

From alignment to integration: A systems-based curriculum governance framework for human resource management graduate employability in South Africa



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Orientation: Persistent misalignment between university curricula and labour market expectations constrains the employability of human resource management (HRM) graduates in South Africa. These challenges are further intensified by rapid technological change and evolving professional standards associated with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) demands, necessitating systemic curriculum reform.

Research purpose: This study aimed to develop and operationalise an integrated, evidence-informed curriculum development framework to strengthen HRM graduate competence by aligning stakeholder expectations, professional standards and curriculum processes within a systems perspective.

Motivation for the study: Although curriculum models and HRM competence frameworks are well established, there is a lack of empirically grounded, integrated approaches that connect competence architecture, pedagogy, assessment, stakeholder engagement and governance within a unified framework.

Research approach/design and method: A qualitative design grounded in a constructivist paradigm was employed. Data were generated through a thematic literature review (2013–2024) and semi-structured interviews with 14 HRM academics from a selected university and three representatives of the South African Board for People Practices. Thematic analysis guided data interpretation and informed framework development.

Main findings: The study empirically validates three interdependent competence domains – technical-digital, strategic-cognitive and relational-ethical – and demonstrates that curriculum misalignment is systemic rather than content-specific.

Practical/managerial implications: The resulting Integrated Curriculum Development Framework, together with a prototype curriculum scorecard and accreditation rubric, provides empirically derived and traceable governance tools.

Contribution/value-add: The study advances a systems-oriented curriculum governance framework for HRM education and offers a systems-based framework supported by empirical findings and prototype instruments requiring further validation.

Keywords: graduate employability; curriculum development; competence-based education; human resource management; stakeholder engagement; quality assurance; Industry 4.0; higher education.

Introduction

Youth unemployment remains a significant socio-economic concern in South Africa. As of the first quarter of 2025, the youth unemployment rate for individuals aged 15–34 years stood at approximately 46.1% (Statistics South Africa, 2025), reflecting structural labour market constraints, uneven economic growth, and persistent mismatches between graduate capabilities and workplace demands. While unemployment is influenced by macroeconomic factors beyond the control of higher education institutions, universities are increasingly scrutinised regarding the extent to which their curricula cultivate graduates who are work-ready, adaptable and capable of contributing to organisational effectiveness and broader socio-economic development.

Within this context, the discipline of human resource management (HRM) occupies a strategically significant position. Human resource (HR) professionals are expected to facilitate organisational performance, ethical governance, digital transformation and workforce capability development. Over the past two decades, HRM has evolved from administrative personnel management towards a strategic, analytics-driven and technology-enabled practice (Ulrich, 2020). Contemporary HR roles demand business acumen, digital literacy, data interpretation skills, ethical judgement and systems thinking (Falletta & Combs, 2021; South African Board for People Practices [SABPP], 2025). However, empirical research indicates that employers and professional bodies remain concerned that HRM graduates often lack integrated applied competencies, particularly in problem-solving, digital capability and workplace readiness (Chweu et al., 2023; Jackson, 2019; Maisiri & Van Dyk, 2021; Seunarin, 2024).

The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has intensified these expectations. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence, automation and HR analytics require professionals who can interpret data ethically, align people strategies with digital transformation and navigate complex socio-technical systems (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022; Nafukho et al., 2024). A key limitation in existing studies is the absence of a clearly defined, systemically integrated research focus. Prior research tends to fragment employability (individual level), curriculum design (programme level) and professional standards (systems level), without demonstrating how these dimensions interact within a coherent curriculum system. This study therefore addresses a single, clearly defined research gap: the absence of an empirically grounded, systems-integrated framework that operationalises HRM graduate competence development through aligned curriculum governance mechanisms.

Existing scholarship provides important foundations. Curriculum theorists emphasise alignment between objectives, learning experiences and evaluation processes (Nicholls & Nicholls, 2018; Taba, 1967; Tyler, 1949; Wheeler, 1967). Employability scholars highlight multidimensional graduate capabilities, including human, social, cultural, identity and psychological capital (Coetzee, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2017). Professional bodies articulate competence standards for HR practice (SABPP, 2025). However, in the South African HRM education context, few integrative models coherently connect the definition of competence, stakeholder engagement, pedagogy, assessment practices and institutional governance within a systems framework. This conceptual and operational fragmentation constrains coherent curriculum development and reduces programmes' capacity to respond dynamically to evolving professional expectations.

Grounded in General Systems Theory (GST) (Von Bertalanffy, 1968), this study conceptualises HRM curriculum development as an interconnected system in which competence architecture (inputs), pedagogical and assessment processes (transformational mechanisms), institutional enablers (contextual conditions) and graduate

employability outcomes (outputs) are dynamically linked through feedback loops (Turner & Baker, 2019). From this perspective, curriculum misalignment is not merely outdated content, but a systemic issue requiring coordinated governance and integrated design. Addressing this gap requires empirical exploration of stakeholder perspectives and the development of an operational framework to guide curriculum review and renewal in a structured, evidence-informed manner.

Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study was to develop an integrated, evidence-based curriculum development framework to strengthen HRM graduate competence within the South African higher education context. To achieve this aim, the study synthesised national and international scholarship on HRM competence requirements, curriculum design principles and graduate employability, and explored stakeholder perspectives from academics and professional body representatives regarding the capabilities required for effective HRM practice. Building on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the study examined the alignment between contemporary HRM curricula and professional expectations, identified systemic gaps and constraints limiting the development of work-ready graduates, and subsequently formulated a systems-oriented framework. This framework was operationalised through practical evaluative instruments intended to support structured curriculum review, quality assurance and continuous programme improvement.

Literature review

To enhance conceptual clarity and avoid repetition, the literature review is structured around four integrative themes: (1) curriculum design and professional formation, (2) HRM competence requirements, (3) employability and outcome-based limitations, and (4) stakeholder governance. The three competence domains are introduced once and referenced consistently throughout.

Curriculum design, competence and professional formation

Curriculum within professional disciplines cannot be reduced to the transmission of disciplinary knowledge. Contemporary scholarship conceptualises curriculum as an integrated architecture comprising learning outcomes, content, pedagogy, assessment, sequencing and governance processes that collectively shape professional capability (Loughlin et al., 2021). Particularly in applied fields such as HRM, curriculum functions as a mechanism of professional formation, mediating between academic knowledge and occupational practice.

Classical curriculum theorists provide enduring foundations but reveal limitations when applied to contemporary competence-based professional education. Tyler's (1949)

objectives-driven model emphasises alignment between educational purposes, learning experiences, organisation and evaluation, anticipating later notions of constructive alignment. Wheeler's (1967) cyclical model introduces feedback and iterative renewal, highlighting curriculum as a dynamic rather than static structure. Taba's (1967) inductive approach foregrounds teacher agency and learner needs, while Nicholls and Nicholls (2018) position assessment as integral to curriculum coherence.

