



# An evaluation of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative in addressing youth unemployment at Winnie Madikizela-Mandela local municipality

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## Abstract

This article evaluates the effectiveness of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) in addressing youth unemployment, using the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipal area as a case study. The study examines whether the PYEI achieved its goals of reducing youth unemployment, promoting skill development, and providing meaningful employment opportunities. The government launched the PYEI to tackle rising youth unemployment, which has significant socio-economic implications. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative research methods, drawing data from a convenient and purposive sample of beneficiaries and school administrators in Bizana. Findings reveal that the programme's objectives were achieved in the short term, with some young people absorbed into employment within the first six months, gaining skills, experience, and income to support their families. However, the study identifies a lack of a withdrawal plan, leaving beneficiaries unemployed after the programme. The study recommends expanding the programme to other departments and engaging the private sector in employing young people. Additionally, placing youth in positions relevant to their qualifications is suggested to enhance skill acquisition and future employability. This study aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing insights into the monitoring and evaluation of youth development programmes and their impact on youth unemployment.

**Keywords:** Capacity Development; Empowerment; Human Capital; Youth Development; Sustainable Development; Programme Evaluation; Public Policy

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## **1. Introduction**

Socio-economic opportunist challenges in South Africa affect youth and expose them to challenges that have prompted them to look for diverse initiatives to tackle them. These issues include poverty, unemployment, and inequality from different angles (National Planning Commission, 2020). Finding a solution to the growing problem of youth unemployment is paramount to governments and other youth organisations worldwide. Unfortunately, decades of economic reforms and policies to reduce youth unemployment have failed to produce sustained positive results (National Treasury, 2022). The youth unemployment rate in South Africa has historically been higher than the national average unemployment rate, even though young people make up a sizable section of the population and are among the most active (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Even though recovery plans are in place set by the government and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide job prospects in South Africa, more focus is needed to support youth in finding jobs and training opportunities. Therefore, it is still difficult for young people to obtain work in South Africa, and the situation is significantly worse in the Eastern Cape, as reported by the Quarterly Labour Report of South Africa (Stats SA, 2021a). According to Stats SA (2021b), during the national lockdown that prevented COVID-19 from spreading, employment conditions altered, and job chances deteriorated. As a result, job creation plans must focus on empowering women, young people, people with disabilities, and military veterans to develop competitiveness and resilience.

The government implemented an Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), which included a job-creation stimulus to help people regain their feet during COVID-19. This strategy aimed to mitigate the short-term economic effects of COVID-19 by boosting the job market and providing more assistance to low-income families. One of the ERRP's eight main economic recovery programs is the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) (The Presidency, 2020). The Basic Education Employment Initiative was developed by the Department of Basic Education and the Provincial Education Departments (BEEI) in response to the high rate of youth unemployment, which was made worse by COVID-19 (Department of Basic Education, 2021a). A PES component that aims to create and support approximately 800,000 employment opportunities was implemented through the PYEI-BEEI, its flagship initiative (Department of Basic Education, 2021b). The PYEI, known as the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, aims to provide job possibilities for South African youth in various school areas.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes implemented to address youth unemployment, focusing on the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative in the Basic education sector in the Eastern Cape Province at Winnie-Madikizela Mandela Local Municipality. Data was drawn from various sources such as questionnaires, interview transcripts, books, articles from accredited journals, and government documents.

## **2. Problem statement**

Youth unemployment is a significant concern for most nations, especially developing countries with emerging economies (Ampadu-Ameyaw et al., 2020). Government-led initiatives like the Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP), Community-Based Projects (CBP), and Learnerships, to mention a few, have not done enough to combat youth unemployment. Due to poor monitoring and evaluation, fraud, bad management, lack

of accountability, inadequate money, and rural youths' lack of persistence, these programmes cannot be sustained (Shava and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022).

The Eastern Cape had the highest unemployment rate in 2022, Q2, at 42.8%, higher than the 33.9% national average. In the Eastern Cape Province, youth between the ages of 15 and 24 and 25 and 34 experienced the most exceptional unemployment rates in 2022 Q2, with 77.2% and 59.2%, respectively (Stats SA, 2022). While the PYEI demonstrates a promising approach to addressing youth unemployment, its effectiveness remains a topic of critical concern. To date, limited empirical research has been conducted to assess the real-world impact of the initiative in the Eastern Cape province, particularly in specific municipalities like Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality. The success of the PYEI hinges on its ability to effectively match the skills and aspirations of young people with the available opportunities, thereby leading to sustained employment and economic advancement.

The Eastern Cape Province of South Africa's Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality faces the severe challenges of high youth unemployment rates. The municipality's mixed-urban and rural economic environment makes solving this problem even more challenging. Although the PYEI has been implemented, there is a critical knowledge gap on its effectiveness in tackling young unemployment in Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality due to the lack of empirical research to evaluate its effects at the local level. The effectiveness of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative in reducing youth unemployment and promoting socio-economic development in the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality needs to be seriously evaluated. Policymakers, local governments, and development practitioners can make informed decisions and recommendations to refine the initiative's strategy and increase its impact by understanding the challenges and implications of the PYEI's implementation in this unique setting. As a result, this study aims to respond to the following question: To what extent has the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative effectively reduced/addressed youth unemployment and contributed to socioeconomic development in the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality?

This article aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) in addressing youth unemployment using the case study of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipal area.

### 3. Theoretical approach

#### 3.1. Sustainable development theory

This study uses Sustainable Development Theory to expand the debate and support youth development initiatives. Sustainable Development is known and has been adopted by various disciplines. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to address poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. This study is aligned with Sustainable Development to advance the inclusion of youth in decision-making towards the realisation of Sustainable Development observed in their area.

The idea of sustainability is to involve young people in their areas by selecting priorities for making cities more liveable and sustainable. It is necessary to work with youth toward SDG targets and hold municipal governments accountable for delivering on the 2030 Agenda, which were among the primary reasons why Fondation Botnar, in collaboration with UN-Habitat, formed the Youth 2030 project in 2021. Young people

were recruited to action through youth meetings in intermediary cities globally in Colombia, Ecuador, Senegal, Ghana, India, and Vietnam by sharing their ideas on how the SDGs should be localised in their towns. When there is a commitment from youth, there can be meaningful youth participation, especially when they are included in high-level meetings on the implementation of the new urban agenda on April 28th and issues of job creation.

