Graduate Employability and
The Role of 21st Century Skills
A case study among Humanities students and academics at the University of Oslo

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Abstract

This study explores perceptions on employability and 21st century skills for work life within non-vocational, humanities study programmes. Within the context of a knowledge-based economy, higher education has a significant role in equipping students not only with discipline-specific knowledge but also with skills that are transferable into different contexts. With increasing calls for universities to demonstrate usefulness and relevance, graduates are expected to be equipped for the world of work not in a narrow sense, but also as engaged, critical citizens. It is widely agreed that these transferable 21st century skills are an integral part of employability and are highlighted in various higher education policy documents. Thus, there is a need to understand how students and academics understand and perceive employability and these skills as relevant for work life.

The aim of this study is to explore students and academics perceptions on employability and the role of 21st century skills, particularly within the history discipline. The analytical framework adopted from Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) was used for the analysis. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were held with six students and three academics at the University of Oslo. The data was analysed using the thematic analysis method.

The findings from student interviews suggest that although disciplinary knowledge is highly valued, generic skills such as collaboration and teamwork skills are perceived as important for work life and could be better supported within the study programmes. While interview findings reveal that students have mixed feelings regarding self-perceived employability, there is a clear pattern that disciplinary knowledge is highly valued and that it should not be subsumed by learning oriented towards employability. Still, both students and academics value generic skills such as critical thinking, writing skills and source critique as important for work life. These skills are viewed as typical discipline-specific skills and regarded as highly supported in the study programmes. Furthermore, both the students and academics viewed the responsibility for skills development and preparation for work life as a combined effort between the university and students. The exploration of humanities academics and students’ perceptions builds on the body of literature on employability and 21st century skills by providing the perspective of postgraduate students and academics regarding the skills they perceive as valuable for work life.
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDPR</td>
<td>The General Data Protection Regulation</td>
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<td>HEIs</td>
<td>Higher Education Institutions</td>
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<td>IAKH</td>
<td>Department of Archaeology, conservation and history</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communications technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>KSAVE</td>
<td>Knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethics</td>
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<td>MITRA</td>
<td>Modern International and Transnational History</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOKUT</td>
<td>The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education</td>
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<td>NSD</td>
<td>The Norwegian Centre for Research Data</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>REFLEX</td>
<td>Responsive and Flexible Career Development Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>UiO</td>
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1 Introduction

Higher education policy makers seek to ensure that study programmes have societal relevance and that graduates are equipped with relevant expertise to transition smoothly from higher education into work life. There have been debates with regards to whether graduates are being equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, required in today’s advancing society. Moreover, there have been ongoing debates about the value of the humanities in particular (Small, 2013). On the one end of the spectrum is the value in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake versus utilitarianism or usefulness on the other. These debates raise questions regarding the purpose of higher education and whether curricula should focus on ‘academic learning’ or ‘learning for employability’ (Speight, Lackovic, & Cooker, 2013). The body of literature on the topic of employability and 21st century skills shows that there is a need to consider the perceptions of students and academics particularly within non-vocational study programmes. This thesis study examines students and academics perceptions on graduate employability and the role of 21st century skills within the humanities. This study is considered timely and relevant to provide the perspective of students, which is often lacking, as well as the perceptions and practices of academics within the humanities.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Higher Education, Employability and the Skills Agenda

As economies have become more knowledge-based, the need for employable graduates with key competencies and skills necessary to cope in the 21st century has been a central aim within the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Beyond 2010, 2009). There is an expectation that higher education has to be more attuned to labour market needs. Moreover, higher education is expected to act as a vehicle towards economic growth in contrast to upholding the German Humboldtian ideal of holistic teaching and research as well as education as a means of character building (Karseth & Solbrekke, 2016).

The effects of technological advancement, global competitiveness and the rise of the knowledge-based economy have placed importance on developing a skilled labour force in most modern societies (Castells, 2010). The world of work has transformed over the past few
decades. Most jobs are no longer in manufacturing but in fields characterised by innovation and knowledge (Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, Ripley, Miller-Ricci & Rumble, 2012). Within the knowledge economy, information technology has transformed the world of work and has contributed vastly to increased global connectedness (Castells, 2010). According to, Kirschner and Stoyanov (2018), technological advancements including increased automation lead to obsolescence or threaten acquired expertise (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018). Obsolescence refers to “the degree to which workers/professionals miss the necessary up-to-date knowledge and skills to effectively function in their present or future work situations” (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018, p. 7). These advancements are changing the demand in skills required by employers and reducing the shelf-life of skills acquired (World Economic Forum, 2016a). As societies progress, there is a need for the labour force to be adequately skilled to respond to the needs and complexities of the 21st century. Some of the apparent driving forces for policy interest in upskilling the labour force include skills shortages, global competitiveness, as well as advancing technology and digitalisation. This has resulted in demands placed on higher education to respond appropriately to the drivers of change.

Higher education has had to adapt to these structural changes in society by equipping students with key competencies for today’s knowledge economy and for lifelong learning (European Comission - Education and Culture DG, 2007). Higher education’s mission has been transformed from universities having the historical functions as “ideological apparatuses” and selecting the dominant elites “elite selecting devices” (Castells, 2001, p. 21) through the socialisation of elites, to producing a skilled labour force. In addition, massification has been central to the changes in the functions of the university from a focus on a small elite group trained mainly as civil servants to educating the masses (Boden & Nedeva, 2010; Trow, 1970). Higher Education’s role, particularly in Europe, has become significant in improving employability by equipping students with the skills needed in the labour market for global competitiveness (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2017). However, several authors caution against the danger of a narrow, utilitarian view reducing higher education’s mission to employability or a list of skills rather than the development of the mind (Boden & Nedeva, 2010), pursuing knowledge for its own sake and enhancing culture (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011). Utilitarianism in higher education refers to usefulness or instrumental relevance whereby the university serves the needs and interests of various stakeholders such as employers, students and policy-makers (Gumport, 2000). The utilitarian rationale of the university’s mission is in stark contrast to the notion of Bildung, knowledge for its own sake (Aamodt, Hovdhaugen, &
Bielfeldt, 2010). The generalist Humboldtian ideal upheld that Bildung was an important part of the university’s key role for character formation, thereby producing good citizens that are culturally competent (Aamodt et al., 2010; Olsen, 2007). However, massification has impacted the mission of the university, serve the changing socio-economic needs of society, by preparing students for the labour market. Although higher education’s function is not primarily to produce employable graduates, Sin and Neave, (2016) observe that it has been seen as a driver of economic success and a vehicle for enhancing employability. Moreover, the reality of the advancing knowledge-based society is that graduates need to be adequately equipped with the skills needed for future work life and as lifelong learners (Harvey, 2000).

**The skills agenda**

The changing landscape of the world of work requires skills for the 21st century. As mentioned, key drivers such as technology, digitalisation and the rise of the knowledge-economy warrant the need for an appropriately skilled labour force. These changes have been occurring in the context of globalisation resulting in work that takes place across borders and cultures thereby giving rise to the need to be able to collaborate in diverse settings. These forces have disrupted the world of work resulting in the need for developing 21st century skills (Whorton, Casillas, Oswald, & Shawm, 2017). Moreover, jobs that are the most in demand today did not exist five to ten years ago (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018). Thus, the relevance of higher education and the skills agenda is important for policy makers. An illustration of this can be found in the European Commission’s skills agenda whereby it seeks reform in the following three areas: “i) improving the quality and relevance of skills formation ii) making skills and qualifications more visible and comparable iii) improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices” (European Commission, 2016, p. 3)

The university is a key player in knowledge production through research, innovation and developing a labour force (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). It could be argued that the skills needed for today’s knowledge-based societies were also previously required in the past (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018; Whorton et al., 2017). However, certain skills are now seen as more important for the 21st century world of work (Whorton et al., 2017) such as information literacy\(^1\) and information management (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018) and the ability to collaborate and work

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\(^1\) Information literacy should not be construed as ICT skills, instead it involves the ability to search for information, critically evaluate its quality and source and use it appropriately (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018)
in culturally diverse teams. In addition, higher-level skills such as research skills are needed for knowledge-based employment landscape (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). The European Commission emphasises the importance of the skills agenda not only for employability but also for personal development, social inclusion and active critical citizenship (European Commission, 2016). These factors justify an exploration of the role that higher education has in providing opportunities for students to learn and acquire knowledge, skills and competencies for future work.

**The Norwegian higher education landscape**

Norway’s higher education system is characterised by egalitarian social values (OECD, 2017). Norway has a stable, robust economy with positive labour market conditions. In Norway, higher education is generally seen as a public good. In 2018, Norway had a higher education participation rate of 35.3% amongst the age group 19 to 24 (Statistics Norway, 2019). As a social welfare state, citizens are entitled to access public higher education at no cost due to the positive benefits it offers to society. The costs associated with higher education in Norway include students’ living expenses as well as foregone earnings. State funding of higher education in Norway is considerably high in comparison to other higher education systems globally. Many students pursue a master’s degree in Norway. It could be argued that this raises employers’ requirements in the labour market, making it more difficult for bachelor’s graduates to find relevant employment. Perceived employability among bachelor’s students is weak and many of them choose to further their studies rather than seek employment immediately (Aamodt et al., 2010).

Norwegian higher education has experienced various reforms over the last two decades, which have had a strong focus on quality, efficiency and effectiveness (Bleiklie, 2009). More specifically, a “Quality Reform” was implemented in 2003, as a result of the approval of the white paper (2000 – 2001) on higher education in 2001, namely *Do your duty—Demand your rights* (KUF, 2001). The main focus of the reform was to improve the quality and efficiency of higher education and to implement changes regarding “status of institutions and institutional funding models, institutional governance, modes of teaching and learning, student support, as well as degree structure” were introduced (Gornitzka, 2007, p. 25). The new degree structure was implemented as a result of the Bologna Process, an intergovernmental agreement signed in

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2 Students in higher education [https://www.ssb.no/en/utuvh](https://www.ssb.no/en/utuvh)
order to establish a European Higher Education area by 2010 (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Bologna Process agreement intended that degrees across European higher education systems were to be compatible for better recognisability. Although Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), it is part of the European Higher Education Area and is one of the signatories on the Bologna Process declaration. The following objectives were central to the Bologna Process and have had a significant influence on higher education reform across Europe:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.
- Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate.
- Establishment of a system of credits - such as in the ECTS system.
- Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective free movement of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff.
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

(Bologna Declaration, 1999, p. 2)

The new structure of the bachelor’s (three years), master’s (two years), and PhD (three years) degrees in Norway were implemented in response to the Bologna Process. Thus, the Bologna Process can be seen as having exerted considerable influence on Norwegian higher education reform. The Bologna Process emphasises the promotion of “citizens mobility and employability” (Bologna Declaration, 1999, p. 1). The Bologna Process aims to strengthens Europe’s position in a competitive global arena and this has had fundamental changes in curriculum policies resulting in educational purposes oriented towards employability and lifelong learning (Karseth & Solbrekke, 2016; Teichler, 2009). In short, employability is a central goal of the Bologna Process (Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

Apart from the change in the degree structure in Norway, another major change that was introduced following the “Quality Reform” was the formal organising of quality assurance through the establishment of NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in
Education (NOKUT). NOKUT is an independent state body. NOKUT was established in 2003 and its mandate is to ensure quality in Norwegian higher education through accreditation and evaluation (Gornitzka, 2007). These both broader policy changes in European higher education and national reforms have placed an expectation on higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure that graduates are adequately equipped with relevant skills for working life. The higher education and policy and reforms at both European and national level manifest at the institutional level, meaning that universities were expected to adjust curricula accordingly.

1.1.2 The Humanities

The role and relevance of the humanities\(^3\) have been a topic of debate both locally and globally (Fritt Ord, 2014; Saunders & Addis, 2010; Small, 2013). The importance of the humanities is crucial in dealing with the challenges of today’s knowledge society as well as educating engaged, critical citizens. However, hard disciplines (Becher, 1994) such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields are often prioritised and receive higher funding over soft disciplines such as the Humanities and Social Sciences (Saunders & Addis, 2010). Moreover, humanities graduates spend a longer time obtaining a suitable job compared to other disciplines (Hordern, 2016; Becher, 1994). With the pace of technological advancement, students today are being trained for jobs that do not yet exist (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018) analytical thinking skills and being an excellent communicator as well as the subject-specific knowledge offered by the humanities provide unique value in the labour market (Saunders & Addis, 2010).

In 2017, a white paper (2016-2017) entitled *The Humanities in Norway* (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2017) was released. It addresses the role and function of the humanities. It further emphasises the unique role of the humanities as a basis for enlightened, public debate and to address social and cultural issues. The white paper points out that HEIs in Norway possess autonomy and academic freedom and that this is coupled with an obligation to ensure the fostering of knowledge and skills relevant to society. Attention is also drawn to the difficulty that humanities graduates face in the labour market and that their unique expertise relevant for working life should be emphasised. This can be seen as an attempt at strengthening humanities

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\(^3\) It is important to note that the humanities includes separate and distinct fields such as, but not limited to history, culture, language, literature and music. The empirical context of this study will focus on the history discipline
Budgetary allocations for research and higher education have not yielded as high returns as they might with regard to understanding and solving urgent societal problems. This is probably also one reason why humanities graduates experience more difficulty than other comparable groups in finding relevant employment. Unless those who teach and carry out research in the humanities can serve as examples by demonstrating that they have something to contribute, private and public employers alike may have difficulty in appreciating the skills of humanities graduates (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 12).

According to the (OECD, 2017), Norway’s unemployment rate among higher education graduates is 3%, in addition, their earnings are 6.7% higher than non-graduates. Humanities graduates are said to have more difficulty in job attainment (Thune & Støren, 2015). Humanities graduates are also at higher risk of being exposed to over-education than graduates from other disciplines (Støren & Wiers-Jenssen, 2016; Verhaest & Van Der Velden, 2013). Over-education occurs as a result of graduates experiencing problems obtaining employment that is directly linked to their level of education. It can also be seen as having educational credentials that are higher than the job requires (Støren & Wiers-Jenssen, 2016). This job-education mismatch results in graduates not being able to make full use of their qualification. Graduates from generally oriented programmes such as those in the humanities have more difficulty in finding a suitable job compared to vocationally oriented programmes (Støren & Aamodt, 2010; Verhaest & Van Der Velden, 2013). In Norway, most humanities graduates are employed in the public sector (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2017). In order to counteract this, HEIs are expected to adapt their study programmes to make humanities graduates more attractive to the private sector as well, thus enhancing their employability. There is a need to ensure that these graduates are attractive in both private and public organisations which place importance on collaboration skills and work-based learning, particularly with the humanities (OECD, 2017; Thune & Støren, 2015).

Previous studies show that humanities students experience difficulties in the job market such as a higher likelihood of job mismatch when entering the labour market, however, they are able to use their qualifications as a stepping stone to advance their careers over time (Verhaest & Van
This raises important questions such as, are students aware of the knowledge and skills that are linked to employability? How can they present their acquired expertise to employers in order to gain and keep fulfilling employment (Hillage & Pollard, 1998) and to utilise their acquired knowledge and skills optimally? Within the body of literature available on employability and the skills needed to enhance it, not enough research exists which focuses on the humanities context.

1.2 Literature Review

Research on the constructs of employability and 21st century skills have largely derived from Anglo-Saxon countries (Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2017). Both constructs have received attention amongst policy-makers as governments seek to enhance human capital for sustained economic success (Yorke & Knight, 2006). In Europe, the Bologna Process has been central in emphasizing employability as well as competencies required for an adequately skilled workforce (Sin & Neave, 2016) which can be seen as the instrumentalisation of higher education (Sin et al., 2017). This literature review will seek to provide an understanding with a particular focus on the role of 21st century skills to keep in line with the focus of the study. The review of literature will start with a delineation of definitions available on employability. This will be followed by a review of previous literature on 21st century skills, also referred to as generic skills. Lastly, the review draws on studies based on perceptions of the different stakeholders regarding employability.

1.2.1 Defining Employability

There is coherence in the literature on the difficulty in defining employability and the skills that constitute it (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Tymon, 2013; Yorke, 2006). The concept of graduate employability is complex, multi-dimensional and has various meanings depending on the context. It can be understood from various perspectives and it draws from theories pertaining to human capital, social capital, cultural capital (Clarke, 2017; Tomlinson, 2017a; Williams, Dodd, Steele, & Randall, 2015) as well as the psychological dimension (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). Not only does employability include knowledge and skills, it is also influenced by individual characteristics (Bridgstock, 2009; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Fugate et al., 2004) and external factors such as labour market conditions (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Due to its complex nature, it is difficult to operationalise employability and the
skills that encompass it. A review of the literature has yielded several definitions of employability. Acquiring skills and competencies appear as a common thread which underpins the various views of the construct of employability.

According to Hillage and Pollard, (1998) employability can be defined as “the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment” (p. 2). Here, it is viewed as with respect to an individual’s ability to obtain and sustain meaningful employment. Hillage and Pollard (1998) argue that an individual’s employability is dependent on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that one possesses and how these assets are used and presented to employees. Hillage and Pollard (1998) also emphasise the importance of contextual factors such as personal circumstances and labour market conditions in determining one’s employability. This is in coherence with Cashian, (2016) who points out structure and agency as pertinent to understanding employability. It is thus important to acknowledge both individual agency as well as the broader social structures that influence employability (Cashian, 2016).

For Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, (2004, p. 15), employability is a “psycho-social construct that embodies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behaviour, and affect, and enhance the individual-work interface”. In this definition, the responsibility to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities required for work life is placed on the individual. This is consistent with Bridgstock's (2009) view on the importance of self-managing one’s career. In addition to the individual dimensions such as career identity and personal adaptability, the importance of social and human capital are also viewed as important (Fugate et al., 2004). In this definition, the emphasis is placed on the person-centred facet and the role of the individual in proactively using their knowledge, skills and individual characteristics to manage their own career. Furthermore, the inclusion of various forms of capital to illustrate the importance of both internal and external factors provides a more holistic understanding of employability (Clarke, 2017; Tomlinson, 2017).

Yorke, (2006) defines employability as a combination of “skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (p.8). In this definition, skills not only include subject-specific skills but also generic
skills “which facilitate the acquisition of subject understanding” (Knight & Yorke, 2002, p. 266) referred to by the authors as communication, numeracy, information and communications technology (ICT) skills and learning how to learn. Knight and Yorke (2002) provide a model for conceptualising employability which includes subject understanding, skills, self-efficacy beliefs and metacognition. They draw on cognitive and social psychology principals and place emphasis on curriculum development. Knight and Yorke, (2002) provide a model which depicts how employability can be enhanced through the curriculum without compromising discipline-specific knowledge.