Although these models establish principles of alignment and cyclicity, they were developed primarily within content-centric educational paradigms. They do not explicitly theorise competence development in digitally mediated, rapidly evolving professional contexts. Moreover, they provide limited guidance on stakeholder co-governance or institutional enablers that influence curriculum responsiveness. In professional disciplines such as HRM – where regulatory standards, technological change and organisational expectations intersect – curriculum design must extend beyond internal alignment towards systemic integration with the professional ecosystem.

The shift towards competence-based education reflects this broader reorientation. Competence models emphasise integrated knowledge, skills, attitudes and values demonstrated through applied performance rather than abstract mastery alone. However, competence-based education has been critiqued for potential reductionism, particularly when competencies are atomised into fragmented behavioural indicators that neglect higher-order integrative judgement. Thus, the challenge for HRM education lies not merely in defining competencies, but in designing curriculum systems that enable their progressive, authentic development.

Human resource management professional competence in a digital and strategic era

The evolution of HRM from a primarily administrative function to a strategic partner within organisations has fundamentally altered the competencies required of professionals.

Ulrich (2020) conceptualises HR professionals as strategic partners, change agents and culture stewards, requiring business acumen and systems awareness. Similarly, Falletta and Combs (2021) emphasise evidence-based HR, HR analytics and data-informed decision-making as defining features of contemporary practice. Professional bodies such as the SABPP (2025) articulate competence standards encompassing technical-functional proficiency, ethical governance, digital capability and strategic alignment.

Within the South African context, research indicates persistent concern regarding graduate readiness for these expanded professional roles (Chweu et al., 2023; Jackson, 2019; Maisiri & Van Dyk, 2021; Seunarine, 2024). Employers frequently report deficiencies not in theoretical knowledge per se, but in applied problem-solving, digital fluency and

integrative judgement. These findings suggest that curriculum misalignment may reflect systemic design issues rather than mere content gaps.

The 4IR further intensifies the demands for competence. Human resource professionals must navigate artificial intelligence applications, digital workforce platforms, algorithmic decision-making and ethical risks associated with data analytics (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022; Nafukho et al., 2024). Consequently, HRM curricula must cultivate digital literacy alongside ethical discernment and strategic reasoning. Importantly, these capabilities are interdependent: technological proficiency without ethical judgement or strategic insight risks superficial competence.

Synthesising the literature, three integrated competence domains were identified and used consistently throughout the study:

- Technical-digital capabilities, including HR analytics, digital systems proficiency and regulatory compliance.
- Strategic-cognitive capabilities, including business acumen, systems thinking and critical analysis.
- Relational-ethical capabilities, including communication, integrity, cultural intelligence and resilience (Coetzee, 2022; SABPP, 2025; Veldsman & Coetzee, 2022).

These domains were not treated as discrete categories, but as interdependent capabilities that must be developed through integrated curriculum processes, a gap not sufficiently addressed in prior literature.

Graduate employability and outcome-based reform limits

Graduate employability research broadens the analysis beyond discipline-specific competencies. Tomlinson et al.'s (2017) graduate capital model conceptualises employability as the interplay of human, social, cultural, identity and psychological capital. Coetzee's (2014) psychological career resources framework similarly foregrounds adaptability, emotional literacy and self-regulation as meta-capabilities enabling career sustainability. These models highlight that employability is multidimensional and contextually embedded.

However, employability discourse has been criticised for implicitly individualising responsibility for labour market outcomes, potentially obscuring structural economic constraints. In the South African context – characterised by high youth unemployment (Statistics South Africa, 2025) – curriculum reform alone cannot resolve systemic labour market inequities. Nevertheless, professional programmes such as HRM can enhance graduates' adaptive and applied capability within these constraints.

A persistent limitation of outcome-based education reforms is their frequent focus on stated graduate attributes rather than on the curriculum processes that produce them. Explicitly articulated outcomes do not guarantee pedagogical

coherence, authentic assessment or institutional support. Thus, employability enhancement requires not only defining capabilities but also embedding them within integrated curriculum governance structures.

Stakeholder engagement and curriculum governance

Effective curriculum design in professional disciplines requires sustained stakeholder engagement. Cheng et al. (2022) conceptualise employability as a shared responsibility among universities, employers, professional bodies and government. Professional bodies such as the SABPP shape competence standards and accreditation expectations (SABPP, 2025), while industry provides insight into evolving skills demands.

Despite this recognition, stakeholder engagement is frequently episodic, limited to periodic programme reviews or advisory consultations (Scott, 2018). Such fragmentation weakens curriculum responsiveness and may produce symbolic rather than substantive alignment. Moreover, governance structures within universities – characterised by layered approval processes and workload pressures – may inhibit agile curriculum reform. The literature, therefore, points to the need for governance mechanisms that systematically integrate stakeholder input into curriculum design, delivery, evaluation and renewal.

A systems perspective on curriculum alignment

General Systems Theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) offers a conceptual lens for integrating these strands. General Systems Theory conceptualises organisations as open systems in dynamic interaction with their environments. Applied to the curriculum, this perspective positions competence definitions as inputs; pedagogical and assessment practices as transformational processes; graduate capabilities as outputs; and stakeholder feedback as regulatory mechanisms that enable adaptation (Turner & Baker, 2019).

A systems perspective foregrounds several insights. Firstly, curriculum misalignment may emerge not from isolated deficiencies but from breakdowns in interconnections between components. Secondly, institutional enablers – such as leadership support, governance agility and resource alignment – serve as boundary conditions that influence system performance. Thirdly, feedback loops are essential for continuous renewal in rapidly evolving professional contexts.

Despite the explanatory potential of systems theory, its application within HRM curriculum research remains limited. Existing studies tend to examine discrete elements – competence requirements, stakeholder perceptions or assessment practices – without integrating them within a coherent systemic architecture.

Research gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates substantial scholarship on curriculum theory, HRM competence frameworks,

employability models and stakeholder engagement. Despite extensive scholarship, a central gap persists: the absence of a systemically integrated, empirically grounded framework that explains how HRM competence development is operationalised through curriculum design, stakeholder engagement, assessment practices and institutional governance within the South African context.

The discipline of HRM is the interface of multiple knowledge domains, mediating between academic knowledge and situated professional practice. In addition, in South Africa, it is shaped by regulatory, professional and labour market forces, as well as internal academic logics. Human resource management is, therefore, not only applied management but also a space where theory is operationalised in organisational practice and where practice-based knowledge feeds back into theory, curriculum and research. This perspective moves away from a 'skills delivery' imperative towards an epistemic mediation role.