Throughout history, sustainable development (SD) has arisen as a means of coordinating agricultural advancement and human survival in subsistence farming economies (Zhou, 2009). Since the start of the Industrial Revolution, both population and productivity have expanded dramatically. Nature's resources have been depleted, and the amount of waste and toxins thrown into the ecosystem has steadily increased. Human-caused rapid and ongoing environmental changes have made it more challenging to protect global life support systems (Kates and Parris, 2003).

Meanwhile, these advances posed a significant threat to human life (Du Pisani, 2006). In this context, sustainable development is a critical strategy for driving the world's socioeconomic progress (Tomislav, 2018). However, individuals in academia, government, and the commercial sector must do more to promote the visibility of SD (Baumgartner, 2011; Broman and Robert, 2017). There is a scarcity of current SD definitions and understandings based on the concept's more significant concepts. Instead, they are influenced by SD organisations' fundamental ideas (Mebratu, 1998; Robert et al., 2005). For example, the notion of development makes no distinction between aims and means. Instead, SD is considered as a long-term, simple-to-understand transformation process.

Using South Africa's Presidential Youth Initiative as an example, we can see how this programme can be combined with sustainable practices to create a prosperous future or consider SD as the business affairs of an organisation, with a strong tendency towards producing outputs or looking for theories in the process of building a sustainable community. As a result, the definition of SD must be altered (Hedenus, Martin, and Sprei, 2018). The most significant aspect of SD theory is SD practice. This is because the principles of limitless repetition and iterative learning are based on the concept of relational dialectics between practice and knowledge. SD theory is used to inform SD practice, which aims to develop youth initiatives in preparation for the new and future generations without compromising resources.

## 4. Literature review

### 4.1. Government interventions on youth initiatives

#### 4.1.1. National Youth Service Programme (NYSP)

The National Youth Service Programme (NYSP) is a government program designed to get South African youth involved in community service projects to improve service delivery, strengthen nationalism, encourage nation-building, and promote social cohesion (Burnett, 2023). It also helps the youth acquire the occupational skills they need to access opportunities for sustainable livelihood. The National Youth Service, the most extensive service program for youth in the nation, receives secretarial support from the NYDA (Madu and Okunna, 2023). The NYDA has determined that, given the substantial advantages that young South Africans gain from participating in volunteer and community service programs, concrete measures must be taken to enhance

youth volunteering (Chauke et al., 2021). According to Lamidi (2019), volunteering makes it easier for young people to find respectable employment and breaks the cycle of poverty. Thus, this could help reduce South Africa's high unemployment rates, which primarily affect the country's youth. Additionally, youth volunteering can help young people become responsible leaders who support diversity, equality, social cohesion, increased civic engagement, respect for equality, and the development of both individual and group voices (Settipani et al., 2019).

The future generation in South Africa faces severe challenges, including high unemployment rates, low literacy rates, and a lack of skills (Ettetal and Agans, 2020). Numerous government agencies and sectors have pushed the National Youth Service as a solution to these issues; one such program, the National Youth Service Programme (NYSP), has shown promise but has mostly fallen short of expectations (Hebinck et al., 2023). Terrance (2023) states that the government recognised the idea of the National Youth Service (NYS) as a crucial means of helping young people acquire skills, participate in community service, and seize exit possibilities for additional education and work. In a South Africa that was still divided, the National Youth Service Programme (NYSP) would strengthen national identity and promote patriotism. Additionally, the government saw the NYSP as a means of delivering vital services to the nation (Madu and Okunna, 2023). The idea behind the NYSP, as stated by Burnett (2023), was to provide young people with technical training in an HIV/AIDS-related field and then provide them with opportunities to use these talents in the community.

#### *4.1.2. Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)*

In 1998, the National Public Works Programme (NPWP) was introduced, which later became the EPWP. Nevertheless, it was proposed that discrimination in the employment market could be exacerbated by young people's lack of unionisation (Mlatsheni and Ranchhod, 2017). After the NPWP, the EPWP was created with two goals: funding projects that would create jobs and increasing the labour intensity of infrastructure spending (Mayer et al., 2011). In its initial phase, the programme aimed to create one million employments, and in its second phase, 4.5 million jobs (Department of Public Works, 2015, cited in De Lannoy et al., 2018). Although it allowed pay below the minimum wage for short-term employment, the EPWP sought to boost small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs), encourage economic inclusion, give low-skilled people temporary jobs, and provide training to participants.

Nonetheless, the programme has come under intense scrutiny on three main fronts. First, the impact on long-term employment has been mitigated by the temporary nature of the employment opportunities and the shorter period of work than anticipated (McCord 2004; Samson 2007). Second, the EPWP's limited ability to alleviate poverty is hampered by its low wage rates, which are an average of R62 per day, much less than the National Minimum Wage, especially considering the program's short duration of employment. The programme has a limited effect on reducing poverty because EPWP workers are not regarded as formal employees and are, therefore, not eligible for unemployment benefits from the Unemployment Insurance Fund. However, the program's temporal financial assistance is the reason participants value it (Hough and Prozesky, 2013).

Most employment offered by the EPWP are low-skilled, with no opportunity for on-the-job training. The program's capacity to serve as a stepping stone to full-time employment has been further diminished by the persistent failure to meet training requirements (Charles Simkins 2007; McCutcheon 2012). Most beneficiaries are reemployed in short-term EPWP programmes, even though over 70% are employed after participating in



the programme. This creates dependency effects and emphasises the need for a long-term approach to combat youth unemployment successfully (De Lannoy et al., 2018).

#### *4.1.3. Community Works Programme (CWP)*

The Community Work Programme (CWP) addressed the structural aspect of unemployment and provided an income floor while concentrating on community-based programmes and social outcomes (Philip, 2013a, 2013b). When measured against its objectives, the CWP has been booming since the poorest individuals have benefited from regular work opportunities that have helped them escape poverty. Additionally, the training offered by the CWP has been practical, especially when it comes to developing specialised skills (Philip, 2013a). Although the CWP is not intended to be a route to official employment, it has promise in that regard, mainly when training is focused on the development of specific skill sets, as in the healthcare industry (De Lannoy et al., 2018). The CWP gives young people an essential connection point that they can use to connect to other opportunities, even though it might not directly lead to formal work. However, bureaucratic issues surfaced when the CWP was incorporated into government systems, impacting the program's efficacy (Philip, 2013a).

#### *4.1.4. Employment tax incentives*

Employers are encouraged to hire young people through the employment incentive, a tax-based intervention. Employers receive a tax refund on the Pay as You Earn Tax that they are responsible for paying for each employee. The intervention was created with the idea that providing a rebate of this kind would help firms who viewed the cost of training as a deterrent to hiring young people (National Treasury, 2011 cited in Graham and Mlatsheni, 2021).

