

The integration of Graduate Attributes Within the Hospitality Management Curriculum at Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: South African institutions of higher learning are responsible for producing graduates who are well-prepared for the demands of the world of work. To meet this imperative, universities have adopted the use of graduate attributes (GAs) to develop and showcase their graduates' skills and competencies. Furthermore, the current economic landscape places pressure on universities to produce highly skilled and employable graduates. Despite the recognised significance of GAs, lecturers often encounter difficulties when attempting to integrate them into the curriculum. The problem (gap), however, is that lecturers find it difficult to integrate these GAs for various reasons, including a lack of comprehensive understanding, effective teaching methods, and reliable assessment strategies of GAs. Moreover, the absence of structured training programs for lecturers on how to integrate GAs into the curriculum is a hindrance to the GAs' successful implementation. This paper aims to determine the extent to which the GAs have been implemented within the hospitality curriculum in South Africa. A desktop review study was conducted and analysed according to identified themes. The findings propose developing the framework, a guiding tool, that will enable academic institutions to integrate GAs into their curriculum.

Keywords: Graduate Attributes, Hospitality Curriculum, Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduction and Background

The higher education landscape is shifting under neoliberal forces that are increasingly aligning the goals of business, government, and education (Giroux, 2010; Ingleby, 2015; Olssen and Peters, 2005). This shift is engendering debate around the world about the role of higher education institutions in producing employable graduates to feed national prosperity in the emerging knowledge economy (with respect to geography see Arrowsmith, Bagoly-Simó, Finchum, Oda, and Pawson, 2011; Erickson, 2012; Hennemann and Liefner, 2010; Kong, 2007; Li, Kong, and Peng, 2007). As this evolution continues, we need to consider how we enhance generic graduate capabilities as well as the disciplinary expertise of our undergraduate students.

To avoid deferring to market forces and the consequent commodification of teaching and learning (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013), we can make conscious decisions about our curriculum content and co-curricular activities, pedagogies and the nature and use of learning spaces. Our graduates should possess the knowledge, skills, and values to enable them to cope with dynamic employment opportunities, but they must also understand, through the benefits and constraints of their disciplinary perspectives, who they are and how they might contribute positively to the heterogeneity they will encounter in their local, regional, and global communities (Barnett, 2004).

While such studies reveal some consensus, integrating university curricula with teaching delivery and graduate attributes attainment rarely seems to align as expected (Barrie, 2007; Drummond et al, 1998). This led Green et al (2009) to question "Why is it so hard to develop graduate attributes (hereafter GAs)?" Their answers included a lack of common understanding of GAs, the challenge of relating GAs to different disciplinary backgrounds and the pressures on academic staff faced with rising student numbers to develop the necessary aligned pedagogies and assessment strategies. To help overcome the latter, the authors suggested that institutions should offer professional development to academic staff, and such staff should subsequently receive appropriate rewards and recognition.

Not so long ago, De la Harpe and David (2012) examined the role of academic staff specifically in integrating graduate attributes across curricula and concluded that academics may hold an idealised conception about the importance of GAs, but this is not always translated into a working conception. The gap between idealised and realised conceptions was linked most strongly to staff willingness and confidence to teach and assess GAs, and these dispositions were, in turn, related positively to gender (being female), teaching qualification and industry experience. These findings have implications for institutional policies concerning staff recruitment, reward, and professional development, not least that they must be appropriately prioritised, properly resourced, and

adequately integrated with one another. There is certainly a need to consider strengthening the relationships between academic and professional staff and offering staff industry placements or mentoring.

Vast research has been done on GAs and their integration into the curriculum to ascertain the preparedness of graduates in the industry. However, to date, graduates' unpreparedness is still a problem in the hospitality industry (Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron, 2023). As far as can be ascertained, there is limited research on GAs within the hospitality curriculum in a developing world context. Given the number of students enrolled in hospitality programs in South Africa and the booming hospitality job market in South Africa, research within this context is necessary. The theoretical contribution relates to critically articulating GAs within the hospitality curriculum from a developing context, where such findings could mirror similarities and differences and inform higher education institutions of academic implications that could be useful for curriculum design and development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Graduate Attributes' (GAs) Implementation in Curriculum

Global and local studies on the importance of GAs have led to their prioritisation in higher education (HE) curricula. In South Africa, Mtawa et al (2021) assert that employers seek graduates with social and human values, including critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, and affiliation, to address societal challenges. Fongwa (2018) concurs, stating that higher education institutions are responsible not only for imparting knowledge but also for fostering the development of GAs. Irish researchers Crowley and Jeske (2021) underscore the significance of GAs for recruiters, who expect graduates to possess resilience and a commitment to continuous learning.