Unlike disciplines like medicine, law or engineering, HRM knowledge is plural, contested and context-dependent. Professional authority is shared between academia, professional bodies and employers. Human resource management competence is judged by a combination of technical mastery, ethical judgement, relational capability and contextual intelligence.

The nature of HRM knowledge and competence makes it vulnerable to reductive competence mapping, managerial instrumentalism and policy-driven curriculum design. The proposed framework fills gaps by framing employability formation in a curriculum-centred manner, integrating professional standards into curriculum design, and providing a global South African perspective on employability. The framework discussed in this article responds directly to these vulnerabilities.

Research design

Philosophical positioning and research approach

This study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, which assumes that social realities, including professional competence and curriculum alignment, are co-constructed through stakeholder interpretations and institutional practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From this perspective, HRM graduate competence is not a fixed entity, but a socially negotiated construct shaped by professional standards, organisational expectations and academic interpretations. A qualitative approach was therefore appropriate, as the study sought to explore meanings, relationships and systemic dynamics rather than to test predetermined hypotheses.

The qualitative design further aligns with the study's objective of developing a theory-informed framework. Rather than measuring existing variables, the study aimed to synthesise theoretical insights and stakeholder perspectives to generate a contextually grounded, systems-oriented curriculum model and associated evaluative instruments.

Sequential qualitative research strategy

A sequential qualitative design was employed, consisting of two interrelated phases: (1) a thematic literature review and (2) semi-structured stakeholder interviews. This design followed a theory–data–integration logic.

In Phase 1, a structured thematic literature review was conducted to synthesise scholarship on HRM competence requirements, curriculum design theory, employability frameworks, stakeholder engagement and systems perspectives. This phase established a provisional conceptual scaffold identifying competence domains and curriculum alignment principles (Beretu & Charles, 2025).

In Phase 2, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HRM academics and representatives of professional bodies. The interview protocol was informed by Phase 1 findings, ensuring conceptual coherence between literature-derived constructs and empirical inquiry. Interview data were then analysed inductively and deductively to validate, refine and contextualise the emerging framework.

This sequential strategy enhanced conceptual rigour by ensuring that the proposed framework was neither purely deductive nor solely emergent, but rather developed through iterative engagement between theory and stakeholder experience.

Research context and setting

The study was situated within the South African higher education context, focusing specifically on undergraduate HRM programmes at a selected public university. South Africa's high youth unemployment rate (Statistics South Africa, 2025), evolving HR professional standards (SABPP, 2025) and digital transformation pressures provide a context in which curriculum responsiveness is particularly salient.

The selection of a single institution was purposive and theoretically justified. The institution represents a typical South African public university offering accredited HRM programmes aligned with SABPP standards, thereby providing a relevant and information-rich case reflective of broader national curriculum structures. This case enabled in-depth exploration of systemic curriculum processes, which would not have been possible in a multi-site, shallow design. While not statistically representative, the case is analytically representative of HRM curriculum governance dynamics in South Africa.

Literature review procedure (Phase 1)

The first phase involved a structured, thematic literature review of publications from 2013 to 2024. Articles were sourced from African Online Scientific Information Systems (AOSIS) and Web of Science databases. Search terms included combinations of HRM competence, graduate employability, curriculum design, competence-based education, stakeholder engagement, HR professional standards, systems theory and curriculum.

The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Moher et al., 2010) to enhance transparency in the identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion of articles. Inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed English-language journal articles addressing HRM competence, professional education, employability or curriculum systems. Exclusion criteria included opinion pieces without empirical or theoretical grounding, non-peer-reviewed sources and studies unrelated to higher education or professional development.

Articles were screened for conceptual relevance and methodological rigour. Extracted data were thematically organised to identify recurring competence domains, curriculum alignment principles and governance themes. These themes informed the preliminary conceptual framework that guided Phase 2 data collection.

Participants and sampling (Phase 2)

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants with direct knowledge of HRM curriculum design and professional competence standards (Akkaş & Meydan, 2024). The sample comprised:

- Fourteen HRM academics involved in curriculum design, delivery or review at the selected university.
- Three board members of the SABPP, selected for their roles in setting and evaluating professional standards.

Participants represented varying academic ranks and levels of professional experience, enhancing the diversity of perspectives within the bounded institutional context. The inclusion of professional body representatives strengthened external stakeholder representation, although industry participation was mediated through professional governance structures rather than direct employer sampling (Beretu, 2026; Beretu & Charles, 2025).

Data saturation was monitored through iterative analysis. After 17 interviews, no substantively new thematic insights emerged, consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) guidance on qualitative sampling adequacy. Saturation was assessed based on thematic redundancy rather than numerical thresholds.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams (Microsoft Inc., Redmond, WA, US) with each session lasting approximately 25–40 min. The interview guide was informed by the literature review and explored:

- required competencies for contemporary HRM practice
- perceived curriculum alignment or misalignment
- stakeholder engagement processes
- assessment practices
- institutional and governance constraints.

Interviews were recorded with participant consent. Verbatim transcription was undertaken, and transcripts were anonymised using participant codes (e.g. R1 for academics; M1 for SABPP members). Field notes were maintained to capture contextual observations and reflexive insights (Beretu, 2026; Beretu & Charles, 2025).

The researcher's position as a doctoral candidate with experience in HRM education necessitated reflexive awareness to mitigate potential bias. Reflexive memos were maintained to document interpretive decisions and analytic reasoning throughout the research process.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework:

- Data familiarisation
- Coding
- Theme identification
- Theme review
- Theme naming
- Developing the narrative account.

Both deductive and inductive coding were employed. Deductive codes were derived from the literature review (e.g. competence domains, stakeholder engagement, assessment alignment), while inductive codes emerged from participant narratives. This dual strategy supported analytic depth while maintaining openness to contextual nuance (Beretu, 2026; Beretu & Charles, 2025).

ATLAS.ti software (Berlin, Germany) facilitated systematic coding, organisation and retrieval of data. Coding proceeded iteratively, with refinement of thematic categories through constant comparison across transcripts. Theme development followed a structured progression from raw data excerpts to coded segments and higher-order thematic categories, ensuring traceability between data and framework components.

The final framework and associated evaluative instruments were derived by mapping validated themes onto a systems-oriented architecture that links inputs, processes, enablers and outputs.

Trustworthiness and quality assurance

Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria:

- **Credibility** was enhanced through triangulation between literature review findings and stakeholder interviews, member checking of key interpretive summaries and iterative engagement with data.
- **Transferability** was enhanced through a comprehensive description of the institutional context and the roles of participants.
- **Dependability** was strengthened through maintenance of an audit trail documenting search procedures, coding decisions, theme refinement and framework derivation.

- **Confirmability** was addressed through reflexive documentation and grounding interpretations in verbatim participant quotations.