Using data from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), further research sought to ascertain how the ETI affected the employment rates of young people. Six months, a year, and even two years after the program's launch, Ranchhod and Finn (2014, 2015, 2016) discovered no effects on the rates of youth unemployment. According to their modelling, the jobs would have been generated even if the ETI had not been implemented. After the ETI was implemented for two to three years, further research using tax data looked at whether it had an impact on the creation of jobs for young people. Although several econometric analyses were used in this research to evaluate the effect, the results varied.

Ebrahim et al. (2017) and Makgetla (2017) conducted two studies that compared ETI and non-ETI claiming enterprises before and after the implementation of the ETI and found no substantial aggregate impact of the subsidy on youth employment. They did note, however, a slight rise in young people working for small businesses. A significant rate of allocative inefficiency was also brought to light, with numerous subsidies being claimed for employment that either already existed or would have been created in the absence of the ETI. Conversely, Rankin and Chatterjee (2016) discovered that the ETI had a favourable impact on the development of youth jobs inside ETI-claiming enterprises, particularly in small firms.

#### *4.1.5. The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention*

The PYEI represents the most extensive endeavour in South Africa to tackle youth unemployment. Its objective is to facilitate the transition of more youth from education to employment. It aims to consolidate, expedite, and

improve current programs while removing employment, training, and youth entrepreneurship barriers. It does not seek to replace the numerous ongoing initiatives. New ideas are developed in response to more resources.

The PYEI integrates the expertise of top specialists, government agencies, the commercial sector, social partners, and young people. It is run by a Project Management Office (PMO) under the Presidency. Convening power is increased by the PMO's direct reporting line to the President. The national departments and units best positioned to guarantee prompt and efficient delivery lead to the implementation.

#### 4.2. Factors affecting the youth initiative programmes in South Africa

Programmes like these are vulnerable to diverse socio-economic factors within the African landscape for young people. Several factors prevent young people from improving their lives, including significant unemployment, different types of poverty, unequal access to school, and lack of mentorship opportunities (Appie et al., 2014). There has not been any notable advancement even though youth employment has dominated national and international development objectives. The number of young people looking for work and their employment opportunities is becoming increasingly disparate (Geza et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a mismatch between the abilities of young people joining the workforce and the needs of companies. Ironically, because there are no possibilities in their chosen fields of study, a large number of graduates are working in lowly professions unrelated to their degrees (Peters, 2017). These elements make it harder for young people to get employment and prevent them from actively contributing to the growth and development of the socioeconomic system.

##### 4.2.1. Necessary infrastructure

For youth initiatives to be implemented, a conducive environment with infrastructure, including technology, internet connectivity, finance, and transportation, is essential. (Ravichandran, 2023). Unfortunately, these infrastructure requirements are either non-existent or insufficient in many South African regions, which makes it challenging for young people to get the tools and assistance they require to carry out their initiatives (Junge, 2023).

##### 4.2.2. Youth initiatives policies

Policies encouraging youth initiatives are crucial to creating an atmosphere where young people may develop and implement their ideas. Nonetheless, there are not many laws in South Africa that encourage youth-led projects. The National Youth Policy 2020-2030 (NYO, 2020-2030) motivates young people to participate in cross-sectoral youth development strategies aimed at redressing the injustices and wrong-doings endured by the youth at the national, provincial, and local levels. Due to some stakeholders' non-compliance with this policy, young people find it challenging to receive the tools and assistance they need to make their ideas a reality, especially regarding support from policymakers and communities (Totana, 2022). To ensure that young people participate in discussions about policy and lawmaking, resource allocation, and the parliament's attempts to hold the government accountable, consultation and broad public participation must be widened to improve the involvement of young people in policy-making directed to their cause (Ricoeur et al., 2023).

#### *4.2.3. Limited youth empowerment activities*

Encouraging youth to become involved in their communities is essential to fostering positive change. Positive youth development strategies ensure that the youth's needs are satisfied, and they acquire the skills needed to contribute positively to society (Lateef, 2023). Nonetheless, there are few options for youth empowerment initiatives in South Africa, which restricts young people's ability to take the initiative and bring about constructive change in their communities (Dada et al., 2023).

#### *4.2.4. Poor involvement of youth in the decision-making processes*

Young people are frequently excluded from decision-making processes when it comes to matters that directly impact them, and their ability to advocate for their needs and interests is diminished by their lack of participation in decision-making processes, which also limits their ability to carry out independent projects (Hafidh, 2023). It is necessary to develop methods and structures to promote youth participation. These can be created to institutionalise youth involvement in decision-making processes that impact youth, including creating youth networks for constructive civic engagement or youth advisory committees (Foster et al., 2023). Since young women and men have equal rights, efforts can be made to ensure that young people are appropriately represented in decision-making bodies and participate in them (Foster et al., 2023).

#### *4.2.5. Poor participation in youth initiatives*

Even though youth initiatives can bring about significant change, many young people choose not to get involved because they are afraid of failing, lacking information, or receive insufficient support (Jawla, 2023). Young people who actively participate can positively impact their and their communities' development by gaining essential life skills, increasing their understanding of human rights and citizenship, and encouraging good civic engagement (Page, Hanrahan and Buckley, 2023). For youth to engage in society effectively, they must be equipped with the correct resources, including knowledge, instruction, and access to their civil rights. The absence of involvement lessens the youth initiatives' overall impact in South Africa.

## **5. Study location**

The Winnie Madikizela municipal area was the location of this study, where three cases of Primary Schools (namely Emdeni J.S.S, Dyifani J.S.S, and Ezizityaneni J.S.S) were used as a sample. A convenient sample was drawn from these 3 Primary Schools, which were the target schools where the trainees of the PYEI programme were placed for programme implementation. The placement of the candidates for the PYEI was in line with the objectives of the PYEI and the interests of the Department of Education and the Bizana community. The participants were 39 educators and general school assistants (13 from each of the three schools), two officials within the Department of Education Bizana District, and two principals from the three schools, totalling 43 participants. The study's geographical focus on the Winnie Madikizela municipal area emphasizes the local relevance of the PYEI initiative, highlighting its role in community upliftment through targeted educational interventions. Furthermore, the strategic placement of PYEI trainees within these schools aligns with broader educational goals, ensuring that the programme's benefits are maximized at the grassroots level (Figure 1).





**Figure 1.** Map of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality (Source: Municipalities of South Africa. n.d.)

