

# The Influence of Industry Guest Lectures on Auditing Students' Participation and Perceptions of Employability Skills

L Nzama

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

**Abstract:** The study examined undergraduate auditing students' perceptions and expectations of the educational experience gained from guest speakers and the ability of the speakers to provide insights into the use of employability skills in the workplace. A mixed-method approach was used to address the research objectives. A survey was conducted with quantitative results analysed using SPSS, which allowed a comparison of mean values between items and identify any statistical difference by students' demographics. A thematic approach using inductive coding to analyse the qualitative responses to open-ended questions was also used. The study found that guest lectures do have a positive effect on student interest and engagement in auditing. The study also found that students considered themselves employable in the future. The study will be helpful to academics in higher education institutions to improve their teaching pedagogies for improved student engagement in the modules taught.

**Keywords:** Engagement, Employability, Industry Guest Lectures, Interest, Skills Development

## 1. Introduction

Accounting educators have been mandated to ensure that accounting courses equip students with the necessary skills to add value to the business (Jacking & De Lange, 2009). Nevertheless, employers generally argue that accounting education has failed to deliver suitably qualified graduates to meet their needs. The extent of the problem is primarily manifested in the notion that graduates do not possess critical generic skills.

It is recommended for Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) to improve academic curricula to improve accounting professionals' early employment and retention (Metrejean, Pittman & Zarzeski, 2002). There have been calls by the accounting profession and international education committees regarding the professional adequacy of graduates (Jacking & De Lange, 2009).

Literature indicates that future accountants and auditors must have emotional intelligence, communication, teamwork, ethics (honestly and integrity), leadership, flexibility, tech-savvy, analytical and critical thinking skills and soft skills such as problem-solving, time management and adaptive (Jacking & De Lange, 2009; Cloete, 2018; Tan & Laswad, 2018; Dolce, Emanuel, Cisi & Ghislieri, 2020). Students need to engage with the study material and engage in a

classroom to develop these required skills. However, it is often a challenge to get students enrolled in accountancy to enjoy the auditing module (Barac, Kirstein, Kunz & Beukes, 2016). As accountancy students mostly struggle with auditing modules since students are expected to conceptualise the content taught in class and apply it to practical situations (Barac et al., 2016). The usual pass rate for the auditing module is below the preferred rate by the HEI of 80%.

The auditing module often has the lowest throughput, resulting in the module being included in the at-risk module list and more interventions expected to be implemented by lecturers. Furthermore, the lack of interest and engagement in the auditing module might also affect the quality of students' skills. Suppose students do not attend their classes and tutorials, do not engage with their study material, or consult with lecturers when they do not understand concepts taught in the module, which has been a problem to some modules, especially with the COVID-19 online teaching. In that case, students might miss the opportunity to develop and nurture their skills, which might affect their employability chances. Therefore, students' interest and engagement would need to be addressed, especially when it also affects the throughput of the module. Thus, specific interventions would need to be put in place to address the issue.

The HIE usually put more interventions in place to improve the module throughput when the module has been listed as a high-risk module. The usual interventions include extra revision classes, tutoring, individual consultations, and mentorship.

Guest lectures presented by industry experts are some of the critical interventions that the HEI has applied. Guest lectures have also been critical during the pandemic when students needed more motivation and professional guidance. Generally, the objectives of these guest lectures are to promote active learning amongst students, to entice student interest and engage with the auditing module from an industry perspective. Most importantly, these guest lectures are also aimed at assisting students in developing skills that will increase their chances of employability when they graduate. Guest lectures are one of the pedagogical methods that may be used to expose students to auditing professionals who share their early and current experiences (journey) (Metrejean et al., 2002).

Literature indicates that to improve student interest, and guest lectures should stimulate interest in the content presented and encourage interactive dialogue (Paul & Mukhopadhyay, 2005; Riebe, Sibson & Meakins, 2013). Furthermore, these guest lectures are practical when guest speakers are industry-aligned and provide relevant and specific examples of the use of employability skills in the 'real-world'. Thus, through guest lectures, there might be an opportunity to improve students' interest and engagement (Riebe et al., 2013). Riebe et al. (2013) conducted a study that analysed the perceptions of Australian undergraduate students on the impact of the industry guest lectures. They found that qualified and exciting guest speakers play an essential role in active learning by exposing students to the "real world" of the workplace and that the guest lectures can reinforce the significance of critical employability skills for future career success. Burdon and Munro (2017) assert that educators may use guest lectures as an experiential method to develop core skills required in the auditing practice.

This study explores and evaluates the undergraduate auditing students' perceptions and expectations of the educational experience gained from the industry guest lecturers at the University of Johannesburg. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of the industry guest lectures on auditing students. The following

secondary objectives are applicable:

- To determine, from the students, if guest lectures stimulate their interest in the module.
- To determine, from the students, if guest lectures motivate them to engage in the module.
- To determine, from students, the ranking of most critical skills for future accountants and auditors and whether the guest lecturers portrayed these skills.
- To determine whether students consider themselves employable in the future based on their experience from guest lecturers.