Methodological delimitations

The study was conducted within a single institutional context and included representation from one professional body. While this enabled depth and coherence in framework development, it limits statistical generalisation. The framework and associated instruments should therefore be regarded as contextually grounded and analytically generalisable, requiring further empirical validation across institutions and disciplines.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of South Africa, College of Economic and Management Sciences, Ethics Research Committee Human Resource Department (Ref. No. 2025_HRM_007 and 6763). All procedures complied with institutional regulations and the *Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)*, ensuring the confidentiality and secure management of data (Beretu, 2026).

Results

The results are presented in four stages aligned with the sequential qualitative design: (1) synthesis of literature-derived competence and curriculum themes, (2) stakeholder validation and contextual refinement of competence domains, (3) identification of systemic curriculum alignment gaps, and (4) development of a systems-oriented framework and associated evaluative instruments. The results integrate literature-derived constructs with empirical interview data, demonstrating how stakeholder perspectives validate, refine and extend theoretical insights. This strengthens the empirical grounding of the proposed framework.

Literature-derived competence architecture and curriculum principles

The thematic literature review identified a convergent pattern across HRM competence frameworks, employability theory and curriculum scholarship. Three interdependent competence domains consistently emerged as foundational to contemporary HRM practice: technical-digital capability, strategic-cognitive capability and relational-ethical capability (Coetzee, 2022; SABPP, 2025; Veldsman & Coetzee, 2022). These domains resonate with broader employability constructs such as human, social and psychological capital (Coetzee, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2017).

In addition to competence domains, the literature emphasised four curriculum design principles:

- Explicit competence articulation and alignment.
- Integration of theory and practice.
- Authentic assessment of applied capability.
- Cyclical review informed by stakeholder feedback (Nicholls & Nicholls, 2018; Tyler, 1949; Wheeler, 1967).

However, while these principles are well-documented, the review revealed limited integration between competence frameworks and curriculum governance mechanisms within the South African HRM context (Beretu, 2026). This gap informed the second empirical phase, which sought stakeholder validation and contextual elaboration.

Stakeholder validation and contextualisation of competence domains

Interview findings largely validated the tripartite competence structure derived from the literature while adding contextual nuance regarding perceived weaknesses. Table 1 summarises the competencies most frequently emphasised by participants. Table 1 is presented to illustrate thematic salience across respondents rather than to imply quantitative measurement.

Table 1 demonstrates that communication and relational capability were consistently emphasised, reinforcing the relational-ethical domain. References on technological and data literacy validated the technical-digital domain, particularly in relation to HR analytics and digital systems. Strategic-cognitive capabilities such as business acumen, critical thinking and problem-solving were also recurrent.

Importantly, participants did not describe these competencies as isolated attributes. Rather, they emphasised their interdependence. For example, digital proficiency was frequently linked to ethical judgement and business interpretation, suggesting that competence development must be integrative rather than modular (Beretu, 2026).

Illustrative quotations underscored this integration:

‘Students come out with lots of theory, but when it comes to practical application, such as using HR systems, interpreting data, and handling real employee relations issues, they struggle. There’s a gap between knowing and doing.’ (Academic R5, Male, Senior Lecturer, 10-15 years experience)

‘The profession has moved on. HR is now about data, strategy, and ethics. Graduates need to be ready to work from day one and not just know the theory.’ (SABPP M2, Male, Board Member, 20+ years experience)

These findings indicate that misalignment is not conceptual disagreement about required competencies, but rather

concerns the processes through which those competencies are cultivated.

Systemic curriculum alignment gaps

Analysis revealed that curriculum misalignment was sustained primarily by systemic and procedural dynamics rather than by the absence of competence awareness (Beretu & Charles, 2025). Four interrelated themes emerged: fragmented stakeholder engagement, disjuncture between theory and practice, assessment misalignment and institutional barriers.

Fragmented stakeholder engagement

Participants widely acknowledged the importance of stakeholder collaboration. Table 2 summarises stakeholder groups identified as essential to curriculum design.

Table 2 reflects broad agreement on the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement. However, qualitative narratives revealed that engagement was typically episodic, occurring primarily during periodic programme reviews rather than embedded throughout the curriculum lifecycle.

As one participant noted:

‘Industry is only consulted when we do programme reviews every 5 years. That’s not enough. By the time we’ve made changes, the workplace has moved on again.’ (Academic R9, Female, Professor, 15+ years experience)

Thus, the issue was not the lack of stakeholder awareness, but the limited integration of stakeholder input into governance processes.

Disjuncture between theory and practice

Participants consistently identified a gap between conceptual instruction and applied competence. Curricula were described as knowledge-rich, but insufficiently scaffolded towards authentic workplace application. This theme aligns with literature critiques of content-driven rather than competence-driven programme design (Nicholls & Nicholls, 2018; Tyler, 1949).

The disjuncture manifested in the limited use of simulations, workplace-based projects or digital HR systems. Participants emphasised that without progressive integration of applied tasks, graduates struggled to translate theoretical understanding into practice.

TABLE 1: Capabilities human resource management graduates should possess upon entering the workplace.

Capability	Respondents
Communication	R1, R2, R3, R7, R9, R10, R12, R13, R14
Technological	R2, R3, R4, R5, R14
Ethical	R10, R12, R13, R14
Problem-solving	R1, R2, R9, R12
Critical thinking	R1, R9, R14
Integrity	R7, R10, R11
Data and analytical literacy	R2, R8, R9
Adaptability and/or resilience	R10, R14
Business acumen	R8
Interpersonal and/or relational	R12, R13

Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa

TABLE 2: Stakeholders identified as essential to curriculum design.

Stakeholder	Respondents
Industry leaders and employers	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R12, R13, R14
Academics and lecturers	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R11, R12, R13, R14
Professional bodies (SABPP, IPM)	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R8, R10, R11, R12, R13
Alumni	R1, R2, R3, R5, R6, R7, R9, R10, R12
Government officials	R1, R2, R4, R8, R10, R13
Students	R3, R12

Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa
SABPP, South African Board for People Practices; IPM, Institute of People Management.

Assessment misalignment

Assessment practices emerged as a central structural constraint. Heavy reliance on traditional examinations was perceived as privileging recall and theoretical exposition over competence demonstration (Beretu, 2026; Beretu & Charles, 2025):

'Examinations are a complete waste of time as they assess human capacity in terms of memory retention ... We need workplace-based projects, portfolios of evidence.' (Academic R4, Male, Lecturer, 5-10 years experience)

This critique reinforces the argument that assessment design serves as a powerful signalling mechanism, shaping student engagement and competence development.

Institutional and governance constraints

Finally, participants highlighted institutional factors, including rigid curriculum approval processes, workload pressures and resource limitations. These systemic enablers and constraints shaped the feasibility of innovation and limited curriculum agility.

