition in the job market had a very different experience. Their experience indicated important methods one could use to overcome these obstacles regardless of the economic state of their country. This group of participants may not have done all the different steps for an easy transition. On average, they had engaged in two of the three steps, and these additional steps (or efforts) made the difference in the start of their careers.

Networking with companies before graduation was the first step that helped them start their careers. This step enabled many of them to allow companies to become familiar with them and their skill sets. Networking also gave these participants various opportunities their classmates were unaware of or had access to acquire (Wanberg et al., 2020). With claims of a lack of economic opportunities, networking seemed to have made opportunities available to these participants.

Next, some participants had done internships in various ICT companies. Upon graduation, these participants were given a chance to work full-time in these companies. Many of them were not required to do formal interviews. In some cases, these jobs were not advertised because the company managers already felt comfortable with these individuals. Again, this is a situation where the average graduate would not be made aware of a job opportunity because it would have already been earmarked for the graduate that did the internship. Some of these

internships did not pay, but in the long run, they facilitated the start of their careers (Jaime et al., 2020).

Finally, some participants had general prior ICT working experiences. These beneficial experiences were obtained through either ICT-based projects and/or volunteer work, which helped their careers (Inceoglu et al., 2019). They focused on learning new skills outside the classroom to engage in different ICT projects. By engaging in these various ICT projects, they were able to build a range of marketable ICT skill sets. Therefore, when job opportunities became available, they were the top picks for employers. It is also interesting to note that by the time they graduated, they could tell their potential employer which area of ICT they were proficient in. On the other hand, their fellow graduates, who had no specialization that they could indicate within their initial job interviews, struggled to find employment.

Interpretation #2: Development of Transitional Skills

An individual can obtain new skill sets through SDL and gather the needed information. SDL presents itself as a skill that allows an individual to gather new skills and knowledge (Zhoc et al., 2018). Therefore, it is high propriety among the different skills needed to transition into the workforce. EI, on the other hand, allows an individual to cope with changes on an emotional level. Furthermore, it helps to connect individuals with others with whom they would need to interact within the workplace (Zhoc et al., 2018).

In speaking with the different participants in the study, it was revealed that confidence played a significant role, specifically, confidence in their performance. This emotion is connected to their skill or performance. Therefore, it is suggested that SDL may allow them to gain a new skill or learn a new task, but their EI would need to enable them to have confidence

in their performance. The reality is that they may not be the best at their job, or they can even see room for improvement, but how they feel about their confidence in their development is critical. Those who struggled with their confidence had a more difficult transition. At the same time, those who felt confident that they were making progress could adapt and perform quickly. These findings connect with Shafait, Khan et al. (2021) study that suggests that EI significantly improves SDL skills.

It is this confidence that also facilitates interaction or engagements within the workplace. Therefore, how individuals feel about themselves and their performance will impact their connection to the workplace, affecting co-workers, clients, managers, and other stakeholders. For this reason, one should consider the relationship between SDL and EI when preparing to enter the workplace, as the combination of these soft skills seems to form a solid foundation for growth in one's career (Rogaten & Moneta, 2016).

Interpretation #3: Adaptability to Different Sectors

In speaking with the various participants, it was noted that half of them had to find a job not categorized as an ICT-based job. The lack of ICT jobs is linked to the economic state of Grenada and the different types of company hiring (Baah-Boateng, 2016). Therefore, half of the participants had to explore other sectors they did not feel their education had prepared them to address. Nevertheless, in joining these non-ICT sectors, these participants realized that their ICT skills made an impact.

All of them indicated that although their ICT skills may not have been the focal point of their job descriptions, they helped set them apart from the other employees (Khan et al., 2021). This differentiation eventually led to some form of long-term benefit in their careers.

