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Strategies for equipping South African youth for a dynamic workforce: A literature review

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Abstract

Given data suggesting that many young South Africans are neither in employment nor in education, the government has introduced the Youth Employment Accord as a strategic framework to engage the business and labor sectors. A significant number of recently matriculated young people are pushed into unemployment, partly due to societal attitudes that promote unrealistic employment expectations and a lack of preparation for work, as well as low levels of foundational skills. This study investigates strategies to equip South African youth to actively contribute to, and benefit from, a dynamic workforce that promotes employment security, economic sustainability, and an improved quality of life. Using a narrative literature review methodology, the paper explores the concept of employability and related constructs such as entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, and enterprise development. These concepts are analyzed in relation to the labor market to identify key strategies for building a future-ready workforce.

Keywords: Economic Sustainability; Education; Employability; Enterprise Development, Entrepreneurship; Intrapreneurship; Labor Market; Skills Development; Unemployment; Youth Employment Accord; Youth Employment Strategies

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1. Introduction

Our world is socially, materially, economically, and technologically more advanced than ever before. It is evolving at a rapid pace, significantly impacting the world of work. Traditional jobs are being replaced by those that demand high-level, adaptable skills (Ode et al., 2025). To respond effectively, it is essential to develop a resilient and skilled workforce, enhance academic and vocational education, and ensure that young people are equipped with the required skills, abilities, networks, attitudes, and behaviors to successfully enter the labor market, fulfill their potential, and meet evolving workplace demands (Razzaque et al., 2025). In this context, being work-ready, having strong employability skills, adopting a career and entrepreneurial outlook, and even creating jobs where none exist, are key success factors.

Globally, youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge. However, in South Africa, the situation is particularly severe. According to Statistics South Africa (2024), the youth unemployment rate (15–34 years) stood at 45.5% in the fourth quarter of 2024, indicating deep structural issues within the labor market. The problem is especially acute for young people who are Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET), a group which comprised over 3.5 million youth in 2023 (Stats SA, 2024). These alarming figures underline the urgent need for multi-dimensional strategies tailored to the South African context.

This study adopts a narrative literature review approach to explore strategies for equipping South African youth for the workforce, synthesizing key themes and challenges from diverse research sources. This includes addressing the educational, training, and employment landscape for youth in order to bridge the skills gap and combat unemployment, especially at the municipal level. The contribution of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector is highlighted in promoting employability, intrapreneurship, and enterprise development. Most importantly, the study identifies innovative, contextually grounded strategies drawing from both global insights and local realities to align education and training systems with workforce demands and drive inclusive economic growth.

1.1. Background and rationale

One of the striking aspects of recent technological changes is that labor markets are becoming increasingly concentrated in specialized work requiring more educated and skilled workers (Autor, 2022). In South Africa, formal educational systems are the primary means by which a match between the demand for and supply of labor is brought about (Samuels and Singh, 2025). However, people learn in ways other than through formal education. A large proportion of the national workforce has learned through life experiences, non-formal education, and on-the-job learning (Lischewski et al., 2020). Over the years, a number of strategies have been proposed to help young people become equipped for the labor markets. Many strategies are being managed respectively by different government departments and civil society organizations. However, the most important point to note is that these strategies are not being implemented effectively. Our common national responsibility is to implement the best practice projects, which have proven to contribute to developing skills and integrating young people into productive work. If the focus is on well-prepared young people, they will be able to contribute to nation-building themselves. Their employment, in turn, would lead to a lower prevalence of crime in the communities, as unemployed people often turn to illicit activities to retain measurable income.

1.2. Scope and objectives

The object of grounding the economically active population (EAP) is often focused on three major means of giving relevance to people for labor purposes, i.e., employability, entrepreneurship, and intrapreneurship/ intra-firm local enterprise development. A dynamic workforce is certainly a knowledgeable workforce or a learning region endeavoring to keep abreast of international developments (Ajayi and Udeh, 2024). Thus, it is not only necessary to properly ground the present labor force and the EAP, but also school leavers and future workers in general, by formulating concrete targeted coherent programs while preventing the marginalization of these youth during the training and development stage.

In recent years, however, society has begun to question whether academic qualifications should be seen alone as the main tool for enabling access to opportunities and success, particularly in a world where the workforce is constantly changing and work is becoming increasingly knowledge-based. As a contribution to addressing these questions, this study reports on literature on the strategies and approaches that have been implemented in South Africa to equip young people for the dynamic workforce. The scope of this literature review is to explore various perspectives on employability, entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, and enterprise development in the South African context, with the objectives of identifying key trends, challenges, and best practices in preparing youth for the changing nature of work, study of the perspectives of key stakeholders in the sector on the role and importance of the sector. The nature of the skills set required has also added to the debate, with the notion of 21st-century skills giving rise to an increase in the focus on the importance of the development of individual social or soft skills in the education and training process, including self-efficacy builders.