Collectively, these themes suggested that curriculum misalignment is systemic: competence expectations are understood, yet processes and governance mechanisms inhibit coherent integration.

Development of the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework

The framework was derived through a three-stage analytic process:

- Theme identification (literature + interviews).
- Theme clustering into system components (inputs, processes, enablers, outputs).
- Mapping themes to framework architecture and instruments.

This process ensured traceability from raw data to framework components, addressing concerns regarding transparency in framework derivation.

Drawing on both literature synthesis and stakeholder validation, the findings were mapped into a systems-oriented architecture that links competence inputs, development processes, contextual enablers and outputs through feedback loops. Figure 1 presents the resulting Integrated Curriculum Development Framework.

Figure 1 illustrates four interrelated components:

- Inputs: competence domains.
- Processes: pedagogy, assessment, stakeholder co-design.
- Enablers: institutional governance and resources.
- Outputs: graduate employability and feedback loops.

Foundational inputs define the competence framework, encompassing technical-digital, strategic-cognitive and

relational-ethical domains. These are derived from literature, professional standards and stakeholder validation.

Core development processes operationalise competence development through stakeholder-integrated curriculum co-design, pedagogy of integration and authentic competence assessment. These processes function synergistically to translate inputs into graduate capability.

Contextual enablers acknowledge that successful implementation depends on leadership commitment, academic capacity development, governance agility and resource alignment within the institutional ecosystem.

Outputs and feedback encompass work-ready HRM graduates, with evidence from employers, professional bodies and alumni informing continuous curriculum review and renewal.

The framework conceptualises the curriculum as an interconnected and evolving system rather than a set of isolated components. The figure illustrates the central insight emerging from the data: defining graduate competencies in isolation is inadequate unless supported by aligned teaching and learning processes, appropriate assessment practices, active stakeholder engagement and enabling institutional governance conditions.

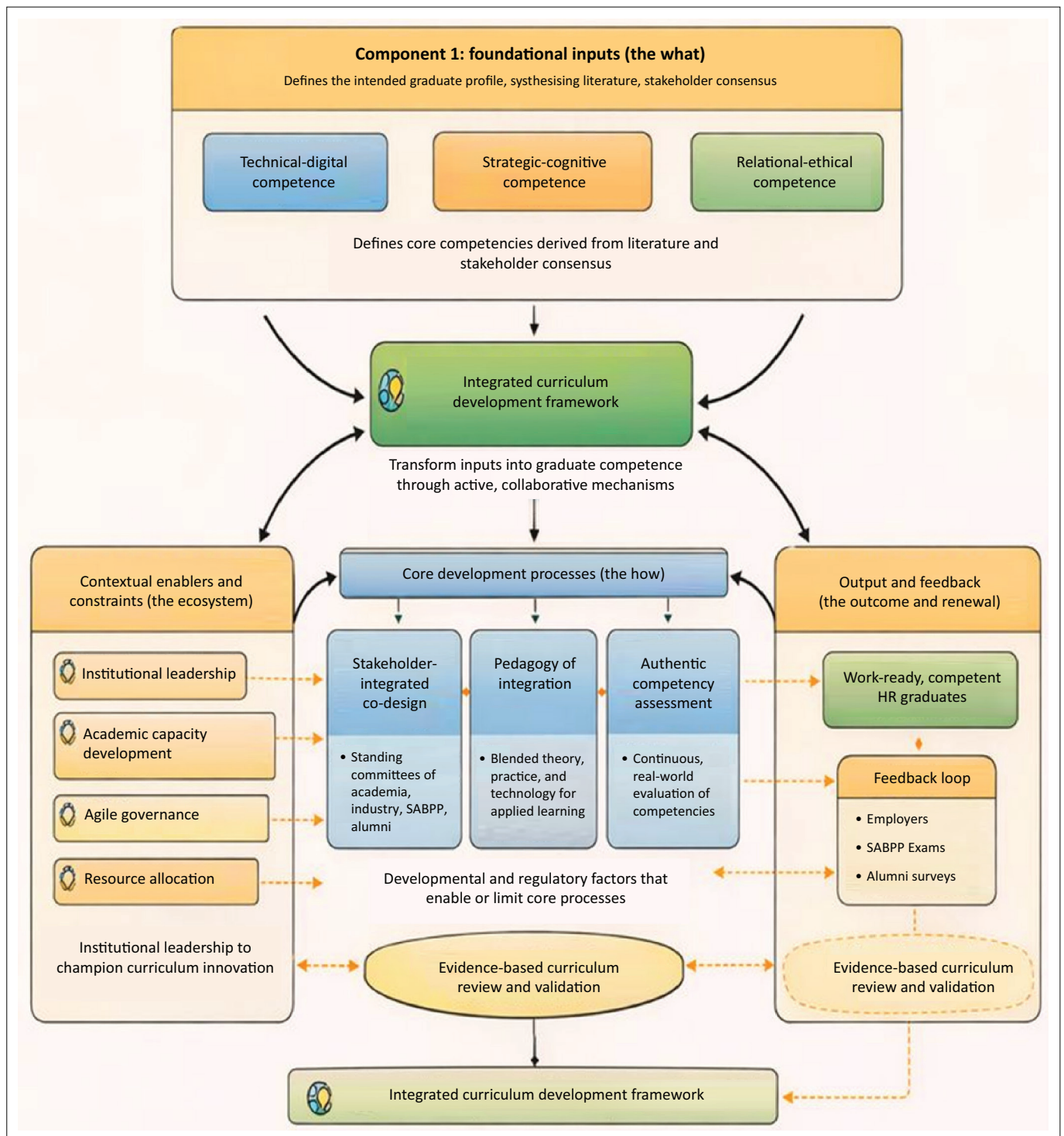
The derivation of the governance instruments followed a traceable mapping logic from empirical themes to framework components and subsequently to evaluative criteria. For example, the theme of fragmented stakeholder engagement informed the framework component 'Stakeholder-Integrated Curriculum Co-Design', which was operationalised in the scorecard through criteria such as B1.1 (Formal co-design structures) and B1.2 (Lifecycle engagement). Similarly, the theme of assessment misalignment informed the 'Authentic Competence Assessment' component and was translated into criteria assessing authentic assessment design and competence-aligned evaluation practices. This mapping process ensured conceptual coherence between qualitative findings, the systems framework and the proposed instruments.

Operationalisation through governance instruments

To translate the framework into evaluative tools, two prototype instruments were developed: an HRM curriculum scorecard and an accreditation rubric. These instruments were derived by mapping validated themes onto observable criteria within each system component.

Human resource management curriculum scorecard

To translate the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework into a practical evaluative tool, an HRM curriculum scorecard was developed. The scorecard provides



Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa

SABPP, South African Board for People Practices; HR, human resource.