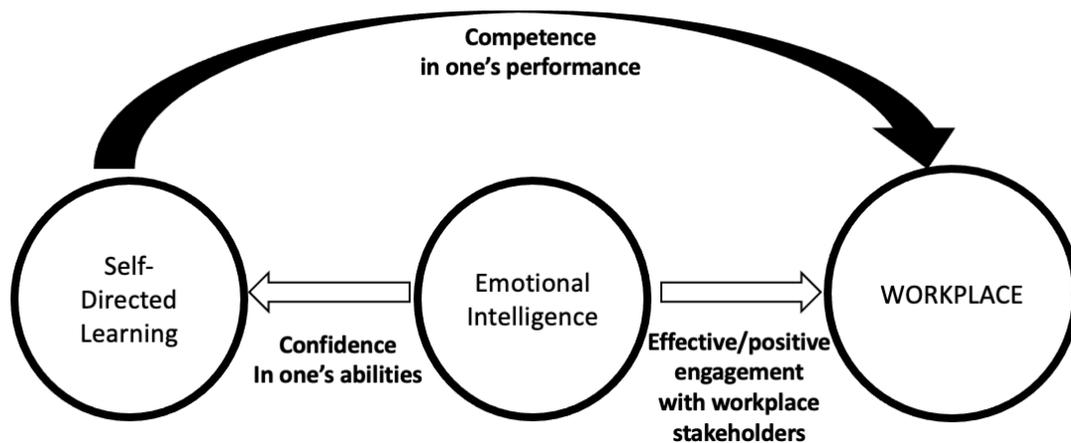
Furthermore, those who were employed in a non-ICT sector tend to appreciate the experience. It should also be noted that the ICT skills enabled their transition because it proved to their co-workers, clients, and managers that they had beneficial skills. The employer often discovered that they needed more employees with strong ICT skills.

Conversely, transitioning into a sector that was not one that the graduate was trained for seemed to have a degree of concern for these individuals. Despite the discomfort, the long-term benefit of such an experience seems to provide a boarder perspective of the job market. Additionally, these same individuals tend to emerge from these experiences with additional skillsets and knowledge that typically benefit them in their careers in the long term.

Emerging Theory

Figure 1

Twum-Barimah's Emotional Intelligence Working Skills Adaptation Theory



Based on the findings of this study, a theory emerged. Twum-Barimah's Emotional Intelligence Working Skills Adaption (EIWSA) theory emerged in speaking with the participants concerning learning a new skill or task for work and transitioning into their new positions. The

theory suggests that EI is central to one's transition into the workplace. It helps with effective engagement with workplace stakeholders within the working environment.

Additionally, EI provides self-confidence in one's abilities when learning a new task or skill, which is often merged with their SDL skills. When effectively done, it would translate into competence in their performance, which impacts others' perception of their contribution to the workplace. Combining their EI skills in relating to others and the mix of their EI and SDL skills to prove their competency creates a positive image of the individual's contribution. This positive image has a shared affirmative perception from both the individual and workplace stakeholders' points of view of the individuals and their value in the workplace.

In conducting the study, multiple reports from participants came in regarding their confidence in adapting to new skills and tasks given to them and how they could integrate themselves into their new working environments at the start of their careers. Those with a low perception or emotional assurance towards their new skills or tasks adapted slower to the workplace. The slow adaptation was accompanied by anxiety and fear, impacting how the workplace stakeholders perceived them.

On the other hand, those with high perception or emotional assurance of their new skill or tasks adapted faster to the workplace. They learned their skills quickly and adapted seamlessly, proving their competence to the stakeholders within the workplace. All the participants had estimable SDL skills with good to high academic performance. However, despite these facts, EI was still needed to learn new skills and tasks since their emotional state was critical to this process.

Implications for Practice or Policy

It is advised that those who are career guidance counselors should encourage their students to engage in projects before graduation that will provide them with working ICT experiences (Lejeune et al., 2021). This advice should also highlight that the experience received will have a higher benefit in the long term than a salary since some students have expressed disinterest in projects or internships that do not pay. Therefore, many of them opt not to take part in such experiences. It should be the task of the career guidance counselor to inform these students of the statistics that prove the long-term benefits.

Based on the findings of this study, lecturers should continue to explore different opportunities to encourage the development of their students' SDL skills (Grosemans et al., 2020). Based on the analysis, all participants claimed to have good SDL skills. This trend seems connected to an education that requires students to find the answers to their questions through their research. As for EI, several participants stated that their education assisted with developing their EI skills.

However, based on the interviews with the participants, the development of SDL skills seemed to be more emphasized than EI skills when it came to their higher education. The study shows a trend of students who failed to notice the efforts to develop EI skills in the classroom or within their educational experience. Consequently, the response to this trend should be a more direct or consistent approach may be necessary. Mainly because the lack of EI skills directly affects one's career development, even at its start (Hendon et al., 2017).