## 6. Research methodology

This study employed mixed research methodologies, integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods. Ivankova et al. (2020) lauded the mixed research method for providing rich data collected using more than one instrument comprehensively; it was suitable to assess the effectiveness of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) in addressing youth unemployment within Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality. The combination of these methods allowed for a holistic understanding of the impact and challenges associated with the PYEI. A mixed-method approach provided a proper integration of looking at this study from several quantitative and qualitative perspectives while providing better insight (Tashakkori et al., 2020). The mixed method research approach used included the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the first phase of the research and the qualitative data collection in the second phase (Ivankova and Plano Clark, 2018). To ensure the representativeness and reliability of the data, participants were selected based on specific criteria. Beneficiaries were chosen within the youth age range of 18 to 35 years, focusing on those unemployed before joining the PYEI. Participants were drawn from 3 schools within the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Local Municipality in Bizana, representing diverse educational backgrounds. School administrators and officials from the Bizana District Department of Education were selected based on their direct involvement in managing the PYEI, with a minimum of two years of experience in their roles, ensuring they had sufficient context and understanding of the program's impact. Qualitative data collection used purposive sampling to select key informants such as school principals and education officials. This approach ensured that both phases of data collection provided in-depth insights into the programme's implementation and outcomes, enhancing the study's robustness and reliability. A sample of 43 participants was drawn from the population of schools

under Winnie Madikizela-Mandela Municipality, where the programme was implemented. 39 participants were the beneficiaries of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, 2 were officials from the Department of Education in Bizana District, and 2 were school managers.

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaires were analysed using the Scientific Package in Social Science (SPSS) software, and data was presented using descriptive statistics and graphs to summarise responses from the participants. Descriptive statistics were employed to explain the significance of the statistical findings and 'translate' them into valuable information that readers could follow and understand (Jacobs, 2019). Frequency Distributions and Percentages were employed to present the distribution of categorical variables, such as demographic information (age, gender, education level) and responses to specific questions regarding the PYEI's impact. This helped in understanding the proportion of participants who experienced particular outcomes. The researchers triangulated the analysed data and created themes. The qualitative data was triangulated with quantitative data by comparing the themes created after data analysis. Themes were created from the data that responded to questions asked in the questionnaire and interviews. According to Maree (2016), through the use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches, a mixed method strategy increases the complexity of the design and research processes. The general layout of the design integrates both deductive and inductive thought processes commonly used in research investigations (Sontos, 2017).

The university ethics committee approved this study, and the researchers also received a gate-keeping letter from the municipality. The researchers considered ethics in terms of privacy and confidentiality, voluntary participation, and upholding truth and honesty during research. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the PYEI in its first implementation period/Phase 1, from December 2021 to April 2021, Phase 2, which started from November 2021 to March 2022, and Phase 3, which commenced in April 2022 to August 2022.

## 7. Data analysis and interpretation

### 7.1. Demographic details

As shown in Table 1, in terms of gender distribution, the study included most female participants, with 64.1% being females and 35.9% males, indicating a gender imbalance in the programme. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 35 years old. A majority, 48.7%, fell within the 18-25 age group, while 33.3% were aged 26-30, and 17.9% were between 31-35 years old. This data suggests that the PYEI programme primarily targets younger individuals, especially those in the 18-25 age group. Respondents displayed a range of educational qualifications, from no Matric to postgraduate degrees. The majority (28.2%) held a diploma, followed by postgraduate qualifications (25.6%), degrees (23.1%), matric certificates (20.5%), and a small minority (2.6%) without a matric certificate. 56.4% of respondents had never been employed before joining the PYEI programme, indicating that the programme served as a gateway to employment for many young people. The remaining 43.6% had prior employment experience but were not employed at the time they joined the programme.

Participants were employed across different programme phases, with 46.2% in Phase 2, 33.3% in Phase 1, and the remaining 20.5% in Phase 3. In terms of job positions, most respondents (66.7%) held positions as

Educator Assistants, reflecting the demand for teaching qualifications in the education sector. A minority (33.3%) worked as General Schools Assistants. Programme categories included curriculum (33.3%), reading champions (23.1%), sport and enrichment (12.8%), ICT, infrastructure brigades, and psychosocial support (10.3% each), highlighting the diverse range of roles within the PYEI programme.

**Table 1.** Demographics of the study participants

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
	Male	14	35.9%
	Female	25	64.1%
Age			
	18-21	19	48.7%
	26-30	13	33.3%
	31-35	7	17.9%
Education			
	No Matric	1	2.6%
	Matriculation	8	20.5%
	Diploma	11	28.2%
	Degree	9	23.1%
	Postgraduate	10	25.6%
Previous Employment			
	Yes	17	43.6%
	No	22	56.4%
Phase			
	Phase 1	13	33.3%
	Phase 2	18	46.2%
	Phase 3	8	20.5%
Occupation			
	Educator Assistant (EA)	26	66.7%
	General Schools Assistant (GSA)	13	33.3%

Programme Category			
	Curriculum	13	33.3%
	ICT (eCadres)	4	10.3%
	Infrastructure Brigades	4	10.3%
	Psychological Support	4	10.3%
	Reading Champions	9	23.1%
	Sport and Enrichment	5	12.8%

## 7.2. Discussions and interpretations

### 7.2.1. Programme impact and quality of employment

The participants were probed to indicate the extent to which the PYEI programme affects their lives while addressing their challenges of unemployment. The participants, who were also regarded as young people, stated that they were impacted positively by the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative on youth unemployment for a short time. They were uncertain about their future and whether the initiative had created sustainable job opportunities that offered them decent work and a living wage that reduced youth unemployment rates in the country. The findings revealed that the programme has a huge positive impact on the livelihoods and socio-economic status of the young people because it has managed to absorb many young people into employment and allowed them to gain experience and earn an income to support their families. One of the participants said:

*“Since we are experiencing a lack of job opportunities as the youth, the PYEI gives us opportunities to participate in this programme and explore our skills, and ideas and gain some experience”. (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

Based on these findings, it is revealed that even though the programme absorbed a larger number of young people who were unemployed and provided them with skills, experience, and income to support their families, it did not provide them with sustainable employment as the programme ran for a very short period and the fact that after the contracts ended, the young people went back to being unemployed. The sum of 69.2% of participants indicated that the programme is not effective, followed by 23.1% who indicated that the programme is effective, while 7.7% participants stated that the programme is partially effective [See figure 2]. The other participants indicated that”.