In contrast, Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006) take on a workplace perspective and define employability as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through optimal use of competences” (p. 453). It is important to note that competences also known as skills or attributes are outlined here. In this definition of employability, the workplace context is used to propose a framework for employability which is competence-based. Furthermore, they highlight the link between developing skills and competences and employability. The European Universities Association Trends 2010 report provides the following clarification to better understand the multi-faceted nature of employability: “Employability depends on knowledge, competences, skills and aptitudes”, “economic and labour market conditions” as well as “age, gender, discipline and recent graduation” (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 45). Again, attention is drawn to competence and skills being integral.

These definitions provide an understanding of employability as multi-dimensional and difficult to pin down. The conceptualisation of employability includes not only subject-specific knowledge but also more general skills, attributes (Harvey, 2001) as well as personal characteristics. To this end, the scope of this will focus on how the university, particularly within the humanities, is enhancing student’s employability. More particularly, i) how are students are assisted to acquire the more general skills required for the world of work ii) which generic skills are valued most iii) and how is learning oriented toward employability perceived? Worthy of noting is that employability cannot be reduced only to a list of skills (Bridgstock, 2009; Knight & Yorke, 2002) meaning that the various broader factors influencing employability cannot be ignored. However, since employability is a complex construct it is possible to identify a set of skills and competencies that are integral to defining it (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Harvey, (2001) suggests that the various ways of defining employability
influences how it is measured and will thus have implications for pedagogy as well as the nature of support services.

In sum, the definitions in the literature show that employability is a complex multi-dimensional construct. What is seen as central is that the acquiring of knowledge and skills is important for clarifying the meaning of employability. Furthermore, the meaning ascribed to employability is complicated and its importance depends on different stakeholders, including employers (Harvey, 2001), as well as different contexts (Sin & Neave, 2016; Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

1.2.2 Understanding 21st Century skills for Employability

Generic skills also known as 21st century skills are an important element of employability. They are defined as “those transferable skills, essential for employability which are relevant at different levels for most” (Kearns, 2001, p. 2). There is general consensus amongst authors that these skills are valued by employers in addition to subject-specific knowledge (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Bennett, Dunne, & Carre, 1999). Generic skills are included in various international and national qualification frameworks (European Commission, 2008). They are also seen in the Norwegian Qualifications Framework (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). Different terminology is used to describe these skills that are transferable from one context to another, hence the term transferable skills, notably, “generic skills” “generic attributes”, “core skills”, “key skills”, “core competencies” or “graduate attributes” (Barrie, 2006; Bennett et al., 1999; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2018). To add to these multiple terms used, there is little agreement globally on a list of essential generic skills (Kearns, 2001; Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018). In Europe, the term key competences is widely used to describe generic skills required not only for employability but also for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2018). In this study, the skills in question will be referred to both as 21st century skills and generic skills, synonymously as a result of the analytical models used (Binkley et al., 2012; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Turning now to teaching and learning in respect to 21st century skills, Bennett et al., (1999) suggest that acquiring and developing generic skills can be better understood through a model of course provision as seen in figure 1 below. The model includes five aspects namely, “disciplinary content, disciplinary skills, workplace awareness, workplace experience and generic skills” (Bennett et al., 1999, p. 80). The model illustrates that generic skills overlap into
disciplinary and workplace dimensions. Moreover, the emphasis on generic skills varies according to discipline. The disciplinary dimensions of the model include theoretical knowledge, disciplinary culture and discipline-specific aspects. Bennett et al., (1999) observe that workplace awareness is of importance and can be fostered in the classroom through simulations of real workplace scenarios, problem-based learning and simulating of work environments through computer-assisted learning. They also propose that workplace experience can be integrated into study programmes structure through work-based placements (Bennet et al. 1999).

**Figure 1. A model of course provision**

Bennet et al. (1999, p.80)

According to Kivunja (2014) 21st century skills require a new learning paradigm “from traditional core subjects to 21st century skills in tandem with the traditional core skills” (p. 40). Kivunja (2014) further suggests that effective teaching is important for improving the learning outcomes among students to enable them to apply generic skills in future workplaces, placing emphasis on the importance of the following skills known as the four C’s: i) critical thinking and problem solving, ii) communication, iii) collaboration and iv) creativity and innovation skills.

These generic skills are seen as vital, foundational skills that learning should foster for the 21st century knowledge economy (Kivunja, 2014; P21, 2016). Since little is known about how students acquire 21st century skills, Virtanen and Tynjälä (2018) conducted a study to explore which pedagogical approaches foster the learning of skills. This study corroborates the vast evidence available that supports student-centred learning over traditional, teacher-directed learning (Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2018). Moreover, pedagogy that is interactive and includes
elements of constructivism, is important for the acquisition of 21st century skills (Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2018). The teaching and learning of 21st century skills is of relevance for the humanities context where teaching is usually tailored towards academic environments and not for the wider jobs in the labour market.

1.2.3 Perceptions of Employability and Skills Required for Work Life

As participation in higher education has increased over the years, students are of the view that a discipline-specific degree alone no longer sets you apart in the labour market (Tomlinson, 2008). Thus, the traditional university education is no longer a passport to a traditional career (Harvey, 2000). Employers needs have adapted as a result of the knowledge-based economy characterised by rapid change and uncertainty. It follows that broader skills and competencies required by employers need to be developed. In addition to having a degree, the obvious value of work experience enhances employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Tomlinson, 2008).

Study programmes that provide opportunities for gaining workplace experience result in better labour market effects for students (Thune & Støren, 2015). Work experience through formal placements at work organisations or part-time work are considered valuable for students to acquire during their studies (Tomlinson, 2008; Tymon, 2013). There is a need for both academia and employers to be involved in the processes of enhancing graduate employability through improved linkages between higher education and the world of work (Harvey, 2000).

In Europe, various cross-national studies have been conducted on higher education and the labour market. One such study is known as the ‘Research into Employment and professional FLEXibility’ project (REFLEX). Using data from the REFLEX project findings reveal that general problem across Europe is not unemployment (Van der Velden & Allen, 2011) but instead is the issue of graduates not finding the relevant job, that is a mismatch between the job and skills (Støren & Arnesen, 2011). Overeducation is also found to be a problem, with more generally oriented programmes having a higher chance of a good match between the study programme and a matching job (Teixeira, Teixeira, Cardoso, Rosa, & Magalhães, 2016; Verhaest & Van Der Velden, 2013). Thus, discussions around employability in Europe are less concerned with graduate unemployment than they are with graduates finding a relevant job that matches their level of education as well as how skills and competencies attained in higher education match with those required in the labour market.
Non-vocational study programmes found within humanities and social sciences are perceived by graduates as having less positive study programme characteristics when compared to programmes in fields such as education, engineering, law, health and welfare (Støren & Aamodt, 2010). In addition, vocationally oriented programmes have been positively linked with employability and the study programme characteristics were found to have significant effects on performing the job. This is similar to Verhaest and Van Der Veldens' (2013) view that humanities study programmes tend to have a more general orientation, thus graduates require on-the-job training for specific skills to perform the job (Verhaest & Van Der Velden, 2013).

In a study by Støren & Aamodt, (2010) which entailed a survey of working graduates from thirteen European countries, including Norway, it was found that there are varying differences among the countries in how graduates view the usefulness of their study programmes for working life. The findings show that the characteristics of the study programme such as the programme’s vocational orientation have a large impact on the value of the programme in the workplace. A positive correlation was found between the study programmes that were seen as demanding, vocationally oriented, known by the employers, academically prestigious, based on lectures, internships, written assignments and/or oral presentations and graduate’s preparedness for work. This shows that studies with a utilitarian orientation were viewed positively by students in terms of preparation for work life.

In a study conducted by Andrews and Higson (2008) working graduates and employers’ perspectives on employability were analysed in four European countries, namely the United Kingdom (UK), Austria, Slovenia and Romania. Graduates reported that they had not gained sufficient expertise from their study programmes to be able to conduct effective verbal presentations. They did, however, report that higher education had equipped them with sound subject-specific knowledge and allowed them to develop good writing skills, which are valued by employers (Andrews & Higson, 2008). In addition to communication, teamwork is also perceived as an important skill for work life (Tymon, 2013). Both graduates and employers share the same sentiments on the importance of prior work experience as well as the importance of both disciplinary knowledge and 21st century skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Thus, students should acquire both discipline-specific skills and generic skills. Barrie (2006) suggests that generic skills can complement disciplinary knowledge. Moreover, Muller and Young, (2014) state that generic or ‘know how’ skills are dependent on disciplinary or ‘know what’ knowledge. It is important to note that there has been widespread criticism against learning
oriented towards enhancing generic skills as opposed to disciplinary subject knowledge (Harris & Ormond, 2018; Muller & Young, 2014). However, Bourn (2018) argues that it is not appropriate to compare knowledge and skills with respect to their importance as both are vital to responding to the needs of today’s globalised, knowledge-based society.

There is uncertainty as to whether skills that foster employability should be embedded within curricula or whether they should be offered as separate skills modules (Harvey, 2000). In a study conducted by Tymon (2013), the students also acknowledged that embedded activities such as presentations and group work helped them develop communication and collaboration skills. Yorke and Knight, (2006) suggest that employability requires good learning and that complex outcomes can be achieved through a programme-level focus instead of stand-alone skills modules. In contrast, in a study investigating the views of 116 final year honours students in the UK it was found that students confidence regarding employability can be enhanced through a separate skills module focused on career building (Scott, Connell, Thomson, & Willison, 2017). The skills module included input from industry experts and was offered to students in addition to their curriculum which already has generic skills embedded. Students reported that the skills module had allowed them to consider skills they were previously not aware of. This shows that whilst embedding generic skills in the overall curriculum is useful, there is potential value in offering separate skills modules to provide learning opportunities (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) for students to be made aware of skills that help them better articulate their knowledge, skills and competencies to future employers.

The offering of isolated modules to enhance employability has been criticised due to a lack of empirical evidence as to whether or not separate skills modules result in graduates obtaining and retaining desired jobs where their education matches the job requirements. Cashian (2016) suggests that a critical realist perspective is needed to measure the effectiveness of efforts to enhance employability such as skills modules offered outside of the formal curriculum. The critical realist approach focuses on how both agency, as well as the influence of social structures both affect employability (Cashian, 2016). From this perspective, individual agency which includes personal constructs such as motivation and self-efficacy influence the effectiveness of how opportunities provided by the university are utilised by students. Thus opportunities to enhance employability should be provided by higher education students however, it is the students own motivation and self-directedness that will result in positive outcomes (Cashian, 2016).
Although vast literature exists on graduate employability and generic skills, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how employability and skills are perceived and experienced within non-vocational fields. In the study conducted by Tymon (2013), it was found that there is a lack of congruence between students’ views and the views of other stakeholders such as employers and academics. The study at hand seeks to address this gap in the literature by investigating humanities academics and students’ views regarding employability and 21st century skills. What therefore remains to be understood is how master’s students within the humanities are being prepared to gain the skills necessary for future work life, which skills they value as important and their perceptions on employability and 21st century skills. Moreover, the study will seek to ascertain whether there are similarities and differences between the views of students and academics. These findings will be linked to relevant literature in the field.

Turning now to the significance of this study, it is worth noting that after careful review of the literature, very little was found that provides the perspectives of humanities students with respect to employability and 21st century skills or generic skills. Qualitative studies that focus specifically on humanities students’ experiences are largely missing from the available literature and are therefore warranted in this study. Moreover, the rationale for investigating academics perspectives and practices is that they are key agents in the fostering of knowledge and skills as well as in implementing higher education reforms such as the Bologna Process (Sin et al., 2017). Particular attention will be paid to understanding perceived employability and the role of 21st century skills at an individual level by also finding out students self-perceived employability. In addition, is also important to gain insight on whether or not students see a link between 21st century skills and how acquiring these can equip them for future work life.

### 1.3 Research Problem and Research Questions

This study will address students and academics views on employability and the role of 21st century skills or generic skills. Moreover, the study will investigate which skills are supported in practice and which are valued by the participants. Much of the available literature on employability and the skills that it entails offers the perspective of various stakeholders including the policy makers, employers and academia (Sin & Neave, 2016). Not much is known about students’ perspectives (Tymon, 2013), particularly in non-vocational study programmes. The students’ perspective is considered an important rationale as they are the beneficiaries of employability development (Tymon, 2013). More insight is needed in terms of how students
perceive these skills as being relevant for employability, as well as whether their views correspond and academics views. It is also important to ascertain, perceptions on how 21st century skills are being implemented in humanities study programmes, including how students understand these skills as well as the link they place on these skills for future working life. Moreover, the view of academics is also considered important since they are key actors with respect to implementing the objectives of policy reforms such as the Bologna Process agreement (Sin & Neave, 2016) which emphasises employability.

If higher education is expected to adequately prepare graduates for today’s labour market, it is important to understand the nature of the required skills, how they affect perceived employability and the extent to which the university is equipping students with these skills. This study thus seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are students and academics understanding of 21st century skills and do they see a connection between these skills and future work life? Which skills do they value the most?
2. How do humanities students and academics perceive employability and the role of 21st century skills in helping to prepare students for future work life?
3. What are students and academics views on how the selected study programmes support the development of 21st century skills and where is the responsibility for developing these skills attributed?

1.4 Thesis Outline

This first chapter provided and understanding of employability and the skills that are integral to it from various perspectives available in the literature. It also provides an understanding of employability and the response of higher education as a result of reforms such as the Bologna Process. Chapter 2 delineates theory on employability and skills. It also presents the theoretical models selected for this study. The third chapter discusses the research methodology providing details about the research design as well as how data was collected and analysed. The fourth chapter provides a description of the context of the study. The fifth chapter provides the findings from the interviews by means of describing the patterns that emerged. The patterns are categorised according to each research question. The sixth chapter includes the overall discussion, linking the findings to relevant literature. The seventh and final chapter includes the conclusion with limitations and suggestions for future research on the topic.
2 Theory and Analytic Model

2.1 Theoretical Propositions

2.1.1 Human Capital Theory

Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, the human capital theory began to receive attention from economists, likening knowledge and skills to investments and resources. Economists such as Becker, Mincer and Schultz were pioneers in research on human capital. Becker (1962) refers to human capital as the “embedding of resources in people”. Thus, education, learning and training are said to enhance investment in human capital. The human capital theory posits that there is a link between the knowledge and skills that students attain and their future employment outcomes (Tomlinson, 2017a). According to Becker (1962), investment in education has a positive correlation to income as well as to economic growth. Students are seen as investing in education and the costs incurred include time and foregone earnings. Becker (1962) uses empirical examples to illustrate how investments in education positively affect job prospects and income.

The human capital theory is of significance to employability and skills as employers hire graduates based on the human capital they have acquired during their studies. Because employers are not able to detect the extent to which potential employees are capable and able, higher education credentials serve as a signal (Spence, 1973). In other words, signalling is a way that graduates show the employer that they have the relevant knowledge and skills required for the job. One of the ways in which the human capital theory can be of value is through equipping students with the tools to be able to further articulate to employers the significance of the knowledge and skills they possess, for instance through the ability to “demonstrate the productive value of generic knowledge” (Tomlinson, 2017a). Thus, graduates should be able to communicate the value of both the subject-specific knowledge and the generic skills acquired, as well as how these are of specific relevance in the workplace.

The human capital theory can be useful for understanding how investment in higher education results in a productive, skilled labour force to meet the changing demands of society. Based on premises such as “maximising behaviour, market equilibrium and stable preference” (Teixeira,
2014, p. 15) the human capital theory explains human and social phenomena from an economic perspective and has thus received a great deal of criticism. The economic rationale is insufficient for understanding the complexities of educating students for working and living in the 21st century. The human capital theory explains the link between education and the labour market purely as an input-output transaction. Thus, a more comprehensive perspective is needed. Beyond acquiring knowledge and skills, education should also foster human development values (Walker & Fongwa, 2017).

2.1.2 Human Development and the Capabilities Approach

The human development approach goes beyond the notion that higher education should only be for developing human capital, a more utilitarian approach. Instead, it includes the importance of capabilities for holistic development. Pioneered by Sen in the 1980s, the capabilities approach has grown in significance and has also been largely influenced by the work of Nussbaum (1997, 2010). The capabilities approach focuses mainly on what people are actually able to do, in other words, their capabilities, drawing from the historical works of Kant who believed in education that cultivates good character (Nussbaum, 2011). For Nussbaum, (2011), good education requires “sensitivity to context, history, and cultural and economic circumstances” (p. 157). Nussbaum, (1997) suggests three capacities that liberal education should foster in students namely, critical examination, global citizenship and narrative imagination.

Critical examination involves critical thinking and reasoning, critical self-examination as well as a critical understanding of one’s own culture. Narrative imagination involves an empathic understanding of another person’s situation, an understanding of world history and the current global economic affairs. According to Nussbaum (2011) “critical thinking, the ability to imagine and understand another person’s situation from within, and a grasp of world history and the current global economic order” are skills closely related to the humanities and are all fundamental for democratic citizenship (p. 155). Moreover, Nussbaum, (2010; 2016) places importance on the humanities in being able to foster these capabilities and sees vocationalism as being at odds with these ideals.

Human development values can be incorporated into university teaching as described in table 1 below. Boni and Gasper, (2012) as well as Boni, Lopez-Fogues, and Walker (2016) propose that university education should include the capabilities and values such as critical thinking, agency,
multi-cultural-perspectives as well as global skills. The model can be adjusted depending on relevance to various national contexts (Boni & Gasper, 2012).

Table 1. Human development matrix for developing and evaluating university teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human development values</th>
<th>University teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Well-being</strong></td>
<td>Critical thinking methodologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. Autonomy, critical thinking; reflexivity, emotions, creativity, health, etc.)</td>
<td>Reflexive practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation and empowerment</strong></td>
<td>Participatory learning methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(includes agency, social transformation.)</td>
<td>Dialogue and horizontal approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equity (social justice) and diversity</strong></td>
<td>Cultural and multicultural presence in the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(learning between different cultures and identities, cultural freedoms.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability and human security</strong></td>
<td>Global issues in the curriculum (ethics, sustainable development, peace studies).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(global issues; holistic perspectives; long-term perspectives; interdisciplinary.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Boni and Gasper, (2012) and Boni, Lopez-Fogues and Walker (2016)

Both the human capital theory and the capabilities approach are interlinked as they both deal with the acquisition of knowledge, skills and capabilities. The capabilities approach can complement the human capital theory as it focuses on a broader social perspective that includes the role of education in developing critical and engaged citizens for the greater public good. The role of training of a skilled labour force, one of the important functions of the university (Castells, 2001) is akin to the human capital theory as both are concerned with the close tie between education and the labour market. The universities role of equipping students for the labour market as well as for the needs of the knowledge-based economy cannot be ignored as a part of today’s world. However, according to the capabilities approach, universities also have a broader more civic role, moving beyond a focus on utilitarian aims of knowledge and skills.
acquisition. This study will, therefore, be situated both in the human capital approach and the human capabilities approach.