The most common complaint from the Grenadian ICT graduates was that the education they received could have been more practical. There are two suggestions to be offered on this

point, one on an institutional level and the other on an individual level. These steps or advice would be crucial, especially if the offered ICT degree does not provide the graduate with a specific area of competency or expertise in any particular area in the field of ICT.

On the institutional level, it is suggested that these educational institutions should consider consulting with employers concerning their expectations of ICT graduates and the overall job market expectations (Kumar Chand et al., 2019). It is also recommended that these educational institutions consider adopting an educational path incorporating several internationally recognized certifications. Such a practice would help validate the graduates' expertise, facilitating their transition into the job market.

On an individual level, students should be encouraged to specialize in an ICT field. This decision should be made by the middle of their degree timeline. Making this decision at that milestone would give them enough time to engage in projects and internships and research their chosen specialization. Their SDL skills would be needed to do the personal research and upskilling required to help build a portfolio that reflects the expertise necessary for their respective careers (Grosemans et al., 2020).

Both suggestions are essential as they take the current trend of the direction of the job market into consideration. There is a growing request for technical and analytical skills in the international job market (Castillo-Segura et al., 2021). Furthermore, organizations and customers generally seem more interested in practical skills and competency in fulfilling unique tasks than a university degree (Agbenyo & Collett, 2014). Therefore, if adopted, one must focus on developing the graduates' practical capabilities.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study's findings confirm previous SDL, EI, and HC research. Mittal (2021) stated that familiarity with EI would allow graduates' careers to be versatile and lead to career success. Although the graduates generally believed that their education could have been more practical. Nevertheless, they all credited their education with helping them have good SDL skills, which aided their adaptation to the new information and required new skills (Lemmetty & Collin, 2020). By remaining aware of the job market, some of the ICT graduates experienced early success in their careers (McClure, 2018)

This study discovered that SDL and EI are two transitional skill sets that should accompany each other when an individual enters the job market (Shafait, Yuming et al., 2021a). SDL would enable individuals to acquire skills and knowledge they did not have before and, in some cases, build upon their previous skills and knowledge. However, it was discovered that doing a new task or learning further information is just as important as how one feels about these tasks. When confidence accompanies the individual, these tasks, as mentioned earlier, become natural and easy, even though they may encounter several errors.

Additionally, that confidence in themselves seems to influence others' opinions of their capabilities and knowledge, allowing the individuals to quickly gain some form of influential power within their respective organizations. However, when one's feelings towards their development or learning of new tasks are tinted with anxiety and uncertainty, these tasks become harder to learn and master (Taylor et al., 2008). It may not have a damaging effect on one's reputation in the organization at first. Still, if the trend prolongs, it risks becoming a part of that

individual's perceived traits from others within the workplace (Doby & Caplan, 1995). In turn, it would lead the individual to have a difficult transition in the workplace.

The study also notes that the type of transition in the workplace had more to do with the decisions made by the individual graduates than the type of education they received.

Dramatically different results in how the two groups of graduates transitioned into the workplace. However, the defining difference was their actions toward preparing for the workplace.

Limitations

Within this research study's phenomenon, there are four limitations: sample size, recruitment sample strategy, data collection method, and data analysis process. The sampling size of this transcendental phenomenological study on Grenadian ICT graduates' lived job transition experiences was reasonably small since it had twelve participants. There were efforts to recruit more than twelve participants. However, this aim was not achieved.

The study's recruitment sample strategies included working with higher education institutions to obtain a contact list of past ICT graduates and informing and recruiting potential participants through phone calls, text messages, and emails. Notwithstanding these efforts, only nineteen potential participants initially agreed to do the study, but only twelve fulfilled their commitment and participated (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Nevertheless, the sample size obtained was sufficient as it was within the scope of the study.

This study's original intention was to have twelve participants (six female and six male subjects) for this study. However, in getting participants to agree to assist in this study, I noticed

that more females were willing to help. Given the time constraints to complete this study, it was decided to have seven females and five males as participants.

The phenomenological study used data triangulation to collect data from different sources to understand the phenomenon (Flick et al., 2019). The means of data collection were individual interviews, focus group interviews, and a questionnaire. The individual and focus group interviews were conducted online due to concerns regarding transportation, work schedule, and COVID-19. Therefore, these interviews were done online via the Zoom platform.

