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## GLOBALISATION AND CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN EXPLORATORY ENQUIRY

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**Abstract.** Globalisation is a broad concept that has continuously impacted various aspects of human endeavours. Globalisation has influenced the realignment of business strategies as well as impacted the availability of jobs in many countries. In modern organisations, managers must understand how current globalisation impacts employment situations. Since the dawn of contemporary globalisation in the early 1990s, several path breaking advances have emerged. These advances have also impacted the ways works are coordinated in the workplace. For instance, recently the use of independent contractors has increased as opposed to permanent appointed employees. As a matter of fact, globalisation has impacted employment situations in several ways. Hence, the current paper is an attempt to explore how globalisation has impacted employment situations in South Africa. The main finding of the paper revealed that there is a rising trend in job insecurity in most organisations owing to advanced sophisticated technologies and the utilisation of more atypical employment pattern in the form of casualisation.

**Keywords:** Globalization; Employment situation; Technology; Casual employees



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#### Introduction

Global historians argue that globalisation is a trend that started ages ago (O'Rourke and Williamson, 2002). In other words, the globalisation concept has been around for centuries. It is a trend that became a wildfire toward the end of the 1980s but was not entirely a new phenomenon (Savrul & Ahmet, 2015). Navvar (2006) concurs with the above position by stating that globalisation is not entirely something new. In current globalisation era, employees are beginning to enter into agreements directly with their employer without union representation. Abbott (2006) was of the view that new developments have moved collective bargaining down to the level of the firm. In concurrence, Pulignano, Kohler, & Stewart, (2016) mention that there has been a rise in the use of company-level agreements and a decline in sector and other multi-employer collective agreements (CA). This notable change in employment situations in terms of less utilisation of collective bargaining intensified to become the norm, since dawn of globalisation. Furthermore, the logics of globalisation although sometimes amoral became a key idea for business practices, which have stimulated several academic debates (Cuterela, 2012). Globalisation, no doubt has accelerated the transformation of human resource management, which includes talent management and employee engagements in organisations (Pace, 2011).

Other aspects of employment situations that have been impacted by globalisation, include working hours, labour market flexibility, pay related strategies and job security. According to Virkkunen (2018), unparalleled technological developments, shifting labour markets and recent job security threats are affecting many organisations globally. Competition from foreign competitor is indeed pressuring South African firms to improve their products to enable them to compete globally (Kolb, 2018). This may cause shifts in employment situations as production strategies are developed by organisations who want to remain competitive and sustainable. Stiff competition has also forced some organisations to close down, which has led to job destruction and losses (Olungo, 2017).

#### **Problem Statement**

Organisations need to articulate ways of managing changes in the employment situations, particularly when they face the realities of globalisation and its byproduct, namely the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution disruptive technological innovations. 404



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Globalisation has accelerated labour market volatility, such as job insecurity and decline in collective bargaining. The current state of affairs has adversely affected employment situations. Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of globalisation on employment situations globally. However, more study needs to be done in this domain within the SADC region, particularly in South Africa.

#### **Research Question**

How has globalisation impacted employment situations in South Africa?

### **Research Objectives**

• To explore how globalisation has impacted employment situations in South Africa.

#### Literature Review

Globalisation has accelerated competition between organisations globally. As a result, management is implementing strategies to boost quality, efficiency, and productivity (Spooner & Haidar, 2005). Globalisation entails the spreading of ideas, practices, and technologies (Cuterela, 2012). Ukpere (2009) indicated that globalisation has had an impact on technology same as technology has impacted globalisation. To become more competitive, organisations are now beginning to replace human labour with machine in the form of computers, robotics, and artificial intelligence, which are all products innovation. Currently without technological innovations organisations cannot maintain competitiveness. However, on the flipside this state of affairs has ultimately resulted in high level job insecurity, which negatively affects decent job creation. The current trend has negatively impacted employment situations and eroded the trust relationship in the workplace between employees and management.

The growing trend to embrace technological changes in the workplace has it own impact on employees' creativity, remuneration employment relations, and constant skill development (Lee & Kang, 2012). In recent times, organisations are currently making earnest efforts to train and develop their employees to handle some of the new emerging technologies. Certainly, training and development of employees have to a great extent some positive effects on employment relations, as employees perceive such as being valued and invested in. Conversely, it could create an opportunity for employees to seek alternative lucrative jobs in another organisation.

The use of new technology requires organisations to hire skilled workers to handle most of the jobs. This has impacted negatively on unskilled employees as many of them becomes automatically redundant, since they lack the skills to handle



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the modern implements of production, namely new technologies (Olungo, 2017). In addition, the current development would as a matter of fact lead to more demand for talent, which would render many employees obsolete, and as such, retrenched. The outcome of this new working conditions will certainly lead to tension and frustration. Owing to the retrenchment of redundant employees, the workload of the remaining employees may increase, which also increases the stress level of employees in the workplace. As a result of continuous training and development some employees are of the view the frequent training may also affect their quality of work life due to lack of relaxation time as they are constantly required to prepare for training on new technologies, which is made compulsory (Lee & Kang, 2012). However, this reinforces the concept of life-long learning for employees, which could also be perceived from a positive light both from the employees and management, as employers gain more talented employees in their workforce.