Barrie (2007) outlines four understandings of GAs as outcomes, ranging from separate generic courses to integration into specific courses. Jones (2013) argues that GAs cannot be standalone attributes and must be integrated into each course's curriculum to be effective. GAs have to be integrated into the hospitality management curriculum by the lecturers through learning, teaching, and student assessments. This is despite the fact that there has been criticism of the hospitality education curriculum being channelled only to serve the industry (Jiang, 2019). Hospitality curriculum designers should be mindful of the frequent changes that affect the industry and ensure that their systems allow for their absorption when the need arises. Current literature emphasises the need for the hospitality curriculum to strengthen its content in finance/Accounting and technological aspects to be in line with the fourth industrial revolution, which is bringing major changes to the way the industry is working currently (Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron, 2023). However, such changes would not yield results if the integration of GAs is in disarray.

Hughes and Barrie (2010) are of the view that lecturers struggle to work with GAs and integrate them into the curriculum. The authors suggest that some of the reasons behind these difficulties are time constraints and lack of resources available to lecturers. Barrie (2004) and Wong et al (2022) also suggest that staff may lack the self-confidence to begin a new process or change which is involved in GAs integration into the curriculum. Furthermore, the idea of GAs and their integration into the curriculum is often viewed as a "top-down" project by management. Lecturers may, therefore, not want to engage as they feel that the project does not represent their interests and issues (Wong et al., 2022). The challenge goes further as to how lecturers would teach and assess these GAs (Karunanayaka and Naidu, 2021) since there is often no training provided for them on these processes and how GAs are to be mapped into the curriculum. Lecturers' assumptions and interpretation of the curriculum mapping process of GAs were cited as needing urgent attention (Winberg et al, 2018). The idea of concepts that are "beyond disciplinary knowledge content" is challenging for lecturers to teach and assess despite them being important attributes in the workplace (Kensington-Miller et al, 2018).

Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023) argue that as long as graduates who are the stakeholders of the GAs are not involved in the GAs integration process, then the desired outcome will not be accomplished. They call on the higher institutions of learning to ensure that the GAs' integration into the curriculum is a continuous process that involves everyone involved (staff, society, students, and management), rather than a one-off or occasional discussion. Maxwell and Armellini (2018) second the student-centeredness approach in the GA integration process. The question, though, is how that will benefit the GAs integration process.

2.2 Graduate Attributes on Graduates' Employability

Wald and Harland (2019) assert that GAs are crucial for improving graduates' employability and should be an integral part of the curriculum. Bridgstock (2009) raises questions about the concept of GAs, challenging what constitutes employability and which attributes are essential for fostering it in tertiary students. GAs, according to Wong et al (2022), serve as a means for universities to communicate their aspirations to prospective employers regarding the attributes their graduates possess. GAs are defined as the "qualities, skills, and knowledge" imparted by HE institutions during tertiary education, which is meant to assist the graduates beyond the classroom (Kensington-Miller et al, 2018). The beyond classroom refers to when the graduates are at work and need to use the attributes acquired from tertiary education. This is the period when graduates display the relevant attributes to solve work-related problems. Failure by graduates to do that reflects on the existing gaps between classroom education and the world of work. The GAs integration challenges include the fact that GAs are not only skills; therefore, they are not easy to teach or access. According to Bowden et al (2000), GAs are skills agreed upon by the university stakeholders for students to learn and practice during the tertiary period as preparation for their future and at the same time, GAs give a brand name to the higher learning institution. The Institutions of higher learning tend to group GAs, which should not be the case because different disciplines require different attributes specific to their requirements (Kensington-Miller et al, 2018). Such poses a challenge to lecturers when integrating attributes like 'being initiative' and 'lifelong learning' into the hospitality curriculum.

According to Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023), the hospitality industry requires graduates that have the following attributes: Information technology system, social media, good communication skills, positive attitude, and time management (to mention a few). Being creative and being able to solve guests' problems are other employability attributes for graduates. This is supported by Lategan (2022), who alludes that problem-solving skills, accountability, time management, team player and confidence are important GAs in the hospitality industry.