The methodology of data analysis could be regarded as a limitation (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method for this transcendental phenomenological study. I was aware of my experiences, prejudices, and other biases and how these could pose a limitation to the study. Therefore, I used triangulation of data, member checking, audit trail, and peer review techniques to put aside my perceptions and emphasize the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990, 2014). As a result, these procedures and purposes were meant to gather and decipher the data from the participants. Confirmation of the study's conclusion could be obtained through replication.

Delimitations

Three delimitations were inserted into this study to ensure its relevance and level of control. These delimitation elements were the research design, theoretical frameworks, and the selection process of the participants. The transcendental phenomenological study was selected among the different qualitative studies listed by Creswell and Poth (2018). This particular study is the best suited because it aims to study and interpret the meaning of the lived experiences of

Grenadian ICT graduates. The study also provided these graduates a platform to share their perspectives on transitioning into the workplace in Grenada (Moustakas, 1994).

Knowles' theory of self-directed learning (1975), Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence (1995), and Becker's theory of human capacity theory (1964) were used as the theoretical frameworks of this study because they all highlight essential elements of the graduates' transition. Knowles' theory of self-directed learning indicated how individuals could learn a new skill or knowledge and adapt to the demands of the workplace. Next, Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence suggests that transition requires a degree of emotional adaptability and connectivity to others. Finally, Becker's theory of human capacity theory highlights the need for graduates to assess their career goals and weigh their options logically.

The different higher educational institutions gave the list of ICT graduates. After this, the researcher called the potential participants. Upon agreeing to participate, the participants were sent emails with a copy of the consent form, a link to the questionnaire, and information on the study. These participants then had to submit the consent form and provide a time to do the different interviews (individual and focus group).

The different possible constraints for these participants were taken into consideration, which were: transportation, availability, and COVID-19 concerns. Therefore, it was decided that data collection would take place over Zoom. As a result, participants who were initially reluctant were made to feel comfortable participating. Additionally, by conducting the study via Zoom, it was easy to record the audio and transcript of these interviews. Microsoft Forms was used to collect data from the questionnaire. This tool was helpful because it allowed participants to send

their information at a convenient time. Furthermore, this online tool automatically placed their responses in an excel spreadsheet according to the questions.

The study focused on ICT graduates. However, in conducting this research, it was noticed that other graduates with different degrees seemed to have some of the same issues.

Unfortunately, this study could not cover all the various degrees offered by these educational institutions in Grenada. However, by focusing on ICT graduates, the researcher was able to address a rapidly changing industry and how companies in Grenada are reacting to human resource needs as a result.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study captures the participants' perspective of their transition into the workplace. However, it is recommended that a similar qualitative study be made of the employers who have hired these ICT graduates from Grenada. Within this study, GG7 indicated that he has a firm and that he has to train or retrain graduates of ICT before they can be effective within his organization. This statement highlighted the need to evaluate how employers regard the higher educational institutions in Grenada that provide ICT programs.

Next, a study should be done to evaluate these graduates' SDL and EI capability levels. Since this study aimed to obtain the graduates' perspective, the level of their SDL and EI skills would be their impression of themselves and may not be the reality of their situation. Furthermore, such a study should be quantitative since it would be before an actual trend of the average number of graduates with different SDL and EI skills. It would also benefit the quantitative study to capture how long the graduate took to find a job.

It was noticed that those who were engaged in entrepreneurial activities were the happiest with their careers (Kanonuhwa et al., 2018). It would be interesting to discover the different paths these individuals took within the economic climate of Grenada. Furthermore, it would be ideal if this study focused on those without access to resources that may have facilitated their entrepreneurial ventures.

Individual question one was designed to be a warm-up question within the study. However, this study noted that the participants' responses were divided into two categories. The first category decided to engage in the ICT sector through logical determination. This group was made up of 33% of the participants. The second category of participants was naturally attracted to the ICT sector from childhood. This set of participants represented 67% of the study's population size. A study could be done on the connection between interest in ICT and the early developmental years of one's life.

Conclusion

The study confirms previous studies made on EI, SDL, and HC. However, in a low to middle-income nation with a small population, such as Grenada, finding job opportunities that match one's education may pose some challenges. This reality is associated with the number of opportunities available within such an economic environment (Bohra et al., 2021). However, through this study, those who practiced vital steps such as networking and obtaining prior ICT working experience got employment without difficulties. Within these cases, one could observe the HC theory impacting their careers (Lejeune et al., 2021). In some cases, their networking and prior ICT working experience created opportunities for them. Both practices often required the individual to upskill, which required them to have SDL skills.