The overall paper is structured as follows: the theoretical framework underpinning the study, literature review related to this study, research design and methodology used as well as data analysis, discussion of the results and concluding remarks and recommendations.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)

The experiential learning theory was founded by Kolb in 1984 and is defined as "the process where knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 2005). According to Kolb (2005), there are four learning stages or learning nodes under ELT that promotes deep learning, and they are:

- **Concrete Experience** – Students apply a feeling node to their experience to learn in this node. Students who apply this learning node are intuitive decision-makers, problem-solvers, and decision-makers.
- **Reflective observation** – under this node, students are watchers as they value reviewing and reflecting from experience. These students are often perceived to value objectivity, and they are impartial and patient.
- **Abstract conceptualisation** – under these nodes, students are believed to be thinkers, and they learn and conclude from experience, and these students are perceived to have cognitive skills.

- **Active experimentation** – under this node, students are believed to be doers and try out what they have learned. These students are believed to be more practical influencers and get the job done.

The above learning nodes are essential and required to be embraced and nurtured by accounting educators and since students learning styles are not fixed, producing well-rounded students is crucial. Students may learn differently from the same experience, and accounting educators need to offer various learning experiences to students. Guest lectures are one of the forms used in experiential learning as students get to experience fundamental work tasks through course activities (Fortin & Leagault, 2010). Guest Speakers provide an efficient real-life experience for students (Fortin & Leagault, 2010). Through the four nodes of experiences listed above, students may have embraced their diverse learning modes and skills from the same experience of guest lectures.

## 2.2 Active Learning – Constructivist Theory

Discovery learning by Bruner (1961) states that students are encouraged to discover skills that need development and career paths within their discipline. Niemi, Nevgi and Aksit, (2016) posit that through discovery learning, students will be offered an opportunity to reflect on their experience, and the learning process will occur. The discovery should come in during the reflecting process after attending the guest lectures. When a student is learning and constructing knowledge gained in the classroom and from the experience of others and themselves, active and effective learning takes place. It could be argued that Industry-based guest lectures are one of the passive methods that may be applied in teaching; however, they might promote active learning through discussion and cooperative learning, which might occur during guest lectures. This depends on the students' responses and reflection from the guest lecture experience. This is because the role of the lecturer is to facilitate the learning process and not to teach. So, students engage with the industry experts and participate in the guest lecturer. The student will have prior knowledge from class and experience of having gone through the study material before engaging with the industry expert who gives the practical side of how they practice the same concepts that have been covered in class. Students would then reflect and merge the

two. Therefore, the learning objectives involving complex cognitive skills require teaching methods that promote active student learning (Fortin & Legault, 2010). Fortin and Legault (2010) indicate that active learning can be achieved through case studies, problem-based learning (PBL), individual and group projects, student presentations, role-play, simulations, discussions, and cooperative learning. Thus, guest lectures may assist students' involvement, resulting in active learners (Metrejean et al., 2002). Thus, the learning experience theory and active learning theory fits well in this study as it links up to the student experience from guest lectures to promote active learning.

## 3. Literature Review

Accounting education in Africa is essential as it promotes the accounting profession, supporting economic development and growth across the continent (Lubbe & Coetzee, 2018). Lubbe and Coetzee (2018) authored the Guest Editorial in Southern African Accounting Association (SAAA), a special issue where academics and practitioners needed to contribute and reflect on accounting education in Africa. In this special issue, few papers were received, only ten papers were submitted, and only five were published. None of the five papers covered guest lectures or measures to improve student engagement, employability, skills development except for the importance of critical thinking skills (Lubbe & Cloete, 2018). This shows limited accounting education research in the African continent as it is still developing (Lubbe & Coetzee, 2018). From the previous background, it is evident that research accounting education is still lacking. However, accounting education is primarily dominant in developed western countries (Marriot, Stoner, Fogarty & Sangster, 2014). In addressing the research objectives of this study, the literature review covers the interest and engagement with material content and within the classroom environment, the employability skills and guest lectures.

### 3.1 Interest and Engagement with Content and Within the Classroom

Literature indicates that a variety of measures may be put in place to entice the student interest with the content taught and engagement in the classroom (Stone, Fiedler & Kandunias, 2014). Stone et al. (2014) conducted a study titled "Harnessing Facebook for Student Engagement in Accounting

Education: Guiding Principles for Accounting Students and Educators". They found that Facebook may be used as an education platform to engage students with their learning. The study was limited to Facebook to improve students' interest and engagement in the classroom. It was also limited to an HEI located in Australia.