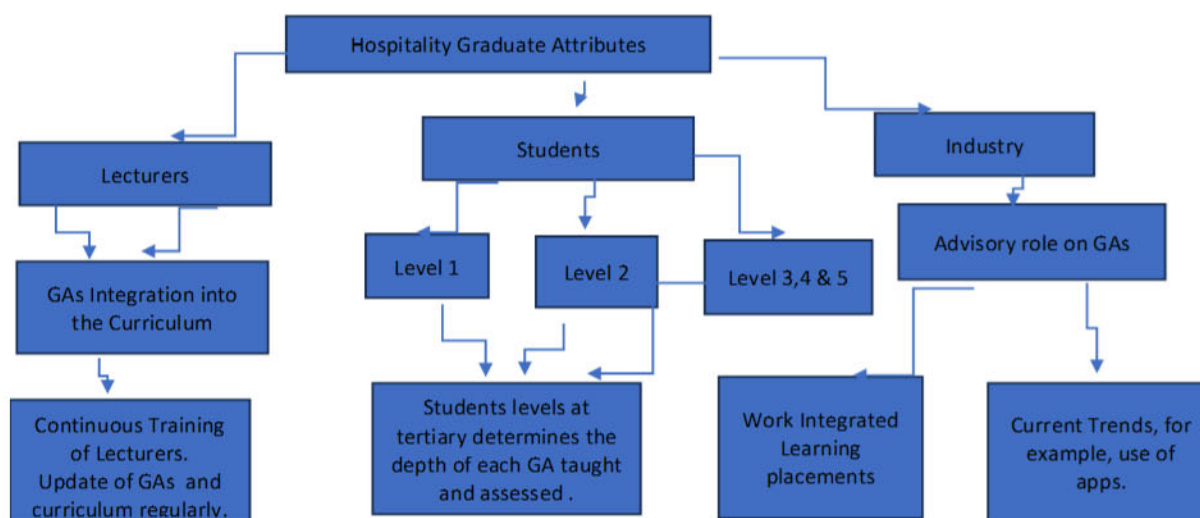


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author's creation)

The idea of a conceptual framework is that all the stakeholders should have an equal contribution towards hospitality GAs and their integration (Williamson et al, 2020). Such an act would allow all parties to play their part in achieving the process of GAs integration. It should be noted that this framework is student-centred. Therefore, students who are at tertiary entry level will be allocated GAs that suit their understanding. This is seconded by Staunton et al. (2021), who indicate that students are the 'changemakers' (refer to Table 2). Part of the framework is adapted from the (Ipperciel1 & ElAtia1, 2014) Criteria-based model. If students become familiar with GA learning, teaching, and assessments as early as the first year, they will be able to grow and adapt to different depths of GAs levels.

The hospitality industry should be utilised by higher learning institutions as such partnerships would give students an opportunity to do their work-integrated learning in those establishments, thereby increasing chances of applying the learned GAs. The hospitality industry is a very dynamic industry; therefore, industry

partnerships would assist with the current trends, thereby enabling the regular update of GAs. The institution's management should prioritise engaging with lecturers for GAs integration into the curriculum and curriculum coordinators to engage with all stakeholders on curriculum matters.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Halibas et al (2020) outline that attributes associated with employability skills are “teamwork, time-management, stress-management, emotional intelligence, common skills, problem-solving and strategy innovation.” (Belwal et al, 2017) is of the view that hospitality graduates’ generic skills are identical to employability skills because they give room to career readiness for graduates.

Various GAs research by different scholars were identified. Most of them had researchers come up with a framework to assist with either interpreting or integrating these into the curriculum. This paper focuses on the GAs' integration into the hospitality curriculum. Therefore, there was a need to see the frameworks and studies that have been done in that area. It is encouraging to note that South Africa has done its part in researching hospitality GAs, although the numbers could be better. Different countries are embarking on the research, although most research is on general GAs and is not specific to the hospitality industry. Table 1 below shows the selected sources to be used for the proposed framework of this paper.