2.2 A Model for Understanding Employability

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) propose a useful model for understanding employability, stating that it can be a useful tool for students as well as other employability stakeholders. The model offers a straightforward way of operationalising the elements that constitute employability and ensures that students are adaptive to the changing world of work. It is not only helpful for better understanding of the construct of employability but is also seen as a tool that students can utilise in their own career development process.

The employability model by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) posits that students should be given the opportunities to acquire expertise related to the following five foundational elements which are essential to understanding employability:

- Career development learning
- Experience (work and life)
- Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills
- Generic skills
- Emotional intelligence

The model, provided in figure 2 below, is seen metaphorically as the “the Key to Employability” and is also referred to as the “CareerEDGE” model, using the five foundational elements as an acronym (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007, p. 280). Furthermore, the model suggests that students should be encouraged to be reflective and to evaluate learning experiences, leading to enhanced self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. These elements are thus seen as the key to employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).
Figure 2. The Key to Employability model illustrating the essential elements of employability

Dacre Pool and Sewell, (2007, p. 280)

Career development learning

The first element refers to skills related to the development and management of one’s career. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that students should be equipped with skills that will help them articulate their acquired knowledge and skills to prospective employers. According to Bridgstock, (2009) a lack of focus on career development or career management skills affects graduate employability negatively. Thus, universities should be directed toward equipping students for lifelong career development (Bridgstock, 2009). Students also have an active role to play in this regard, by taking the initiative to develop and manage their own careers.

Experience (work and life)

The second dimension refers to the importance of both work and life experiences for employability. Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) suggest that students should have access to
opportunities for gaining appropriate work experience during their studies. Work experience positively enhances employability (Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2009) and is valued by employers as they often look for evidence of this (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Other authors are also in agreement that workplace experience during studies offers enhanced labour market benefits to students (Bennett et al., 1999; Thune & Støren, 2015). Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) point out that students should be assisted with respect to how both their work and life experiences can be used to enhance their employability.

**Degree subject knowledge, understanding and skills**

The third element is central to the model for understanding employability. Theoretical knowledge, also referred to as conceptual knowledge within a specialist field, is fundamental to course curricula (Muller & Young, 2014). With no other concrete means to judge graduates, employers often use students’ achievement in subject knowledge as a means to gauge their suitability for a particular job (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Speight, Lackovic and Cooker, (2013) observe that two orientations, namely ‘academic learning’ and ‘learning for employability’ are often seen as separate. They further suggest that both can be achieved by “learning for employability through the academic discipline” (Speight et al., 2013, p. 4). Moreover, the realities of a rapidly changing world prompt the need for an exploration of the link between higher education and work life and not to see employability merely as an “add-on” to academic learning as suggested by Harvey, (2000, p. 4).

**Generic skills**

Generic skills are the fourth element of the employability model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007), which are those soft skills that support the learning of disciplinary knowledge (Knight & Yorke, 2002). Dependent on the specialist disciplinary knowledge of the field concerned (Muller & Young, 2014), these skills are said to “enable the disciplinary base to be deployed to optimal effect” (Knight & Yorke, 2002, p. 266). Generic skills are sometimes embedded in courses (Mason et al., 2009) and can however be so deeply embedded in the study programme to the extent that they are not made clear in learning outcomes (Barrie, 2006). The most common generic skills found to appear frequently in 21st century skills models include collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, social and/or cultural, skills, citizenship (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Generic skills are seen as an important component of employability as they appear in several employability models (Clarke, 2017; Knight & Yorke, 2002). Furthermore, active and engaged
citizenship skills also seen as vital (Knight & Yorke, 2002; Nussbaum, 2010; Nussbaum, 2016) for the 21st century (Binkley et al., 2012).

**Emotional intelligence**

The fifth foundational element on the first tier of the model refers to the psychological construct, emotional intelligence, without which an employability model cannot be holistic (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Emotional intelligence is defined as:

> the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004, p. 197).

The above definition shows that emotional intelligence is closely linked with thinking and being reflective. Emotional intelligence is not only important for facilitating thinking, Knight and Yorke (2002) also include it as an aspect that enhances employability amongst other personal qualities such as “adaptability, willingness to learn and reflectiveness” (p. 273).

**Reflection and evaluation**

The next level of the model refers to encouraging students to reflect on and to evaluate what they have learned from the knowledge, skills and attributes fostered in the five foundational elements (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Students should thus actively reflect upon their learning processes as opposed to being passive. Reflection and evaluation can be linked to the learning component, metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2002; Whorton et al., 2017). Metacognition allows learners to reflect on learning processes and supports the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge understanding and skills (Knight & Yorke, 2002). Equipping students with learning strategies that include reflection, evaluation and metacognition can help them yield the most out of their learning efforts (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).
**Self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem**

The final level of the model refers to psychological and personal qualities which are a vital part of employability. According to Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), once students have accessed opportunities for the five elements of employability, through the process of reflection and evaluation, they will be able to build self-efficacy, self-confidence as well as self-esteem. This process of interaction between these tiers, as indicated in the model, results in enhanced employability. These personal qualities are said to be a form of psychological capital, important for improving students perceived employability (Tomlinson, 2017a). The importance of personal qualities including “self-theories and efficacy beliefs” have been recognised as important in previous employability models (Knight & Yorke, 2002, p. 265).

**2.3 A Model for Understanding 21st Century Skills**

21st Century skills or generic skills are an important element of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). These skills include a range of transferable skills intended to equip graduates for the working world (Jones, 2009). 21st Century skills are intended to equip graduates with competencies that allow them to think critically and analytically, communicate effectively, work collaboratively as well as the ability to solve complex problems (Jones, 2009; Yorke, 2006).

There is general consensus in the literature that skills including but not limited to critical thinking, problem solving and communication are valued by employers in addition to subject-specific skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Bennett et al., 1999). These transferable skills are included in various international and national qualification frameworks such as the (European Commission, 2008) and the Norwegian Qualifications Framework (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). 21st Century skills are also referred to as generic skills, key skills and core competencies (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007; Virtanen & Tynjälä, 2018).

A comprehensive model that synthesises various essential 21st century skills, is known as the KSAVE model (Binkley, Ola, Herman, Raizen & Miller-Ricci, 2012), depicted in table 2 below. The acronym KSAVE includes broad categories of the model namely, knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and ethics. Firstly, knowledge refers to the specific knowledge or understanding required for each skill. Secondly, skills refer to the intended abilities that learning seeks to foster. The final dimension includes attitudes, values and ethics which refer to the
beliefs and viewpoints that students demonstrate in relation to the ten skills listed in table 2. This model is considered suitable for identifying a comprehensive list of the generic skills needed for the 21st century. Moreover, it is useful for categorising generic skills as well as understanding what is required of students in order to be prepared for the world of work. The ten skills identified by Binkley et al., (2012) have been grouped into four categories namely, ways of thinking, ways of working, tools for working and living in the world.

Table 2. The KSAVE model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of Thinking</th>
<th>Ways of Working</th>
<th>Tools for Working</th>
<th>Living in the World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Creativity and innovation</td>
<td>- Communication</td>
<td>- Information literacy (includes research on sources, evidence, biases, etc.)</td>
<td>- Citizenship – local and global citizenship skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical thinking, problem solving, decision making</td>
<td>- Collaboration (teamwork)</td>
<td>- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) literacy</td>
<td>- Life and career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning to learn, metacognition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal and social responsibility – including cultural awareness and competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Binkley et al., (2012)

Ways of thinking

Ways of thinking include creativity, critical thinking and metacognitive skills. Creativity and Innovation involve thinking creatively, working creatively with others and implementing creative ideas to make a useful contribution to a given field. Critical thinking involves reasoning effectively, using systems thinking, making judgements and decisions as well as solving problems (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007). Students should be taught how to think critically to enable them to adapt to as and when required and they should be guided to develop problem solving skills that equip them to solve problems that are not yet known (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018). Critical thinking is of high importance, particularly in the humanities, the context of this study. The learning of critical thinking skills is associated with humanities study programmes and often embedded within these disciplinary contexts (Coate, 2009). It is
arguably a fundamental skill in the history discipline which encourages independence of mind and thinking critically about the present in light of past injustices in society (Nussbaum, 2010). Finally, ways of thinking also include metacognition which includes reflection (Knight & Yorke, 2002), learning how to learn and being self-aware of one’s competencies (Binkley et al., 2012).

Ways of working

Ways of working include communication and collaboration which includes teamwork. Communication skills appear frequently in most 21st century skills frameworks and are thus considered important (Voogt & Roblin, 2012). Effective communication skills include both written and oral communication (Andrews & Higson, 2008) and refer to being able to articulate one’s thoughts and ideas in a clear manner. Kirschner and Stoyanov (2018) suggest that the learning environment should include the fostering of professional communication. Collaboration skills include flexibility, being able to work effectively with others in teams. Employers value teamwork skills as vital (Andrews & Higson, 2008). Kirschner and Stoyanov (2018) argue that learning methods should encourage teamwork as collaboration and communication are an essential part of the learning experience. Moreover, in an increasingly globally connected world, “communication must be rapid, concise, and cognisant of cultural differences” (Binkley et al., 2012, p. 44). Thus, the ability to effectively communicate and work in multi-cultural, global settings are vital workplace skills.

Tools for working

Skills within this category include information literacy as well as ICT literacy. These skills are vital for future jobs and mark a major change in society (Binkley et al., 2012). Jobs in today’s knowledge intensive, digitally driven society require competence in these digital skills. Moreover, students require skills that enable them to effectively and strategically search and sort through information and effectively judge its quality (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018). Tools for working in the 21st century are imperative for learners to hone, in order to be digitally adept and to be able to manage and evaluate new information. Van Laar, Van Deursen, Van Dijk and De Haan (2018) suggest that 21st century digital skills should go beyond mere technical abilities in ICT and further argue that digital skills can be used in information management, to communicate ideas, for collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. Of central relevance to this study is the use of digital skills among students, to make critical and
informed judgements about sources. The use of ICT in today’s society for effective information literacy or management is seen as essential for work life (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2018; Van Laar et al., 2018). Information literacy skills are known as skills to “efficiently search, select, organise information to make informed decisions about the most suitable sources of information for a given task” (Van Laar et al., 2018, p. 583).

Living in the World

Living in the world includes aspects of critical citizenship, life and career and well as personal and social responsibility. Higher education is a key player in facilitating critical citizenship skills. Cultivation of citizenship, perseveration of cultural heritage and building wholeness of character are all part of educational legacies that the university should uphold as a social institution (Gumport, 2000). Active citizenship and lifelong learning are also emphasised in Europe’s skills agenda (European Commission, 2016) and are seen as functions of higher education (Harvey, 2000; Knight & Yorke, 2002). In addition, a focus on life and career are also important for the 21st century as one needs to be able to adapt to change, manage goals and time, be self-directed as well as being able to manage projects (Binkley et al., 2012). Skills that include personal and social responsibility are also vital for today’s complex world and are lacking in some of the available literature on 21st century skills. According to Binkley et al. (2012), these skills include being able to communicate constructively, tolerance, empathy, the ability to separate personal and working life spheres, awareness of national cultural identity and the ability to interact in diverse contexts. Local and global citizenship involving the awareness of different groups including the marginalised is also observed as important by Nussbaum, (2010).

Since employability and 21st century skills are both complex constructs and are often attributed different meanings depending on the purpose and context, there is a need to better understand their meanings. Thus, a holistic analytical framework that combines how both these constructs can be better understood is warranted. Furthermore, an analytic framework that shows the interconnectedness of employability and the skills that are integral to it is needed. The five foundational elements of the employability model above are closely linked with the skills required for the 21st century as indicated in table 3. This shows the close interplay between the constructs of employability and 21st century skills. After careful examination of various analytical models that would best suit the aims of this study, the Key to Employability model
(Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) as well as the KSAVE model (Binkley et al., 2012) were combined and deemed appropriate as illustrated in table 3 below.

Table 3. The essential elements of Employability in relation to 21st century skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of employability</th>
<th>21st century skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career development learning</strong></td>
<td>Living in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Life and career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td>Living in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Citizenship – local and global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal and social responsibility – including cultural awareness and competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Ways of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning to learn, metacognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generic skills</strong></td>
<td>Ways of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Creativity and innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Critical thinking, problem solving, decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning to learn, metacognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Citizenship – local and global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tools for Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Information literacy (includes research on sources, evidence, biases, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ICT literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional intelligence</strong></td>
<td>Ways of Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Collaboration (teamwork)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Dacre Pool and Sewell, (2007) and Binkley et al., (2012)

---

4 The Key to Employability model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007) as well as the KSAVE model (Binkley et al., 2012) have been adapted for the purposes of this study to illustrate how the different elements of employability and 21st century skills are closely linked.
3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm and Research Design

This study is situated within the constructivist research paradigm. Within the constructivist paradigm knowledge, phenomena and their meanings are understood as being socially and historically constructed (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2009) and individuals contribute to meaning making within the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In other words, the constructivist paradigm asserts that meaning and reality is constructed by social and historical actors within the context. The participant's views in this study are thus seen as informed by cultural norms within the discipline. My role as the researcher was to seek out richness and depth in the viewpoints of the participants by posing open-ended questions allowing for participants to construct meaning in a given situation as suggested by (Creswell, 2009).

The case study research design approach is adopted in this study. The case study research design corresponds to the constructivist paradigm. According to Yin (2017, p. 15) a case study is “an empirical method that investigates real-world contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”. The case study method is frequently used in qualitative research and involves an “in-depth study” of the unit of analysis (Creswell, 2009, p.43) through a "detailed exploration of a specific case" (Bryman, 2012, p.45). The case study design is deemed appropriate for this study as it will allow for a rigorous, thorough analysis of perceptions on employability and the role of 21st century skills within the identified context.

According to (Yin, 2003, 2017) a case study research design can either be classified as holistic or it can have embedded units of analysis. A holistic case study focuses on one single case, whereas an embedded case study can have more than one unit of analysis or sub-units (Yin, 2003). The contextual setting for this study is the broader context of humanities students’ skills and working life and the case refers to the history master’s programmes offered at the humanities faculty at UiO. The participants represent the embedded sub-units of the case study. This is represented in figure 3 below.
3.1.1 Definition and Selection of the Cases

The focus of this study is on the following two history master’s programmes offered within the department of archaeology, conservation and history at the humanities faculty:

- History master’s programme, offered in Norwegian
- Modern international and transnational history (MITRA), offered in English

The rationale for selecting the history discipline within the humanities faculty is due to its non-vocational nature as well as the traditional focus on disciplinary knowledge as opposed to a professional orientation. The case study design method is used to explore how 21st century skills and the employability discourse are conceptualised within the history master’s degree programmes. This, as well as the exploratory nature of the study, justifies the use of the case study method. The particular advantage of using the case study method is, according to Yin (2017, p. 13) when a “how” or “why” question is being asked about

- “A contemporary set of events,
- over which a researcher has little or no control”
In addition, the research questions were carefully developed in a manner that allows “how” questions to be answered. The research questions thus also justify the use of the case study method.

According to Biglan, (1973) as cited in Becher (1994) there are four main groupings that characterise academic disciplines, namely, hard pure (natural sciences), soft pure (humanities and social sciences), hard applied (science-based professions) and soft applied (social professions). The programmes selected for this embedded case study, history and MITRA master’s programmes are categorised as soft pure according to this typology. The disciplinary context is of relevance to the selection of the case for this work as graduates from soft pure disciplines are more generally-oriented programmes are said to have more challenges with entering the labour market, having more difficulty finding suitable work than graduates from more specifically-oriented programmes (Verhaest & Van Der Velden, 2013).

The general or specific orientation of a programme affects employability. Furthermore, the orientation of disciplines, differ in terms of which skills learners are expected to develop. According to Verhaest and Van Der Velden (2013), specifically oriented programmes are aimed at enhancing specific skills required for very specific careers, leading to a higher likelihood of these graduates finding a suitable job. For example law and medicine, offer long term security in a professional career (Becher, 1994). Whereas, generally oriented programmes within the humanities focus more on the acquisition of more general skills such as 21st century skills. In sum, disciplinary differences exist with regards to specific versus general orientation and these differences are of relevance for understanding how skills acquired and labour market opportunities differ according to discipline.

3.2 Recruitment of Participants

Participants that were recruited include final-year master students and academic staff members from the department of archaeology, conservation and history at the humanities faculty. Purposeful random sampling was used as a strategy to recruit participants. Purposeful random sampling involves an aim of a specific group of participants to gather data from (Creswell, 2009). It adds an element of “credibility” to the study and “reduces bias” (Patton, 2002, p. 244)
by aiming at a specific group. In this study, history master’s students and academics were the specific groups focused on.

An information letter, including details regarding the study and the consent form, were prepared. Once approval was granted by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), the recruitment of participants began. Students were recruited through 14 emails I sent out to student associations. Furthermore, 181 emails were sent out by a department administrator to all history master’s students. This yielded 5 email responses of students who were interested in taking part in the study. In addition, I placed created and placed information flyers, inviting students to take part in the study, at the humanities buildings notice boards. One of the students was recruited as a result of the snowballing method after an interview with one of the academic participants. Students were offered an incentive of 100 Norwegian Krone for taking part in the study. Moreover, history academic staff members were recruited. The academics were recruited through email requests I sent out describing the details and purpose of the study. In total, 16 emails were sent out to history academic staff members of which 3 showed interest in participating in the study.

3.3 Participants

The student participants included 6 second year history master’s students, 4 from the history master’s offered in Norwegian and 2 students from the MITRA study programme. Of the participants, 3 are Norwegian and 3 international students. It is important to note that international students will not be identified by study programme in order to maintain their anonymity. The faculty staff participants included 3 academic staff members from the department of archaeology, conservation and history at the humanities faculty. Both study programmes were represented in the academic staff sample group, providing an array of perspectives. Academics included management staff, who will not be identified by the study programme to uphold anonymity.
3.4 Data Collection

Interviews

Interviews were the primary and core source of data collection for this study. Interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for an in-depth exploration views and perceptions on employability and the role of 21st century skills among students and academics. Investigating humanities students’ perspectives is important in order to add to the gap in the body of literature. It was also important to investigate whether or not students’ views on these phenomena are similar to the views of academic staff members.

Prior to the commencement of the actual interviews, a pilot interview was conducted in order to test the questions with a fellow master’s student in the higher education programme. The pilot interview was useful in that it revealed areas where improvements to the interview guide were necessary by identifying problems such as unclear or confusing questions (Bryman, 2012). All necessary adjustments were made to the interview guides to ensure that questions were reasonable, appropriate for the study aims and unambiguous prior to the commencement of the interviews with the participants.