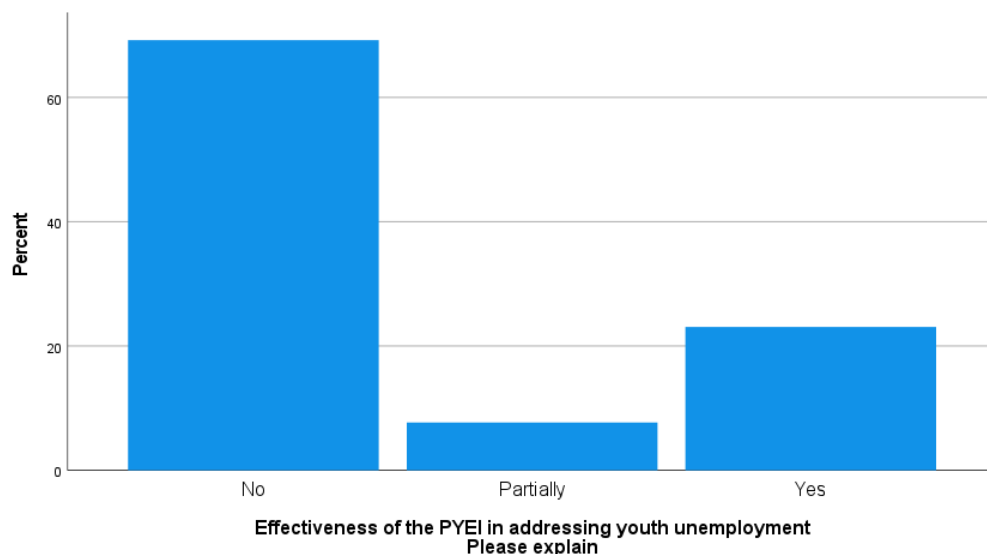
*“This programme does not benefit us at all because, after six months, we become unemployed again”. (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

Findings further revealed that the stipend as income given to recipients was not enough to cover their basic needs. They also indicated that they cannot even use the stipend as income to assist them in starting their businesses and creating employment for themselves when the programme ends. It was also found that

graduates with qualifications were paid the same stipend as young people without any qualifications. One school principal also mentioned that:

*“Not enough because the assistants employed in these departments must be employed in terms of their qualifications so that they can be able to gain experience. An educated person was earning the same money as the one without a degree, and the period of employment was very short” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*

The above statement indicates that the programme had only short-term effects on the beneficiaries and on decreasing youth unemployment. There has not been much difference between the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative and other previous youth empowerment programmes. De Lannoy et al. (2020) mention that despite enormous investments made in the Active Labour Market Programme (ALMP) to support youth employment, high rates of youth unemployment continue to exist. These initiatives include spending on work-integrated learning programs, a tax incentive for employers to encourage hiring young people, a variety of entrepreneurship grants and programs, extensive public employment initiatives, and reforming the post-secondary education system to increase access and throughput. All these initiatives have high goals for reaching the intended youth beneficiaries. High investments in ALMPs and a small reduction in youth unemployment rates highlight the necessity for evidence synthesis to comprehend a complex situation.



**Figure 2.** Effectiveness of the programme in addressing youth unemployment

### 7.2.2. Training and skills development

Skill development was probed as an important kind of training needed to do the work and opportunities available to youth through the initiative. Regarding whether the participants received training before and

during placement and whether they gained any skills in the programme, the findings revealed that some of the participants received training and gained skills in the programme. In response to this, a respondent stated that:

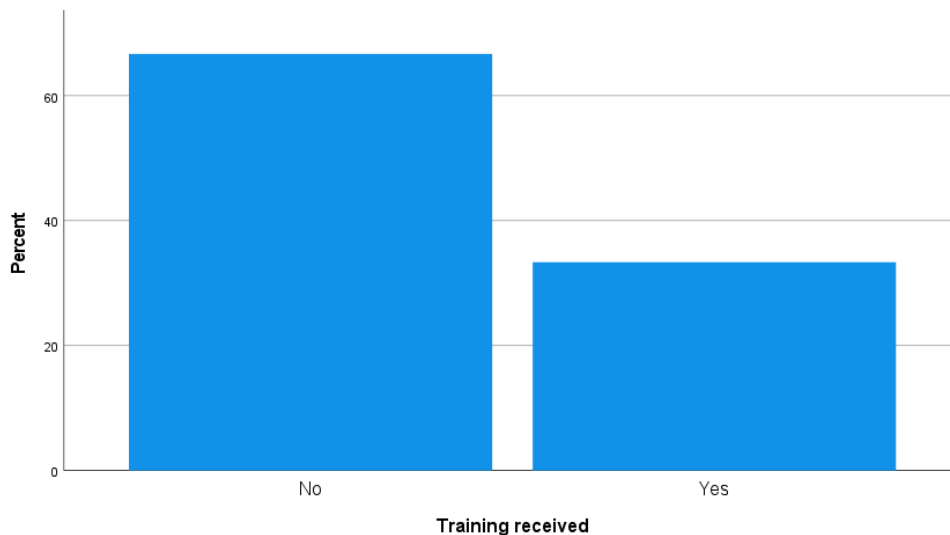
*“Yes, the training was relevant, it was mainly on the dos and don’ts, The facilitator made it easy to know what you need to do when you are at the school even if no one oriented you at that particular school.” (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

One of the respondents stated that they gained the following skills:

*“I have gained the confidence and ability to stand before students with confidence in reading, Interpersonal skills, Leadership skills, and communication skills” (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

The above statement indicates that there is skill transfer, and this beneficiary has learnt some skills that can advance her opportunity to be placed in a better job position in the future. Magidi and Mahiya (2021) and Floreani (2014) also concur with the view that training programs must train and help the youth build their confidence and develop other soft skills such as interpersonal skills, communication, and self-esteem.

However, the findings also revealed that some participants were never trained before and during placement in the programme or claimed that the training was not enough. This means that they were expected to do the work for which they were not trained, which might have affected the programme participants' performance. A significant number (66.7%) of the respondents indicated that they never received training before or during their involvement in the programme (see Figure 3). *“There was no physical training besides learning on duty and WhatsApp studies” (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*



**Figure 3.** Training before/during placement



Furthermore, one of the interviewed school managers conquered the claim of the previous participant by stating that:

*“Very few workshops were done, and funny enough, it was the handyman who repeatedly got training, even towards the end of the contracts” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*

This shows that the only people that were prioritised when it came to training were the handymen, as claimed by one of the interviewed officials who mentioned:

*“Some did, handymen were trained for 4 weeks and even managed to obtain certificates while some did not receive enough training because it was a one-day training and the training they received cannot allow them to secure future employment” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*

This means that one of the objectives of the programme, which is to provide beneficiaries with skills and competencies that will enhance their prospects for future employment, was not met.