Table 1: Identified and consulted (Sources: Authors’ Creation)

Author/s, Year and Country	Research Design and Sample	Purpose of the Study	Findings of the Study	Gaps Identified on GAs Integration
Ipperciel1 and ElAtia1, 2014, Canada.	Criteria-based method.	To develop a criteria-based model that will be used for GAs teaching and assessment.	Various GAs were plotted successfully for different levels of students.	The model is still to be tested for reliability and validity.
Belwal et al 2017, Oman	Principles of hypothetico-deductive logic and inferential analysis using both focus group and survey approach	Explore the most common GAs that apply to graduates' employability in Onam	Students perceive Computing skills, Teamwork, and English language expertise. Industry and Higher Education relations boost the employability of graduates.	Oman is restricted to basic generic skills in developing GAs
Winberg et al, 2018, South Africa	Mixed Method Study- Questionnaire & Case Study used.	To comprehend how various forms of knowledge contribute to acquiring desirable GAs using selected flagship programs (Hospitality included) within South Africa's University of Technology sector.	Research findings indicate that desirable graduate attributes are achieved through academic staff ownership, collaboration with external groups, a strong sense of purpose, innovation, forward-looking attitudes, appropriate curricular interventions, and knowledge of students.	Density lacked a clear pattern, but shifts towards entrepreneurship were noted, particularly in fashion programs. Temporal positions varied, with innovation common. Semantics emphasised practical orientation. Experiential learning and specialisation played roles, influencing the emergence of graduate attributes.
Maxwell and Armellini, 2018, UK.	An iterative process of co-design and co-development was employed to produce both the framework and the associated learning outcomes toolkit.	To present an evidence-based, transferable framework of graduate attributes and a university toolkit. The goal is to facilitate the formulation of level-appropriate learning outcomes, aligning with the university's mission to Transform Lives and Inspire Change.	Adopting an integrated framework yields tangible benefits, fostering students' development of personal literacy and graduate identity. The toolkit empowers staff to craft assessable learning outcomes, promoting student	Authors are of the opinion that opportunities arise during the design stage to address any gaps and guide students through co-curricular activities. No identified gaps, though.

Author/s, Year and Country	Research Design and Sample	Purpose of the Study	Findings of the Study	Gaps Identified on GAs Integration
			progression and facilitating the attainment of framework objectives.	
Kensington-Miller et al, 2018, New Zealand.	A mixed method approach was used.	Identify GAs that are commonly viewed as 'invisible' and construct a framework for observing, analysing, and reporting these attributes. furthermore, it empowers lecturers to integrate these 'invisible' GAs into the course design.	The study introduces the SEEN framework, emphasising the importance of both certified and "invisible" attributes in university education. SEEN stands for Specify, Explain, Embed and Nudge.	The study implies that future studies will address certain aspects, such as identifying teaching strategies, comparing pedagogical approaches, and assessing the transferability of attributes across disciplines. This suggests potential gaps in the mentioned areas.
Adeyinka et al, 2020, Malaysia	Content analysis	To identify key digital literacy and employability skills to match the changing digital landscape of the hospitality and tourism industry	Industry practitioner perspectives, employability skills and disruptive digital innovations are used to develop a framework that will benefit the industry.	No record of digital literacy skills in the curriculum
Halibas et al. 2020, Oman	Thematic Analysis	To describe approaches used by an institution in developing an assessment framework to measure GAs achievement and learning outcomes.	69% of higher learning institutions are failing to embed GAs into their assessments and learning outcomes	Potential gaps on higher education on current trends and practices of GAs assessment and learning outcomes
Staunton et al, 2021, Ireland.	Qualitative approach: Focus group & quantitative using questionnaires in framework development.	Developing a GAs Framework for higher education to enhance graduates' employability.	Developing a GAs Framework for higher education to enhance graduates' employability.	Stakeholders are different individuals with differing opinions and specialities. Therefore, the way they view GAs differs. Consulting them would bring up varying responses.
Williamson et al, 2021, Australia. (Hospitality)	Survey using Professional Capability Framework. ANOVA test identified gaps	To explore the roles of educators' industry and students in transforming the Work Integrated Learning curriculum and learning experiences	Multiple stakeholders make it difficult to create a curriculum. Students need to be consulted, otherwise, gaps in unpreparedness will persist	Lack of student consultations in curriculum development.
Marneros et al, 2022, Cyprus. (Hospitality)	Systematic classification process, use of literature.	Developing Hospitality Management Core Competencies Framework.	A framework consisting of seven competencies was proposed.	No gaps were identified.
Wong et al, 2022, UK.	Qualitative research on 37 Universities using literature.	To contribute to a gap in the UK literature by presenting what we believe is the first systematic mapping of the graduate attributes as publicised by the UK.	Universities define diverse graduate attributes, emphasising self-awareness, employability, global citizenship, and academic literacy, with implementation challenges.	The gaps identified include the lack of systematic and consistent development of graduate attributes driven by senior management or marketing rather than educational theories. Additionally, there's a need for more inclusive discussions involving staff and students to shape the 'ideal graduate.' Challenges include generic application across disciplines and unclear embedding in curricula.

