

Factors affecting the registration of candidates, graduates and non-registered practitioners in the built environment professions

Abstract

A primary concern for the Built Environment sector is the shortage of professional skills required to meet the current and future demands of infrastructure required for socio-economic development. Another challenge is that the sector remains untransformed in terms of race and gender. Therefore, this study aimed to address this gap by examining the perceived benefits and factors affecting the registration of candidates, graduates and non-registered practitioners in the Built Environment Professions (BEPs). The study revealed that the major barriers and challenges hindering the professional registration of the above-mentioned persons include the expensive annual fees for registration and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), the complicated registration process and the shortage of mentors. If these challenges are not addressed, the sector will continue to face a decline of registered professionals. The quantitative research methodology was adopted in conducting the study. Purposive sampling was adopted in the study and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data of graduates, candidates and non-registered groups/individuals and their registration challenges in the Built Environment. Recommendations state that Councils for the Built Environment Professions (CBEP) are encouraged to automate the registration process to expedite the process and provide feedback, and CBEP are encouraged to engage employers for the co-funding of professional registration fees for their employees.

Introduction

A primary concern for the Built Environment sector is the shortage of professional skills required to meet the current and future demands of infrastructure required for socio-economic development. Another challenge is that the sector remains untransformed in terms of race and gender. The 2022/2023 professional registration statistics suggest that white males continue to dominate the sector in terms of professional membership across the six professions, while black persons, women and people with disabilities remain a minority.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the perceived benefits and factors affecting the registration of candidates, graduates and non-registered practitioners in the BEPs. The research is guided by the following sub-objectives:

- Identify the challenges affecting the registration of graduates, candidates and non-registered practitioners.
- Propose mitigating measures that the CBEP can implement to improve the numbers of professionally registered persons.

Methodology

This research adopted a quantitative research method to achieve the aim of the study. Sampling techniques were used to identify the challenges hindering the registration of graduates, candidates and non-registered practitioners in the Built Environment professions. The purposive sampling method was adopted for the study. Noting that this is a quantitative research, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data of graduates, candidates and non-registered groups/individuals and their registration challenges in the Built Environment.

The largest population for this study is graduates, candidates and non-registered persons. The sample frame for the study encompassed all nine councils for the BEPs, public institutions and voluntary associations.

Self-administered structured questionnaires were utilised to collect data from candidates, graduates, and non-registered practitioners in the BEPs. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to all nine CBEP. In addition, the structured questionnaire was circulated on all social media platforms of the CBE.

Research Findings

Biographical information of respondents

The questionnaire was completed by 104 graduates, 135 non-registered practitioners and 187 candidates in the BE.

Most respondents (56,8%) were males, while females constituted 43,3% of the respondents. This research finding is in alignment with the demographic profile of the BE which is male dominated. Most of the respondents were African (79,2%) followed by whites (10%). Indians were underrepresented with only 11 respondents (2,6%) while coloureds constituted 8,1% of the respondents.

Most respondents (38,9%) fell between the age group 30 – 39, followed by those in the 20 – 29 age group (26,2%). Only nine respondents (2,1%) reported being 60 and older and 35 people (8,3%) have been in the age group 50 – 59 years.

Most of the respondents (29,6%) had a certificate as their highest level of education, followed by those who possess a bachelor's degree (23,2%). Postgraduate qualifications made up 22% of the sample while 12,8% of the cohort had an honour's degree. A minority (1,4%) being those with a doctoral degree.

Further research showed that 47,4% indicated that they are currently working in the private sector. However, a significant proportion of the respondents (30,9%) are currently unemployed. The study only had 2,4% in academia, while those working in the public sector constituted 19,3% of respondents.

Other statistics shows that 23,8% have 10 – 19 years of working experience in the BE sector, followed by those reporting to be in the 1 – 3 years (19,4%) category. Worth noting is the 10,9% of the respondents reporting that they have zero experience in the BE. Those with more than 20 years' experience amounted to 6,4%, and 1 – 3 years 8,1%.

Awareness of the requirements for professional registration with the councils for the BEPs

These statistics presents an analysis of the stage of career in which graduates, non-registered practitioners and candidates became aware of the requirements to register with a professional council.