2. Conceptual framework

The primary goal of education is to create opportunities for sustainable development. Sustainable development is closely linked to employment, as holding a job contributes to economic survival and a better quality of life (Hariram et al., 2023). Employment enables individuals to meet their needs and those of their dependents. Learning and working are interconnected individuals often learn through their work, and their understanding of their future occupations influences how they connect education to the labor market (Szymkowiak et al., 2021)

This study explores ways to enhance the employability of South African youth while promoting entrepreneurial thinking and business opportunities. Given that youth unemployment is more than double that of adults, strategic investments in labor-intensive sectors can serve as multipliers for inclusive economic growth (Aryeetey et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating flexibility and functional capabilities into education—starting from foundational stages—is essential.

2.1. Key concepts: Employability, entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, and enterprise development

Addressing youth unemployment involves multiple pathways: increasing employability, fostering self-employment, cultivating intrapreneurship, and supporting small business development (Ayandibu et al., 2019).

These strategies emphasize the need to restructure education and training systems to prepare youth not only to seek employment but to create it.

Enterprise development, in particular, involves adapting support systems and the broader ecosystem to facilitate the creation, growth, and sustainability of small businesses (Akpan et al., 2022). Often, efforts to curb unemployment focus narrowly on job creation or entrepreneurship education, without addressing the developmental potential of young people before they enter the labor market.

From an employability standpoint—defined as the capacity to find and retain meaningful work there is a tendency to focus prematurely on narrow occupational paths. Instead, education systems should foster adaptable, responsible, and proactive individuals with strong problem-solving and interpersonal skills. This requires curricula that emphasize generic, transferable capabilities from an early age.

2.2. Theoretical perspectives

This study draws on multiple theoretical lenses, including human capital theory, cognitive learning perspectives, signaling theory, and the concept of generic capabilities.

Human capital theory views training as a strategic investment in productivity and future earnings (Baharin et al., 2020). Grounded in economic production theory, it assumes that individuals and governments invest in training to achieve returns, whether through increased income or improved welfare. Governments may support this process through training subsidies or tax incentives (Daneshmandi et al., 2022).

However, human capital theory has faced criticism for failing to fully account for the outcomes of training investments. As an alternative, cognitive learning perspectives emphasize the importance of beliefs, attitudes, and cultural contexts in shaping learning outcomes (Gerhart & Feng, 2021). These models focus on how learners internalize training and shift mindsets key factors in long-term employability.

Signaling theory, rooted in information theory, proposes that training sends a message to employers or internal labor markets about a candidate's quality (Kaas & Habli, 2024). In this view, training functions less as a skill-building process and more as a way to demonstrate competence and potential to external stakeholders.

Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive understanding of how education and training influence employment outcomes and guide the design of more effective workforce development strategies.

3. Youth unemployment in South Africa

The high level of unemployment is a concern for policymakers, researchers, businesses, and society at large. Youth unemployment is of particular concern as it is associated with development challenges. In South Africa, the unemployment rate among educated school leavers is very high and is largely attributed to inadequate skills, experience, and training (Adely et al., 2021). To address this concern, the South African government has developed various strategies aimed at increasing employability among young people. The intended outcome of such strategies is to eventually help those who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs or taking intrapreneurial routes. The paper systematically reviews various strategies previously suggested across versions of the South African government's white paper series.

3.1. Current situation and trends

It could be cogently proffered that one decidedly significant factor informing the impressively robust academic curiosity about the topic of potential strategies that can be inculcated in young people to prepare them for future labor market challenges is the concurrence on the affirmation that there indeed is a beleaguering situation of a future labor market that is rapidly changing due to a dizzying array of emerging and converging technological and economic shifts, trends, and challenges (Vyas, 2022). It is well recognized that the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has dawned, and that business cannot be transacted as usual. Literature suggests that global interconnectedness, productivity shifts, platforms, automation, intelligent processes, and algorithmic management of work, augmented and virtual realities, and work transformation along with countless other global megatrends are placing affordable, fast, and accessible technologies at the disposal of ordinary people and their children (Naparin, 2025). Countries may capitalize on these connected opportunities with either strategic digital strategies or forge collaborative partnerships in companies, schools, tertiary educational institutions, and governments. Currently, the dimensions of employability factors as a tool to equip young people for an ever-changing dynamic workforce, the dimensions of entrepreneurship as a tool to provide young unemployed people with a sustainable income, and the concept of enterprise development as a strategic vehicle to capture a number of strategies from the racks of employability and entrepreneurship factors are reviewed.

3.2. Challenges and barriers

To enable barriers to be effectively overcome, the causes of such barriers must be understood. These causes are many and often interrelated in complex ways. The extent to which these issues pertain in a particular developing country depends on, among other variables, the local legal and administrative regime, scale of macroeconomic issues, traditions and culture, nature of social provision, and the pace of development. However, an appreciation of such global problems is useful background and, as in the case of ongoing and often intractable social problems in many countries, certain organizations are devoting efforts to addressing these matters (Voegtlin et al.2022). Globalization and technological advance can exacerbate the challenges such countries and their youthful populations face.