### 3.2 Employability Skills

Accounting students need to have adequate skills that will make them stand out and improve their chances of employability. They also need to comply with the five principles of the code of ethics. The code of ethics of professional accountants by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) consists of five principles that need to be adhered to by professional accountants and auditors (Apostolou, Dull & Schleifer, 2013). These five principles consist of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behaviour. These principles apply to all accounting and auditing professionals who have certification from accounting professional bodies such as the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA), South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA), South African Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA) (Apostolou et al., 2013).

Even though the five principles recommended by IFAC are for when students are already certified, accounting educators need to transfer the knowledge and assist students in embracing these principles and other crucial skills required in practice for students to be competent and employable (Dolce et al., 2020). However, the transfer of knowledge and nurturing of these skills can effectively be thought through active engagement and learning at an early tertiary education stage. Under employability skills, there is sufficient literature review available as past studies have investigated skills that will be required from future accounting and auditing students. Jacking and De Lange (2009) conducted a study titled "Do Accounting Graduate Skills Meet the Expectations of Employers? A matter of Convergence or Divergence". Their study found that employers require a range of generic skills that graduates are empowered with during their student tenure. Some of the skills they have highlighted are team skills, leadership potential, verbal communication and interpersonal skills and computer skills (Jacking & De Lange, 2009). The study was, however, limited to the HEI in Australia.

In Canada, Fortin and Legault (2010) conducted a study titled "Development of Generic Competencies: Impact of a Mixed Teaching Approach on Students Perceptions". They found that the development of generic competencies has been emphasised in accounting education literature. The study was limited to an HEI in Canada and focused on post-graduate students. The skills that were found to be important in the study were decision-making, communication skills and interpersonal relations skills, and these are similar skills recommended by Jacking and De Lange (2009) (Jacking & De Lange, 2009). Stone, Lightbody and Whait (2013) conducted a study titled "Developing Accounting Students Listening Skills: Barriers, Opportunities and an Integrated Stakeholder Approach". They found that communication skills (listening and talking are crucial for accounting professionals) were essential to develop and nurture accounting students. They believe that communication skills will enable accounting students to engage with their stakeholders when joining the working class (Stone et al., 2013). The study was limited to the role that may be played by the professional accounting bodies and future employees in improving accounting students' communication skills. The study was also limited to HEI based in the United Kingdom. The communication skill was also highlighted by Jacking and De Lange (2009) and Fortin and Legault (2010) as the most crucial skill for future accountants and auditors.

In Australia and New Zealand, Tan and Laswad (2018) conducted a study titled "Professional skills required of accountants: what do job advertisements tell us?" They examined the employability skills of accountants cited in job advertisements in Australia and New Zealand (Tan & Laswad, 2018). They found that interpersonal and personal skills are frequently required skills by employers. They also found that collaboration, communication, and a positive attitude were crucial as they were included in most job adverts. Tan and Laswad (2018) posit that accountants have changed from background number crushers to engaged business professionals. They further suggest that the HEI should adjust the curriculum to incorporate skills development required in practice. The study was limited to HEI in Australia and New Zealand.

In Italy, Dolce et al. (2020) conducted a study titled "The soft skills of accounting graduates: perception versus expectations." Their study explored the viewpoints of both graduates and employers

about soft skills in accounting education (Dolce et al., 2020). They recommend that academics need to enhance skills required by employers during their engagement with students. These soft skills included problem-solving, time management, adaptive, objective, conflict management, and technical skills, including IT usage, communication, public speaking. Their study was limited to HEI in Italy. In the African continent, minimal studies were conducted which address the employability skills required from future accountants. In Ghana, Awayiga, Onumah and Tsamenyi (2010) conducted a study titled "Knowledge and Skills Development of Accounting Graduates: The Perceptions of Graduates and Employers in Ghana". They found that Analytical/Critical thinking is rated the most important professional skill by both employers and graduates. Spreadsheet packages were rated as the most crucial skill (under IT) (Awayiga et al., 2010). The study is only limited to the HEI in Ghana.

In South Africa, Herbert (2013) posits that communication and critical thinking skills may be developed and nurtured when students work in teams with fixed deadlines. Barac and du Plessis (2014) conducted a study titled "Teaching pervasive skills to South African accounting students". They found a lack of development of pervasive skills in the undergraduate accredited programmes and recommended integrating pervasive skills into courses. They grouped pervasive skills into four categories, ethical behaviour and professionalism, personal attributes, professional skills and IT skills. Their study was limited to aspiring Chartered Accountants students in South African HEI's. Soobramoney and Bornman (2020) conducted a study titled "Students' Perceptions on the importance of soft skills for their future career in Tax". They found a gap between the student's perception of the required soft skills and the employers' expectations. The authors recommended that there should be an awareness by tax educators of the crucial skills that are required in practice to address misconceptions that students may have. Self-driven, working independently, eager to learn, communication, knowledge to solve a problem, planning skills and meeting deadlines, decision making and critical thinking, ethics, and attention to detail were some of the ranked soft critical skills required from tax graduates based on employers perception with the communication skills ranked the highest (Bornman & Soobramoney, 2018; Soobramoney & Bornman, 2020). In contrast, students perceived communication skills as