The interviews were semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews were deemed most suitable to ensure that respondents are not limited in their responses, but that they have the freedom to express their views (Bryman, 2012). Questions posed in this study were open-ended allowing participants to describe their experiences as well as raise additional opinions. According to (Creswell, 2009) the use of open-ended questions allows participants the freedom to express their views.

Two separate interview guides were designed for both participant groups. The interview guides contained elements of “probing, specifying, and direct questions” as suggested by Bryman (2012, p. 497), so as to elicit participant’s in-depth views. The interview guides also provided structure whilst allowing some flexibility for participants to openly express their opinions. The interview guide included background questions, questions focused on employability and those focused on 21st century skills. It is worth noting that because students were not familiar with the terms 21st century skills or generic skills, I provided a brief explanation as to what is meant by these skills. This was done to further elicit students own understanding and viewpoints.
Towards the end of the interviews, participants were also asked if they wanted to provide any further information regarding the discussion. The detailed interview guides are attached in Appendix A.

The interviews were held in January and February 2019. Five of the six student interviews took place in a meeting room at the UiO’s main library. One of the interviews took place at the student’s workplace at the student’s request, for convenience. Interviews with academics took place at the offices at the archaeology, conservation and history. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour in length.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and further analysed and coded into various themes. The thematic analysis approach was used in this study. The thematic analysis approach is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data.” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The thematic analysis approach is often used in qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012) and is used to make sense of shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). Moreover, this approach can be used for “systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into, patterns\(^5\) of meaning (themes)” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 2). Rather than allowing the themes to emerge passively, patterns or themes that described participants’ perceptions and experiences regarding employability and 21st century skills were actively identified in this study.

The six-step thematic analysis approach by Braun and Clarke, (2006, 2012) was used to guide the analysis in this study and further elaborated upon by transferring the data into an analytical processing tool on Microsoft Excel. The steps taken in this study are detailed below:

1) Becoming familiar with the data

After each interview I created memos, noting down aspects of the interviews that were pertinent. Thereafter I transcribed the data verbatim, carefully ensuring that the participants own words were used. Transcribing took place directly after each interview was held and resulted in a total of 83 pages of transcribed data. Thereafter, I re-listened to the interview recordings to become

\(^5\) Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012) describe themes as patterns of meaning found within the data. Thus, the term themes and patterns are used synonymously
more familiar with the data. Moreover, I read through the transcribed interviews, highlighting sections of the transcriptions that were vital to the aims of the study. This initial step provided a foundation for thinking about interesting patterns that best describe participants’ perceptions and viewpoints. The interview recordings were revisited several times during the data analysis process to verify what the participants had actually said and to best represent their perceptions.

2) Generating initial codes

Using the NVIVO software tool for qualitative research, I created initial codes from the transcribed data. NVIVO was useful for organising and naming the codes in a structured way. It also provided a means for comparing data from all participants on each particular code. This was useful during the writing phase as I was able to compare and contrast excerpts with relative ease. The codes were created through re-reading each interview transcript and by creating a label for each initial code that appeared interesting and meaningful. In total twenty-three initial codes were identified after becoming familiar with each interview. These codes were under three broad themes at the early stage of generating initial codes. The broad themes and corresponding codes identified are affixed as Appendix C.

3) Searching for perception patterns of meaning (themes)

Themes were identified through carefully organising each code into relevant categories. I searched for themes using the initial codes created on NVIVO. Once I had the initial broad themes with corresponding codes on NVIVO, I then sought to identify perception patterns from the data in a richer more detailed way. I transferred the data onto a Microsoft Excel sheet with a separate tab for each participant for a more in-depth analysis of participants’ perceptions. I used this as a schema and analytical processing tool, which allowed for a more thorough analysis. An outline of the analytical processing tool is affixed as Appendix D. This process allowed me to further analyse the data set in a systematic way, whereby I could compare and contrast similarities and differences among the participant's perceptions, viewpoints and experiences. It also allowed me to capture recurring perception patterns and to find nuances in a structured way. This process also included extracting excerpts from the transcribed data, I included summaries and interpretations that I gleaned from the excerpts in a separate column on the Excel sheet. In total, this process yielded approximately 45 pages of text.
4) Reviewing themes

The fourth step involved reviewing themes merging related topics. It also involved discarding any duplication or topics that were not deemed as relevant to the research questions. I was then able to refine the patterns and combine similar patterns together. This was a detailed process of ensuring that the patterns best represent the participant's views and perceptions.

5) Defining and naming the perception patterns of meaning (themes)

This step also involved labelling the patterns appropriately and ensuring that they represent the crux of participants’ views and perceptions. The patterns were then defined and named appropriately. This involved revising and paying attention to the terminology used to name each pattern to best represent the data. After further refining, eight patterns emerged from the student participants and seven from the academics, showing some similarities and differences in perceptions and views across the two groups.

6) Reporting

The sixth and final step of the thematic analysis process involved writing up the findings, discussion and conclusion by providing rich explanations of the data as well as by using interview excerpts to support the findings. The schema created on Microsoft Excel was used as a frame of reference during the writing up phase.

During the data analysis, it was important to ensure that multiple perspectives were considered. The capturing of multiple perspectives is considered good practice, particularly in social construction inquiry (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, I considered the similarities and differences in perceptions and experiences between student and academic participants. I therefore, payed attention to the words or use of language by the participants, in order to better understand their experiences and viewpoints. This involved being aware of the disciplinary culture and the language used when participants described the constructs of employability and 21st century skills. As Payton (2015) observes, paying attention to language and the participants’ use of words is a core element of constructivism in qualitative research. Thus, throughout the data analysis phase, I was mindful of the particular words and vocabulary used by participants with the aim of best representing their perceptions when interpreting the findings.
Throughout the data analysis and interpretation process, self-reflexivity was identified and used as a method to ensure a valid analysis. Self-reflexivity, as suggested by Creswell, (2009) and Tracy, (2010) was employed in this study as a means to examine my own role in constructing meaning. Self-reflexivity can be described as “honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). Good practice in qualitative research includes embracing this ongoing work of verification by revisiting the data numerous times and by asking the following questions, “is my interpretation true to the data?” as well as “how might my knowledge, position, and experience be shaping my analysis? (Pyett, 2003, p. 1171). This was done in practice by being self-aware of my own subjective perceptions during the study and how these could influence the findings.

3.6 Quality Criteria

This section describes how quality criteria were upheld in the study. According to Creswell (2014), validity in qualitative research involves the use of procedures that check for the accuracy of the findings. One of the strategies suggested for ensuring validity in qualitative research includes using “rich, thick description to convey the findings” (Creswell, 2014, p. 251). Detailed descriptions of the findings will be given to convey richness and rigour. Qualitative research is characterised by “rich rigour”, which includes aspects such as selecting appropriate “samples and contexts” (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). The participants and context for this study are deemed appropriate for the aims. Rigour and trustworthiness are seen as an important means of ensuring validation of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rigour will be ensured through sufficient data to support claims, allowing enough time to gather interesting and significant data that provides depth as well as using interview styles that facilitate in-depth discussion and by making use of the thematic analysis procedure. Moreover, trustworthiness can be used to assess quality in qualitative research. One of the criteria used to ensure trustworthiness and enhance quality is credibility (Bryman, 2012). Thus, credibility was employed in this study as discussed below.

Methods for achieving credibility include, but are not limited to thick description and multivocality, (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). For this study, the first method used for achieving credibility is thick description. Tracy (2010) advises researchers to show credibility by providing rich, descriptive detail about the data rather than telling the reader what to think. I sought to describe the findings in an in-depth way and to show the complexity of data by
providing sufficient detail and paying attention to nuances. The rich and detailed findings and discussion in this study can also serve to strengthen the transferability. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) suggest that instead of generalisability, qualitative research should provide rich descriptions so that readers can make judgements about how results can be transferred to other contexts. Lincoln and Guba, (1985) caution that transferability is an empirical matter and that the degree to which findings can be transferred depends on the similarities of the contexts.

The second method used to obtain credibility in this study is multivocality. Multivocality, similar to showing rather than telling (Tracy, 2010), involves making use of various voices thus providing multiple points of view to support the credibility of the research. Here, students both local and international, as well as academic staff members were all selected to provide a diverse view of opinions from different groups. Thus, various viewpoints were captured. Both history master’s programmes were represented in the sample groups, enhancing multivocality. Furthermore, Tracy (2010) cautions against putting words in participants’ mouths. Thus, careful attention was paid to ensure that the participant’s own views and opinions were reported and that the questions posed were not leading. In addition, probing was used to ensure that participants describe their views and opinions in detail and in their own words. The strategy used was to keep the discussion conversational, whilst simultaneously following the interview guide in which the topics and categories were decided in advance.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Approval was obtained from the NSD for this study to be conducted. In accordance with UiO and the NSD guidelines, an information letter and a consent form for the participants was compiled as seen in Appendix B. These provide detailed information about the project, the type of data being collected, what participation in this project will involve, how the information provided will be used and the duration it will be kept for. Participants were recruited only after approval from the NSD had been granted. Participants were notified of their right to opt out of the study should they wish to do so. Signed consent was given by each participant. The data has been de-identified the data reported anonymously. To further uphold all participants’ anonymity, only information that will not render them identifiable will be used for example students’ places of work and other specific information in this regard will be hidden in parentheses. Moreover, all the data collected for this study was saved on UiO’s secured severe in accordance with the university’s procedure pertaining to the general data protection regulation (GDPR).
4 Context of the Study

This chapter provides a description of the context of the study. It begins with a broader description of wider policies that have influenced the aims of higher education both at a supranational level (EU) and at a national level. It then looks at institutional strategies at the University of Oslo, describing how employability is framed within the goals of the university. Finally, a description of the selected study programmes will be presented, including corresponding prospective careers for graduates of these programmes.

4.1 Higher Education Policies and the Employability Discourse

The June 1999 Bologna Process places employability as a common goal for EU member states to work towards, placing HEIs in a utilitarian role (Karseth & Solbrekke, 2016; Sin & Neave, 2016). Employability has been central from the outset of the Bologna Process and has continued to be emphasised in further ministerial communiques (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). The rationale for employability of Europe’s citizens included the development of a knowledge-based economy. The Bologna Process has been used by policy makers across Europe as a guideline for national higher education reforms. Following this, it has been included in the strategies of many HEIs.

As the Bologna Process progressed in the first ten years of implementation, its objectives became “easily readable and comparable degrees, mobility, employability, quality, improved synergies between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area through the Doctoral level, in a perspective that stresses social cohesion through access to higher education and lifelong learning” (Sursock & Smidt, 2010, p. 28). Higher education is expected to be the means through which graduates enhance their employability (Sin & Neave, 2016). Thus, the Bologna Process sought to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the labour market (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011).

In Norway, the Bologna Process has been a guideline that has influenced higher education policy (Gornitzka, 2007). The report from 2001 that informed the quality reform in Norway
emphasises the link between higher education and the labour market stating that HEIs should ensure that study programmes have relevance for future work life (KUF, 2001; Støren & Arnesen, 2011). The quality reform resulted in several changes related to course structure teaching and learning practices in study programmes as reported by academics (OECD, 2017). The quality reform in Norway can be seen as a move towards study programmes that are less research-oriented to allow for more work life relevance (Grøtta, 2019). More recently, the white paper (2016-2017) on Quality Culture in higher education highlights the relevance of employability both for using academic competencies at the workplace as well as the importance of lifelong learning (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). This shows how elements of the Bologna Process have infiltrated higher education policies in Norway. There is a clear expectation of higher education to ensure that graduates possess the skills that are in demand in the labour market and have the ability to adapt to the changing world of work.

In the Norwegian context, the higher education system is traditionally influenced by the German Humboldtian tradition and less by the Anglo-Saxon model which is viewed as having a more instrumentalised approach to education. The instrumentalisation of higher education (Sin et al., 2017) is thus viewed by some as a threat to the Humboldtian ethos which is oriented towards academic freedom and autonomy known as lehrfreiheit and lernfreiheit as well as science, research and scholarship referred to as Bildung durch Wissenschaft (Grøtta, 2019; Karseth & Solbrekke, 2016; Watson, 2010).

### 4.2 Link Between Higher Education and Work in Norway

In Norway, there have been debates about the relevance of the humanities. Humanities\(^6\) graduates experience more challenges finding jobs where they can make use of their competencies as compared to graduates from other fields (Wiers-Jenssen, Næss, & Røberg, Karl Ingar Kittelsen Fekjær, 2016). In addition, there is a gap between students how students evaluate the relevance of their study programme’s in relation to what is expected and required in the labour market. Historically, humanities graduates in Norway resulted in graduates pursuing teaching as a profession (Grøtta, 2019). Humanities graduates in Norway are represented in various fields of work. Within the humanities in Norway, access to opportunities for workplace.

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\(^6\) There are differences according to specific humanities fields.
learning is low, suggesting that closer interaction with the work organisations is needed (Thune & Støren, 2015).

### 4.3 The University of Oslo’s Strategy for Employability

The University of Oslo is the highest-ranking university in Norway and ranked at 62 in the world (Shanghai Ranking, 2018). It is the oldest university in Norway and has 28000 students and 6000 employees and 8 faculties (UiO, 2018). Being a research intensive university, it highlights employability as part of the second objective of its strategy for 2020 as follows, “The University of Oslo will offer research-based education equivalent to that offered by the foremost international places of learning.” (UiO, 2010). Part of this objective to offer research-oriented education that is on par with the best HEIs internationally. It is from this objective that the following strategy: “Cooperation with public and private sector will be improved so that students are ensured natural advantages in the labour market.” This corresponds with prior research that shows the importance of cooperation with work organisations (Thune & Støren, 2015). Furthermore, the University states the following regarding the employability of its graduates:

Graduates from the University of Oslo will be regarded as attractive employees both nationally and internationally. The relevance of their qualifications for employment will be increased through better contact with workplaces during the period of study. Public and private enterprises will be active participants in the development and evaluation of study programmes. During their studies, students will be made aware of the ways in which the competences they acquire can be used in the workplace. (University of Oslo, 2010)

With regards to the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and generic skills, the university states that students “will be equipped with specialised as well as general competences preparing them for participation in the knowledge society.” (UiO, 2010, p. 8). This is in alignment with the aims of the European Commission regarding the skills agenda (European Commission, 2018).

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7 UiO Facts and figures [https://www.uio.no/english/about/facts/]
4.4 Description of the Selected Study Programmes

The context of the study is focused on the humanities faculty. The humanities faculty at UiO was originally called the philosophy faculty and was one of the four original faculties at the university. The humanities faculty is now one of eight faculties and has over 6500 students and approximately 1000 staff members\(^8\) (UiO, 2018). It also has a total of seven departments, as well as two research centres of excellence. The humanities faculty offers 21 master’s degree programmes and 13 bachelors programmes and has 227 PhD and post-doctoral researchers\(^9\) (UiO, 2018).

The scope of this study will be focused on the history discipline. The empirical setting selected within the humanities faculty includes two master’s study programmes offered within the department of archaeology, conservation and history (IAKH). Of the three different disciplines within department, this study focuses on two master’s degree programmes within the history discipline. The master’s study programmes selected are the Norwegian history programme and the Modern International Transnational History programme (MITRA). The Norwegian history master’s programme is rooted in disciplinary knowledge that focuses on the historical societal and cultural factors that have had an influence on Norwegian society over the decades\(^10\) (UiO, n.d.). The study programme draws on historical periods from Antiquity. Career prospects for graduates of this master’s programme include the following fields\(^11\) (UiO, n.d.):

- Archives, libraries and museums
- Education
- Research
- Public administration
- Defence / Police / Justice
- Publishing/ PR
- Interest organisations/ Volunteer organisations/ NGO’s
- Business

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\(^8\) About the faculty of humanities [https://www.hf.uio.no/english/about/]
\(^9\) Facts and figures [https://www.hf.uio.no/english/about/facts/]
\(^10\) Historie master [https://www.uio.no/studier/program/historie-master/hva-lerer-du/]
\(^11\) Jobb og videre studier [https://www.uio.no/studier/program/historie-master/jobb-studier/]
Implemented in 2017, the MITRA programme is relatively new and its first cohort will graduate at the end of the Spring semester, 2019. The MITRA programme includes an internship component in the third semester, in which students either choose to do an internship in an international organisation or work on an archival research project. The MITRA history programme has a 30-credit master’s thesis component. Career prospects for graduates of the MITRA programme include competence in the following expertise within organisations that have an internation orientation 12 (UiO, n.d.):

- Project management and project work
- Administrative procedures and various administrative tasks
- Counselling and guidance
- Research
- Management
- Organisational work

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12 Career opportunities [https://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/transnational-history/career/](https://www.uio.no/english/studies/programmes/transnational-history/career/)
5 Findings

This chapter provides a description of the main thematic patterns that emerged from the interviews with both academics and students from the two selected history master’s study programmes. The chapter will delineate patterns that were common amongst the interviews firstly beginning with student participants followed by academics. Moreover, the findings will be related to the main constructs of employability and 21st century skills. Thematic perception patterns that emerged will be addressed with respect to each research question. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

5.1 Students Perceptions and Experiences

This section of the findings delineates the findings from the interviews held with students. It is important to note that one of the striking findings is students’ lack of familiarity with the term generic skills or 21st century skills. Once I had given the student interviewees a brief working definition of what these skills are, students were able to express what they viewed to be the nature of these skills and how they value them as important for work life. Once students had a basic understanding of these skills, they were able to describe the nature of generic skills in their own words, mostly describing them in discipline-specific ways. Students were also able to connect these skills to their relevance for future work life.