Author/s, Year and Country	Research Design and Sample	Purpose of the Study	Findings of the Study	Gaps Identified on GAs Integration
Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron, 2023, South Africa (Hospitality)	Qualitative using semi-structured interviews.	To determine the employability attributes of hospitality management students from private Higher education institutions.	The study identifies knowledge and skill sub-domains required by hotel managers, emphasizing competencies in both soft and hard skills. These skills are considered crucial, as they impact graduates' ability to cope, contribute effectively, and sustain employment in the hotel industry.	The study suggests a mismatch between the attributes sought by hotel managers and those possessed by graduates from Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), highlighting concerns about graduates' work-readiness in the hotel labour market. Industry to be involved with GAs integration into the curriculum.

3. Research Methodology

This paper uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) to identify, choose and find available literature to be used in coming up with a proposed framework that will be used to integrate GAs into the hospitality curriculum. The reason for using Prisma is that it allows “accurate and transparent” reporting of the study reviews as compared to Bibliometric and Thematic analysis (Page et al, 2020). Research sources from online databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Premier (EBSCOhost), and Emerald Insight for the year 2014 -2023 were used to source literature. Grey literature with relevant data that addressed the objectives of the paper as characterised by the search phrases was used from Research Gate. Since this paper focuses on the integration of GAs into the hospitality curriculum, a search of top-tier hospitality journals was done using Google Scholar, and the top twenty journals were used. This literature search exercise was done between 15 December 2023 and 2 January 2024. To get the information needed, phrases used included “Hospitality management graduate attributes”, “graduate attributes integration into hospitality curriculum”, and “graduate attributes framework”.

The eligibility criteria used included all peer-reviewed published sources, and the focus was on the aim of the paper, the findings, identified gaps and developed frameworks on graduate attributes and their integration into the curriculum. Data was collected and recorded under the different phrases used for each database. Refer to figure 2 below.

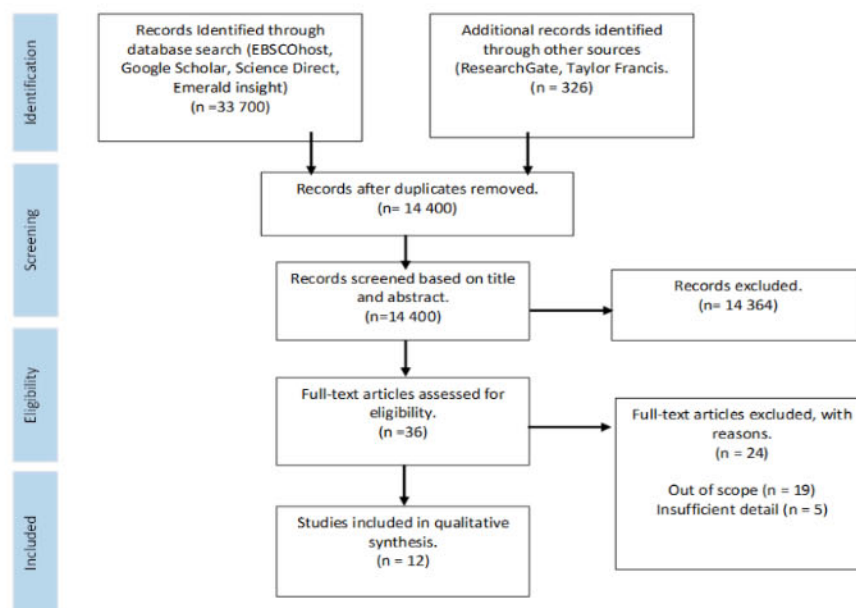


Figure 2: PRISMA Diagram (Pegg et al, 2012)