the least essential skill as it was rated the 6<sup>th</sup> out of the 8<sup>th</sup> soft skills, which students need to rank. The study was limited to the required skills from tax practitioners. Keevy (2020) conducted a study titled "Core subjects in accounting academic programmes: Development of pervasive skills". The pervasive skills were grouped into three categories as per, Barac and du Plessis (2014). However, they did not include IT skills (Keevy, 2020). The study also found that auditing was the most crucial subject in developing ethical behaviour and professionalism competencies. The study was limited to CA aspiring students in South Africa.

### 3.3 Guest Lectures

Few studies have been conducted to evaluate the effect of guest lectures on accounting students. Metrejean et al. (2002) conducted a study titled "Guest speakers: reflections on the role of accountants in the classroom". They found that a successful guest speaker benefits students, educators, guest speakers and the university. They also found that the students enjoyed the guest-lecture sessions and requested more guest lectures to be planned in the future. Metrejean et al. (2002) also argue that guest speakers improve the learning experience because they inspire students to pay closer attention to class topics and increase students' awareness of accounting career opportunities. The study was limited to the USA students and the impact guest lecturers have on accounting students. The study was also limited on the procedure to be followed when organizing guest lectures.

Another study investigating the impact of guest lectures on accounting students was Riebe, Sibson & Meakins (2013) and Riebe et al. (2013), who conducted a study that analysed the perceptions of Australian undergraduate students on the impact of the industry guest lectures. They found that qualified and exciting guest speakers play an essential role in active learning by exposing students to the "real world" of the workplace and that the guest lectures can reinforce the significance of critical employability skills for future career success (Riebe et al., 2013). The study was limited to HEI in Australia. The previous literature review shows that limited research has been conducted on the impact of guest lectures in improving auditing students' interest and engagement and possible development of skills that will assist them for future employment. This also indicates that there is limited research

conducted by academics reflecting on their teaching pedagogies and interventions. Especially in the African continent, this agrees with the observation made by Lubbe & Coetzee (2018). Thus, this study seeks to address the existing research gap in South Africa and add to the body of knowledge in accounting education.

#### 4. Research Design and Methodology

The research design is phenomenology, as the study explores the individual experiences and the students' experiences in this context. The study employed a mixed-method approach with a self-completed online survey through Google forms. The survey was conducted over a semester since the official guest lectures were initiated in the second semester of the year. Two groups of students enrolled for the auditing modules, the second-year group and the third-year group. These groups of students are taught online. Hence the survey was also conducted online to allow a systematic and efficient collection of quantifiable data on a set of pre-determined variables and some open-ended qualitative responses.

Students enrolled under the second-year group were 582, and those enrolled in the third-year group were 484. There were two guest lectures per group; thus, both groups held four guest lectures per semester. In the first sessions, there was an attendance of 260 students from the second and third-year groups. However, during the second sessions, the numbers dropped as there were only 120 students who attended from both groups. The drop in attendance in the second session is arguably attributed to the timing of the guest lecturer, which corresponded with the last week of the semester. Purposive sampling was used as the only student who attended guest lectures response was considered valid for the study. Furthermore, these were the same students who attended the first sessions. Thus, the population size was 260 students. Thirty-four responses were received from students, and only 32 of the students who responded did attend the guest lectures. Therefore only 32 responses are valid to be considered. Thus, the response rate was 12%.

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Johannesburg, School of Accountancy Ethics Committee, and permission to research was also granted by the research office since the study involved students. This was to

ensure that the research was conducted ethically and that no harm was caused to students. The ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained, and the ethical number is SAREC20210820/01. Thus, the research followed the ethical guidelines of the university. The information section that included the purpose and objectives of the study confidentiality and the student's rights and that the study was entirely voluntary was provided to the students prior to completing the study. A consent form was also included so students could consent prior to participating in the study.

The online questionnaire was set up and administered on Google forms. The students were asked to provide basic demographic information such as age, gender, number of guest lectures. They were also asked to indicate the extent of these guest lectures' impact on their interest and engagement in the module. Students were also asked to rate their agreement on a five-point scale (where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree) on the statement that relates to skills required from future accountants and auditors. There were also a few "Yes" and "No" questions that students needed to respond to regarding the guest lectures' effect, the skills required by practice, and chances of employability in the future. The questionnaire also included three open-ended questions which asked students to comment in long sentences on the skills that guest lecturers portrayed during their presentations, other skills that students can recommend as important that were not covered and on whether there was a significant impact on students' studies and career by the guest lectures.