5.1.1 Students understanding of 21st century skills and the value placed on them

1. From lack of awareness to discipline-specific ways of describing generic skills

Student participants were unfamiliar with the terms generic skills or 21st century skills. Some students did not have a concrete understanding of these skills. Others initially described them as practical skills for living in the 21st century pertaining to global skills such as being multi-lingual. The following extracts capture students’ initial understanding and views on 21st century skills:

I’m not sure what that means. (Student B)

No, I haven’t heard of it until you mentioned it. (Student C)
When it comes to 21st century skills, you need to know at least two languages. At least, and know them well. You need to know geography. (Student D)

No, but I can kind of imagine what it means. I guess this means digital skills. (Student E)

After a brief description was given of these skills to elicit student’s own understanding of generic skills and their perceived importance, students were able to describe them in more detail. Skills needed to effectively conduct research as well as writing skills emerged as important. This highlighted the skills that are of value in the history discipline. Students perceived these skills as valuable expressing that they are highly supported in the programme and useful for work life. The following statements express the emphasis placed on research skills:

To spend a lot of time to figure out small details, to connect it all together. To look at different situations by analysing the past and predicting the future. (Student C)

Usually, historians are employed for their research skills. That’s what you expect from a historian, research skills. (Student D)

The ability to handle large sets of written text and communicate effectively in written form came across as one of the valuable skills needed for future work. Being aware of the societal context also appears to be an important part of thinking critically about texts and sources. Some participants also raised that they have acquired the ability to critically ascertain if there is an element of propaganda in texts:

For me, it would be for instance handling huge amounts of information and managing to sort it out. We also have a lot of focus on sources (Student B)

A lot of things seem so obvious like critical thinking, historicising, being aware of contingency and so forth. And I think it’s probably even harder to translate those into a potential employer-employee setting. So, I think with anything it’s easy if you give examples for instance if I’m talking to someone who’s not in academia per se because it
helps me a lot to know what is a historian’s perspective. So, explaining that to a lay person involves, for me, taking some kind of text that has a propagandic edge to it or a very kind of narrow, shallow view historically speaking, and then presenting a historical analysis to juxtapose it with. (Student F)

2. **Disciplinary knowledge valued as superior to generic skills**

Disciplinary or subject-specific knowledge is seen by the participants as superior to generic skills and not necessarily as complimentary. A pattern amongst all the participants is that disciplinary knowledge is of central importance, thus placing less emphasis on skills or employability. Some students place emphasis on the importance of academic freedom. The following statement illustrates the value placed on theoretical knowledge as opposed to learning aimed at enhancing employability:

> It’s important in the humanities to embrace freedom of academics. I think that it would be a degradation of the university to have this [employability] in mind all the time and to have programmes adapted. […] I think instead of preparing us too much for what is going to happen after we finish here we should just explore our academic potential. These were my thoughts when we were discussing this with the department head who wants us to be more employable. (Student A)

> I don’t think they should make it all about employability, because mostly they need to develop good researchers, good professionals. (Student C)

When asked about views on disciplinary knowledge and future work, the students attributed significance and value to subject understanding or knowledge. One of the students expressed that knowledge acquired in the history field can be applied in different fields in the following manner, highlighting analytical thinking skills:

> It has developed me to be an analytical thinker, not just in history but other related jobs that deal with analysing information. So, they develop those skills using history but then it’s possible for us to use those skills in other jobs. (Student C)

Overall students seem satisfied with the academic or disciplinary knowledge focused upon in the study programmes. They seem to value the focus on disciplinary knowledge as linked to careers
within research. Students concerns are not the extent to which disciplinary knowledge is emphasised but rather in how they can be helped to convert the knowledge and skills they have acquired and effectively articulate it to future employers as expressed by some. The following statement shows that there is a feeling of needing some guidance to better transition into work life:

*I think that’s very much the source of it - to teach us how do we package all the knowledge that we’re left with and how do we translate that into a job application or an interview with someone. We have a career centre and I didn’t even know it existed until a couple of months ago.* (Student B)

3. **Critical thinking and writing skills valued the most followed by teamwork and digital skills**

Most students described skills that they viewed as important and required for future work in relation to careers that included academia and writing, for newspapers for example. Most students referred to the possibility of pursuing a PhD degree as the next step in building their research careers. Thus, the skills that they perceived as valuable for future work were tied mostly to careers in research or academia. Skills that students viewed as highly valuable for their future work include critical thinking skills, including reading and writing critically and judging information sources critically.

In addition, skills associated with conducting research such as handling and analysing large sets of information and reading complex texts were perceived by students as valuable to future employers. This pattern also shows discipline-bound ways of speaking about generic skills. Thus, in the students view, historians would be sought after by employers their ability to think critically as well as writing skills. This is highlighted for the following excerpts whereby the students explain the central importance they attribute to critical thinking skills to effectively analyse texts:

*If you want to explain a complex topic looking at longer timeline is bound to be helpful. Whereas if you read a text and you see that an author is just cherry picking to further some goal. There’s endless amounts of instrumentalising history. So that is something that is a generic skill, to be able to look at a topic and read it critically and I think that’s probably likely the most fundamental skill that we will come away with after this master’s degree.* (Student F)
There is this course, one of the first subjects that you have to take, mostly it’s about analysing literature in a critical way. Source criticism so to speak.  (Student E)

Most students also valued teamwork and collaboration skills as important for work life. They see teamwork and collaboration skills as helpful. Students reported that teamwork, particularly in the final year of the master’s programmes, could be improved upon as they see the final year as much more isolated:

Definitely working in teams could have been supported more because I find it helpful when I’m in the study group. I often notice that those who don’t work in study groups, who just have one-on-one feedback from their supervisor, when they do get feedback from others they don’t react very well – the reaction is not always very nice. They get pissed off or grumpy. It’s important to be able to work in teams nowadays. (Student B)

I think there should be more teamwork. For example, in the last year, we are all independent, working with our supervisors. In the third semester, we either do an internship or a history project and in the fourth semester, we work on our thesis without any connections or working together. So I think there should be more opportunities in the final year to work together with others, maybe small courses that encourage teamwork. (Student C)

Students who were involved in relevant work experience expressed having now acknowledged the need for teamwork and collaboration skills. The following excerpt shows how the student views the lack of group work at university, particularly in the final semester, as having a "disconnect" with the world of work. Furthermore, the student relates the thesis work period as not having a connection to the real world of work. However, the student still believes there is inherent value in conducting master’s thesis work as preparation for future work within research:

To answer your question, the closer I get to graduation the less interaction there is in my master’s track, but I see more that group activities and interaction are important in the professional setting. So, I feel that there is a little bit of a disconnect, to be honest. If you look at it from an employability perspective no-one is ever going to put you away for 6
months and say write 70 pages on this and get back to me, it’s never going to happen.
(Student F)

In addition to teamwork skills, possessing digital skills was seen as a given or taken for granted in today’s working world. Students are aware that they need to be digitally competent to live and work in the 21st century. Thus, students perceive digital skills as important and some have indicated learning various digital tools to equip themselves. They did not see the university, particularly, the history discipline as a place for honing digital skills:

With my study programme we just use basic digital skills like Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel. On my own I learned programming, to write programmes and websites etc. You need to learn programming language. Learning a lot of programming, creating databases and working with them. You need more than just basic knowledge on excel and word for example. Nowadays it’s important to know a lot of digital skills.
(Student C)

This kind of skill is important for employers, but they are not necessarily something that has been focused on a lot in my degree because history is an old-fashioned discipline and I think it is assumed that a lot of the more basic digital age skills are in us. (Student F)

There was also an awareness of the wider discussions around job automation and the general concern that people will lose their jobs in the future as a result of rapid technological advancements as this student observes. This shows that students are aware of the public narrative around technology, digitalisation and implications for future jobs. The student is also aware of the change from traditional career paths:

I think most people will lose their jobs because robots and automatised jobs, will be able to do a lot in the future. If you want to have a job in the future, you have to prepare now. With digitalisation, the popular jobs now are being bloggers and influencers. It’s pretty much unpredictable but a lot of things that we do ourselves now will be done through algorithms for example. (Student C)
5.1.2 Students perceptions on employability and the role of 21st century skills

4. Tension-laden views of employability including mixed feelings regarding self-perceived employability

Most students associated the term employability with negative connotations. However, there were mixed-feelings. Feelings of fear and worry about employability appear to be common among most participants. Some participants viewed employability as the amount of time it takes to obtain a job that is of relevance to the degree:

*I think it’s partly because I’m in the humanities faculty it makes me think of something that is forced in a way. That’s the first thing that comes to mind, being forced into a frame.*

(Student A)

*To me, that word means how quickly you are able to find a relevant job after your studies.*

(Student E)

While some students viewed employability negatively, they generally perceive it as something important that one should think about and plan towards. Thus, there were both negative and positive sentiments expressed. This shows that there is a level of discomfort and tension regarding views on employability as on the one hand it is seen as something negative but on the other hand, there is a sense that some preparation for the transition into work life is needed. The following excerpt illustrates the negative attitude towards employability whilst viewing it positively:

*I think mostly negative. But also, I guess positive because you can’t deny that your future depends on having work. So, you don’t want to not think about it but in some ways, it’s good to have some thoughts about it. Like for instance, we received an email the other day from the faculty saying if you want to sign up for a job applying course so my thought were “that’s nice” and I signed up. So, employability is something that you can’t not think about. It also feels like a scary and forced thing.*

(Student A)

*It might be because I’m in the middle of finishing my education so a little bit negative because I’m not sure if there’s going to be a job waiting for me when I finish.*

(Student B)
Students viewed humanities graduates as not having a positive outlook in terms of job relevant opportunities when compared to graduates from business schools who could be perceived more positively in this regard. The following statement reveals that this student sees employability as positive for graduates from less generally oriented study programmes. The statement below also shows that the student perceives employability negatively for humanities graduates, stating that it is more difficult to find a good match:

*Positive if you study at BI for example. It’s probably a negative thing if you get a degree from the faculty of humanities - it’s much more complicated to find something relevant. You have to put yourself out there much more. I read a lot in papers that people who study engineering and economics find a job even before they finish their studies. Well, it’s not going to happen that way for us obviously.* (Student E)

While some students had negative perceptions on employability, others had a more neutral stance towards it seeing it as inherent in capitalism whereby having paid work is considered necessary. However, there is still the pervasive perception that humanities students experience some difficulties in the labour market. There is a sense from the following statement that humanities students experience difficulties in a market-driven world:

*I think it’s… I mean… The world is run by capitalism so you’ve gotta have a job. Not necessarily a job, you’ve gotta have an income. It’s harder for people in the humanities to sell themselves, the way capitalism works.* (Student D)

Moreover, students view employability as possessing specific skills that employers see as having instrumental value. For some, having knowledge and skills that have a general orientation renders one more flexible to different employment opportunities. The assertion that being “too specialized” reduces one’s employability shows that having a more general qualification is seen positively. The following excerpt thus captures a more optimistic view of employability:

*It would mean having a skill set that is generally seen as valuable and useful. It also implies a certain amount of versatility because if you’re too specialised a lot of people in the real world don’t know what to do with you, from an employer’s perspective.* (Student F)
Although there were mixed feelings about perceived employability, students spoke positively about their own individual efforts to find opportunities to learn skills. Students described formal and informal ways that they had acquired additional skills such as the acquisition of new languages, writing, learning IT programming languages as well as past life and work experiences. Students who spoke about strategic steps they had taken to start building their careers, show overall confidence about employability and a sense of self-directedness. The excerpt from the following participant shows that students are aware that there are other ways of developing skills:

_There are a lot of places where you can learn such skills. There’s a lot of skills that you gain not only in university like learning the skills yourself, working etc. Some skills I learned from working part-time, some from reading a lot of books, some from my military past._ (Student C)

Most students also generally spoke about strategic steps that they had taken during their studies, with future work in mind. Examples include strategically pursuing specific organisations for internships and finding relevant part-time work. This shows that students exercise individual agency. Furthermore, students spoke about the steps they had taken in line with pursuing their career aspirations within. The following excerpts reveal how some students viewed their next step as pursuing a PhD degree:

_I want to either do a PhD or to try and get a full-time position at the (public sector institution)¹³ I’m working at (student B)_

_My plan is to get a PhD placement and that will go on for three years so I will figure out at the end of that what I will do after that. (Student E)_

5. **High value placed on relevant part-time work and internships**

All the participants reported working part-time or as part of an internship. Relevant work was seen as being helpful particularly as a doorway to future job opportunities. Irrelevant work did not have much value for some participants. For students who engaged in work that’s unrelated to the discipline, work served only as a means to earn a living whilst studying, not to acquire

¹³ The particular public sector institution where the student works part-time is withheld to uphold the student’s anonymity
any skills or competencies for future work. Students with work experience were also able to see the value certain skills such as teamwork and collaboration offered as they have first-hand experience in operating in groups and networks in real workplace contexts. Relevant work experience also seemed to inform their future career decisions and goals such as pursuing a PhD degree in order to further career goals within research. Students engaged in relevant work and internships within history and research highly valued the experience for their future careers as exemplified in the following statement:

_“I was thinking more, I finish my master’s and then I look for work. Now I find that perhaps in the setting where I would like to work a PhD is a requirement, so I have to consider that.”_ (Student F)

For some students, irrelevant work was viewed as a stumbling block to future career goals as they experienced that no relevant skills were being fostered. This statement shows the negative perception towards work experience that is not related to the history discipline:

_“It’s more of an impediment because I could be asked: “why have you been working in this kind of job for so long?””_ (Student E)

For others, irrelevant part-time work was a means of gaining social and cultural capital through language skills to enhance employability within Norway as stated in the following excerpt:

_Because I want to stay in Norway, I’m improving my Norwegian in my current part-time job. I’m able to have small talk, and discussions on history, politics and sport. It’s a way of just learning about Norwegian culture._ (Student C)

6. **Awareness of local socio-cultural context and value placed on global citizenship skills**

Students in the MITRA study programme particularly valued the international orientation of the programme. This and the ability for participants to interact with culturally diverse students and lecturers in the MITRA programme was perceived positively. One of the students expressed the possibility of pursuing work abroad and that for this reason, others expressed possibly working for an international organisation. Thus, it was important for these students to choose a study programme that encourages a global perspective. The following illustrates this point and shows how the student perceives the change in the department, to offer an internationally oriented study programme, as a vast improvement from previous years:
There’s been primarily a focus on the global agenda with some kind of relations to a Norwegian context is my summation. And that’s the way I wanted it, I didn’t want it to be too Norway-centric because I am also opened to being employed outside of Norway. It’s been great and also among the faculty there are some with a Middle Eastern background. And there are also students from China and Cameroon. The majority is still Europe but compared to how UiO was 15 years ago when I was first a student there it’s a vast improvement. I’m kind of amazed that they’ve moved as fast as they have, the diversity has gone up to a great extent. That’s a huge plus. It was too inward-looking before. (Student F)

Overall participants showed an awareness of the skills needed to work effectively in contexts with people with different views or from different backgrounds. Cultural diversity and tolerance of differing perspectives were valued as important for the 21st century workplace. The following excerpts show how students perceive the importance of interpersonal skills within a diverse, globalised workplace:

The world is changing so much and multiculturalism is growing and we need to learn that whatever your personal opinion is you need to set that aside and be in a professional setting. I think that’s extremely important. (Student B)

You have to respect other people. Especially if you work in an open economy. People might be from different backgrounds, you have to find some common ground at least in that work environment. (Student E)

Students in the Norwegian History master’s programme valued the local knowledge on Norwegian history. However, it was expressed that more knowledge of history from non-Western countries would broaden their knowledge of world history. This was seen as important in today’s globally connected world. This seems to show students need for a more variety in the study programme to enhance global citizenship skills. The following sentiments highlight the need for a broader worldview whilst acknowledging the importance of national history:

I think our courses are very Europe dominated. I do think it’s important to learn Norwegian History because it’s our local society and we don’t learn about it then who will? But I think in terms of crossing our boarder I don’t feel like I’ve been educated much
on that at all – for example, we had African History. We had about 6 hours, speaking about both Africa and Asia. I feel it’s not keeping track with the globalised world.

(Student A)

Moreover, students also referred to the importance of not only being able to write academically but also for the layperson in society. This included being able to write historical content for newspapers. One of the participants referred to this as the “public intellectual” phenomenon of being able to analyse and write about political issues for example in a way that wider parts of society would understand. Students placed value of being able to make history understandable to a non-academic audience. Thus, being able to open up academia to the local societal context was valued by students for academic research in history to be societally relevant:

Last year we worked on a task to write something in groups publish either in a local or national newspaper so that’s a specific example ‘Historieformidling’ – to have knowledge and convey it to people. I really liked that class. That really opened my eyes to what is actually is the main task to be in university to be able to narrow your project and work and then think about conveying it to the rest of society and finding the use of the project and not just moving on to the narrow topic. That will be important for me after I’m done studying (Student A)

Students participants also made reference to class discussions about societal issues. This can also be seen as the developing citizenship skills or capabilities whereby awareness of issues in the societal context prompt learning to think critically about issues in society. In the following statement, the student views these local and global citizenship skills as valuable referring to them as the "beauty of the humanities”. Thus, seeing class discussions and opportunities to debate on various issues in the social context as something enriching and valuable that the humanities offers:

You discuss a lot every class, you discuss societal problems. That’s an avenue where you discuss things like this, whether it’s societal stereotyping or historical wrongs or racism or whatever it might be. I think that’s honestly the beauty of the humanities in general, if I can allow myself to be a little bit grandstanding, ingrained in it there’s a lot of space for debate and discussion. Sometimes you lose the quote on quote “real world” in those discussions but there’s still potential value in that. (Student F)
5.1.3 Views on how 21st century skills are supported and the purpose of higher education

7. Generic skills supported in the study programmes while not clearly articulated

A recurring perception pattern among all participants is that discipline-specific skills have been highly supported in the study programme mainly through assessments focused on writing papers. The programmes also supported this skill through various mediums such as writing for newspaper articles and for Wikipedia. This excerpt illustrates how some generic skills are supported in practice:

We also have the course I mentioned where we learn to talk about history on different platforms like newspaper and radio. So not necessarily digital tools but we were handed tools on how to tell history in something other than an academic text, for example, the newspaper article, the radio interview. We had to also write a text for Wikipedia. Then there’s a website dedicated to Norwegian history so they had us make videos and things for that. (Student B)

Another interesting finding amongst all students’ participants is that they report that generic skills have not been made explicitly clear meaning that not all of them were aware of the skills they were acquiring during the learning process. This illustrates how students experience that they are not provided sufficient opportunities to be reflective about knowledge and skills acquired and to evaluate their own learning experiences. The fact that students were not familiar with the terms generic skills or 21st century skills shows that these skills may not have been clearly made explicit although the skills may be embedded in the study programmes:

No, not at all. That connection between about how we deal with skills learned and future relevance hasn’t been made clear. We just work as historians and nothing more. So, they don’t say that analysing or presenting something in a particular way will be good for you. (Student C)

I think that unfortunately a lot of the times that I’ve been explained this and I actually got it is pursuing the professors in the faculty after class or talking to my supervisors. (Student F)
8. **Shared locus of responsibility for developing expertise for work life**

There were varied views amongst students regarding the responsibility for skills development. Students viewed the responsibility for learning opportunities to foster work life skills as a combined effort between both the university and students. The following quote illustrates how some students view generic skills as separate from the university learning context, placing the onus of acquiring skills through other means:

> They do a good job at training us as professionals as historians to be good at analysing data. All the other skills are up to use to learn. If students don’t take the initiative and work on themselves, they will be weak and will lose opportunities. They should prepare themselves for future work life. (Student C)

Although the locus of responsibility for developing expertise for work life was seen as somewhat of a shared effort between students and the university, it was ultimately seen as falling on the students themselves to take ownership. Furthermore, students acknowledged the guidance provided by the career centre as a helpful resource. However, it was criticised as only providing generic advice. Students seem to prefer specific career-building assistance and support should be relevant to their discipline instead of receiving general career advice. The following excerpt statement elucidates this:

> I think at the end of the day it’s going to fall on the student, even if they don’t want that. That’s just the way it is. The university can go a ways in making you more employable but I think that it really needs to come from the student at the end of the day. What the university can do is make it abundantly clear at an early stage and get people thinking about it. And also talk a little about “well, this is what you will know at the end of this course and what can you do”. What is usually done at UiO is that they reference you to the career centre. But the career centre is more generic, they don’t necessarily deal with whatever you are doing in your master’s. (Student F)

Several students referred to the need for more guidance and support, expressing that the university could give students “a little nudge” or by presenting them with possibilities to “tickle our brain”. Thus, while students value disciplinary knowledge highly, they express needing some direction and assistance with respect to preparing for future work as well as advice on the career possibilities available for history graduates:
I don’t know [if employability should be a] focus, but there should some offer somewhere to tickle your brain – maybe you should think about this, but there’s no such thing.