FIGURE 1: The Integrated Curriculum Development Framework for human resource management programmes in South Africa.

a structured diagnostic mechanism for assessing the extent to which competence architecture, curriculum processes, institutional enablers and feedback mechanisms are systematically embedded within an HRM programme, as reflected in the scoring scale outlined in Table 3.

The scale reflects progressive levels of curriculum maturity rather than binary compliance. It enables diagnostic

assessment across foundational inputs, processes, enablers and outputs.

Appendix 1 presents the practical HRM curriculum scorecard, derived directly from the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework. It is designed as a diagnostic and developmental tool, not merely an audit instrument, and can be used by programme review panels, curriculum

TABLE 3: Scoring scale for the human resource management curriculum scorecard.

Score	Descriptor
0	Not evident
1	Minimally evident (informal or ad hoc)
2	Partially evident (inconsistent)
3	Mostly evident (structured, but room for improvement)
4	Fully evident (embedded, systematic, evidence-based)

Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa

committees, HRM departments and professional bodies (e.g. for advisory or accreditation input). The structure mirrors the framework components (inputs → processes → ecosystem → outputs and feedback), ensuring conceptual alignment between the Framework and the scorecard.

The scorecard operationalises system elements into assessable criteria, linking competence articulation, stakeholder integration, pedagogy, assessment, governance and feedback mechanisms. It is proposed as a developmental tool rather than a prescriptive compliance instrument.

Accreditation rubric

Developing an HRM programme accreditation rubric based on the HRM curriculum scorecard is both methodologically sound and practically justified. The scorecard provides a structured, evidence-based articulation of the core competence domains, curriculum design principles and contextual imperatives that define quality and relevance in HRM education. Translating these criteria into an accreditation rubric enables a systematic, transparent evaluation of HRM programmes against clearly defined performance levels, rather than a binary, compliance-driven judgement. The rubric, therefore, operationalises the scorecard by converting its dimensions into measurable standards that can be applied consistently across institutions, supporting comparability, fairness and defensibility in accreditation decisions. Moreover, the rubric strengthens alignment between curriculum design, graduate competence outcomes, and professional and regulatory expectations, ensuring that accreditation judgements are anchored in the same integrated competence logic that informed curriculum development. In this way, the accreditation rubric functions not only as a quality assurance instrument but also as a developmental tool that guides programme enhancement, continuous improvement, and alignment with evolving HRM practice and labour market demands.

The accreditation rubric is designed to support programme accreditation and re-accreditation, as well as quality assurance, by providing transparent, standardised criteria aligned with the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework.

The rubric serves as an applied evaluative instrument designed to operationalise the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework for HRM programmes and to support systematic curriculum review, quality assurance and accreditation decision-making.

Derivation of the accreditation rubric

The derivation of the rubric followed a theory–data–application sequence, consistent with qualitative instrument development in applied educational and HRM research.

Phase 1: Theoretical grounding

The first phase involved a systematic synthesis of the literature reviewed. Key constructs relating to competence development, employability, HRM curriculum design and professional education were extracted and grouped thematically. Particular attention was given to frameworks emphasising:

- competence-based education and capability development
- theory–practice integration
- stakeholder engagement in curriculum design
- authentic assessment of professional competence
- institutional enablers of curriculum innovation.

These constructs provided the conceptual domains that underpin the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework and, by extension, the rubric's structure.

Phase 2: Framework-to-criteria mapping

In the second phase, each component of the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework was systematically translated into observable and assessable criteria. This ensured construct validity by maintaining direct alignment between the framework and the evaluative instrument.

Specifically:

- Foundational inputs were operationalised as criteria relating to the clarity, coherence and evidence base of the HRM graduate competence profile.
- Core development processes were translated into criteria assessing stakeholder-integrated curriculum co-design, pedagogy of integration and authentic competence assessment.
- Contextual enablers and constraints informed criteria relating to leadership support, academic capacity development, governance responsiveness and resource alignment.
- Outputs and feedback loops were operationalised as criteria evaluating graduate employability evidence, stakeholder feedback mechanisms and evidence-based curriculum review cycles.

This mapping process ensured that each rubric criterion could be traced to both the conceptual framework and the study's empirical findings.

Phase 3: Performance-level construction

The third phase involved constructing four performance levels (non-compliant to fully compliant or exemplary) for each criterion. These levels were designed to:

- reflect progressive stages of curriculum maturity

TABLE 4: Performance levels and descriptors.

Level	Descriptor
1	Non-compliant
2	Partially compliant
3	Substantially compliant
4	Fully compliant or exemplary

Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa

- distinguish between superficial compliance and embedded practice
- enable diagnostic as well as summative evaluation.

To operationalise the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework for external evaluation and accreditation, performance standards were articulated as graduated compliance levels. Table 4 presents these performance levels and their descriptors, which provide a structured basis for distinguishing between minimal, partial, substantial and exemplary implementation of curriculum governance practices. The table establishes the evaluative logic underpinning the accreditation rubric by clarifying how programme quality and alignment can be assessed transparently, in a criterion-referenced manner, rather than through binary compliance judgements.

Descriptors for each level were written in behavioural, evidence-based language, allowing evaluators to anchor their judgements in documented practices rather than on perceptions alone. This approach enhances reliability and consistency across reviewers.

Building on the performance levels outlined in Appendix 1, Appendix 2 presents the full HRM programme accreditation rubric derived from the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework. The rubric translates the framework's core components – foundational competence architecture, development processes, contextual enablers and output validation mechanisms – into explicit evaluative criteria with differentiated performance descriptors. In doing so, it provides a structured instrument for assessing the extent to which HRM programmes demonstrate coherent, embedded and evidence-based curriculum practices aligned with professional standards and graduate employability objectives.

The two-instrument approach enables strategic oversight and quality assurance. The HRM curriculum scorecard serves as a diagnostic tool, while the accreditation rubric provides a detailed evaluation of compliance. Decision-making across all phases of curriculum development is simplified by the HRM curriculum scorecard, which provides a basis for resource prioritisation. On the other hand, the accreditation rubric serves as a measurement tool to determine curricula's accreditation status and enables standardisation across qualifications.

Together, the HRM curriculum scorecard and accreditation rubric extend the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework into actionable governance instruments, enabling

institutions to move beyond conceptual alignment towards measurable, accountable and continuously improving HRM education.

It is important to emphasise that the HRM curriculum scorecard and accreditation rubric are exploratory governance prototypes derived from qualitative insights and theory–data integration within a single institutional context. They are not presented as psychometrically validated accreditation instruments but as conceptually grounded tools requiring further empirical testing, refinement and validation across institutional settings.