4. Strategies for enhancing employability

To ensure that these 21st-century workers also remain employable, some strategies that could be implemented include ensuring human capital development through relevant and timely support for both job seekers and workers to obtain and maintain a skilled workforce. The majority of young people in South Africa, especially those at the bottom end of the economic ladder, have little access to formal employment or are part of the working poo (Dawson and Fouksman, 2020). Consequently, these young people drop out of the skills development and formal education system or avoid getting involved in it (Aina et al.2024). They do not have the motivation or the resources to stay connected. The formal economy is not generating enough skilled jobs and does not see the need to train these groups. Policymakers should pay attention to the limited involvement of disadvantaged people in the job market and address the issue. Furthermore, these individuals must have

access to adequate training options, ensuring that they possess the necessary skills to fully engage in the workforce.

Another effective way is to provide proactive measures to improve job search performance, increase the motivation of job seekers to comply with search requirements, and raise the probability of information gathering (Li, et al., 2022). The critical issue is to incentivize the potential employee, whether he or she is a job seeker, a trainee, or a current worker, to invest in acquiring and updating his or her skills. Access to accurate and timely information, advice, and assistance can play an essential role in facilitating career decisions and increasing engagement in training and work (Barnes et al.2020). With the guidance of career advisers, an effective and user-friendly gateway to career information, advice, and employment services can steer young people and workers toward the career paths for which they are best suited, which are more likely to be associated with job satisfaction (Presti et al.2023).

4.1. Education and skills development programs

Increased linkages between the world of work and tertiary educational institutions have been recognized as necessary for enhancing the employability of graduates (Cheng et al.2022). Increasing numbers of undergraduates undertake field service work and experiential learning as part of their degree programs, providing students with practical experience in real-world settings and transferring skills in teamwork, communication, and problem-solving (Li et al., 2022). However, in South Africa, statistics show that many students struggle to find employment, with a quarter of them currently unemployed (Meyer and Mncayi, 2021). The problem lies in the systemic challenge of the number of suitable jobs available to absorb students at the rate at which they are produced, or for students to create their own jobs or innovate in the field of work based on their studies (Abe and Chikoko, 2020). It is necessary to shift towards entrepreneurial skill building and experiential learning. The lack of skills is most likely associated with the graduates' pipeline (Rodríguez and Lieber, 2020). The lack of jobs is often used to explain why the unemployed are without work. Using the proposed model, the various variables and their interplays can be explored. What is troubling, however, is that the data does not seem to support the concept of excessive skilling as the reason for unemployment, especially in the developing world. With the recent trend of rising graduate unemployment rates, rather high-skilled graduates find themselves competing for fewer job opportunities. The policy implications for this model are that it may still be worth it due to the positive externality that spending on education and skills development creates.

4.2. Internship and apprenticeship schemes

An internship or traineeship is a work experience opportunity offered for a short term between 1 to 3 months, with a maximum duration of six months (Alp et al., 2023). The scheme is designed to provide practical experience in a selected field. Benefits to the intern include practical work experience in their field of study, working under supervision, and experiencing personal and professional growth. The business or sector benefits include the opportunity to manage an intern, helping to enrich the organization's existing workforce through the intern’s knowledge, training, interest, and creativity.

An apprenticeship is also a work experience initiative but is designed for a longer period, ranging from 12 months to two years (Quew-Jones, 2022). Apprenticeships offer highly skilled expertise, knowledge, and tailor-

made skills available to the organization or business. In essence, internships are designed for individuals interested in exploring various career fields, new sector employment opportunities, or graduate recruitment initiatives. Apprenticeship programs are packaged and developed through partnerships and driven by business and industry. The specific type of apprenticeship is driven by sector-specific business needs and market-induced economic changes. There are two kinds of internships: a qualified internship where interns must have a degree, postgraduate degree, or an advanced diploma, and an intern who just has a matriculation certificate (Bradford, 2023). This could be a graduated internship where the intern can have a degree, diploma, or certificate. With amendments in the LRA, this distinction creates an employment risk as the intern might be seen as having earned the right to fill a permanent employment position.