Additionally, after being given an opportunity to be employed, each participant noticed the importance of SDL and EI in their careers (Dust et al., 2018). All of them noticed that they had to quickly learn new tasks and procedures and interact with individuals associated with their workplaces. The study also noted the importance of one's emotional connection to their new job's functions in the workplace (Celik & Storme, 2018). Confidence in one's tasks and capabilities has been highlighted and implied by the participants as a defining factor in one's transition into the workplace. By exercising their SDL skills and proving their capabilities with confidence, they noticed a more effortless and, in some cases, rapid transition into becoming a valued and respected player in the workplace and throughout the job market.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Permission to contact

David Twum-Barimah, MBA, PMP

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]

Date: 5/16/2022

Hello, Ms. Tonya Duncan

Re: Permission to contact SGU's ICT graduates for research participation

My name is David Twum-Barimah, and I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am currently conducting a research study entitled *The Experiences of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Graduates' Transition into a Low- and Middle-Income Economy's Job Market: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of ICT graduates as they looked for work in Grenada after graduation and to determine how human capacity, emotional intelligence, self-directed learning, and knowledge of the ICT industry have helped them in their search and performance in the workplace.

I am requesting permission to obtain the contact information of twenty of your ICT graduates for this study. This contact will be in the form of a phone call and email requesting

their participation in this study. The study will be in the form of a one-on-one interview, a small group interview, and a questionnaire. The study will be conducted via Zoom to allow the participants to be as comfortable as possible during the interviews. The time and date of the interviews will be arranged based on the participants' availability.

There are no foreseeable risks to your institution as a result of this research. The anonymity of the participants will be maintained. The data that will be collected may be published in journals and presented in professional seminars. However, the identity of the participants and the institution where they graduated will be kept confidential. Participation in this study will be voluntary, therefore, participants will be given the option to withdraw at any time they wish.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you can contact me:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

David Twum-Barimah, MBA, PMP

Doctoral Candidate

Liberty University

David Twum-Barimah, MBA, PMP

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]

Date: 5/16/2022

Hello, Dr. Ronald Brunton

Re: Permission to contact TAMCC's ICT graduates for research participation

My name is David Twum-Barimah, and I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am currently conducting a research study entitled *The Experiences of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Graduates' Transition into a Low- and Middle-Income Economy's Job Market: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of ICT graduates as they looked for work in Grenada after graduation and to determine how human capacity, emotional intelligence, self-directed learning, and knowledge of the ICT industry have helped them in their search and performance in the workplace.

I am requesting permission to obtain the contact information of twenty of your ICT graduates for this study. This contact will be in the form of a phone call and email requesting their participation in this study. The study will be in the form of a one-on-one interview, a small group interview, and a questionnaire. The study will be conducted via Zoom to allow the participants to be as comfortable as possible during the interviews. The time and date of the interviews will be arranged based on the participants' availability.

There are no foreseeable risks to your institution as a result of this research. The anonymity of the participants will be maintained. The data that will be collected may be published in journals and presented in professional seminars. However, the identity of the participants and the institution where they graduated will be kept confidential. Participation in this study will be voluntary, therefore, participants will be given the option to withdraw at any time they wish.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you can contact me:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

David Twum-Barimah, MBA, PMP

Doctoral Candidate

Liberty University

Appendix B: St. George's University's IRB Approval Letter



19th September 2022

David Twum-Barimah
School of Education
Liberty University

Re: Approval of SGU IRB Application 22032-“The Experiences of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Graduates’ Transition into a Low- and Middle-Income Economy’s Job Market: A Phenomenological Study ”

Dear Mr. Twum-Barimah,

Your application for approval, for the use of human participants in the captioned research project has been reviewed by the St. George’s University Institutional Review Board (SGU IRB). This letter serves to advise that your revised application is hereby approved.

If there are no obstacles and no changes to the research protocol as approved, kindly note that we shall require a progress report twelve months following the date of approval. An annual summary report is due no later than **Friday, 22nd September, 2023**. Please note that IRB approval is granted for a period of one year and it is necessary to submit this progress report to obtain continuation of approval for projects spanning more than one year. The form is also posted on the IRB page of the St. George’s University’s website. Please submit it to the IRB Administrator, Kareem Coomansingh, email [REDACTED]. An e-version is preferred.