Currently, unemployment rate has accelerated globally, forcing people, particularly from developing nations, into global migration in search for more favourable working conditions else (Ukpere & Slabbert, 2009). Some of the major causes of workers displacements are labour-replacing technologies such as artificial intelligence and automated machines (Kolb, 2018). Those new technologies have the capabilities to displace employees from their jobs (Pietro, Girsberger, & Vuille, 2010). Indeed, technological advancement such as automation and robotics will certainly destroy some jobs, whilst at the same time creating new ones (Virkkunen, 2018).

#### Globalisation and casualisation

Previously, labour market changes have increased due to globalisation. There is a considerable expansion of non-regular labour, as well as the re-organisation of work, including massive downsizing (Lee & Kang, 2012). Kim et al. (2001) argue that the effects of globalisation are extensive. Ali (2005) highlights that globalisation has played a role in accelerating unemployment, casualisation and erosion of labour movements. Globalisation logics push firms to reduce their labour costs and increase labour mobility, thereby weakening trade union power to protect workers (Philips & Eamets, 2015). For example, the tenacious recession in Japan has encouraged the development of new strategies to reduce labour costs; for example, by employing casual workers (Kim et al., 2001).

Casualisation refers to hiring casual workers, which causes a decline in the number of employees that are employed permanently in full-time employment (Hudson, 2014). In the past twenty years, there has seemingly been an increase in



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the utilisation of casual labour in South Africa. Recently, at least 82.5% of firms in South Africa have hired casual employees (Standing, Sender, & Weeks, 1996). Furthermore, casual employees have minimum to no protection because trade unions do not generally represented them. Casualisation is also characterised by job insecurity, as most contracts may not be renewed (Hudson, 2014). Therefore, employers may prefer this employment pattern to reduce labour costs and to achieve flexibility by increasing working hours to increase productivity and efficiency. Conversely, employees may engage in casual labour to obtain the required experience that will enable them to obtain full-time employment. Standing et al. (1996) substantiate this by mentioning that such form of employment is perceived as a stepping stone to future standard employment. Engaging casual workers has adverse effects on the employment relationship (Olungo, 2017). The kind of employment relationship in casualisation makes it difficult for casual labourers to negotiate for a better pay.

### Restructuring of work in the era of globalisation

One specific aspect of globalisation is the intensity of the changes in the way things are done that have been witness across the globe (Cuterela, 2012). Managerial decision making in organisations is increasingly influenced by the global environmental forces rather than local or domestic environmental forces (Cambridge, 2001). Globalisation may have impacted office working hours and location. At least for one thing, it has influenced the use of virtual workplaces and virtual teams. The organisation of work is another aspect of the workplace that globalisation has affected (Spooner & Haidar, 2005). Employees may now work in an environment where they feel more relaxed. For example, a scriptwriter may think of a storyline in his/her home or coffee shop and immediately start working on it. The re-organisation of work is vital for organisational flexibility and efficiency in productivity. Indeed, organisational required requires flexibility and efficiency to respond swiftly and effectively to market demands (Spooner & Haidar, 2005). Virtual workplaces may be favourable for employees due to its flexibility, which has tendency to improve their employment situations as employees can work in any environments.

Due to globalisations, some organisations have resorted to the restructuring of their workforce through downsizing. The phenomenon of downsizing has shattered employees' belief in job for life (Lee & Kang, 2012). The progressive rise of deregulated labour markets has enabled employers to pursue the ideas of atypical job and downsizing to the highest level (Cambridge, 2001).



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### Globalisation and employee remuneration

Olungo (2017) observes that organisations have changed how they operate owing to global competition. For example, introduction of performance for pay reward system to compensate employees. This may be done through appraisal systems, which some employees may deem to be unfair, and may be seen to breach their psychological contract. Other organisations have since resorted to retrenchments and cutting salaries to reduce labour costs, in other to remain competitive. Some businesses retrench employees as a way to lower their salary costs (Olungo, 2017). This trend may also have a negative effect if employees are insecure about their jobs and dissatisfied with their salaries. Job satisfaction is an essential policy aspect of any organisation (Tansel & Gazioglu, 2014). An organisation's management is responsible for fostering a harmonious employment relationship by ensuring that employees have all their required resources, which ultimately leads to job satisfaction (Olungo, 2017).