5. Promoting entrepreneurship among youth

Five of the most common and often intersecting strategies used to promote entrepreneurship among the young are (1) entrepreneurship development forums or other collaborative deliberative platforms; (2) an experiential learning pedagogy that focuses on creating mini-micro enterprises in schools and using real-life case studies and immersive experiences to create young entrepreneurs; (3) training adult entrepreneurs in enterprise creation, financial, and service markets; (4) delivering targeted and age-appropriate training to young people on how to create and operate small-scale service enterprises; and (5) psychology-based interventions (Cieslik et al., 2022). This evidence suggests that because not everyone can be or indeed should be an entrepreneur at any one time, too much emphasis on promoting youth entrepreneurship at the expense of adequate and sustainable work opportunities emerging from the labor market as a whole may not be justified. The institutional macroeconomic and business environment also plays an important role. From the literature review, it is clear that entrepreneurship development has a key role to play in the economic development of countries. In South Africa, youth entrepreneurship development organizations have proliferated, with almost every organ of state now having a youth entrepreneurship development arm receiving some form of funding (Argiolas et al., 2024). The importance of teaching young people to create and run their own businesses is also frequently supported in the literature reviewed. Indeed, there are campaigns to promote and foster a “can-do” culture of entrepreneurship (Donaldson et al.2024). Such a culture is presumably what motivates those who have entrepreneurial intentions to become entrepreneurs and start businesses. An “entrepreneurship and youth” paradigm dominates youth enterprise development, notwithstanding evidence that unemployment among young South Africans has mushroomed because of an increased focus on promoting an entrepreneurial spirit among the very young (Chinyamurindi, 2022).

5.1. Government initiatives

Current government policy largely focuses on addressing unemployment through initiatives that seek to enable and stimulate a meaningful social entrepreneurial economy. Within the Department of Trade and Industry, there exists a Social Entrepreneurship Directorate that focuses on both social and commercial entrepreneurship (Rayeji et al.2021). Initiatives within this directorate include partnerships with the private sector to provide the necessary entrepreneurial skills for a franchise business to individuals from disadvantaged communities, the Incubator Support and Development Programme, and seed funding to

encourage new industrial inventions, the Community Public Private Partnership Programme, and the Women Entrepreneurial Rural Development Initiative (Morris et al., 2020).

Supportive areas, however, remain "surrogate" areas in which strategies are fragmented due to differing agency priorities and delivery mechanisms across the three spheres of government. Areas that aim at addressing individualized learning strategies are encompassed in education, youth, HIV/AIDS, skills, and national labor market policies, while city financial planning, resources, and institutional responses are encompassed in urban planning, infrastructure, and housing (Agyepong et al.2021). Furthermore, while the need to engage in cooperative partnerships is well articulated in policy, practice does not currently demonstrate the existence of a true self-help ethos. The existence of the term social economy implies the presence of an economic function, while in fact, the practice of social development is the outcome of emptying the economy of resources (Onifade et al., 2024). The presentation of the new policy in a format that is heavily dependent on traditional models of partnership and corporatism is unhelpful, as it finds expression in processes that do not facilitate the required commitment and cooperation of all actors involved.

5.2. Private sector involvement

The role of the business sector in promoting economic development in South Africa and, by extension, in Africa is increasingly recognized. This understanding is reflected in an increased interest on the part of business to be involved in a range of activities that contribute to the development of their communities, particularly the most essential requirement for successful economic development, which is the development of the country's human resources. A new economic compact based on moral economic growth and transformation should be negotiated that would entrench sustainable and shared growth and tackle the scourge of unemployment in the post-apartheid economy (Musara, 2020). Also notable is the statement that "government was prepared to put aside ideological dogma and allow the private sector to invest and create jobs" to make it easy for employers to hire people and difficult to fire them when they do (Majid, et al., 2022).

A partnership formed among branches of the government, provinces, organized business, labor, and community networks, leaders, and people formally sealed that pact on jobs (Baquero-Melo, 2023). The various multilateral corporations and business people within this web signed an employment pledge, which serves as their firm commitment and obligation in the fight for job creation (Pfajfar et al., 2022). For the purpose of this study, it is significant to make job creation the central plank of a new macroeconomic policy that seeks to turn around South Africa's post-apartheid economy. The private sector, particularly multinational corporations, has an important role to play in creating job opportunities by virtue of their local and global stature, access to resources, skilled labor, management, technical, and entrepreneurial capabilities (Li, 2022). They have access to advanced technology and capacity, the experience of managing international operations, as well as technology transfer capabilities, making them the main providers of opportunities and the essential elements of labor market and enterprise development. It is only with the active participation of the private sector that lasting approaches to poverty and underdevelopment problems can be developed. It is to the advantage of governments to include members of the business community in the public policy-making process. These new partnerships, with their potential for giving shape and significance to public policymaking in a variety of areas, will require businesses to play a more active role in local affairs.