The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 27). The open-ended responses were analysed through inductive coding.

##### 4.1 Data Analysis

There were 260 (out of 1066) students enrolled under the second year or third year auditing module who attended the guest lectures in the second semester of 2021. Out of 260, only 32 students completed the guest lecture survey, an overall response rate of 12%. Students are currently taught online due to COVID-19, and the country is currently experiencing load-shedding, which might be one of the reasons for poor attendance and low response rate. Furthermore, the poor response rate

might be due to data issues, as students might not have sufficient data or may reserve data for other high-priority tasks. The questionnaire link was shared in class. However, students need enough time to engage with the information details of the research, consent form and the questionnaire itself. Thus, the researcher did not want to put students under pressure to complete the form so that the response could reflect students' true perceptions. As illustrated in Table 1 below, more females (65,6%) than males (34,4%) submitted their responses. The large participation by age group of students are aged between 21-25 (65, 60), with a slight balance between the 18-20 age group (15,6%) and the over 25 age group (18,8%). Of the 32 students who completed the questionnaires because they attended the guest lectures, 73,5% attended both sessions under their group, and 20,6% only attended one session within their respective groups.

#### **4.1.1 Guest Lectures Stimulation of Students Interest in the Module**

Students were asked to indicate their extent of interest within the module. They had three options to choose from "to a large extent, to a lesser extent and not at all". In Table 2, it is illustrated that most

of the students (90,6%) indicated that the guest lectures stimulated their interest in the auditing module, with only very few students (9,4%) who selected to a lesser extent. Therefore, it may be concluded that the guest lectures positively stimulated students' interest in the auditing module.

#### **4.1.2 Guest Lectures Motivate Students to Engage in the Module**

Students were asked to indicate the extent of engagement with the module in three areas: online class sessions, online tutorial sessions, and study material. Students were given three options for all these three areas to choose from, from "Not at all, to a larger extent and a lesser extent". As illustrated in Table 3 on the next page, most students indicated that the guest lectures motivated them to engage in all three areas. Under the engagement in online class sessions, most students (90.6%) indicated that they engaged with in a class session to a large extent. In the engagement during tutorial sessions, 65,6% indicated to have engaged to a larger extent and on the question of engagement with the study material, 84,4% of students indicated that they have engaged to a large extent. A minimal number of students in all three areas used to measure student

**Table 1: Demographics of Undergraduate Accountancy Students Who Participated in the Study**

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Age Group</b>				
Valid	18-20	5	15,6	15,6
	21-25	21	65,6	81,3
	Over 25	6	18,8	100,0
	Total	32	100,0	
<b>Gender</b>				
Valid	Female	21	65,6	65,6
	Male	11	34,4	100,0
	Total	32	100,0	

Source: Authors own data analysis

**Table 2: Student Interest**

<b>Guest Lectures improve your interest in Auditing?</b>				
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	To a large extent	29	90,6	90,6
	To a lesser extent	3	9,4	100,0
	Total	32	100,0	

Source: Authors own data analysis

**Table 3: Student Engagement**

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Guest Lectures motivate you to engage in online class session?</b>				
Valid	Not at All	1	3,1	3,1
	To a large extent	29	90,6	93,8
	To a lesser extent	2	6,3	100,0
	Total	32	100,0	
<b>Guest Lectures motivate you to engage during Tutorials sessions?</b>				
Valid	Not at All	3	9,4	9,4
	To a large extent	21	65,6	75,0
	To a lesser extent	8	25,0	100,0
	Total	32	100,0	
<b>Guest Lectures motivate you to engage with your Auditing study material?</b>				
Valid	Not at All	1	3,1	3,1
	To a large extent	27	84,4	87,5
	To a lesser extent	4	12,5	100,0
	Total	32	100,0	

Source: Authors own data analyses

engagement within the module selected "not at all" these students are less than 10% for tutorial sessions and less than 5% for class session and auditing study material. Although this is a small number, it would still need to be addressed and not ignored.

#### **4.1.3 The Most Critical Skills Expected by Industry and Projected by Guest Lecturers Based on Student Point of View and Whether They Consider Developing Critical Skills**

Students were asked to rate whether the six proposed skills were critical. Each of the six critical skills was rated on a five-point sliding scale, where one (1) represented "strongly agree" and five (5) was "strongly disagree."