In the event that any change(s) is anticipated, as the Principal Investigator, you must notify the IRB to seek permission to make such change(s) before you can proceed. Should you have any questions regarding this approval, please contact the IRB Administrator. If an adverse event arises you are required to notify the IRB administrator immediately and discontinue the research until the situation has been assessed.

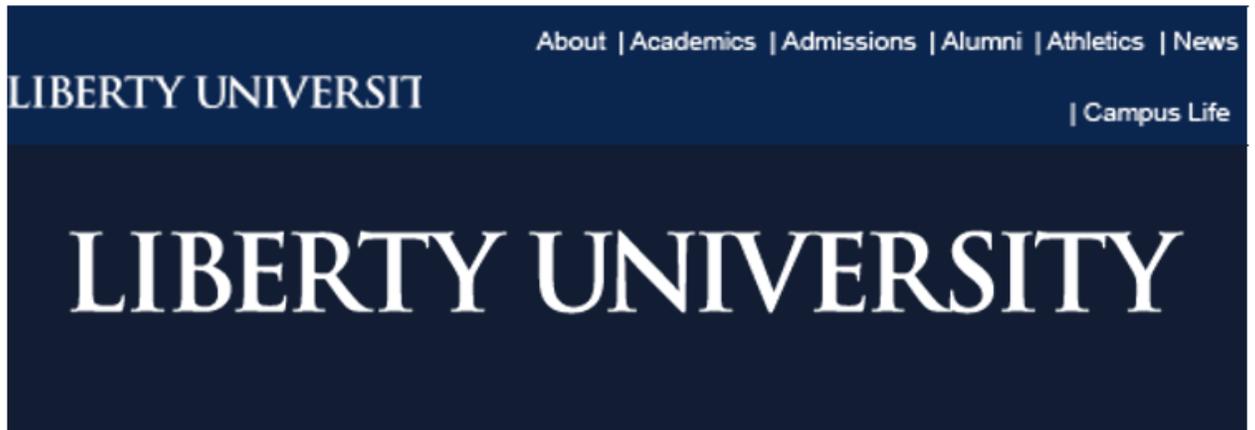
Outcomes of research must be provided to the IRB/SGU Office of Research. Any publications or conference presentations arising from the research should be shared with the Office of Research.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Maira du Plessis, PhD
Chair, IRB
Department of Anatomical Sciences

[REDACTED]

Appendix C: Liberty University IRB Approval Letter



Your dissertation chair has been approved, and your registration process has begun. You will be automatically registered for the next course in your degree sequence. Your committee is listed below:

Committee Member	Email
Assigned chair: Sharon Michael-Chadwell	[REDACTED]
Assigned reader: Shariva White	

Please complete Financial Check-In in [ASIST](#) once your course is showing on your account.

Please note that this does not mean that all facets of your dissertation and topic are approved. If you have any questions regarding your committee, please contact your academic department.

Kirsten Hoegh
Director of Doctoral Programs Support
School of Education



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- EDUCDissertation@liberty.edu

Appendix D: Verbal/Phone Script to Potential Participants

Hello (Name of potential participant),

My name is David Twum-Barimah, and I am a doctoral student at Liberty University. I am currently conducting a research study entitled *The Experiences of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Graduates' Transition into a Low- and Middle-Income Economy's Job Market: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of ICT graduates as they looked for work in Grenada after graduation and to determine how human capacity, emotional intelligence, self-directed learning, and knowledge of the ICT industry have helped them in their search and performance in the workplace.

I would like to know if you would like to participate in this study. It would consist of an individual interview, a focus group interview with five other participants (both will be on Zoom and no more than 45 mins), and a short questionnaire (which will take about 5 to 10 mins). The information you would provide will only be used in the study. These questions will revolve around your experience transitioning to the job market. All the interviews will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Every participant will be given a copy of their respective interview transcription to review for accuracy.

I will protect the identities of all participants by giving each of them a pseudonym in this study. The data collected will be stored on a computer that is password protected and backed up for safety on Liberty University's Microsoft OneDrive. Once the study has been accepted and published, the data will be discarded after three years. If you are interested in participating in this study, kindly let me know, and I will send you a copy of my dissertation proposal and a copy of

the consent form. If you would like to participate in the study, kindly fill out the consent form and email it back to me. Please contact me via email ([REDACTED]), phone, or WhatsApp ([REDACTED]) if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you and take care.