6. Enterprise development programs

The South African government has put in place a number of initiatives aimed at stimulating the growth of enterprise. These programs are generally intended to address issues relating to the supply and demand of small business development services. Enterprise development programs are conceptualized as a system and constituted by several important horizontal and vertical relationships. The primary reason for enterprise development failure is the lack of demand for products or services supplied by small businesses. Small business support programs often create and fill niches in specific or general business environments, exacerbating systemic weaknesses or focusing on presumptive factors outside of the direct control of small businesses (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). Data from recent studies concluded that advances in small business assistance programming and policy development do not necessarily produce better support systems, less failure, more successes, or stronger small business development environments (Belitski et al., 2022). Small businesses affected by violent crime are better prepared to meet that challenge and to continue operating their businesses if they are already participating in preventive activities, irrespective of their type or size (Caplan et al.2021). Results also show that those respondents who are concerned and who have taken steps to prevent violent crime express both positive and a high level of confidence in their ability to manage the risk posed by workplace violence. These SMEs are seriously addressing workplace violence by becoming experts in ongoing risk management and guarding against such events. In line with this, it is also important to note that enterprise development programs often do not include an evaluation of demand conditions or reasons for their existence but simply assume that the program is valuable for those businesses that should find it beneficial and market it to. Participants remain as weakly demand-driven services SMEs and as an important alternative to institutional support mechanisms.

6.1. Incubation centers and hubs

Incubation centers, often located within institutions of higher education or in close proximity to an entrepreneurial ecosystem, can play a central role in unlocking the potential of future entrepreneurs (Lose, 2021). Incubators offer various services, facilities, and resources to those serious about starting a business (Millette et al., 2020). Business incubation is a proven way to help a new business reach sustainability faster. Encouraging word-of-mouth marketing by incubates is one of the strategies for business retention. Incubatees are educated about good entrepreneurial practices, with ideas and new business plans evaluated against pre-set criteria, allowing weak proposals to be quickly weeded out. A number of services and resources are tailored to the different stages of the business's life: flexible workspace and later office facilities tailored to changing needs, business support facilities, technology infrastructure, financial resources, and financial advice, management consulting, expertise in intellectual property, assistance in finding strategic partners or joint ventures, and other resources such as legal advice, medical benefits, or human resources support (Ferrari et al.2021).

Startup companies exhibit unique characteristics at different stages of development. New businesses often need assistance when they are young, fragile, and poorly organized. Incubators, while today supporting mostly service sector companies, have also, in the past, played an important role in commercializing new technology (Paoloni and Modaffari, 2022). Incubators continue to address new market opportunities, including specialized programs to introduce the element of social responsibility by focusing on socially driven

enterprises and social entrepreneurs. At the same time, incubators should also be ready to embrace competitive sustainable businesses. Flexibility and adaptability are key to the success of an incubation program. A vibrant entrepreneurs' community is formed as these success stories often spread the word and encourage other new entrepreneurs (Tula et al.2024). Incubators encourage entrepreneurship and are often supported by the host governments as they complement and are compatible with traditional training programs (Leitão et al.2022). However, there are various stakeholders and philosophical views about the roles and objectives of incubators and the process itself.

Some incubation centers are exploring the possibility of creating a relationship with existing small enterprises in the regions. Incubators can offer various types of services to help already established smaller businesses strengthen, grow, or start thinking about modifying their existing business model to take advantage of emerging market opportunities (Lose, 2021). It is believed that incubators can better help local economies by encouraging and maintaining those firms' presence nearby. Currently, many such businesses operate in peripheral areas where natural resources are abundant, which are important for jobs, tax base, and other support required for the region's well-being. Educated younger generations are moving away from heritage areas for so-called skilled jobs in larger towns and cities, creating a skills drain, which stifles opportunities for individuals to create small businesses. Companies in the informal sector, such as forestry, manufacturing, and healthcare facilities, are burdened with the operational and financial challenges of being in a rural area and do not have the resources to pursue the opportunities that accompany renewable natural resources or demand from government health sectors (Gopinath and Chitra, 2020). For many companies, constantly living with the threat of closure can be devastating for employees, families, and economies that depend on these small businesses. In order for these businesses to benefit from active participation in supporting their enterprise ecosystem, they need to be supported in both soft and hard service.

6.2. Access to finance and resources

Inadequate financial support from the family, the government, financial institutions, venture capital, and other sources (Lerner and Nanda, 2020). This funding serves as evidence of the kind of resources that young new entrepreneurs possess from the GEM countries. The implications are that youth in South Africa and the rest of the African countries are unable to pursue opportunities for the creation of new business ventures. When funds are made available through a microfinance program, for example, young people have more capacity to pursue business opportunities. But the challenge does not stop there. The view is that the funding support should start from as early as the school education level in order to equip students with the knowledge required to properly utilize the funds obtained to venture into business.

Before young people start their own businesses, it is important that they have a certain level of capital, whether it be physical, human, social, or financial capital. (Ruggeri and Yu, 2023) It is further posited that if the business needs certain physical capital in order to start, the insufficient physical capital as a barrier will not allow young people to start their businesses (Ayalu et al.2023). Not having access to capital means youth entrepreneurs have limited ability to finance investments in raw materials, equipment, labor, and the marketing of their start-ups to help mobilize and start small businesses (Bilal et al.2021). This inability leads to a restriction of movement of the youth between certain occupations and restricts the possibility of starting their own business activity, because once we affirm that people need goods in relation to their level of

consumption, all societies have a minimum threshold of goods, and this, of course, demands the realization of a minimum activity, be it of goods and services.