It is indicated by 58,5% of the respondents that it was at the employment stage where they became aware of the requirements to be registered, followed by 36,5% who became aware when they were at the tertiary education stage. A significant proportion of respondents (2,6%) are not aware of the requirements while 2,4% became aware at high school. It is evident from the results of the research that majority of respondents became aware of the requirements for professional registration upon completion of their BE studies.

The legality of professional practice in the BEPs

Majority of respondents (56,4%) think that practicing without being professionally registered is not legal in South Africa while 43,6% think that it is legal. The figure of 56,4% can be broken down further, indicating that candidates constitute a major percentage (25,1%), followed by non-registered practitioners (17,5%) and graduates (13,7%), showing a clear demonstration that more people think that practicing without being professionally registered is not legal in South Africa.

The perceived benefits of having more registered professionals

Majority of respondents (85,4%) think that South Africa will benefit from more registered professionals in the BE while only 14,6% do not think the South Africa will benefit from more professionals. Of the 85,4% candidates constitute a major percentage (37,0%), followed by non-registered practitioners (26,9%) and graduates (21,5%). There is, therefore, a clear demonstration that more people think that South Africa will benefit from having more registered professionals.

Factors deterring professional registration

Majority of respondents (35,2%) reported that a complicated registration process, followed by (20,2%) expensive registration fees, as the two main factors that respectively demotivates them. Further issues mentioned was that some employers do not require their employees to be professionally registered (3,1%) as well as the lack of incentives for being professionally registered (7,1%).

The respondents were also requested to specify other factors not recorded in the questionnaire that deter them from professional registration. These specified factors include: 1) lack of mentorship; 2) financial stress; 3) educational stress and foreign qualifications; 4) inefficiency; 5) frustration; 6) lack of recognition of work experience; 7) challenging assessment journey; 8) unresponsiveness from professional councils, and 9) unemployment. The

lack of professional registered mentors was the most specified deterrent. Each of the factors is discussed below:

Lack of mentorship

The findings of this study are consistent with previous literature which confirms that the shortage of mentors hinders the progress towards registration.

Lack of financial resources

The results of this study corroborate with previous literature where respondents cited their inability to settle their tuition fees prevented them from completing their qualification; this became a major deterrent of professional registration.

Educational stress and lack of recognition of qualifications

Some respondents indicated that professional bodies do not recognise foreign BE qualifications, which makes it difficult for them to register as candidates.

Inefficiencies in the registration process

Some candidates indicated that the process seems tedious, even after one has made the payment and is only waiting for assessment. Graduates also highlighted that the professional councils do not respond to their applications on time, which is frustrating.

Lack of recognition of work experience

Some respondents indicated that professional councils do not recognise their previous work experience in the BE, which can be translated to a waste of time.

Challenging assessment journey

Concerns revolved around the difficulty in answering the exam and interview questions. One candidate has highlighted that the interview process has questions that no one had ever seen in practice. This is seen as an attempt to make one fail.

Unemployment

Unemployment is undoubtedly the biggest setback for progression in many realms of the economy. South Africa is currently grappling with a high unemployment rate, and the BE is no exception. The findings of this study affirm this notion, since a number of respondents indicated that unemployment inhibits their ability to register with a professional council as candidates.

Descriptive statistics of importance of professional registration

The descriptive statistics of the importance of professional registration was determined from the questionnaire. The results indicated that most

respondents opted for professional registration due to the desire to acquire a license to practice and improve their career prospects and employability.

Descriptive statistics of major challenges experienced with the registration process

The statistics shows that respondents grapple with expensive registration fees from professional councils in the BE. Another important factor was the lack of mentors and the lengthy registration process.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations from the study:

1. CBEP are encouraged to massify public awareness campaigns on the role BEPs play to increase awareness about the professions, to improve the image of the industry and attract young people to study in the BE.
2. CBEP are encouraged to expand the "road to registration" workshops online and be shared on all media platforms.
3. CBEP are encouraged to automate the registration process to expedite the process and provide feedback.
4. CBEP are encouraged to engage employers for co-funding professional registration fees for their employees.

Conclusion

The findings from aspiring BE students, BE tertiary students, BE graduates and non-registered practitioners reveals the challenges experienced in the BE professions registration process. The data collected revealed that financial challenges are the major contributing factors to the decline of BE professional registrations.

Areas for Future Research

- Comparative research on how other sectors (accounting, law and health) are motivating their professionals to pay professional registration fees.
- Research on the efficiencies of professional registration processes.

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