The results demonstrate that HRM curriculum misalignment is not primarily conceptual but systemic, thus synthesising these findings within a systems perspective. The associated scorecard and rubric represent prototype operational tools derived from empirical themes and theoretical integration. Further validation and cross-institutional testing are required. Competence expectations are broadly shared across literature and stakeholders; however, fragmented stakeholder integration, limited theory–practice scaffolding, assessment misalignment and governance constraints disrupt coherence.

Discussion

This study developed an Integrated Curriculum Development Framework for HRM programmes to address persistent misalignment between graduate competence and professional expectations within the South African context. The findings indicate that misalignment is not primarily attributable to disagreement regarding required competencies. Rather, both literature and stakeholder perspectives converge around a tripartite competence structure comprising technical-digital, strategic-cognitive and relational-ethical domains (Coetzee, 2022; SABPP, 2025; Veldsman & Coetzee, 2022).

The critical insight emerging from the data is systemic: competence expectations are broadly understood, yet curriculum processes, assessment practices, stakeholder engagement mechanisms and institutional governance structures are insufficiently integrated to support coherent competence development. Fragmented stakeholder consultation, theory-heavy pedagogical approaches, assessment practices privileging knowledge recall and rigid institutional approval processes collectively disrupt alignment. These findings echo prior scholarship on employability and curriculum fragmentation (Cheng et al., 2022; Scott, 2018), but extend it by demonstrating how these elements interact within a broader curriculum system rather than operating as isolated deficiencies.

The framework developed in this study, therefore, conceptualises curriculum not as a linear sequence of outcomes and modules, but as a dynamic system in which competence architecture, developmental processes, contextual enablers and feedback loops are interdependent. This systems orientation, grounded in GST (Turner & Baker, 2019; Von Bertalanffy, 1968), provides a structured explanation for why piecemeal curriculum reforms often yield limited impact.

The integration of literature and stakeholder data strengthens the empirical basis of the findings, demonstrating that the identified misalignment is not hypothetical but grounded in practitioner and academic experience.

Theoretical implications

This study extends classical curriculum alignment models (Nicholls & Nicholls, 2018; Tyler, 1949; Wheeler, 1967) by embedding them within a systems-oriented governance framework tailored to HRM education. Drawing on organisational systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968), the findings suggest that curriculum alignment must move beyond objectives, pedagogy and assessment to incorporate stakeholder co-governance and institutional enabling conditions. The framework further integrates HR professional standards (Falletta & Combs, 2021; SABPP, 2025; Ulrich, 2020) with employability theory (Coetzee, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2017), conceptualising competence not as a static graduate attribute but as an emergent property of integrated curriculum systems. In reframing misalignment as systemic rather than content-based (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022; Nafukho et al., 2024), the study shifts attention from what should be taught to how curriculum systems function.

Practical implications for higher education institutions

The Integrated Curriculum Development Framework provides HRM departments with a structured lens for evaluating programme coherence. The HRM curriculum scorecard serves as a developmental diagnostic tool to assess competence articulation, scaffolding, stakeholder integration and authentic assessment. The findings underscore that meaningful reform requires aligned assessment redesign and digital integration; without these, competence-based curricula risk remaining symbolic.

Managerial and governance implications

Institutional leadership, governance agility, workload recognition and academic capacity development were identified as critical enablers of curriculum responsiveness. Curriculum reform, therefore, requires coordinated institutional support rather than isolated module-level initiatives. For professional bodies such as the SABPP (2025), the accreditation rubric offers a structured basis for programme evaluation, though further empirical validation is required. The findings also highlight the need for sustained, formalised stakeholder engagement mechanisms beyond periodic consultation.

Policy implications

At the policy level, enhancing graduate employability (Statistics South Africa, 2025) requires governance frameworks that balance accountability with agility. Streamlined approval processes and enabling regulatory environments may support more responsive curriculum renewal in rapidly evolving professional contexts.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, the research was undertaken within a single institutional setting, focusing on one South African university's undergraduate HRM programme. While this enabled in-depth exploration and contextual sensitivity, it limits statistical generalisability. The framework should therefore be regarded as analytically transferable rather than universally generalisable.

Secondly, although purposively selected, stakeholder representation was limited to HRM academics and representatives of a single professional body (SABPP). Direct participation from employers, alumni and students was not included in the interview phase. Although these stakeholder groups were discussed by participants and reflected in the literature synthesis, their direct voices were not empirically captured, which may constrain the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Thirdly, the study relied on qualitative data from participants' self-reports. While triangulation between the literature and interview findings strengthened credibility, the absence of observational or document analysis data limits insight into enacted curriculum practices. Additionally, interviews of 25–40 min, while sufficient for thematic saturation, may not have captured deeper organisational dynamics influencing curriculum governance.

Fourthly, the HRM curriculum scorecard and accreditation rubric were derived through theory–data integration but were not subjected to empirical validation procedures such as pilot implementation, inter-rater reliability testing or psychometric analysis. The instruments should therefore be regarded as prototype governance tools requiring further refinement and validation.

The absence of direct employer data represents a limitation. While SABPP representatives provided professional insight, future research should incorporate direct employer perspectives to strengthen external validity. Expanding the institutional scope in future studies will enable comparative validation of the framework across diverse higher education contexts.

Finally, the researcher's professional background in HRM education, while beneficial for contextual understanding, required reflexive awareness to mitigate potential interpretive bias. Although reflexive documentation was maintained, qualitative interpretation remains inherently shaped by researcher positionality.

Recommendations

The findings highlight several priorities for future research and development. Firstly, the Integrated Curriculum Development Framework, HRM curriculum scorecard and accreditation rubric require empirical validation across multiple institutions. Pilot studies and action research

designs could assess implementation feasibility, contextual adaptation and the impact on curriculum coherence, while quantitative analyses should examine reliability and construct validity to strengthen the defensibility of these approaches for quality assurance purposes.

Secondly, broader stakeholder inclusion is recommended. Future research should incorporate employers, alumni, students and policymakers to triangulate perspectives on competence development and curriculum alignment, including comparative studies across diverse institutional contexts. Longitudinal tracking of HRM graduates would further clarify the relationship between curriculum design and employability outcomes over time.

Finally, the framework's applicability beyond HRM warrants exploration. Cross-disciplinary studies could test its relevance in other professional programmes, while integrating the scorecard into institutional quality management systems may enable data-driven monitoring and benchmarking to support continuous curriculum renewal.

Conclusion

This study addressed the persistent misalignment between HRM graduate competence and professional expectations in South Africa by developing a systems-oriented Integrated Curriculum Development Framework. Based on a thematic review of the literature and insights from stakeholders, the study identified three interrelated competence domains – technical-digital, strategic-cognitive and relational-ethical – and demonstrated that curriculum misalignment is largely a systemic issue rather than one rooted solely in content. The findings highlight that defining competencies alone is insufficient unless supported by aligned pedagogical processes, authentic assessment practices, structured stakeholder engagement and enabling institutional governance conditions.