7. Case studies and best practices

The studies revealed some inspiring, successful case studies of interventions encouraging youth intermediation for employability and enterprise development in the South African context. Key factors contributing to the success of such initiatives included government-funded initiatives in partnership with the private sector, the embracement of a school-enterprise relationship, an overarching youth entrepreneurship policy, teacher empowerment through training, and the collaboration of key stakeholders such as parent bodies, local government, SETAs, and community leaders. In a recent case in South Africa, the Gauteng Department of Education, in partnership with a government-owned electricity utility company with a vast infrastructure, formalized a relationship for the provision of Techno, Business Studies, and Economic and Management Sciences within the National Senior Certificate (Cindi, 2021). The partnership also provided teachers with 10 days of industry exposure and orientation, with the aim of equipping them with the required cues to encourage the entrepreneurs of the future. The utility company also identified a number of schools that could benefit from the establishment of school enterprise-based companies through a structured and accredited school-business partnership program.

7.1. Successful youth-led initiatives

Youth enterprise development is increasingly being promoted at various levels, including government, for the potential of creating jobs and promoting economic growth (Geza et al., 2023). Successful youth entrepreneurship programs can improve a sense of innovation, provide practical experience, and produce tangible products, which are not always provided by traditional forms of employment. Youth-led initiatives are well-known and reported on in the South African context. These initiatives provide both financial and non-financial support that ranges from mentorship, coaching, training, and infrastructure to networking that makes them scalable. Such initiatives either manage the coordination of the start, maintain, or grow stages of entrepreneurship and help with all the obstacles and barriers that young people face when managing a business.

Youth employment, motivation, initiative, and self-employment have always existed throughout history, and enterprises have been created time and time again. Plans by the state to channel them toward wealth and job creation have been praised over the years, especially in the face of high levels of unemployment. The South African government has approved a national integrated youth development strategy with a goal of significantly exceeding the 30% objective set by the GDS (Dladla, 2020). The GDS aimed to create 5 million jobs by 2019, of which 30% directly contributed to the development of young people. Young people face levels of unemployment, and for the country to realize job quantity and job quality of life, youth entrepreneurship is a sad reality. Authorities must address the major challenges of unemployment, poverty, and inequality in the country.

7.2. Innovative models and approaches

Educational placements (EPs) offer students opportunities to use and develop their knowledge, gain a sense of purpose, and obtain skills by solving non-trivial problems, evaluating alternatives, gathering resources, and synthesizing information (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022). This innovative model provides an agreement between academics and operators who source a strategic problem that requires intellectual innovation and can be solved through operations research and/or management science interventions. Many of the placements have resulted in patents, investments, and new organizations. Publication of the educational placements is done in a professional development book, journal, or conference paper. These programs are evaluated as well as the students' progress at the postgraduate level. A way of consolidating this model is recommended that will provide the necessary networking and linkages.

Service-learning and work-integrated learning courses have become the most popular and widespread approach to higher education in the United States in the past decade (Sovilla and Varty, 2023). However, to the best of our knowledge, reports on such experiential education in accounting have been nonexistent. In this paper, we present the results for a service-learning mentor program in accounting for university students in their last two years of study. The mentor program experience involved affiliations with small business owners. The response from the participating students, mentors, and small business owners in this project is that the principles and ideas presented in their classrooms have indeed been tested in real-life situations. Data from a survey performed after the service-learning mentor program highlighted the benefits of such experiential education for students, testimony to a better understanding of social obligation, and evidence of community service.

In this paper, the author examines work experience and learning in the context of unavoidable job transitions experienced by university students before they embark on their professions. For some students, job transitions are aborted early in the career development process. That is, students are placed in jobs and subsequently opt out while working. Upon being exposed to a specific employment sector, some very strategically reevaluate their career path, industry choice, and job fit criteria. That is, they switch industries or job options early in the process; administrators and less motivated students affect job transitions late in the process. These students drop out late or after completion. Descriptive statistics illustrate the roles of individual, contextual, and motivational characteristics in students' attitudes toward work. Given the importance of positive early employment experiences in career education, typical work-related programs and interventions are discussed (Nguyen et al., 2025).

8. Impact assessment and evaluation

There are very few studies designed to evaluate the impact of entrepreneurship programs. A comprehensive review reveals that researchers are shifting from surveys of attitudes and intentions to direct measures of business creation and success. In some cases, a comparison is made between those exposed to educational experience and those who were not. A quasi-experimental field test was created for systematically comparing the behavior of similar students, using real-life events to confirm or refute hypothesized relationships.

The Annapolis Plan provided an interesting opportunity for researchers to measure the financial success, as an outcome variable, of their in-residence entrepreneurship program (Ervin, 2024). Researchers recruited

intervention and control subjects for later comparison. Comparison of the intervention versus control group revealed a correlation between prior business training and higher sales; however, those taking the entrepreneurship course were not more successful than those who did not. The field study was found to be more informative than a pure laboratory experiment, but it was cautioned that an analysis of only one class must be repeated in other settings and programs. Social interventions require more than single experimental studies, about which generalization cannot be made (McArdle, et al., 2024).