Table 4 on the next page shows that the most critical skills between the six skills. The highly ranked skill was ethics skills, which included honesty and integrity with 59.4%, followed by leadership skill, at 53.1% and the flexibility skill, at 50.0%. These three skills were the top three which more than 50% of respondents allocated under strongly agree option. The skill that has been ranked the lowest, based on strongly agree responses, was the tech-savviness skills at 40.6%. It is interesting to note that tech-savviness has been ranked the lowest, among the six skills, when more businesses and HEI rely sincerely on technology for continuity purposes, especially during the pandemic when most operations have been online for social

distancing purposes. Nevertheless, looking at each skill separately, the majority of responses favoured "strongly agree" across all skills, which means that all the critical skills are relatively important in the industry. In the analysis of the qualitative data where students were asked, "what other skill would increase your chances of employability in the future", the following skills were included:

- Working as a team.
- Collaborative.
- Time management.
- Working under critical conditions.
- Being confident.
- Hardworking.
- Being punctual.

Working as a teams and time management were the skills which were indicated to be the other most essential skills for future employment, and these were also noted to be amongst the essential skills in literature (Jacking & De Lange, 2009; Cloete, 2018; Tan & Laswad, 2018; Dolce, Emanuel, Cisi & Ghislieri, 2020).

**Table 4: Ranking of Skills Based on their Importance**

<b>Ethics (honesty and integrity) is one of the critical skills expected from future accountants and auditors?</b>					<b>Leadership (taking ownership and making difficult decisions) is one of the critical skills expected from future accountants and auditors?</b>				
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>			<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	1.00	19	59,4	59,4	Valid	1.00	17	53,1	53,1
	2.00	1	3,1	62,5		2.00	3	9,4	62,5
	3.00	2	6,3	68,8		3.00	1	3,1	65,6
	4.00	1	3,1	71,9		4.00	1	3,1	68,8
	5.00	9	28,1	100,0		5.00	10	31,3	100,0
	Total	32	100,0			Total	32	100,0	
<b>Flexibility (being agile and proactive by quickly adapting to changing environment) is one of the critical skills expected from future accountants and auditors?</b>					<b>Emotional intelligence is one of the critical skills expected from future accountants and auditors?</b>				
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>			<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	1.00	16	50,0	50,0	Valid	1.00	15	46,9	46,9
	2.00	4	12,5	62,5		2.00	3	9,4	56,3
	3.00	1	3,1	65,6		3.00	2	6,3	62,5
	4.00	2	6,3	71,9		4.00	3	9,4	71,9
	5.00	9	28,1	100,0		5.00	9	28,1	100,0
	Total	32	100,0			Total	32	100,0	
<b>Strong written and verbal communication is one of the critical skills expected from future accountants and auditors?</b>					<b>Tech-Savviness (having interest and knowledge to use technology) is one of the critical skills expected from future accountants and auditors?</b>				
		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>			<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Valid	1.00	14	43,8	43,8	Valid	1.00	13	40,6	40,6
	2.00	5	15,6	59,4		2.00	5	15,6	56,3
	3.00	1	3,1	62,5		3.00	3	9,4	65,6
	4.00	2	6,3	68,8		4.00	1	3,1	68,8
	5.00	10	31,3	100,0		5.00	10	31,3	100,0
	Total	32	100,0			Total	32	100,0	

Source: Authors own data analyses

#### 4.1.4 Determining Whether Students Consider Themselves Employable in the Future Based on their Experience with Guest Lecturers

As illustrated in Table 5 on the next page, all students (100%) indicated that the guest lecturers portrayed some of the expected skills from future accountants and auditors, and 96,9% indicated that the guest lecturers portrayed these skills to a larger extent. When asked if students consider themselves to have some of these critical skills, 78,1% of the students selected "yes", and all students (100%) selected a yes when asked if they would consider developing

these critical skills going forward to increase their employment chances. This indicates some commitment from students to improve their skills as 21,9% of these students indicated that they do not believe they possess some of these skills. However, they indicated that they would consider developing these skills to increase their employability chances. This indicates that, through guest lecturers, students have reflected on the skills, have identified their shortfalls, and are willing to close the skills gap and become employable. When students were asked to indicate whether they consider themselves employable in

**Table 5: The Quality of Guest Lecturers and Employability Perception**

Quality of Guest Speakers and Critical Skills	Selected Options	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Did the guest lectures (speakers) portray some of the critical skills expected from accountants and auditors (emotional intelligence, communication, ethics, leadership, flexibility, tech-savvy)?	Yes	32	100,0	100,0
To what extent did they portray these critical skills of future accountants and auditors?	To a large extent	31	96,9	96,9
	To a lesser extent	1	3,1	100,0
Do you believe that you have these critical skills of future accountants and auditors?	No	7	21,9	21,9
	Yes	25	78,1	100,0
Would you consider developing these skills going	Yes	32	100,0	100,0
Would you consider yourself employable as an accountant or auditor in future?	No	2	6,3	6,3
	Yes	30	93,8	100,0

Source: Author

the future, 93,8% of the students selected a "Yes", indicating their confidence in their competencies and skills. Although only 6.3% of students said they did not consider themselves employable in the future, these might be the students who had indicated that they do not possess the required critical skills. However, it is encouraging to note that the number has dropped from 21,9% who indicated not having the skills. This might be because students have indicated to commit to developing themselves and acquiring these critical skills.