Employment relations in most organisations globally have been affected by the trend of global competition (Olungo, 2017). Olungo (2017) further maintains that the decision-making capabilities of managers regarding employment relations issues seem to have improved since the dawn of globalisation. This may be because managers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century now have to view the organisations from an objective point of view.

Globalisation has resulted in changes in the production process, which has ultimately impacted employment situations. Globalisation has adversely affected the unskilled workers, while the skilled workers seem to have been positively affected (Dadush, 2014). Due to globalisation, skilled employees are presently relatively at a better advantage and are able to negotiate higher wages because they are in higher managerial positions, which require certain skills and knowledge. However, unskilled employees may be at a receiving end as they lack the required technological knowledge to fit into the new workspace. Highly skilled and educated migrants tend to respond positively when it comes to how globalisation has affected them (Testa & Celi, 2016). This has led to an increase in the talent pool in labour markets, whilst also increasing competitiveness.

Indeed, perceptions regarding globalisation are quite blurring and polarising (Ukpere, 2009). Accordingly, as insecurities are associated with globalisation, increasing retrenchments and pay cuts will also accelerate. This reflects the high level of job destruction since the dawn of globalisation. Furthermore, flexibility in the labour market owing to globalisation has negatively affected labour standard,



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which compromises decent work. According to Breakey (2018), one of the challenges confronting workers in South Africa is poor working conditions.

### Research Methodology

The current paper adopted a qualitative research approach to address the research question. The current study was carried out at an organization in the film industry that is situated in the north-western part of Johannesburg in South Africa. A purposive sampling technique was utilised to select ten employees that were from different managerial levels in the organization. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted. For credible data reporting and writing, interview transcripts were repetitively reviewed to determine common themes.

### Findings and discussion

**Table 1: Profile of Research Participants** 

Research Participant	Sex	Age	Org Management Level	Tenure	Highest Level Of Education	Union Affiliation
REP1	F	60	Top Level	14	Diploma	No
REP2	M	43	Junior Level	15	Grade 10	No
REP3	M	41	Middle Level	Undisclosed	Degree	No
REP4	F	33	Middle Level	11	Matric	No
REP5	M	33	Actor	4	Matric	No
REP6	M	53	Top Level	9	Degree	No
REP7	F	20	Actress	4	Matric/Currently studying towards degree	No
REP8	F	34	Top Level	7	Diploma/Currently studying towards degree	No
REP9	F	40	Non- Managerial	8	Diploma	No
REP10	M	38	Middle Level	3	Degree	No

Source: Authors Fieldwork 2021



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Pseudonyms were assigned to research participants for protection of their identities of the. Quite a number of the participants have been employed in the film industry for over 7 years. 60% of the participants obtained a tertiary qualification and 20% are studying towards a qualification currently. Most participants have gained immense experience at the organization. There is only one participant under the age of 30 years amongst the ten research participants. This revealed that majority of the participants clearly understood how globalization had transformed operations in the organization. The research also revealed that all participants did not belong to a union. The researcher took field notes during the interviews. The researcher also concurrently identified and noted participants' gestures. Furthermore, an interview guide was used to ensure that the study maintained its objective. Lastly, the notes from the interviews were compared against the posed questions.

### Findings and discussion

The study sought to establish the impact of globalisation on employment situations within South African organisations. Responses of the research participants are summarised in the following table.

Table 2. Keywords used by participants to describe the impact of globalisation on employment situation

Rep1=Competition, working hours; Rep2=Working hours; Rep3=Technology and systems; Rep4= Technology, working hours, contracts; Rep5=Competition, use of short-term contracts; Rep6=Process of globalisation changing the world, technology; Rep7=Technology, type of contracts; Rep8= Management systems, competition, innovation; Rep9=Equality especially between genders Rep10=Ever changing technology

Source: Authors Fieldwork



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Findings revealed that some research participants shared similar opinions regarding the impact of globalisation on employment situations in South African.

### Globalisation and employment situation in South Africa

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The findings reveal that the effects of globalisation on employment situations are twofold, namely, they have both positive and negative effects on the workplace. The findings revealed that while globalisation has brought new opportunities, such as high standards and improved communication channels, has on the contrary accelerated the use of casual labour, which has resulted in several conflicts and allegations of unfair labour practices such as discrimination and labour exploitation. The findings of this study also corroborated with existing literature on globalisation and employment situations, confirming what other authorities have said about the phenomenon. For instance, the study's finding corroborated Hudson (2014) view that casualisation in the era of globalisation accelerates job insecurity as most contracts are often not renewed at the end of the contract. In fact, all efforts towards casualisation are to the benefit of the employers, in terms of cost cutting, as opposed to the employees. This state of affairs has tendency to negatively affect the employment situations as well as employment relations within an organisation.