8.1. Measuring employability skills acquisition

Measuring employability and employability skills acquisition is not straightforward. Literature indicates that there is no agreed set of employability attributes one can possess or develop in order to be successful in seeking employment (Byrne, 2022). Measures are based on self and other perceptions that vary because of context, background, and interpretation. Employability is assessed for different targeted groups of graduates, by those about to enter graduate roles in the chosen field and manage the retention and development of employed graduates in their first years of work (Pitan and Muller, 2020). The primary employer concerns and indicators of employability that make young people more attractive in the eyes of recruiters are perseverance, responsibility, communication skills, enthusiasm for work, proactivity, results-driven, well-managed, strong personal motivation and commitment to what they do, curiosity, teamwork skills, ability to adapt, political acuity, customer-focused, trustworthy and ethical approach, concern for quality and accuracy, loyalty, organizational skills, flexibility, problem-solving skills, good judgment, stress management, coping with conflict, and the ability to work under pressure (Mainga et al.2022).

It is possible to define areas of employer concern to the extent that it is useful. The area of employer values contained within a concern is essential, focusing on knowledge, skills, practical/intellectual, and personal attributes. In the same light, statutory bodies, professional bodies, graduates, individual students, parents, various commentators, industrial needs, and government have all developed a range of data and employability indicators (Cantatore et al.2021). Statements of learning outcomes in higher education and training can, by being used as part of focused enterprise and career education programs, take account of an increasing phenomenon in graduate employment, involvement, working, creating, and developing small companies, and what is seen as the consolidation of entrepreneurial behavior in graduates (Rodríguez and Lieber, 2020). An understanding by graduates of a potential range of employability indicators, an appreciation of the necessity to be versatile, to take responsibility, to be realistic about the range of income that can be earned and the personal sacrifices that being employed requires, and a preparedness to be creative in finding or creating their ideal job are of interest to graduates, further to employers.

Being an outstanding student has been shown to be a good predictor of later success, indicating the necessity of concerted efforts to recruit and support such students in enrolling in post-secondary academic programs. Popular recruitment selection criteria are also supportive of personal characteristics that society values for work, including knowledge, highly developed teamwork skills including the ability to see the view from another's perspective to negotiate and to influence as well as the ability to lead and manage, digital literacies, numeracy, and communication skills, the ability to work at tasks requiring a range of action attributes, including problem solving, teamwork, creativity, presenting work, and action, and the ability to work under pressure in a team and to organize and communicate well, including the capacity to design and communicate solutions to problems, prevent or solve a problem (Ababneh, 2021). Additionally, generic

capabilities that are expected of new recruits include commercial know-how, being capable of understanding the consequences of their actions, and demonstrating sound decision-making. They also promoted the role of innovation and enterprise, including the idea and concept of action learning and the development of the workplace as the classroom rather than the standard instruction setting. Specialty and other professional bodies have developed their own learning indicators according to the specific competencies they consider graduates require to be considered employable by the specialty area (Brown et al.2022).

8.2. Assessing entrepreneurial ventures

The central issue confronting educators who wish to establish entrepreneurship training programs is how to ensure that students actually come away from the ventures with the noted valuable benefits. Simply attending an "entrepreneurship" class, workshop, or seminar does not ensure that learners' thinking and personal attributes have been changed in ways that are highly correlated to entrepreneurial success (Cieslik et al., 2021). Learners' thinking and their personal attitudes about entrepreneurship must be affected: they must actually behave or act like entrepreneurs. This is what is meant by a person having the "GI Joe (or Jane) Kung-Fu Action Grip." Although the importance of these "experiential" and holistic teaching methods is widely recognized by entrepreneurship educators, they must still face problems of assessing these outcomes of their ventures.

In assessing learner performance, traditional "content" presentation courses are relatively simple and straightforward to assess: learners cannot do well on exams and assignments unless they have acquired and can apply knowledge that is being taught. However, equipping learners with a set of specific skills and knowledge does not ensure their continued use or positive effect. Whether learners are involved in real-world or simulated entrepreneurial ventures, assessment on an overall "experiential" basis matching the very nature of the ventures themselves is still essential. Such an approach is also consistent with the practice of assessing student business plan competition ventures by evaluating their "investability" (Donaldson et al.2024).