Appendix E: Email Follow-Up Correspondence

Hello (Name of potential participant),

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this research study, *The Experiences of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Graduates' Transition into a Low- and Middle-Income Economy's Job Market: A Phenomenological Study*. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the perceptions of ICT graduates as they looked for work in Grenada after graduation and to determine how human capacity, emotional intelligence, self-directed learning, and knowledge of the ICT industry have helped them in their search and performance in the workplace. I have attached a copy of the consent form for review and consideration. I have also attached a copy of my dissertation proposal to this email to better understand this study and the different theories I will use (self-directed learning, emotional intelligence, and human capacity).

I would like to take this time to reiterate some important information about participating in this study. It would consist of an individual interview, a focus group interview with five other participants (both will be on Zoom and no more than 45 mins), and a short questionnaire (which will take about 5 to 10 mins). The information you would provide will only be used in the study. These questions will revolve around your experience transitioning to the job market. All the interviews will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Every participant will be given a copy of their respective interview transcription to review for accuracy.

I will protect the identities of all participants by giving them a pseudonym in this study. The data collected will be stored on a computer that is password protected and backed up for safety on Liberty University's Microsoft OneDrive. Once the study has been accepted and

published, the data will then be discarded after three years. Please contact me via email

([REDACTED]), phone, or WhatsApp ([REDACTED]) if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you and take care.

Sincerely,

David Twum-Barimah, MBA, PMP

Ph.D. Candidate - Education: Organizational Leadership

Liberty University

Appendix F: Consent Form

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to determine whether you wish to participate in the present study. Please review the purpose and procedures for this study. The purpose of this study is:

- To examine alum experiences from the different higher education institutions' ICT (Information Communication Technology) programs in Grenada.
- To examine how human capacity, emotional intelligence, and self-directed learning can help ICT future ICT graduates find employment and excel in the workplace.

The benefits of the research will be:

- To better understand how effective the program was in helping graduates find jobs in the field of ICT
- To identify how human capacity, emotional intelligence, and self-directed learning can help improve ICT.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose include:

- Individual interviews via Zoom (30 to 45 mins)
- Focus group interviews via Zoom (30 to 45 mins)

Note: Interviewees can leave their cameras off and use fake names to hide their identities from other interviewees.

- Questionnaire – to be completed online (5 to 10 mins)

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study methods I am using. Please contact me via email ([REDACTED]) or telephone ([REDACTED]) if you so desire.

Our interviews will be done via Zoom and recorded using that application to help the researcher accurately capture your insights in your own words. The researcher will only hear the recording for this study. Your name and identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. All your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will not share participants' responses that can identify them. However, data that is relevant to the study will be shared with the chair of the study, who will oversee the research. If you feel uncomfortable with the session recording, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time by emailing or calling the researcher, stating that you no longer wish to continue participating. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provide (including the recordings of the interviews) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

By signing this consent form, I certify that I _____ agree to

(Print complete name here)

the terms of this agreement. _____

(Signature)

(Date)

Appendix G: Individual Interview Questions

1. What made you want to get involved in ICT?
2. Before your undergraduate studies, how much knowledge and experience did you have in ICT?
3. What steps did you take in securing a job?
4. How would you describe your job search?
5. What impressions did you receive from the different interviews with potential employers?
6. How did your self-directed learning skill sets help you transition into the workplace?
7. How did your emotional intelligence skillsets helped your transition into the workplace?
8. Describe your first month of employment.
9. How comfortable were you with your tasks?
10. How difficult or easy was it for you to function alongside your fellow employees, manager, and customers at the start of your career?

Appendix H: Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How would your transition into the workplace be different from the knowledge and skillset today?
2. Which courses in higher education have helped you transition to the job market the most?
3. What would you point to as to why your employer chose you for the job you have today?
4. Which skill sets were the most valuable to you in your transition into the workplace?
5. Describe the skill sets you wish you had before searching for a job.

Appendix I: Questionnaire

1. How prepared were you to enter the job market?
2. How would you describe how your higher education helped you prepare for the job market?
3. How would you describe your SDL skills in the workplace?
4. How would you describe your EI skills in the workplace?
5. How would you describe your level of self-efficacy within your work performance?