These claims are further supported by the Youth Capital research report on the Basic Education Employment Initiative, which revealed that the training received by young people in the BEEI programme differed from school to school, and the major of this training did not appear to have a strong focus on transferrable skills (Youth Capital, 2021).

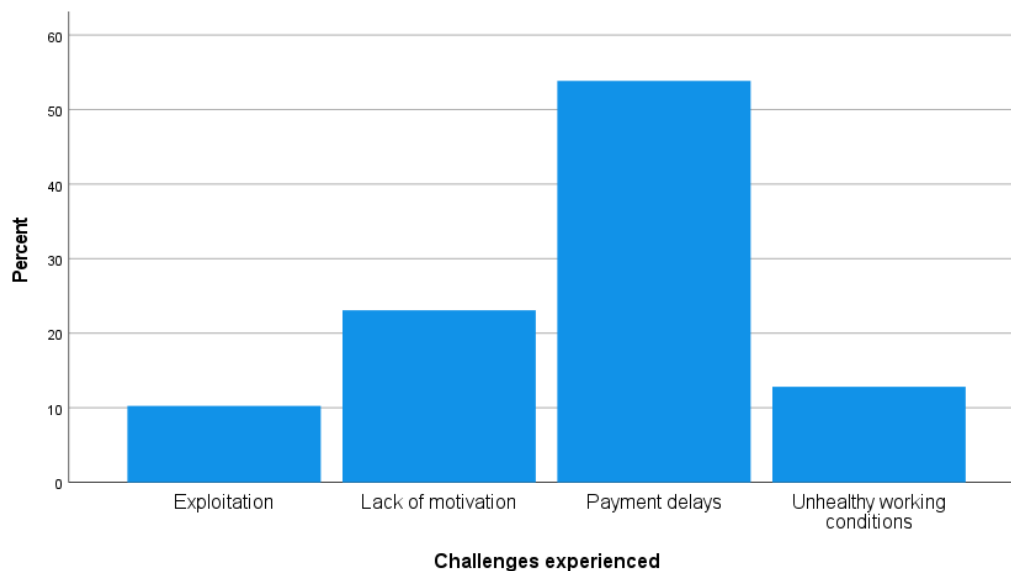
### 7.2.3. Challenges and barriers

Participants alluded to the challenges they experienced during their involvement in the programme, and it was revealed that the participants experienced a variety of challenges that discouraged them while working, which led to a terrible experience in the programme. It was revealed that even though one of the objectives of the programme is to support livelihoods and serve as a vehicle to address elevated levels of unemployment, participants' payments were delayed for months while they had to go to work and perform their duties. The statistical data concurs with this because most of the beneficiaries (53.8%) mentioned that one of the challenges they experienced during their involvement in the programme was payment delays [Refer to Figure 4]. This does not guarantee any support for their livelihoods as they were sometimes not paid while they needed the income to meet their basic needs, improve their socio-economic status, and support their families. These claims were supported by one of the interviewed principals, who attested that:

*“1<sup>st</sup> phase was worse, money was transferred to schools, and it was short, some schools did not have enough surplus to pay them. Phase 3 at least they were paid on time” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*

One of the interviewed officials confirmed this by claiming that:

*“In phase II, they were not paid in time, a system that was used for them had challenges and it was very slow, there was too much paperwork to process their payments. In phase III, they were paid on time hence they were paid through the PERSAL system” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*



**Figure 4.** Challenges experienced

According to Moja (2022), some of the issues of the programme include the failure to follow the Implementation Framework by PED and schools, failure to meet placement goals (lost opportunities for youth and communities) and failure to meet training goals (missed opportunities for youth) and mismatch between expenditure and accomplishments.

The issue of too much paperwork was revealed as one of the challenges all the stakeholders experienced as there was too much paperwork to be submitted by the assistants to the principals as project managers in the schools, while the principals had to submit the paperwork to the department of education and the department of education officials having to submit the documents to the head office. One principal stated:

*“There is too much paperwork; every month, there is paperwork to be submitted with unclear time frames” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*

The beneficiaries also alluded that they were exploited and overworked, claiming that they were sometimes asked to do work that was outside their job descriptions and not paid for. One participant confirms this by stating:

*“Being given work outside the job description and overworked” (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

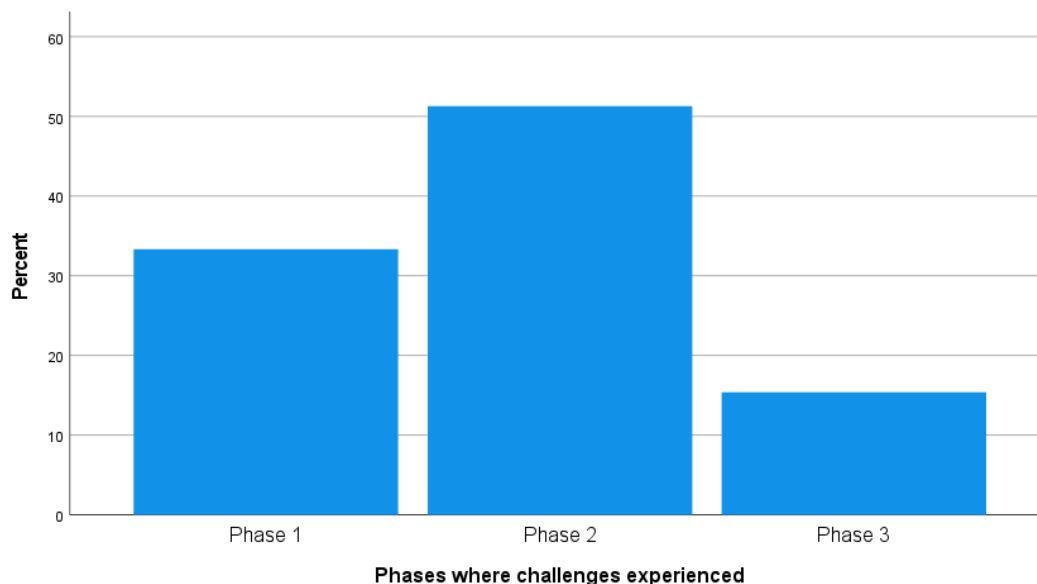
One beneficiary added,

*“Toxic environment. The seniors were misusing their powers to us to do their work” (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