9. Policy recommendations and future directions

Common to all the reviewed strategies is the need to reconsider the philosophy and approaches underpinning education and training, to ensure that they foster key Graduate Attributes that are commensurate with changing workplace needs. It is important to note that a graduate is a member of the body of scholars, and it is this aspect that enables the graduate to play a role in knowledge creation, as well as the enhancement and extension of knowledge. Thus, the ability not only to do and achieve something, but to do so in such a manner that it propels individuals and society to higher levels of productivity is critical and involves eight basic qualities, valued differently by different sectors and markets. The conceptual space of aptitude, skills, competence, and expertise is a domain rich with distinctions and correspondingly complex language commons that cut across different academic disciplines, professional curricula, and occupation-specific forms and discourses. It is clear that in developing strategies to equip young people for the dynamic challenges of the world of work, we continue to be bound by the old ideologies of unemployment and skills and by professional categories such as job seeker, entrepreneur, intrapreneur, learning program provider, curriculum planner, teacher, etc. Despite the currently fashionable disciplines, modularization, and stratification of knowledge and learning standards, the expanding knowledge base of the sciences and technological evolution continues paving the way toward an even larger knowledge economy involving innovative policy and practice. What is

missing, however, is an informed, creative, and transforming discourse between the varied stakeholders that transcends the entrenched categorical ideological divides. The correctness of future interventions is dependent on future vision and perspective. What, together, should we collectively enable for whom and why so that we continue contributing to the development of the productive economy?

9.1. Policy implications for government and stakeholders

The study of youth employability and entrepreneurship is multifaceted and cannot be sectorized or oversimplified. Policy implications will need to take on board the status quo of the local and global economies and will shift dramatically in response to the exponentially changing environment. Only with a clear understanding of the status quo, in relation to our global peers, will these interventions be more focused. In addition to publicly funded interventions, regulations and strategies for an enabling environment are extremely important for the success of large-scale youth employment initiatives. Public policy has a very important role to play as a complement, promoter, and capacity builder in the development, implementation, and sustainability of large-scale youth entrepreneurship and youth enterprise development initiatives. It will need to ensure that the environment is ready and conducive for the entry and sustainability of these young entrepreneurs and the well-being of the young workers.

Policy makers in government will also need to carefully consider recommendations to invest in more detailed data collection related to youth employment and entrepreneurship. The interpretability and comparability of such data will be critical to form the backbone of a more robust and coherent management, implementation, and evaluation of government interventions. Furthermore, it is also important to ensure the engagement of all relevant departments that could possibly play a role in youth employment and entrepreneurship and integrate the voices of youth in the design of such interventions. Interventions need to be properly targeted at the constraints and needs of young people. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and for greater impact and sustainability of youth initiatives, there might be different approaches for the marginalized and special target groups.

9.2. Areas for further research

Given the knowledge gaps that were highlighted due to the limited available South African research pertaining to youth entrepreneurship development, their employability, and intrapreneurship, it is suggested that the topical discourse enters a new phase. The outcomes of these knowledge inquiries can prove to be insightful and offer further direction for enterprise educational initiatives. A greater understanding of these topics, with active – practical and experiential – involvement of employers and industrial organizations, will highlight the specification and adaptability of these theoretical underpinnings in order to better prepare young people for current labor market dynamics. The specific research suggested includes more focused exploration of corporate readiness: the extent to which non-employer companies are willing to train, develop, and give new recruits a chance to enter their workplace.

A related important research question that was recognized as part of the analysis is the determination of which skills and competencies can be effectively taught, developed, and inculcated through focused enterprise educational interventions. These include important national policy areas such as enterprise educational curriculum content, educators' training, and implementation of the National Development Plan in relation to

improving entrepreneurship in junior phases. The findings can contribute to developing proposals and guidelines for educators in promoting youth entrepreneurship development, their employability, and career progression. The research could also include conducting detailed case studies of existing enterprise interventions within schools, focusing on their success criteria, optimization, and sustainability.

10. Conclusion

This study underscores that equipping young people with entrepreneurial, intrapreneurial, and employability skills is not only a national priority but also a global necessity. The evidence presented throughout this paper highlights the urgent need to prepare South African youth to be both job seekers and job creators, capable of contributing meaningfully to an ever-evolving workforce. In particular, young people from urban and under-resourced communities require targeted support that addresses their unique social, economic, and educational circumstances.

The key findings stress the importance of transforming education and training systems beyond traditional models. There is a pressing need to cultivate real-world problem-solving, creativity, teamwork, and resilience from an early stage. Stakeholders must ensure that these systems are adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to industry needs to nurture a generation that is ready for the future. The promotion of enterprise-based learning, work-integrated experiences, and localized incubation programs is crucial to achieving these objectives.

To realize this vision, institutions and policymakers must integrate entrepreneurship and employability modules across all levels of education and establish formal partnerships between education providers and industry. Furthermore, differentiated support strategies—particularly those designed to overcome the barriers faced by youth in rural and township areas—are essential to ensure equitable access to opportunities.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing discourse on the need to embed 21st-century competencies within education systems. It calls for a shift from fragmented interventions toward cohesive, system-wide strategies that reflect the lived realities of South African youth and the evolving labor market. As the country continues to confront the twin challenges of unemployment and economic transformation, such integrated and inclusive approaches will be critical to building a resilient and inclusive workforce for the future.

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