There is a perception that collective bargaining has improved since the dawn of globalisation. Collective bargaining, which entails negotiation with an intention to reach an agreement related to employee remuneration, working conditions, as well as expectations of both parties in the employment relationship. Collective bargaining has always been encouraged because its potency to reduces conflicts and turnover intentions in the workplace. As a matter of fact, collective bargaining helps to create an atmosphere of trust, which supports work restructuring based on mutual agreement between employers and employees (Hayter & Lee, 2018; Abbott, 2006). The process of collective bargaining seems to have been positively impacted by globalisation in most industries, which has boosted more agreements between employers and employees without the presence of a third party. Therefore, globalisation has created room for employees to make their own informed decisions. In concordance with the above, Rep9 observed that collective bargaining had improved in recent times. However, entering into agreements with respective employees without the unions will also go a long way to harm collective bargaining since what is playing out is individual bargaining as opposed to collective bargaining.

Due to a rise in production standards and competition, the employers seem to be demanding additional work input, innovation, and flexibility, while employees in



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turn are demanding increased remuneration and improved working condition. The current study's findings confirmed the above notion as reflected **Rep8** statement: "Increased competition and new strategies to stay competitive and relevant in the industry has cause employers to demand for more work, while employees, in turn, demand for more pay, which ultimately satisfies the needs of both parties".

The current study also found that the rise in the use of 4IR technology is accompanied by a rise in job insecurity amongst employees. However, organisations cannot do without embracing the rapid technological advancements within a highly competitive business environment. In line with that, **Rep3** stated: "There is a need to continuously be in touch with technology and know the advancements so as to find effective and efficient ways to work because once you snooze, you lose." This is, however, a major challenge as organisations must keep up with technological advancements, which is also a threat to job security owing to technological displacement of workers.

### Limitations of the study

As every research endeavours have their own limitations, so does the current study. The current enquiry was restricted to a single organisation in a film industry located in the Gauteng province in South African, as such, the current findings of the study cannot be generalised to other enterprises in other regions in South Africa. Additionally, only ten employees were interviewed hence the study did not include all employees during the data gathering phase. Consequently, not every worker's perception was taken into account. This study analysed the views of a tiny proportion of the population that are conversant with the phenomenon under study. Hence, the current study's outcome might have been affected by some level of bias. The COVID-19 pandemic also posed affected the study, particularly during data collection. Hence, some interviews were carried out telephonically, and others through video conferencing, which mostly limited the full observation of participants' expressions and nonverbal cues.

#### Recommendations

From the foregoing the following recommendations are worth pondering:

#### Recognise and reward employees constantly

Employers should consider appraising and recognising their employees and reward their good performance on a continuous basis. This strategy needs to be



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developed and implemented during restructuring of work as a result of globalisation. Recognition reinforces good performance as employees will through that perceive their organisation is caring and appreciative their contribution. Employees are happier when recognition and reward happens on a regular basis, which positively affects employees' motivation and morale in the workplace. Amoatemaa and Kyeremeh (2016) opine that several companies are gradually adopting the concept of employee recognition to achieve increased productivity, higher performance as well as motivate employees. Good relationship is very important in the workplace for both employers and employees to achieve the strategic goals of the organisation and regular recognition and reward helps to foster good relationship through employee involvement and engagement.

### Improve the level job security in organisations

According to Lansbury (2000), the right to job security does not apply to casual employee. However, technological displacement of worker also applies to permanent employees nowadays as they have also become insecure due to rapid technological incursion of the workplace. Based on these new threats, there is an urgent need to improve labour standards based on the prescriptions of the ILO through their various conventions. There is also a need for a shift in some of the human resource policies that focus only on cutting cost through job destruction, as a way of reducing job insecurity amongst workers (Kim et al., 2001). Hence, HR policies should be drafted in such a way that job security is enhanced.

### A need to improved working conditions in organisations

Working in a pleasant environment has a positive effect on employees, as it motivates them to give their best performance. Hence, good working conditions will motivate employees to add values to their organisations. All employees, regardless of the type of employment contract they hold, should be made to feel safe and secure within their workplaces (Mpabanga, Ukpere & Knight 2022). Therefore, employers should provide safer and secure environments for employees to function effectively. HR policies that support fair labour practices should be encouraged and adopted.

#### Conclusion

Globalisation has impacted labour situations in organisations in South Africa in both positive and negative ways. Accordingly, the current findings reveal that there



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has been an increase in direct interactions between the employers and employees since globalisation. Rapid technological innovations and casualisation of labour are conspicuous aspects of globalisation that have affected employment situation in South Africa. The current findings revealed that there is an inevitable rise in job insecurity in most organisations owing to the increasing use of casual employees and the rapid incursion of advanced technological innovation into the workplace use. Fair treatment of all employees should be a paramount way of curbing perceptions of inequality and discrimination induced by globalization. This will enhance employment situation in the South Africa or elsewhere in the age of globalisation and its corollary, the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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