#### 7.2.4. Programme implementation, monitoring, and evaluation

In terms of whether the programme was properly planned and implemented and whether it was regularly monitored and evaluated and to understand its effectiveness and make improvements, the findings revealed that there was a lack of planning as well as monitoring and evaluation in the programme since there were a lot of challenges that were experienced during phase 1, phase 2 and 3. This is illustrated in the statistical results whereby the majority (51.3%) stated that the challenges were experienced in phase 2, followed by 33.3% who stated that the challenges were experienced in phase 1, where's 15.4% of the respondents stated that the challenges were experienced in phase 3 [Refer to figure 5]. This means that the programme was designed in haste without any proper planning. As a result, some of the challenges that were experienced in Phase 1 were also experienced in Phase 2. One participant said,

*“The delays and misunderstandings that happen make it seem like they do not plan early, and they do not take it seriously.”*



**Figure 5.** Phases where challenges are experienced

This also indicates that there was a lack of monitoring because there were still payment delays even in phase 2. Lack of evaluation is also revealed because if there was proper evaluation, the challenges that were experienced in phase 1 would have been avoided in phases 2 and 3. There was no clear start and end date for the programme, and the timing of the implementation especially was wrong. One official claimed that:

*“The timing of implementing the programme was inconveniencing because it was during exam time” (personal communication, 09 May 2023)*

According to Moja (2022), some of the issues of the programme as a result of lack of implementation, monitoring and evaluation, are “paying stipends to ghost or fictitious assistance at schools or paying the

incorrect amount to assistance, money that was not used for what it was supposed to be, the lack of records of money transfers to a list of schools or unauthorized double payments to schools and the poor implementation communication between DBE, PED, districts, and schools”.

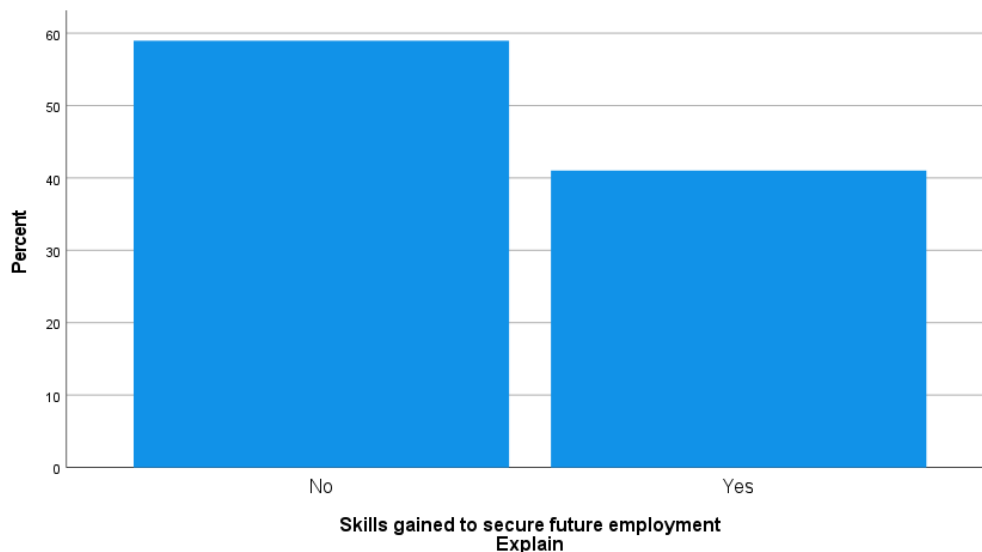
Things would have been better if the programme was regularly monitored and evaluated. The government must evaluate the programme after each phase. They must check the successes and failures of the programme, the challenges that were experienced in each phase, and what worked and what did not work so that they can be able to come up with strategies to overcome the barriers to the successful implementation of the programme, to make sure that the challenges that were experienced in the previous phase are not experienced in the following phase thereby improving the benefits of the programme to the recipients and making sure that it meets its objectives as well as reducing youth unemployment.

*“Project managers need to visit the schools to check if the school follow the instructions” (personal communication, 08 May 2023)*

### 7.2.5. Pathway to future employment

With regards to the extent to which participating in the programme leads to long-term employment outcomes, the findings revealed that there is no withdrawal plan as the beneficiaries leave with nothing, joining the unemployed, there are no transferable skills, and most of the participants exited the programme without a plan and no certificates. This is confirmed by the statistical results whereby 59.0% of the beneficiaries indicated that they cannot use the skills they have acquired to secure future employment [Figure 6].

*“...Time spent on the programme was very limited. There is nothing much we learned from it. Therefore, the skills gained from the programme are very insufficient to secure future employment” (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*



**Figure 6.** Relevance of skills for future employment

This is common in most of the youth empowerment programmes, there is no comprehensive strategy in place to ensure that the recipients can use the acquired skills for them to create self-employment of secure future employment.

This is evident in the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation report which highlights that the criticisms of the exit pathways across EPWP, NARYSEC, and NYS are particularly significant to the design of the Basic Package of Support (BPS). It was said that, notably in rural areas, there is no comprehensive withdrawal plan in place to ensure that beneficiaries can use skills acquired to be self-employed or to be placed with existing firms. Very few participants leave the programs with a plan (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2013).

A critical question to ask when designing public employment programmes of this type is whether the goal is to provide young people with short-term employment that provides temporary financial relief or to create a pathway for young people to gain and experience skills that will help them gain meaningful employment.

#### *7.2.6. Participants experience of the programme*

When the participants were asked about their experiences with the programme, how they felt about it, and how it changed their lives in any way, they had different experiences and views about the programme. Many of them were grateful for the opportunity to be part of the programme, claiming that they had managed to maintain themselves with the stipend and gained some experience. One participant explained that:

*"It is a good initiative as some were able to maintain themselves from the stipend and others were able to get some experience as they had teaching qualifications" (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

However, it was also revealed that some of the beneficiaries had very bad experiences with the programme, claiming that it was horrible and stressful due to the number of challenges they experienced and the fact that some were working in environments different from their fields of study. They alluded that:

*"My experience was very bad due to a lot of challenges one had to face and also seeing people becoming teachers without qualifications" (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

*"It was hectic because it did not serve its initial purpose" (personal communication, 08 May 2023).*

#### *7.2.7. Future directions*

The findings revealed that the respondents were in support of the statement that the government must expand the programme by developing other programmes like the PYEI outside the Department of Education and recruiting the private sector to absorb young people in employment. The findings also pointed out that the youth must be placed in positions that are relevant to their qualifications so that they can gain skills and experience to obtain future employment. Furthermore, the findings show that the respondents were in support of the fact that the programme should run for a longer period, at least a full year to 3 years, so that the assistants can have enough time to gain meaningful work experience and skills.