(Student D)

Students also expressed not having been assisted with how they might translate the disciplinary knowledge and skills acquired to prospective employers. This participant in particular, felt that there needs to be a shared responsibility between students and the university with regards to developing the skills required for future work. The student also views acquiring relevant work as a shared responsibility:

I think it has to be an even balance. But I think it’s the university’s job to make us fit for working life. I think they have to help us with a little bit of a nudge into getting a job that’s relevant. I also feel that as the master’s students we haven’t been prepared and there’s no one that’s telling us what we can do so basically, we are on our own. (Student B)

5.2 Academics Perceptions and Practices

Next, the academics’ perspectives on employability and 21st century skills and the perception patterns that emerged are presented. Overall academics had varying perceptions with regards to employability and learning oriented towards enhancing skills for work life. There was general consensus among academics regarding 21st century skills or generic skills in that they viewed in discipline-specific ways and that they are dependent on disciplinary knoweldge.

5.2.1 Academics understanding of 21st century skills and the value placed on them

1. Discipline-specific ways of describing generic skills

There is coherence with regards to how generic skills are understood amongst history academics. As is the case with students, academics also have very discipline-specific ways of describing generic skills. Regarding generic skills focused on in the history discipline, handling large amounts of textual data, contextualising sources and awareness of historical timeframes were also viewed as important. Academic writing skills and the ability to evaluate and critique sources were also valued as important by academics. The following excerpts from academics elucidate discipline-specific ways of describing generic skills:
The main competence would be the ability to research large amounts of text and to put the sources in context, to put them in a chronological context as well. To write a well-written thesis on the subject with the aid of those sources. (Academic A)

Perhaps one of the most important things today is with source criticism, that you ask: How did this material come up? What was the intention? How was it presented? What is the context? In a way they can understand and interpret different types of materials and the critical sense is very very important. (Academic C)

The coherence amongst academics regarding skills valued and developed include competencies such as the ability to judge and evaluate various sources in a critical manner and to contextualise it in a well written manner. The skills valued as important are fostered through writing essays. How this is done in practice was captured in the following statement:

I can give you a brief outline on what I do with the students. I put heavy emphasis on their writing skills, that they are able to write an independent paper. That that they are able to define a problem in the first place, provide a coherent narrative, weigh in pros and cons, create a nuanced argument – this is where I put the emphasis. (Academic B)

2. Disciplinary knowledge and generic skills both valued

Both disciplinary knowledge and generic skills are valued as important by academic participants. Generic skills are generally seen by academics as useful in learning how to implement subject knowledge. The following excerpt describes how generic skills can be supported through short courses whilst still focusing on the importance of history knowledge:

I think we have to do it in smaller courses and concentrate on that history the study is about knowledge about history and the other in a way is to help you to do it. I think it’s more balanced that way. (Academic C)

Generic skills are perceived as supporting disciplinary knowledge whereby students are not expected to focus only on theoretical “facts” but also on more procedural skills. For some academics, more formal practices at an institutional level are needed so that students know what is expected of them in terms of acquiring both the conceptual subject knowledge as well as generic skills. To this end, separate short courses are seen by academics as a means by which
practices for students to develop generic skills can be fostered. This is seen in the following excerpt:

*Also, to make sure what we expect from them, to learn how they are to develop. That this is not just about a fact-finding mission but that they actually have to acquire analytical academic skills. I’ve never done that with my students and that’s something I should start doing and something the department can do in a more institutionalised way when we receive the first students. An introductory course or something.* (Academic B)

Overall amongst academics, generic skills were not perceived as a threat to disciplinary knowledge. Some academics were of the view that a healthy balance should be attained between disciplinary knowledge and generic skills. There is tension between whether enhancing these skills will reduce the time spent on teaching disciplinary knowledge. One of the academics expressed that there is a need to strike a balance between the two orientations for students to be equipped with the expertise needed in the working world. These concerns were raised as follows:

*At least I think we must strive for a balance but again it’s difficult to say and there would be different opinions as to what is the best balance, of course, it’s a challenge that most of the teachers here have spent all or a vast majority of our working years at the university. So, we have little hands on experience on what is expected in the world outside of academia. Of course, we can read research papers and stuff like that.* (Academic A)

3. **Perceptions on the most valuable skills underpinned by critical thinking and writing skills**

Generic skills that are fostered within the discipline are emphasised with a focus on critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills thus emerged as a pattern across all the interviews. Generic skills of critical thinking including critically evaluating sources, analytical skills and considering multiple perspectives are valued as important. Moreover, the ability to handle a large amount of information and writing skills were also valued as important by academics. The following views from academics express the emphasis placed on critical thinking:

*The employers that hire graduates from this department wouldn’t look for mathematical skills or statistical skills or things like that. They know that that’s not what they get from this department of these programmes. I think that they would want the kind of ability to handle big text corpuses, to write clearly, to search for sources and literature, independence, critical thinking, analytical skills.* (Academic A)
I would say it’s the more general skills of analyzing critically different sources and bringing that together in a narrative account, that is really what makes our discipline particular. Also, multi-perspectivity, assess diverging views, so the ability to operate with huge amounts of data. (Academic B)

Although history is traditionally oriented to working individually, the importance of teamwork and collaboration were also acknowledged by academics as valuable. Teamwork is valued and supported in practice by some academics through various tasks such as students working together in groups to give and receive feedback on their work. This was illustrated by one of the academics as follows:

I think one very important thing is people who has knowledge and also can receive and give comments on texts and other colleagues work. That’s one of the things that masters students in history really are good at because they really learn both how to give and take comments and work with their texts and present it to other students. And like teamwork, feel that this is my text if you criticise the text you don't know necessarily criticise the person. (Academic C)

Collaboration and teamwork were thus valued by most academics. This finding is interesting given that history traditionally requires independent work. The following excerpt describes how institutionalised efforts towards ensuring that more group work is being incorporated into learning practices:

We’re in the midst of revising the study programme, to push students to be better trained at working in groups. But the traditional, conventional history programme has students working very independently. That’s something we value that we are actually able to do (Academic A)

Presentation skills were also valued as important and as something the study programme could better support. The concern by the academic is that this is a skill required in today’s jobs but that students are currently not adequately equipped in effective presentation skills. This is emphasised in the excerpt below:
Also, literature searching and presentation skills, I think we should work hard in teaching them presentation skills so that they are not just sent out into the labour market with no idea on how to make an efficient presentation of your thoughts. (Academic A)

5.2.2 Academics perceptions on employability and the role of 21st century skills

4. Polarised views and perceptions on employability

There are varied views towards employability amongst academics. The teaching profession is viewed by some academics as the main career trajectory of most history students. For this reason, students need to have a solid disciplinary knowledge base. Academics views regarding the teaching profession as a career trajectory for history students are captured as follows:

It should also be mentioned that I want to make sure that you are aware that most history graduates end up as teachers in upper secondary school. Some of them enter into the lektorprogramme, the teacher programme. Also, quite a significant proportion of the regular history programme students find out the chance of getting a history relevant job is by adding an extra year of pedagogics at university and then apply for a job at a school. -- That is a way in which they can use the methodological skills and knowledge of history that they acquired and practice it in schools. (Academic A)

Most students from humanities and from my department, archaeology and history become teachers. So, they have to know a lot about the subject they are going to teach because students in schools are very intelligent and they will understand very fast if the teacher in front of them doesn't have knowledge. So, to be a good and critical teacher you have a lot of knowledge, so that's the first thing and they have to understand and recognise their own way of learning. To understand what are the presumptions of the subject and then to learn new things. (Academic C)

Moreover, some academics are in favour of learning that enhances employability while others seem averse towards this notion. Some academics express that employability and questions regarding students’ career aspirations should be addressed with students at an early stage. This sentiment was expressed as follows:
I think we all should, very early on, discuss employability. I’ve started asking students who want to write with me that precisely that kind of question, what they want to do. It’s important to understand what their ambitions are. It has become a standard question now, to better understand what they want to do with their lives. (Academic B)

5. Value placed on importance of both local and international socio-cultural context

Generic skills are seen as equipping students to harness critical thinking skills by considering and evaluating historical viewpoints. Moreover, knowledge of political affairs and the ability to question presuppositions through analysing information about the past to better understand present socio-cultural issues was seen as important. The global citizenship skill of being aware of and the ability to work effectively in multicultural settings was also highlighted in the following manner:

History is a very specific case. It is probably the ability to think in alternatives. You don’t take our perspective on current problems as given, you reflect on that with perspectives that people in a different time period took. I think that helps students a lot to develop more critical thinking and question common assumptions about our current politics and societies. That’s what I try to train. ---In a way intercultural competence that you acquire in our field, not just by engaging with current and other societies but with societies of the past. (Academic B)

Critical citizenship skills were also seen as important. The following excerpt depicts how Norwegian history subject knowledge is viewed as important for students to learn. This shows how history prompts the acquisition of active citizenship skills through an awareness of national history and what it means for society as described in the following statement:

I think it’s very important for them to learn Norwegian history really good because by doing that, we see all types of social formations. They will learn about the big man and chief in the Viking era and how they treated their slaves that they took from England and other places. They will see how disastrous plagues could take half the population. They will understand what landholding means and about over 50% were held by the crown and 30% by the nobility. And what it meant for people to be, proletariat, when people became landless. What industrialisation meant and also what it meant that 90% lived in the countryside and if you sowed one kilo of grain you only get 5 up again. It would be one harvest a year so that is hard work. (Academic C)
Citizenship skills were also seen as supported indirectly through the history knowledge. The following quote describes how teaching students about societal structures is supports citizenship skills and how societal injustices of the past can be viewed critically to better understand the societal context:

*I would say the programme supports citizenship skills indirectly by teaching how society worked and partly works. Afterall its history and its backward looking. By teaching how society functions, then you learn about oppressions, the striving to eliminate oppression, free oneself etc. in that respect I think students of history learn citizenship skills* (Academic A).

5.2.3 Views on how 21st century skills are supported

6. Generic skills supported in practice but mostly not made explicit

There are varied views amongst academics with regards to whether or not generic skills are made explicit to students. In practice, some academics report making generic skills explicit, expressing that they are clearly articulated through discussions about the learning process with students as well through encouraging self-reflection. This can be seen as a way that students are equipped to be able to make those connections between knowledge and skills acquired and future work. The following statement shows how generic skills are articulated:

*Sometimes I think I used to talk to them about their own learning process like the tacit learning process and then say “do you understand why we are sitting here and commenting?” we usually do the work in the classroom and then we go down and have a coffee and then we talk about what have we done. So, to be in and out of the process and the reflect about - how I wrote this a year ago and I didn’t see how I was thinking but now I understand more - and then they feel how they develop in an intellectual way and also in the skill of writing.* (Academic C)

However, the majority of the academics state there is a need for improvement regarding the articulation of generic skills and the connection between what they learn and how these skills apply to work life. For some, self-reflection amongst students is encouraged as well as the ability to evaluate their own learning experiences. Moreover, the career centre is seen as the
place where students are given further direction regarding the skills they have acquired and how to best articulate them to employers. The following excerpts express that generic skills are not made explicitly clear to students:

They are not articulated. The connection between what they learn during their studies and what is expected of them when they get a job, I don’t think that is articulated or discussed much here. So that would be something they would have to think about when they direct themselves towards the labour market. Then they would often go to the career center. Which is supposed to help students be aware of and communicate their skills. (Academic A)

To be honest I have never really talked in the classroom about what they should acquire as more general skills. We break them down to individual courses sometimes. We touch upon that, but I think we are never really explicit about what we expect them to be in two years or after three years when they do their bachelor’s degree. I think that’s something we should definitely introduce. (Academic B)

7. Shared locus of responsibility for developing expertise for work life
There is a move towards changing the Norwegian history master’s programme to enhance employability. For most academics, the responsibility for employability is placed on both students and the university. There is also a keen sense amongst some academics for students to acquire skills in different contexts, not only within higher education. This is in agreement with student’s views whereby life experiences and past work experience are also seen as learning contexts for skills development. The following excerpt shows that there is an awareness of the shared responsibility and for the programme structure to incorporate skills needed in the labour market:

At least it’s something we should be conscious of and have some thoughts on, to what degree should we leave the acquisition of such skills to the students to learn them on their own or to what degree we should make them a part of the study programme here. Well, there has been a slight movement in making it a part of the programme. (Academic A)

Some academics engage with their students by asking them questions about their career ambitions as well as by actively encouraging workplace experience. There is a clear move
towards helping students transition better into work life. The institutionalised ways of 
enhancing employability can be seen in the changing programme structure of the Norwegian 
History master's programme as well as the internship component offered within the MITRA 
programme:

> Of course, it's both, it's their careers. I try to turn them into independent thinkers as well, 
of course, I expect them to have ideas as well, not just me desperately trying to find 
internships. (Academic B)

Some academics expressed encouraging students by showing and discussing various career 
paths and possibilities with them. This includes discussions regarding the different career 
opportunities available for students to utilise their knowledge in history. In addition to this, 
academics were in support of career events that are organised within the department showing 
that efforts are made to assist students with information about using the knowledge base to build 
careers in different areas. The following statement depicts these practices:

> I try to show them a different type of workplaces or different ways that using your 
education is possible like museums, archives, libraries and also schools. I also try to talk 
about places I don’t know very well like the state or bureaucracy because many people 
end up in those types of bureaucracies. Sometimes we have events like people coming 
from those departments and they say they would really like to hire history students or 
language students because of the things they can do. I think events like that are good. 
(Academic C)

It is acknowledged that in the past, the disciplinary knowledge base was the traditional focus of 
humanities study programmes and it was up to students themselves to translate the acquired 
knowledge into a career of choice. Students are now expected to also play their role by taking 
initiative towards building their careers such as ideas on which internships to pursue. There is 
agreement that students should be open to the different opportunities that may be available to 
them by knowing their own capabilities and pursuing careers with a sense of inquiry or curiosity 
regarding the various ways they can use their acquired expertise. Academics also express that 
students should start thinking about employability and developing their careers during their 
studies:

> To the degree they want a job immediately afterwards they should think about it during 
their studies. Not necessarily from day one because its wise and commendable to pursue
their interests. If your interests lie in an unemployable direction, then at least you should be aware that what you’re pursuing now will not land you a relevant and reasonably well-paid job. They should be aware of the employment perspectives of the directions that they’re pursuing. (Academic A)

That’s why I ask them about what they want to do later on and what their ideas are for the future to better understand what we can do with the time we have together. (Academic B)

5.3 Summary of Findings

Most students view their university studies as a means to acquire disciplinary knowledge, whilst acknowledging that 21st century skills are valuable for future work life. The student participants place the acquisition of knowledge in high regard and have also not fully considered or engaged in discussions about 21st century skills or generic skills until this point. Students view these skills as attributes that can be gained in various settings and through life experiences, not only within the context of the university. Similarly, academics also place high value on disciplinary knowledge.

A marked difference that emerged is that academics show a more concrete understanding of the role of 21st century skills, seen as encouraging students to be reflective and supporting the learning of disciplinary knowledge. Both students and academics understood 21st century skills from a history-specific perspective with independent critical thinking being one of the most fundamental skills valued. Skills such as critical thinking, source critique and writing skills were seen by all the participants as having relevance for future work life. It is important to note that students viewed both academic and non-academic writing for a public audience as important skills. Academics payed particular attention to the importance of contextualisation, that is understanding and evaluating facts and sources within the appropriate context. Thus, whilst disciplinary knowledge is valued as central, generic skills from a discipline-specific perspective were also valued as having importance for work life.

With regards to perceptions on employability, mixed reactions emerged. For the most part, participants viewed employability generally as preparedness for work life and obtaining a job. Most students express that it is more difficult for humanities graduates to obtain a relevant job.
Strikingly, most students show agency and initiative in acquiring skills to prepare for their future careers. This is illustrated through various endeavours that the students undertook such as extra-curricular activities, volunteering, learning new languages and enhancing digital skills as well as having part-time work. Academics had varied views on employability with both positive and negative sentiments emerging. Some academics express that it is important for students to be adequately prepared for work life while others stress the importance of a good disciplinary knowledge based on not having this weakened by the needs of employers. Academics expressed the need for striking a balance between learning oriented towards employability and skills on the one hand and upholding the central importance of disciplinary knowledge and methodological skills on the other. Active citizenship skills also emerged as important amongst most students and academics. Skills for active and engaged citizenship were seen as supported indirectly by disciplinary knowledge whereby students acquire the ability to reflect upon previous injustices in a critical and informed way.

With respect to how skills were fostered in practice, both students and academics view the study programmes as supporting the development of 21st century skills. However, students express that skills such as collaboration and teamwork could be better supported, particularly as a large component of the master’s work is mostly isolated and individual. Students also expressed the need for generic skills to be made more explicit so that they are more aware of the link between skills fostered in the learning environment and work life. Most academics were in agreement that generic skills should be more clearly articulated. The responsibility for employability and developing skills for work life was attributed to both the university and students, however, students felt that they are ultimately responsible for taking the necessary steps to develop their own careers.