4. Findings

This paper found that a lot of research has been done on GAs. However, limited information focuses on integrating GAs into various subjects' curricula (Wong et al, 2022). Of the literature researched, there were international and South African studies on the topic, and no studies on the topic were found from other African countries. The results from the 12 global and national literature sources show that the integration of GAs in a curriculum is a problem, as reflected by the number of researchers developing frameworks and even models to assist with the integration of varying GAs. In Table 1, Kensington-Miller et al (2018) suggest that there are potential gaps in the transferability of attributes across disciplines, and Ipperciel & El Atial (2014) developed a model for GAs teaching and assessment. Adeyinka et al (2020), on the other hand, found that graduates lack digital literacy skills. This is a problem since new hospitality trends are technologically inclined. 6990 higher learning institutions are failing to embed GAs into their curriculum (Halibas et al. 2020)-Staunton et al. 2021) outline the difficulty of dealing with various higher learning stakeholders, which could be confusing due to varying responses on GAs. According to (Williamson et al 2021), a lack of student consultations on GAs results in graduates' unpreparedness. Furthermore, Wong et al (2022), reciprocate the need for students' involvement in GAs if an 'ideal graduate' is to be shaped. Ngoepe and Wakelin-Theron (2023) feel that there is a mismatch of GAs taught versus the ones required in the industry.

Belwal et al (2017) believe that GAs are employment skills, and on the other hand, Winberg et al (2018) emphasise the importance of WIL in influencing GAs emergency. Furthermore, out of the 12 journal articles identified, only three sources were identified reporting on GAs in hospitality. These support the earlier statements about the limited studies regarding integrating GAs into the curriculum globally. The paper aims to report on the extent of the incorporation of GAs within the hospitality curriculum by finding relevant literature sources. Of the 12 sources identified, six focused on the development of GAs frameworks to assist with curriculum development and learning; Europe studies (Maxwell and Armellini, 2018; Staunton et al, 2021) developed a framework to assist with GAs development and learning outcomes; In Asia, Adeyinka et al (2020) developed a framework to assist the Hospitality and Tourism with digital literacy and employability skills integration into the curriculum.

In the Middle East, Halibas et al (2020) developed a GAs assessment framework to measure GAs achievements and learning outcomes. In Canada, Ipperciel and Eiatial (2014) developed a model for use in GAs teaching, and assessment. The other three studies focused on the perception of GAs, whereby Belwal et al.'s (2017) study conducted in Oman explored students' views on GAs that apply to graduates' employability. In Africa, specifically South Africa, Ngoepe and Walkelin-Theron (2023) determined managers' perceptions of hospitality students' employability attributes. Williamson et al. (2022) in Australia developed a work-integrated learning curriculum using a professional capability framework.

5. Practical implications

This paper presents gaps found in hospitality literature on GAs' integration into the hospitality curriculum and the challenges faced with developing effective ways of teaching, assessing, and implementing GAs to hospitality graduates for employability purposes.

6. Conclusion

This paper has addressed a significant challenge faced by universities in many parts of the world: assessing the graduate attributes they intend their students to develop because of the university experience. To those engaged with this task, its complexity and challenge to traditional assessment practices will have come as no surprise. Previous discussions of the difficulty of assessing graduate attributes have focussed on assessment issues in relative isolation from other systemic issues of university practice. This paper has drawn on a national study of how South African universities achieve graduate attributes to argue that assessments while challenging enough on their own, are inextricably connected with seven other critical systemic factors that influence an institution's efforts to achieve graduate attributes. In discussing how these other factors can influence the assessment of graduate attributes, the study proposes that changing assessment practice without appropriate consideration of these other factors is unlikely to have a significant or sustained impact.

Effective assessment is intrinsically intertwined with other elements of institutional systems, which may present obstacles that daunt and discourage the efforts of all but those with a solid commitment to change. Though individual academics continue to engage successfully with the challenge of assessing graduate attributes, this

paper has raised issues concerning the impact of a range of systemic factors over which individuals have little or no influence, which, until institutions address them, will continue to limit the effectiveness of graduate attribute assessment. The renewed focus on the assessment of graduate attributes and outcomes evident in projects in many parts of the world promises a forum for international collaboration in addressing these issues and for overcoming many of the limitations evident in current practice.

7. Limitations of the Study

The researchers acknowledge the limited literature on the study's primary objective. Furthermore, there are very few studies on hospitality, which limited the findings to only 12 data sources, with only 3 addressing the paper's focus.

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