In the qualitative analysis, students were asked to indicate *"what other skills were portrayed by the guest lectures which you think, are also applicable in a workplace"*:

- Critical thinking.
- Teamwork.
- Thinking beyond what is in the textbooks.
- Listening skills.
- Value ethical and good behaviour.
- Accountability and commitment.
- Professional skepticism.

#### **4.1.5 How Did Guest Lectures Impact on Students Studies and Career**

Students indicated the following:

- Very positive.

- Very positive and motivating.
- Encouraged to study hard and be patient. Be happy with the job I am doing.
- Positive impact in my studies.
- The guest lecture helps me to put more effort in order to persue my studies.
- The guest lecture made me realise how nice being an auditor is and is making me consider choosing the auditing career path.
- It made me take my career seriously.
- They give an overview of what we are going to do in the work place and showed the importance of my studies in the work place.
- They encouraged me to do more research, so that I will be able to get an insight understanding of the career I want to persue in the near future.
- They helped me to understand what procedures I need to follow if I want to be an auditor and what exactly auditors do.
- They have made me work hard and to be assured that I can also be like them or do more. I can say that they made me to believe an auditor or accountant is possible. If they did it I can do it!
- They give us a broader outlook on Auditing, insight on how the real industry is.

- I've always wanted to become a chartered accountant, but now I'm a bit interested in becoming an auditor.
- To a large extent I managed to put more effort in my studies and get my ethics in order.
- Yes, I have a clear vision of what I want to achieve now.
- They made me think of becoming an auditor.
- Yes, indeed she did play a huge role to inspire my confidence since we are doing online lessons.
- Auditor motivated us and gave us guidance on which route to follow in order to get to a certain point of our careers as auditor. They also gave us hope that there's a huge gap/opportunities for us as students.
- They motivated me to study even harder and attend classes and tutorials.

## 5. Discussion

The study revealed that industry guest lectures have a positive effect on student interest and engagement within the module. The results also indicate that through guest lectures, students are offered an opportunity to reflect on the skills that are required by the industry and portrayed by guest lectures. During and after guest lectures, students have an opportunity to reflect on their studies and careers and become intentional about their studies and career. Through guest lectures, critical skills may be introduced and reinforced to the students for them to develop and increase their chances of employability. With the overall impact of the guest lecture to students' studies and careers based on qualitative studies majority of students indicated that the guest lectures motivated them and positively impacted them, with one student indicating that guest lecturers motivated them to engage within the module, *"They motivated me to study even harder and attend classes and tutorials" and "encouraged me to study hard and be patient and to be happy with the job I am doing". Thus, guest lectures made students to become active learners. As it encouraged students to take action.*

Reflecting on Kolb's (2005) learning theory of four nodes, students' qualitative response indicates

that students experience in the guest lecturer impacted students in these nodes. For example, with the node of feeling where students are perceived to be decision-makers and problem solvers. Some students indicate that from their experience in attending the guest lecture they manage to think intentionally about their studies and careers as they were inspired and *"encouraged to study hard and be patient, to be happy with the job I am doing" and "to a large extent I managed to put more effort in my studies and get my ethics in order"*.

On the second node of the learning experience, where students value reviewing and reflecting from experience, some of the students indicated, *"It made me take my career seriously" and "they have made me work hard and be assured that I can also be like them or do more, I can say that they made me believe an auditor or accountant is possible. If they did it I can do it."*

On the third node where students are believed to be thinkers, *"they made me think of becoming an auditor" and "yes, I have a clear vision of what I want to achieve now"*.

The last node of active experimentation, where students are believed to be doers, try out what they have learned. Some of the students' reflections linked to this node of learning experience and this includes, *"they encouraged me to do more research, so that I will be able to get an insight understanding of the career I want to pursue in the near future" and "the guest lecture helps me to put in more effort in order to pursue my studies"*.

The qualitative results were that students were asked to indicate other skills they considered critical for future employability chances and when they were asked to reflect on other skills that guest lecturers portrayed. Most of these other skills which students listed are similar to those included in the literature. For example, teamwork is a similar skill that Graduate Career Australia noted (2008) and Reibie et al. (2013), where it was highly ranked. Time management and critical thinking were also rated as critical skills by Jacking & De Lange (2009), Cloete (2018), Tan & Laswad (2018), and Dolce, Emanuel, Cisi & Ghislieri, (2020).