By integrating competence architecture, curriculum processes, contextual enablers and feedback mechanisms within a coherent system, the framework advances a governance-oriented approach to HRM curriculum reform. The accompanying HRM curriculum scorecard and accreditation rubric extend the framework into prototype evaluative instruments intended to support structured curriculum review and quality assurance. While further empirical validation is required, the study contributes a contextually grounded model that reframes graduate employability as an outcome of integrated curriculum systems rather than isolated curriculum adjustments.

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A related article focusing on the alignment between university assessment practices and workplace performance expectations has been published in *SAJHRM*, 23(0), a2808. The present article addresses a distinct research question: the development of an integrated curriculum governance framework.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

CRediT authorship contribution

Tendency Beretu: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft. Mariette Coetzee: Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. Jo-Anne Botha: Conceptualisation, Resources, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication, and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Mariette Coetzee, upon reasonable request.

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Appendix starts on the next page →

Appendix 1

TABLE 1-A1: The human resource management curriculum scorecard.

Criterion	Key indicators	Score (0–4)	Evidence / Notes
Foundational inputs – The ‘what’			
A1. Explicit graduate competence profile	The graduate profile clearly articulates technical-digital, strategic-cognitive and relational-ethical competencies.	-	-
A2. Literature-informed competence design	Competencies are grounded in current HRM, HRD and employability literature	-	-
A3. Stakeholder-informed competence inputs	Employers, alumni and professional bodies contributed to defining competencies	-	-
A4. Alignment across curriculum documents	Competence profile is consistently reflected in outcomes, modules and assessments	-	-
A subtotal: __ / 16			
Stakeholder-integrated curriculum co-design			
B1.1 Formal co-design structures	Standing committees / advisory boards with industry and professional bodies	-	-
B1.2 Lifecycle engagement	Stakeholders involved in design, delivery, review and validation	-	-
B1.3 Documented decision-making	Evidence of stakeholder input influencing curriculum changes	-	-
B1 subtotal: __ / 12			
Pedagogy of integration			
B2.1 Theory–practice integration	Modules explicitly link theory to applied HR practice	-	-
B2.2 Digital integration	HR technologies, analytics and digital tools embedded in learning activities	-	-
B2.3 Active learning approaches	Use of simulations, case-based learning, projects, WIL and problem-based learning	-	-
B2.4 Progressive competence development	Learning activities scaffold competence development across levels	-	-
B2 subtotal: __ / 16			
Authentic competence assessment			
B3.1 Authentic assessment design	Use of portfolios, integrated projects, simulations and workplace tasks	-	-
B3.2 Continuous assessment	Formative assessment supports competence development over time	-	-
B3.3 Assessment alignment	Assessment explicitly evaluates the application of competencies	-	-
B3.4 Transparent criteria	Rubrics linked to defined competencies	-	-
B3 subtotal: __ / 16			
SECTION B TOTAL: ____ / 44			
Contextual enablers and constraints – The ecosystem			
C1. Institutional leadership support	Senior leadership actively supports curriculum innovation	-	-
C2. Academic capacity development	Staff receive CPD in digital pedagogy, assessment and HR practice	-	-
C3. Governance agility	Curriculum approval and revision processes enable timely updates	-	-
C4. Resource alignment	Adequate digital, financial and staffing resources support delivery	-	-
C5. Workload recognition	Curriculum innovation recognised in workload and performance models	-	-
C subtotal: __ / 20			
Outputs, feedback and validation – the outcome and renewal			
D1. Graduate employability outcomes	Evidence of work-ready HR graduates (employment, roles, progression)	-	-
D2. Employer feedback	Systematic collection and use of employer feedback	-	-
D3. Alumni feedback	Alumni surveys inform curriculum refinement	-	-
D4. Professional body alignment	Curriculum aligned with professional standards (e.g. SABPP)	-	-
D5. Evidence-based review cycles	Regular curriculum review informed by performance data	-	-
D subtotal: __ / 20			
Overall score summary			
Section		Maximum	Score
Section A: Foundational Inputs		16	-
Section B: Core Processes		44	-
Section C: Ecosystem		20	-
Section D: Outputs & Feedback		20	-
Total 100			
Score interpretation			
Interpretation		-	Score
Fragmented curriculum with limited competence coherence		-	0–39
Emerging alignment; significant gaps in process integration		-	40–59
Largely aligned competence-based curriculum; targeted improvements needed		-	60–79
Fully integrated, evidence-based competence development system		-	80–100

Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa

HRM, human resource management; HR, human resource; SABPP, South African Board for People Practices; HRD, Human Resource Development; WIL, Work integrated Learning; CPD, Continuing Professional Development.

Appendix 2

TABLE 1-A2: Accreditation rubric.

Criterion	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Foundational curriculum framework (The what)				
Defined graduate competence profile	No explicit competence framework	Generic outcomes stated	Clear competence profile defined	Evidence-based, stakeholder-validated competence framework
Alignment across the curriculum	No alignment	Partial alignment	Consistent alignment across modules	Fully integrated and coherently scaffolded
Core development processes (The how)				
Stakeholder-integrated curriculum co-design				
Industry and professional engagement	Absent	Ad hoc consultation	Formal advisory structures	Continuous co-design and documented influence
Pedagogy of integration				
Theory–practice integration	Content-driven	Some applied components	Applied learning embedded	Fully integrated, scaffolded applied pedagogy
Digital competence integration	Absent	Optional	Embedded in selected modules	Systematically embedded across the programme
Authentic competence assessment				
Assessment design	Traditional exams only	Mixed methods	Competency-focused assessment	Authentic, continuous, workplace-aligned assessment
Contextual enablers (The ecosystem)				
Institutional leadership	No support	Passive support	Active endorsement	Strategic leadership and resourcing
Academic capacity development	None	Limited	Structured CPD	Ongoing, competency-focused development
Governance responsiveness	Rigid	Slow	Moderately responsive	Agile and innovation-enabling
Outputs, validation and continuous improvement (Objective 5)				
Graduate employability evidence	None	Anecdotal	Tracked outcomes	Strong, verified employability data
Feedback mechanisms	Absent	Informal	Formal but irregular	Systematic, evidence-driven feedback loop
Curriculum review cycle	Irregular	Compliance-driven	Scheduled reviews	Continuous, evidence-based renewal
Accreditation decision guidance				
Predominantly Level 1–2	-	-	Accreditation not recommended	-
Predominantly Level 3	-	-	Accreditation recommended with conditions	-
Predominantly Level 4	-	-	Accreditation recommended (good/exemplary practice)	-

Source: Beretu, T. (2026). *A competency-based Industry 4.0 curriculum development framework for developing human resource management graduate employability in South Africa*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa

CPD, Continuing Professional Development.