Table 4 below shows a brief summary of the perception patterns that emerged among students and academics.
Table 4. Key findings from interviews

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<th>Students</th>
<th>Academics</th>
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<td><strong>RQ1: What are students and academics understanding of 21st century skills and do they see a connection between these skills and future work life? Which skills do they value the most?</strong></td>
<td>From lack of awareness to discipline-specific ways of describing generic skills</td>
<td>Discipline-specific ways of describing generic skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Disciplinary knowledge valued as superior to generic skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Critical thinking and writing skills valued the most followed by teamwork and digital skills</td>
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<td><strong>RQ2: How do humanities students and academics perceive employability and the role of 21st century skills in helping to prepare students for future work life?</strong></td>
<td>Tension-laden views of employability including mixed feelings regarding self-perceived employability</td>
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<td><strong>RQ3: What are students and academic staff members views on how the selected study programmes support the development of 21st century skills and where is the responsibility for developing these skills attributed?</strong></td>
<td>Generic skills supported in the study programmes while not clearly articulated</td>
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<td>Shared locus of responsibility for developing expertise for work life</td>
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6 Discussion

The main focus of this study is on humanities students and academics views on employability and 21st century skills, how they perceive these as being relevant to future work life and how the study programmes support skills required for work life. The study is conducted against the backdrop of supranational policies such as the Bologna Process which place emphasis on employability. The viewpoints of students and academics are pivotal as they represent the key stakeholder groups involved in fostering knowledge and skills. The findings of this study contribute to knowledge in this field, particularly pertaining to non-vocational study programmes. This chapter provides a discussion based on each research question of the study. It also provides a discussion of the findings in relation to the model adapted from Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) as well as Binkley et al. (2012). Similarities and differences amongst the perceptions of students and academics are discussed, drawing on relevant literature on employability and 21st century skills.

6.1 Discussion of the Findings

6.1.1 Understanding of 21st century skills and the value placed on them

The first research question sought to ascertain students and academics understanding of 21st century skills and to find out if they perceive a link between these skills and work life. Moreover, it seeks to ascertain which are the skills most valued by the participants. An interesting finding is that student participants were not initially aware of the terms of generic skills nor 21st century skills. The findings show that among student participants, there was a general lack of understanding of the basic definition and nature of 21st century skills. Thus, the role of generic skills for aiding the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge was also not fully understood by students. Students’ lack of awareness of these skills may have implications for how they reflect on learning experiences where generic skills are fostered. This may be linked to the overall lack of awareness of the nature of generic skills and their function in the learning process. In order to elicit students’ viewpoints on generic skills, I briefly explained the basic meaning of the concept without being too explicit so as to encourage the participants to describe their understanding of the skills in their own words. Once students had a basic understanding of these skills, they were able to discuss them in more depth.
Unlike the student participants, academics where well versed with the concept of generic skills and understood their relevance for learning and for students’ future work contexts. That said, both students and academics viewed generic skills from a discipline-bound perspective. The generic skills valued by all the participants include critical thinking, writing skills, and evaluating information and sources critically. These skills were seen as relevant for work life. Furthermore, these generic skills are closely associated with the history subject domain. The conceptualisation of skills from a disciplinary standpoint is consistent with the study by Jones (2009) indicating that generic skills depend on context and are shaped by the disciplinary knowledge base. Moreover, generic skills take on different meanings according to discipline and are influenced by the disciplinary culture (Jones, 2009). Academics expressed that students are taught to approach facts and sources critically, to place those facts in proper context historically, and to convey information in a well written argument. There was general coherence amongst both students and academics regarding the research-oriented skills that are valued and that historians are typically trained in. Similarly, findings by Harris and Ormond, (2018) show that sourcing, research and writing essays are important in the history discipline.

Generic skills were less valued than theoretical subject knowledge by students. Students did not seem to place these ‘know how’ skills in high regard as much as they valued disciplinary subject knowledge. This could be attributed to the fact that they were unfamiliar with these skills and thus had not given them much thought or reflection up until this point. The findings show that when students speak about the connection between skills acquired and the link to future work, this seemed to prompt a disconcerting image. Some students felt strongly that changing programmes to focus on skills to enhance employability was likened to reducing quality or “a degradation of the university” as indicated by one of the student participants. This can be understood as the instrumentalising of higher education posing a threat to disciplinary knowledge, a common theme amongst debates regarding knowledge and skills. This finding is similar to findings by (Monteiro, Almeida, & García-Aracil, 2015) showing that students value theoretical or disciplinary knowledge over other skills. While disciplinary knowledge is fundamental in higher education, Dacre Pool and Sewell, (2007) suggest that knowledge alone cannot secure graduates the skills they need for work life. Furthermore, (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2016) report that humanities programmes often have a strong focus on traditional subject knowledge and not on skills for work life resulting in graduates needing more on-the-job training than in other fields.
Although academics also valued disciplinary knowledge, they did not seem to rank the importance of knowledge and generic skills differently. They did, however, emphasise the importance of methodologies and being able to conduct quality research. Disciplinary methodological skills were also seen as important particularly for students who intend to pursue teaching as a career. Methodologies and effective research were also emphasised as important in the discipline in findings by Harris and Ormond, (2018).

With respect to subject knowledge and usefulness for work life, some students expressed the need to use their qualifications to make a positive impact. More specifically, using writing skills to write about history in newspapers in non-academic language for a wider readership was seen as important. This would involve making history understandable for broader groups of society. Thus, having a social impact is highly valued by some students. Moreover, the societal context seemed to motivate career aspirations such as obtaining a PhD degree as a means of social mobility and impact. Pursuing a PhD degree and a career in academia was seen by some students as still generally reserved for the elite. There was, therefore, an awareness that accessing academia helps change this perception of it being elitist and closed off to the rest of society. Thus, using acquired knowledge and skills for the wider benefit of society was seen as important. Students awareness of the local societal context is aligned to the capabilities approach which places emphasis on democratic citizenship skills such as the ability to be aware of and have concern for the different groups represented in society (Nussbaum, 2010, 2016).

Democratic citizenship skills are of value to both students and academic participants. Academics pointed out that an understanding of past events in history helped students think more critically about broader local and global societal issues. This is consistent with the human development approach which suggests that curricula that encompass local and global issues result in ethically engaged citizens (Boni & Gasper, 2012; Boni et al., 2016).

With regards to skills that students and academics value the most, critical thinking emerged as a fundamental skill and capability. Critical thinking seemed to inform more effective source critique, writing skills as well as reading to evaluate an author’s stance. Both academics and students recognised discipline-specific ways in which the programme has helped students develop critical thinking skills such as analytical thinking and being able to critically analyse large sets of texts and to write a cohesive essay based on relevant sources. Both students and academics viewed history knowledge as providing the basis for understanding complex topics and thinking critically about what is read. The focus on reading texts critically in the history
discipline is also outlined by Shanahan, Shanahan, and Misischia, (2011), who found that historians focus heavily on critique to ascertain how credible an author’s argument is.

With respect to critical thinking, students also described how through reading critically, they are able to ascertain the motivation behind the text and not take it at face value. This was perceived as a useful skill. The ability to think critically to determine the orientation or motivation behind texts is also in line with literature on the human development and capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2006). According to this approach, students should be able to preserve their independent thinking if they are able to think critically about simplistic or propagandic viewpoints in society (Nussbaum, 2006).

Both students and academics place importance on being able to work collaboratively with others in teams and networks. Most students stated that teamwork could be better supported in the study programme. Students currently exposed to work life whilst studying also see the practical importance of teamwork skills. Moreover, both academics and students acknowledged the importance of digital skills as a given in today’s digitalised world. However, students placed more emphasis on digital skills than academics. Several students had engaged in more advanced digital skills such as learning programming and website design informally as a way of honing their own digital skills. Both students and academics did not perceive the university as the best place for further enhancing the digital skills needed in future jobs as only basic digital skills were supported in the programme. Most students had acquired digital skills on their own accord informally and through peers, including searching for literature. Moreover, students expressed having acquired information management or information literacy skills more informally. This shows that students are aware that jobs in the 21st century require more than basic digital competence and that it is within their own interest to find opportunities to learn these skills. The awareness of digital skills as valuable for today’s technology driven workplace is evident in most 21st century frameworks which also highlight information literacy as important in the context of a knowledge-based society (Bourn, 2018; Van Laar et al., 2018).

6.1.2 Perceptions on employability and the role of 21st century skills

The second research question addresses how participants perceive employability as well as the role of 21st century skills in helping prepare students for future work life. Both students and academics had a variety of perceptions and understandings of the term employability. This is in
accordance with the literature that shows that employability has contested meanings (Williams et al., 2015). Students and academics used vocabulary such as skills, tools, preparedness for work and how soon a graduate can find a job relevant to his/her field of study to describe employability. These descriptions can be linked to the human capital theory by Becker (1962). According to this theory, higher education is tied to acquiring knowledge and skills for a future job and is seen as a vehicle through which human capital can be enhanced for future labour market success. Thus, for many, a rationale for pursuing higher education is to qualify for jobs (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2016).

Overall attitudes of both students and academics towards the concept of employability were varied and tension-laden. Interviews with the student participants revealed self-perceived employability as mostly negative. However, those students who were in relevant part-time work or internships spoke more confidently about their career prospects. Overall, there were dilemmatic ways of speaking about employability as students expressed it as something both negative but positive in the sense that one needs to find a job. In other words, it is an aspect of transitioning from higher education that cannot be ignored. The tension-laden viewpoints and perceptions on employability that emerged in this study are consistent with findings by Speight, Lackovic, and Cooker, (2013) who found that participants had conflicting viewpoints on employability. The negative feelings expressed included not wanting to be “forced”, as one student put it, by the university to learn towards employability. Other students felt that students were alone and needed more guidance with regards to how their knowledge and skills can be translated into possible career opportunities. The ability to translate both disciplinary knowledge and generic skills and communicate this in a way employers understand is outlined by Tomlinson, (2017) who suggests that graduates should be able to:

exemplify the link between technical knowledge and subject specialism, as well as whatever generic skills they have acquired, and demonstrate how these may translate into future performance (p. 342).

This ability to articulate and present the theoretical knowledge and other analytical skills to employers is of particular significance, as Wiers-Jenssen et al., (2016) suggest, employers may not be fully aware of the specific disciplinary knowledge and skills that humanities graduates offer. This general lack of awareness of the value of the knowledge and skills acquired in the discipline can be seen as disadvantageous to students. The participants’ sentiments are an
indication that some level of support or guidance regarding future work life is needed, seeing that they are close to transitioning to the world of work.

With regards to work experience, students had varied views, with relevant part-time work and internships valued as important. Overall students worked as a means for income whilst studying and for obtaining relevant work experience. It is important to note that students valued relevant work experience highly and viewed it as something to leverage from when seeking full-time work. Interestingly, for international students’ part-time work, which did not have disciplinary relevance, was a form of access to gain social and cultural capital in Norway, particularly with regards to learning the language and culture. These students felt less confident about their employability stating that they would be disadvantaged. International students reported working in jobs that are not relevant to their discipline. Paradoxically, although gaining cultural and social capital was seen as enhancing international students’ employability in Norway, some saw irrelevant work as an impediment as it did not afford them the opportunity to gain appropriate experience within the discipline. The influence of both social and cultural capital, amongst other forms, on enhancing employability is emphasised by both Tomlinson, (2017) and Clarke (2017).

Relevant part-time work and internships seemed to enhance self-confidence regarding employability. This is supported by the Key to Employability model that emphasises work experience as an important element of employability (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Employers also place significance on prior work experience and highlight it during the recruitment process (Støren; Reiling; Skjelbred; Ulvestad; Carlsten & Olsen, 2019). From the interviews, it is evident that students in the MITRA study programme have closer connections with work organisations through a field term internship or project and are thus better able to access opportunities for relevant work experience. Although work experience is highly valued by future employers and provides a good foundation for the transition into work life for students, the humanities in general, is said to have the lowest collaborations with work organisations as compared to other fields (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2016).

Academics had varied views towards history students future work life. It is important to note that academics viewed teacher education as the career trajectory of most history master’s graduates. In contrast, most students interviewed indicated that they would try to pursue a PhD degree for a career in research or academia. Thus, in order to train competent history teachers,
good disciplinary knowledge base and self-reflection were emphasised by some academics. Overall the concept of employability seems to elicit mixed reactions amongst both students and academics, whereby some view it more positively while others expressed more negative viewpoints. This is coherent with prior research that explores perceptions on employability in higher education (Speight et al., 2013). The varied views and perspectives are consistent with the literature on employability observing that it is a complex construct (Harvey, 2001; Tomlinson, 2017b). There are also different meanings attached to employability by the participants, showing that it is indeed a “comprehensive construct” which has not “commanded consensus” (Sin & Neave, 2016, p. 1459).

With respect to local and global citizenship skills, there were varied viewpoints on how these skills are perceived and supported. The Norwegian history programme focuses more on the local societal context whereas the MITRA programme is more internationally oriented. Knowledge of Norwegian history was seen by the students and academics of the Norwegian history master’s programme as important for knowing about one’s own local context and for fostering active citizenship skills. Knowledge of the local societal context is seen as important for active local citizenship (Binkley et al., 2012). It is important to note that while students valued the knowledge of national history, they also expressed a need for more knowledge about other non-Western countries to enhance their global awareness. Learning that includes an awareness of non-Western countries is seen as important for developing good global citizenship skills (Nussbaum, 2010, 2016). The importance of global issues in the curriculum is outlined by (Boni et al., 2016).

Students in the MITRA programme expressed having been exposed to a global perspective both within the study programme as well as by the mere fact that the programme includes students and staff from various countries. The participants viewed these as positive aspects both for fostering global citizenship skills and for possibly working for an international organisation and working abroad. In the literature, the importance of local and global citizenship skills are pointed out as essential skills that foster an awareness of different groups and societal contexts (Binkley et al., 2012; Nussbaum, 2010, 2016). Furthermore, learning that includes local and global citizenship skills fosters an understanding of how democracies operate and upholds cultural values associated with Bildung (Binkley et al., 2012). Nussbaum (2010) proposes that curricula should include “richer, more nuanced knowledge of the world, its histories and cultures” (p. 83). This awareness of other groups in society is outlined in the human
development approach which places importance on learning that fosters equity, social justice and diversity (Boni & Gasper, 2012).

6.1.3 Views on how 21st century skills are supported

The third and final research question addresses viewpoints on how 21st century skills are supported in the study programme as well as other steps that students take to equip themselves with these skills. Both students and academics reported that generic skills are supported in the study programme in practice, thus there was coherence in this regard. However, some skills such as critical thinking are embedded in the study programmes to a larger extent than others such as teamwork and presentation skills. Overall students experience activities such as working collaboratively in teams, engaging in group discussions writing essays and sourcing information critically as having been supported in practice. Students also expressed valuing the importance of teamwork and collaboration skills saying that these could be better supported particularly throughout the final semesters. The significance of being able to work collaboratively is consistent with previous studies (Andrews & Higson, 2008) as well as with recent findings showing that employers value collaboration skills (Støren et al., 2019).

With respect to students’ awareness of generic skills, students expressed that these skills were not made explicit and were not clearly articulated during the learning process. This links to the striking finding that students expressed not being familiar with the terms “generic skills” or “21st century skills” when asked initially about their thoughts on these skills in the interviews. This could suggest that few opportunities are given for students to be able to evaluate their own learning experiences and link embedded activities as relevant for future work life. Tomlinson, (2017b) asserts that some of the implicit aspects of learning could be made more explicit and that there is legitimacy in students viewing learning as having value for future work life.

Most academics are of the view that generic skills are not generally made explicit to students and that this could be improved upon. In contrast, some academics mentioned that in practice generic skills are made explicit and that students are encouraged to be reflective in the learning process. These varied views show that there could be a variety of practices and regarding the teaching and learning of generic skills. Notwithstanding this, the students experience is that generic skills are not clearly articulated to them. If students are unaware of the skills they possess, they will not have a full understanding of the resources they have acquired (Finch,
Peacock, Levallet, & Foster, 2016). This awareness is also seen as important for reflection on learning (Tomlinson, 2017b), as outlined in the employability model adopted in this study (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Overall students and academics view the purpose of university education as a means of acquiring disciplinary knowledge required as a historian. Students in particular, expressed the importance of developing skills for work life as an individual endeavour pursued through various means such as part-time work, voluntary work, reading, learning new languages and taking up short courses to learn new skills. This is consistent with the view that both work and life experiences are important for enhancing employability as observed by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007). Students seemed to show individual agency and self-directedness in pursuing their own opportunities to be better prepared for future work such as gaining relevant work experience. This self-directedness corresponds with Bridgstock, (2009) who suggests that students should take the necessary steps to build and develop their careers.

With respect to where the responsibility for employability and skills development is attributed, students viewed the university as primarily responsible for cultivating academic knowledge. However, they also expressed a need for specific and targeted guidance related to their discipline for better workplace readiness. In other words, students placed the responsibility for employability and skills development on both themselves and the university. Similar findings were reported by Sin, Tavares and Amaral (2016). This shows a need for the university to provide some opportunities for a better transition into work life without focusing on ‘learning for employability’ at the expense of the theoretical history knowledge. Moreover, institution-wide services such as the career-centre were seen as offering only general advice. The practical, non-discipline-specific career advice was considered useful but findings from the students show that more support was needed from within the discipline.

Students expressed that the ultimate onus is on them to access opportunities for learning skills and to be workplace ready. This finding is in line with prior research showing that students perceive employability as being the responsibility of both themselves and the university but that the ultimately as students own responsibility (Sin et al., 2016). Students thus have to map out their own career building process and navigate their own way through the transition from higher education to work life. Students own acknowledgement that they should take responsibility for
their employability could be attributed to the fact that they pursue a humanities education knowing that it inherently does not lead to a professional or vocational qualification. Being satisfied with the disciplinary knowledge aspect could then be seen as lining up to their expectations of pursuing a qualification in the humanities.

Overall both students and academics were of the view that the primary purpose of higher education is to develop theoretical or subject-specific knowledge and students were satisfied with this aspect but needed some discipline-specific guidance from the university. Students perception of the university’s role as a provider of discipline-specific knowledge is echoed by Tynjälä et al., (2006). Academics, on the other hand, had polarised views but overall acknowledged that the humanities inherently focus more on disciplinary knowledge and that students should be open to different career possibilities. Similarly, findings by Sin et al. (2017) show that academics supported generic skills in practice but had varied views on employability as a purpose of higher education. Overall, learning oriented towards employability was not seen as a purpose of higher education, instead, more emphasis was placed on acquiring a good disciplinary knowledge base. However, Speight et al. (2013) argue that learning that enhances employability does not need to be at the expense of theoretical knowledge. Instead, students can be equipped for the changing world of work by acquiring knowledge and skills relevant for work life, through academic learning (Speight et al., 2013).

### 6.2 Implications

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following implications are suggested if study programmes are to equip students with knowledge and skills that are relevant for working life as pointed out in the white paper (2016-2017) entitled *The Humanities in Norway* (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2017).

Firstly, while disciplinary knowledge is fundamental and should not be eclipsed by generic skills, the findings suggest that these skills should be made more explicit to students as well as how the acquired expertise are relevant for workplace contexts. Thus, students could be made more aware of the knowledge and skills they possess. Moreover, there is a need to be equipped to effectively articulate the knowledge and skills they possess to employers who may not be fully familiar with each discipline and the subject-specific knowledge and skills it fosters.
Secondly, the results of this study show that there are varying views of employability as well as uncertainty expressed as it relates to students self-perceived employability. Students could benefit from opportunities to engage in discussions that would address some of the tensions that may exist around employability as a result of the nature of non-vocational study programmes.