The most ranked critical skills within the six skills included in the study were ethics, followed by leadership skills, whilst the least rated skill was tech-saviness.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study indicates to have a positive effect on developing the interest and engagement of the students within the module as guest lectures. The study also found that guest lectures allow students to engage with the industry experts who inspire them to reflect on the content taught in class. The study also found that guest lectures offer students an opportunity to reflect on their studies and career goals. Since students are offered advice about possible future endeavors, thus guest lectures assist students in becoming more intentional and active learners.

For possible future research, the perceptions of guest lectures may also be researched and noted on what lecturers can do more to improve students' interest and engagement within the auditing module.

## References

- Apostolou, B., Dull, R.B. & Schleifer, L.L. 2013. A framework for the pedagogy of accounting ethics. *Accounting Education*, 22(1):1-17.
- Awayiga, J.Y., Onumah, J.M. & Tsamenyi, M. 2010. Knowledge and skills development of accounting graduates: The perceptions of graduates and employers in Ghana. *Accounting Education: An International Journal*, 19(1-2):139-158.
- Barac, K. & Du Plessis, L. 2014. Teaching pervasive skills to South African accounting students. *Southern African Business Review*, 18(1):53-79.
- Barac, K., Kirstein, M., Kunz, R. & Beukes, B. 2016. Factors influencing students' learning approaches in auditing. *Meditari Accountancy Research*, 24(3):390-413.
- Bornman, M. & Soobramoney, J. 2018. Work Readiness Skills of Tax Technicians. *Proceedings of the SAAA Teaching and Learning Conference*. Port Elizabeth. December 2018.
- Bruner, J.S. 1961. The act of discovery. *Harvard Educational Review*: Harvard.
- Burdon, W.M. & Munro, K. 2017. Simulation – is it all worth it? The impact of simulation from the perspective of accounting students. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 15(3):429-448.
- Cloete, M. 2018. The impact of an integrated assessment on the critical thinking skills of first-year university students. *Accounting Education*, 27(5):479-494.
- Dolce, V., Emanuel, F., Cisi, M. & Ghislieri, C. 2020. The soft skills of accounting graduates: Perceptions versus expectations. *Accounting Education*, 29(1):57-76.
- Fortin, A. & Legault, M. 2010. Development of generic competencies: Impact of a mixed teaching approach on students' perceptions. *Accounting Education: An International Journal*, 19(1-2):93-122.
- Herbert, S. 2013. Enhancing students understanding in an undergraduate accounting course through student-created videos. *Proceedings of the SAAA Teaching and Learning Conference, Virtual Conference, 2013. Regional Conference Proceedings*.
- Jackling, B. & De Lange, P. 2009. Do accounting graduates' skills meet the expectations of employers? A matter of convergence or divergence. *Accounting Education: An International Journal*, 18(4-5):369-385.
- Keey, M. 2020. Core subjects in accounting academic programmes: Development of pervasive skills. *South African Journal of Accounting Research*, 34(2):140-160.
- Kolb, A.Y. 2005. *The Kolb learning style inventory-version 3.1 2005 technical specifications*. Boston, MA: Hay Resource Direct, 200(72):166-171.
- Lubbe, I. & Coetzee, S. 2018. Accounting education in Africa. *Accounting Education*, 27(5):453-455.
- Marriott, N., Stoner, G., Fogarty, T. & Sangster, A. 2014. Publishing characteristics, geographic dispersion and research traditions of recent international accounting education research. *The British Accounting Review*, 46(3):264-280.
- Metrejean, C., Pittman, J. & Zarzeski, M.T. 2002. Guest speakers: Reflections on the role of accountants in the classroom. *Accounting Education*, 11(4):347-364.
- Niemi, H., Nevgi, A. & Aksit, F. 2016. Active learning promoting student teachers' professional competences in Finland and Turkey. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(4):471-490.
- Paul, P. & Mukhopadhyay, K. 2005. Experiential learning in international business education. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 16(2):7-25.
- Riebe, L., Sibson, R., Roepen, D. & Meakins, K. 2013. Impact of industry guest speakers on business students' perceptions of employability skills development. *Industry and Higher Education*, 27(1):55-66.
- Soobramoney, J. & Bornman, M. 2020. Students' perception of the Importance of Soft Skills for Their Future Career in Tax. *Proceedings of the SAAA Teaching and Learning Conference, Virtual Conference, October 2020. Regional Conference Proceedings*.
- Stone, G., Fiedler, B.A. & Kandunias, C. 2014. Harnessing Facebook for student engagement in accounting education: Guiding principles for accounting students and educators. *Accounting Education*, 23(4):295-321.
- Stone, G., Lightbody, M. & Whit, R. 2013. Developing accounting students' listening skills: Barriers, opportunities and an integrated stakeholder approach. *Accounting Education*, 22(2):168-192.
- Tan, L.M. & Laswad, F. 2018. Professional skills required of accountants: What do job advertisements tell us? *Accounting Education*, 27(4):403-432.