This is also supported by the youth capital research report on the Basic Education Employment Initiative which states that “Instead of 3-4 months contracts, assistants should be contracted for a full school year. Given school holidays, the actual time on the job over the school year is closer to 9 months. Contracting assistants for a full school year would ensure that assistants have enough time to gain meaningful experience, skills, and social networks; and that schools get the maximum value from having assistants” (Youth Capital, 2021).

Other major findings on the strategies that can be used to address youth unemployment revealed that the respondents believed that the youth must be provided with resources, training, and skills and encouraged to resort to entrepreneurship.

*“Instil the youth with entrepreneurial skills and introduce entrepreneurship programmes that will give them certificates that will help them start their businesses” (personal communication, 09 May 2023).*

This is because there is a variety of youth programmes that were implemented to address the issue of youth unemployment but have failed to provide substantial results. Rothmann et al. (2019) claim that, Government-led initiatives like the Expanded Public Works Program, Community Based Projects (CBP), and Learnerships to mention a few have not done enough to combat youth unemployment and despite these efforts, South Africa is still burdened with a high level of unemployment. Shava and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022) concur by stating that, due to poor monitoring and evaluation, fraud, bad management, lack of accountability, inadequate money, and rural youths' lack of persistence, these programs cannot be sustained.

The idea of instilling young people with entrepreneurship mindset is supported by a paper written by Vutsova et al. (2023), which considers youth entrepreneurship an answer to the problem of youth unemployment. The paper suggests that young people be encouraged to start a business and gives easy steps to do so, here comes the role of training.

Furthermore, Zwane et al. (2021) state that “finance is crucial for business operations and growth. Therefore, financial support must be made available to start-up businesses, for even if you do not have collateral, if you have an excellent idea, funders are likely to support you.” This indicates a need for entrepreneurship development programmes whereby the youth can be trained in how to start, maintain, and run their businesses. Entrepreneurship education is also crucial in higher learning institutions as it will give young people a broader knowledge of entrepreneurship and starting businesses.

The literature points out that “Although it is unclear how long these youth-owned businesses will last, data from both outside and locally points to the need for integrated training and support programs and funding to encourage youth entrepreneurship. For young people interested in self-employment as a career route, incubator and training programs for entrepreneurship growth are crucial” (Yiannakaris, 2019; Cho and Honorati, 2013).

## 8. Conclusions

The evaluation of the programme's effectiveness revealed a combination of achievements and shortcomings in its objectives. The programme successfully achieved its objective of transitioning young people from education to work in the short term. It was effective because it managed to support South African schools,



contributing to enhanced teaching and learning processes in short terms since the assistant teachers were placed for only six months. This impact was particularly evident during the challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the assistants alleviated the strain on teachers and played a crucial role in maintaining educational continuity. Moreover, the programme positively influenced learners' academic performance by assisting them in improving their reading and writing skills. However, the programme's efficacy was limited in some respects.

Although it provided short-term relief from poverty by offering beneficiaries income, this effect was transient due to the programme's short duration. Notably, the programme did not fully realise its objectives of supporting livelihoods and addressing high levels of youth unemployment, revealing the need for a more sustainable approach. Additionally, the objective of enhancing beneficiaries' prospects for future employment through skills development was undermined by the absence of an effective exit strategy and the mismatch between job placements and qualifications.

The examination of challenges faced by stakeholders highlighted a range of issues encountered during the programme's implementation. Among these, excessive paperwork emerged as a significant obstacle for beneficiaries, principals, and officials alike, burdening them with additional responsibilities. Late payments were a substantial concern, leaving beneficiaries without income for extended periods and leading to disruptions and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, beneficiaries faced challenges related to inadequate stipends, inappropriate job assignments, and unfavourable working environments. Particularly noteworthy was the adversarial treatment of assistants by teachers, contributing to a toxic work atmosphere. These challenges collectively underscored the need for streamlined administrative processes, punctual payments, and supportive work environments to enhance the programme's effectiveness. The study identified crucial strategies for the monitoring and enhancement of the programme's impact. Findings revealed deficiencies in planning, monitoring, and evaluation, resulting in challenges experienced by participants.

## 9. Recommendations

One of the programme's objectives is to offer young people practical work experience. Therefore, it is envisaged that participating young people will require mentoring, support, and guidance to fulfil their assistance role. Lack of sufficient training, preparation, and briefing hurts the assistants' capacity to do their duties effectively. Before commencing work, young people must be offered training, and ongoing learning should be provided. The duration of employment must be long enough to instil key transferable skills and guarantee that the experience has a lasting impact.

To achieve the greatest impact for all stakeholders, the design of these interventions should build on current best practices. Keeping the participants in the programme longer will allow them to gain more practical experience and skills that will assist the beneficiaries in securing future employment. It is recommended that the programme should run for at least 3 years to allow those who have an interest in starting their businesses to raise enough startup capital. If these programs are intended to be short-term, then beneficiaries should be given assistance and information throughout the programme to prepare them for navigating their next (post-programme) step in more informed ways than they would have if they had not participated.

The coordinators of the PYEI and the stakeholders must realise that practical strategic planning is needed to identify and address gaps that emerged in programme implementation. Furthermore, a strategic approach

to how the opportunity of placing trainees for this programme can provide a meaningful exit path for them. The participants must be provided with certificates explaining the skills the beneficiary acquired.

The participants must be placed based on their field of study to gain relevant experience that will count on their CVs and increase their chances of securing future employment. For example, a person studying public administration must be placed in a suitable job position rather than doing general work or work in the classroom. The programme must be expanded to all the government departments, such as the Department of Health, Department of Home Affairs, Public Works and many more, including the private sector, to allow young people to gain work experience relevant to their degrees.

The issue of unpleasant working conditions and toxic environments must be addressed. Young people must not be treated like slaves and reminded that they are desperate for jobs. Proper monitoring must be done regularly to ensure that the assistants are not made to do work that is outside their job descriptions and that the stipends are paid on time and to the right people.

The youth must be supported with capital and skills to start businesses, create self-employment and hire others. Youth must be encouraged to be entrepreneurs through programmes that will teach the youth skills they do not have. Those who start their own business must be monitored and mentored until their businesses are successful. Entrepreneurship education must be part of the curriculum in higher learning institutions to equip young people with enough knowledge of entrepreneurship.

To improve its viability, this programme should be monitored and evaluated more effectively. Schools must submit monitoring reports to the Presidency to indicate the programme's performance and effectiveness in relation to its goals and objectives. There must not be more costs than benefits.

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