A third implication relates to the responsibility for developing skills for work life. The results suggest that the onus is on both the university and students themselves to develop the necessary skills and to prepare for work life. Thus, while students should exercise self-directedness and take initiative for their own careers, the university can provide more opportunities for career development for students from non-vocational programmes. Examples include i) facilitating opportunities for students to gain relevant work experience through strategic collaborations between non-vocational study programmes and both private and public sector organisations and ii) providing students with a clearer understanding of the value of both theoretical subject-specific knowledge and discipline-bound generic skills and how these can be useful for multiple career paths.

Fourthly, the findings also show that students perceive the university-wide career services as offering broad, general advice. However, students report needing more specific, targeted guidance and support from within their own discipline about possible career opportunities where they can utilise their specialised knowledge and skills.

Finally, perceptions on employability may have unique disciplinary-specific features, as suggested in this study. Furthermore, the findings justify a need for a framework for conceptualising employability within non-vocational study programmes. Here, employability is not seen in the narrow sense of students merely obtaining a job but rather how they can better match their acquired knowledge and skills to relevant jobs.
7 Conclusion

7.1 Limitations

The findings of this study should be considered in the context of the following limitations. Firstly, some limitations in the research methodology include the sample size. A total of nine participants were interviewed for this study. This small sample size poses a limitation for the transferability of the study’s findings to other contexts.

Secondly, a more thorough investigation about how work experience contributes to students’ perceptions of employability and the skills integral to it, would have also provided useful insight.

Thirdly, the study is limited to one disciplinary context due to time constraints. The study would have benefited from a comparison of various disciplines to highlight and contrast differences in perceptions on employability and 21st century. An interdisciplinary focus could have potentially yielded interesting results on which particular skills are valued as important for working life by students representing different disciplines. In addition, a comparison between vocational and non-vocational study programmes could potentially elicit interesting insights and provide a clear juxtaposition between perceptions of students and academics from more general or specifically oriented study programmes.

Whilst acknowledging these limitations, the results of the study do provide richness and depth to better understand what is experienced, practiced and perceived by participating actors regarding employability and 21st century skills in non-vocational, study programmes.

It is believed that this study has contributed to research in the area of employability and 21st century skills by providing nuanced and descriptive viewpoints of students and academics perceptions, particularly from non-vocational programmes. It was vital to represent the voices of both these stakeholder groups who are at the centre of daily higher education activities.
Moreover, the qualitative findings of this study can add an additional perspective to previous findings from student and graduate surveys on higher education and the labour market.

### 7.2 Suggestions for Future Research

There are several potential directions for future research in this area. Firstly, future research could focus on larger contexts such as including other faculties within the university to allow for comparing and contrasting different disciplinary fields.

Secondly, further research could also seek to investigate other stakeholders’ views such as employers’ expectations of graduates from humanities fields. In addition, this could be directed towards ways employers and HEIs can more effectively collaborate to ensure that students have access to experiential workplace learning opportunities during their studies.

Finally, further research could include a follow-up study of graduates once they have obtained employment to investigate how they view their acquired knowledge and skills as relevant for work as well as how they experienced the transition from higher education to work life.

### 7.3 Concluding Remarks

Employability is central to the objectives of supranational reforms such as the Bologna Process whereby higher education is expected to meet the needs of the knowledge-based economy. Higher education is therefore seen as a vehicle for enhancing employability (Sin & Neave, 2016). This notion has been challenged by those who seek to preserve higher education, particularly the humanities, as crucial for upholding democracy and for cultivating critical, reflective thinkers (Nussbaum, 2010). The ongoing debate between ‘learning for employability’ versus ‘academic learning’ still remains (Speight et al., 2013) as different stakeholders have differing views regarding employability (Sin & Neave, 2016) and the skills agenda. These two orientations are often pitted against each other whereas the significance of a good disciplinary knowledge base and employability can both be achieved by means of “learning for employability through the academic discipline” (Speight et al., 2013, p. 4). In other words,
employability can be enhanced through the curriculum without compromising discipline-specific knowledge as pointed out by (Knight & Yorke, 2002).

There are various understandings and perspectives of employability in the literature showing that it is multi-faceted (Tomlinson, 2017b) and that generic skills are an essential component of understanding it (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Similarly, the findings in this study show that participants perceive employability in various ways. While labour market conditions, social and cultural capital and individual attributes all influence employability, the acquisition of knowledge and skills are a vital element in understanding it (Clarke, 2017). Furthermore, developing generic skills, seen as a component of human capital, are an important part of learning in higher education (Clarke, 2017). Higher education can be seen as central to enhancing human capital fostering the development of not only the expertise required in the labour market but also the cultural values needed in society. The move towards a closer link between the university and labour market outcomes is seen by some as the instrumentalisation of higher education (Sin et al., 2017). The human development approach which emphasises capabilities and values over economic success offers an additional perspective (Nussbaum, 2010, 2016). This approach is more concerned with the fostering of capabilities such as critical thinking, active democratic citizenship (local and global) as well as agency. To better understand employability and the role of 21st century skills both the human capital theory and the human development approach were used in this study for a more holistic perspective. The findings suggest that both these approaches were present in how the participants perceived employability and the acquisition of skills that are integral to it.

Higher education can result in labour market success for graduates whilst also fostering capabilities and skills for critical and ethical citizens. These competencies are often closely linked with the humanities. While the humanities has been defended for providing cultural value and significance for social good in any democracy, governments who fund higher education expect HEIs to provide impact and societal relevance (Nussbaum, 2010; Small, 2013). A closer connection between higher education and the labour market is one of the ways that impact and relevance can be seen. Prior research shows that a closer interaction is needed between the humanities and the world of work (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2016).
The findings suggest that both students and academics have varied perceptions and views regarding employability and the role of 21st century skills. Furthermore, both groups did perceive 21st century skills or generic skills as important for future work. Students’ initial lack of familiarity with the terms generic skills or 21st century skills shows a need for these to be better made explicit in practice. The results also show that students are generally satisfied with the theoretical knowledge orientation of the study programmes, however, they report needing some support with how to “package” their knowledge and skills to better communicate these to employers. This could come from a clearer understanding and awareness of the skills they have acquired.

Generic skills were understood from a discipline-specific perspective with emphasis on thinking critically and analytically, writing skills, and information literacy skills such as sourcing, including critically evaluating sources. Overall, skills that are valued the most were related to critical thinking and writing skills. Other skills that were valued and seen as required for work life include teamwork and presentation skills. Participants expressed that these skills could be better supported in the study programmes. Digital skills were also valued as important for work life but were acknowledged as skills that students learned more informally and not within the domain of the university.

In light of the literature and the various meanings attributed to employability, the views from students and academics show varied perceptions on learning that is oriented towards employability and skills for work life. Some participants viewed employability as a threat to academic learning while others viewed it as an imperative to ensure that students are workplace-ready and have a positive transition into the labour market. Moreover, students expressed needing targeted support from within the discipline with respect to a clearer understanding of the skills developed and their relevance for future work. It is clear from the findings that viewpoints on employability and skills are varied. The findings further suggest that there is room for robust discussions on the topic amongst the various stakeholders concerned.
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Appendix A: Interview Guides

Interview guide – Students

**Background questions**

- Can you give a brief description of your study programme?
- What drew you to select this specific study programme?
- What were your expectations of the content of the study programme before you started it?
- What are your thoughts about it now?
- Do you take part in any extracurricular activities in your free time?

**Questions related to work experience and employability**

- **Do you have any previous work experience?**
  - If yes, is your previous work experience related to your field of study?
- Do you currently work part-time?
  - Is your current work related to your field of study?
- What comes to mind when you hear the term “employability”
  - What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you hear this term?
- Is employability something you have started thinking about?
- What kind of expectations do you have regarding your future work once you have completed your studies?
- What kind of skills do you think employers are potentially looking for in graduates?
  - Do you think that university is the best place where these skills can be developed? If so, why?
- What kind of personal attributes do you think employers are potentially looking for in graduates?
  - In what ways can these personal attributes be developed?

**Employability and the role of 21st century skills**

- What comes to your mind when you think of the concept “21st century skills”?
o Can you give examples of the skills that you think are included in 21st century skills?

- Do you think 21st century skills are important for work life?
- Do you think your study programme has provided opportunities to learn any 21st century skills?
  o Which skills, do you think were focused on mostly?
  o Can you give examples of classroom activities in which you think that these types of skills are/were being developed?
- When you participate in classroom activities, do you make the connection between the skills being developed and your future work life? Do you think that these skills are helping prepare you for future work life?
- What is the most important skill, relevant for your future work, that you think you’ve developed through your studies?

1. Ways of Thinking

- What do you think are thinking skills? Can you give examples?
  o What thinking skills do you think are important for future work life? Why?
  o How relevant do you think these thinking skills are for future work?
  o Do you think that the programme has helped you develop thinking skills? Can you give an example?

2. Ways of Working

- What skills do you think people need to be able to work effectively in groups or networks?
  o Which of these skills for working together, do you think are important for future work life? Why?
  o How relevant do you think these working skills are for future work life?
  o Do you think that the programme has helped you develop skills to work with others? How?

3. Tools for Working

- What skills do you think are important when working in today’s digitalized society?
  o Do you think developing these skills is important for preparing for future work? Why?
How relevant do you think these skills are for future work life?
How do you feel about how these skills have developed during your studies? Can you give an example?

4. Living in the World

A. Skills important for living in an increasingly global and multicultural world

- Do you think it is important to have skills that enhance active involvement in local communities? Why?
- In your opinion what skills are needed to address national issues?
- Do you think it is important to have the skills to participate in the global world as a ‘global’ citizen?
  o Do you think developing these skills is important for preparing for future work? Why?
- What are your views regarding personal and social responsibility?
- What are your opinions about social and cultural diversity?
  o Do you think developing these skills is important for preparing for future work? Why?
  o How relevant do you think these skills are for future work life?
  o How do you feel about how these skills have been developed during your studies? Can you give an example?

B: Career management skills

- What career management skills do you think are important to adapt to the complex and changing world of work?
  o Do you think developing these skills is important for preparing for future work? Why?
  o How relevant do you think these skills are for future work life?
  o How do you feel about how these skills have developed during your studies? Can you give an example?

Concluding questions

- Which of the different skills that we discussed do you feel should be given more focus in the study programme? Why?
• Which of the different skills do you feel are least important for working life? Why?
• Do you think that you have had enough opportunities to develop skills for future work life during their studies? How?
• Do you think it is important for students to develop skills that prepare them for the workplace at University or do you think it is up to students themselves to prepare for working life?
• Are there any skills that we haven’t discussed that you feel are relevant?
• Is there anything else you would like to add?
Interview guide – Academics

Background questions

- Can you give a brief description of the study programme?
- Can you explain your involvement in the study programme?

Questions related to employability

- Do you think it is important for students to have work experience?
- What comes to mind when you hear the term “employability”
  - What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you hear this term?
- Is employability something that students should start thinking about?
- What kind of skills do you think employers are potentially looking for in graduates?
  - Do you think that university is the best place where these skills can be developed? If so, why?

Employability and the role of 21st century skills

- What comes to your mind when you think of the concept “21st century skills”?
  - Can you give examples of the skills that you think are included in 21st century skills?
- Do you think 21st century skills are important for work life?
- Do you think the curriculum provides opportunities for students to learn 21st century skills?
  - Which skills, do you think are focused on mostly in the curriculum?
  - Can you give examples of classroom activities which are aimed at developing these skills?
- When conducting classroom activities, are students made aware of the skills being developed?
  - Do you think that these skills are helping prepare students for future work life?
- In your opinion, what is the most important skill, relevant for your future work, that you think students should develop through their studies?
1. Ways of Thinking

- What do you think are thinking skills? Can you give examples?
  - What thinking skills do you think are important for future work life? Why?
  - How relevant do you think these skills are for students’ future work life?
- In your opinion, how do curricula support the development of thinking skills?

2. Ways of Working

- What skills do you think people need to be able to work effectively in groups or networks?
  - Which of these skills for working together, do you think are important for future work life? Why?
  - How relevant do you think these skills are for students’ future work life?
- In your opinion, how do curricula support the development of these skills?

3. Tools for Working

- What skills do you think are important when working in today’s digitalized society?
  - Do you think developing these skills is important for preparing for future work? Why?
  - How relevant do you think these skills are for students’ future work life?
- In your opinion, how do curricula support the development of these skills?

4. Living in the World

A. Skills important for living in an increasingly global and multicultural world

- Do you think it is important for students to have skills that enhance active involvement in local communities? Why?
- In your opinion what skills are needed to address national issues?
- Do you think it is important for students to have the skills to participate in the global world as a ‘global’ citizen?
  - Do you think developing these skills are relevant for students’ future work life? Why?
- What are your views regarding personal and social responsibility?
- What are your opinions about social and cultural diversity?
Do you think developing these skills are relevant for students’ future work life? Why?

- In your opinion, how does curriculum support the development of these skills of living in a global and multicultural world?

**B: Career management skills**

- What career management skills do you think are important for students to be able to adapt to the complex and changing world of work?
  - Do you think developing these skills is important for preparing for future work? Why?
- In your opinion, how does curriculum support the development of these skills?

**Concluding questions**

- Which of the different skills that we discussed do you feel should be given more focus in the study programme? Why?
- Which of the different skills do you feel are least important for students future working life? Why?
- Do you think that students have had enough opportunities to develop skills for future work life during their studies? How?
- Do you think it is important for students to develop skills that prepare them for the workplace at University or do you think it is up to students themselves to prepare for working life?
- Are there any skills that we haven’t discussed that you feel are relevant?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix B: Information Letters and Consent Forms

Information letter and consent form - Students

Are you interested in taking part in the following research project?

Graduate employability: The role of 21st century skills

A case study among Humanities students and academics at the University of Oslo

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project in which the main purpose is to ascertain master’s students’ views regarding current and future work life skills. In this letter, I will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

In order to fulfil the requirements towards a master’s degree in higher education at the University of Oslo’s (UiO) Department of Education, I will conduct a thesis project that seeks to investigate students’ and academic staff members’ views on which skills are important for future work life. The purpose of this study is to ascertain views on which skills are most relevant for work life and how these skills are being developed. I will conduct individual interviews with six master’s students and three academics. The information gathered will be valuable for understanding how the university is preparing students for future work contexts. The data collected will only be used for the purposes of this master’s thesis project. I sincerely hope that you are willing to contribute to the study and share your views.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being asked to participate because you are part of the Humanities faculty. This study seeks information about Humanities students’ views regarding skills needed for future work life.
What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in an individual interview. It will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will include questions about your views on current and future work life skills. The interviews will be conducted at the University of Oslo. Digital recording software will be used to record the interviews. The interviews will be conducted in English.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

I will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter, which is for the master’s thesis project. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act GDPR), and will follow the UiO’s data guidelines and procedures based on GDPR legislation.

I will personally transcribe the interviews. During transcription I will replace your name with a code. The list of names and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data. The information will be stored on UiO’s protected server for the duration of the study and will be deleted at the end of the study. The data will be de-identified. Only my master’s thesis supervisors will have access to the anonymised data after transcription. A copy of the completed thesis will be sent to The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). No personal information will be published. Participants will not be recognizable in the thesis.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end on 30 June 2019. The personal data including digital recordings will be deleted at the end of the project.
Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:
- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of Oslo, Department of Education, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project or want to exercise your rights, contact:

University of Oslo, Department of Education
Student:
Lynn Dittrich email: lynndi@student.uv.uio.no telephone: +47 92 519 352

Supervisors
Mervi Anneli Hasu, email: m.a.hasu@iped.uio.no telephone: +47 22 85 43 36
Carita Kiili, email: c.p.s.kiili@iped.uio.no telephone: +47 22 85 77 80

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS,
NSD email: personverntjenester@nsd.no telephone: +47 55 58 21 17

Yours sincerely,
Student: Lynn Dittrich
Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project, *Graduate employability: The role of 21st century skills. A case study among Humanities students and academics at the University of Oslo*, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent:

☐ to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, 30 June 2019

(Signed by participant, date)
Information letter and consent form – Academics

Are you interested in taking part in the following research project?

Graduate employability: The role of 21st century skills

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Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being asked to participate because you are an academic staff member at the Humanities faculty. This study seeks information about views regarding how curriculum within the Humanities supports the development of skills that students need for future work life.
What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in an individual interview. It will take approximately 60 minutes. The interview will include questions about your views on current and future work life skills. The interviews will be conducted at the University of Oslo. Digital recording software will be used to record the interviews. The interviews will be conducted in English.

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I will process your personal data based on your consent.

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Where can I find out more?

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The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS,
NSD email: personverntjenester@nsd.no telephone: +47 55 58 21 17

Yours sincerely,
Student: Lynn Dittrich
Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project, *Graduate employability: The role of 21st century skills. A case study among Humanities students and academics at the University of Oslo*, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent:

☐ to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, 30 June 2019

(Signed by participant, date)
Appendix C: Broad Themes and Initial Codes

Initial broad themes and corresponding codes identified on NVIVO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline-specific understanding of 21st century skills or generic skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪  Views on how the programmes supports the development of 21st century skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ways of thinking**
- Analytical thinking
- Critical thinking
- Methodological skills

**Ways of working**
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Research skills
- Writing skills

**Tools for working**
- Information literacy
  - Source critique
  - Contextualisation
- ICT literacy

**Living in the world**
- Local and Global citizenship skills
- Career management skills
- Language skills

**Perceived employability and perceptions on relevance of skills**

- Attitudes towards employability
  - Positive attitude
  - Negative attitude
  - Neutral

- Relevance placed on 21st century skills to enhance employability

- Academics views on history students career trajectories & history students self-reported career aspirations

- Skills considered important for future work versus skills acquired

- Workplace experience

**Educational purposes**

- The role of the university versus agency
- Balance between disciplinary knowledge versus 21st century skills
- Link between generic skills and future work
- Examples of how 21st century skills are supported in the programmes
- Changes in the study programmes to enhance employability
Appendix D: Analytical Processing Tool

| RQ1: What are students and academics understanding of 21st century skills and do they see a connection between these skills and future work life? Which skills do they value the most? |
|---|---|---|
| Analytical element examined from the interview transcript | Operationalisation | Discussion on analytical element and relevant literature sources |
| 1. Participants understanding of generic skills and the dispute between disciplinary knowledge vs. utilitarian skills | | |

| RQ2: How do humanities students and academics perceive employability and the role of 21st century skills in helping to prepare students for future work life? |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Perceptions on employability and views on skills required in the labour market, work experience and other life experiences. | | |

| RQ3: What are students and academics views on how the selected study programmes support the development of 21st century skills and where is the responsibility for developing these skills attributed? |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Perceptions about the university’s role in preparing students for the labour market vs agency | | |