

Determinants of Youth Unemployment among TVET College Graduates in the Vhembe District

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors that determine youth unemployment among young Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college graduates and offers a solution to the problem in the Vhembe district of Limpopo Province, South Africa. To comprehend the lived experiences of TVET college graduates that were unemployed, this study used a qualitative approach. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to gather data. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to sample individuals. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This study found that skill gaps and obsolescence due to the TVET college curriculum, as well as skills mismatch, nepotism, and tribalism, are among the other factors that determine unemployment among TVET college graduates. The study also found that the applicability of the skills provided by TVET colleges to job market demands is a key concern. This study recommends that revamping the TVET college curriculum to meet the demands of the fourth industrial revolution is critical. This entails teaching soft skills and digital abilities. Furthermore, tackling problems such as nepotism and tribalism through public awareness campaigns, regulatory changes, and inclusive behaviors can help reduce youth unemployment.

KEYWORDS

Determinants; economic participation; graduates; young people; unemployment; TVET college.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, young graduates in South Africa have been feeling pessimistic about finding employment because of the country's rising youth unemployment rate (Mseleku, 2022). For young people to enter the South African labor market, vocational training programs are a crucial choice (Mayombe, 2021). More TVET colleges need to be constructed nationwide and claim the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (Republic of South Africa, 2013) if the nation's youth are to graduate with the skills demanded by the labor market. In addition, initiatives should be taken to persuade young people to consider TVET colleges as options for post-secondary education. The South African government has shown dedication to creating jobs for the youth; however, there is still a significant unemployment rate among TVET graduates. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the unemployment rate for TVET college graduates in 2020 was just over 50% (52.2%), with women experiencing a slightly higher rate (54.2%) than men (49.1%) (Republic of South Africa, 2013). According to StatsSA (2022), the graduate unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2022 was 10.7%. TVET college graduates in Mauritius have a greater rate of unemployment and underemployment than university graduates (Ministry of Labour Report, 2015). Job scarcity often leads TVET college graduates to take jobs unrelated to the course they were taught (MITD, 2016). According to Bauman and Lucy (2019), entrepreneurship education is critical for TVET college graduates seeking self-employment.

In South Africa, post-secondary education institutions formerly known as further education and training (FET) colleges were renamed TVET colleges (Republic of South Africa 2013). Powell (2014) defines TVET colleges as various delivery techniques that can be offered in non-formal and formal education to individuals of all ages and backgrounds. In South Africa, a TVET College is a higher education institution that differs from universities in that its focus is on providing graduates with technical skills, as opposed to universities, which focus on theory (Cloete, 2021). According to the DHET TVET College website (2016), TVET College is a post-school education program in which students who have completed Grade 9 can enroll in a program of their choice if they are 16 years old or older. Furthermore, TVET College prepares graduates for careers and entrepreneurship. TVET colleges are in the early stages of development worldwide. They have been viewed as workforce education that could prepare graduates for the labor market (UNESCO, 2012). According to Adams (2019), skill development experts criticized the South African government's commitment strategy toward TVET College for failing to respond to industry needs. In response to this criticism, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) granted R10.7 billion to TVET colleges in 2018. According to Needham (2019), the South African government's aim to implement the TVET college strategy was genuine; nevertheless, the sector issues pose hurdles for TVET colleges to create marketable graduates.

By suggesting a framework that can aid TVET college graduates in finding employment or launching their own enterprises after graduation, this study makes a positive contribution to the economic participation of TVET college graduates in the Vhembe district. Graduates of TVET

colleges would be able to participate in the mainstream economy if academic leaders at TVET colleges could work with various stakeholders in the youth development sector and related businesses. The current study consequently suggests a TVET college– industry partnership framework to entice TVET colleges to sign a memorandum of understanding with businesses in which the TVET college guarantees that no TVET college students between the ages of 18 and 35 receive their qualification without performing two weeks of youth service in the area of their study. This could make it easier for TVET college students to obtain real-world experiences while learning. Additionally, rather than graduates searching for placement opportunities on their own, which has proven to be an impossible mission for graduates who do not find a place to do practical work, TVET colleges should look for placement opportunities for TVET college graduates where they can do practical work for 18 months. This study makes a significant contribution not only by highlighting the difficulties experienced by TVET college graduates in South Africa but also by suggesting workable solutions to these difficulties. Emphasis is placed on curriculum updates, skill alignment, and addressing societal prejudices to improve young graduates' economic involvement and contribute to reducing youth unemployment in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

Research on the determinants of unemployment among TVET college graduates

According to Nkosi (2017), one- third of South African graduates from technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges are unable to find jobs. More than 10,000 TVET college graduates are expected to be unemployed by January 2022. This prompted the Department of Higher Education and Science, Innovation, and SETAs to launch a skills development initiative with the goal of hiring 10 000 TVET college graduates by April 2022 (Thwala, 2022). According to the gender parity index for 2021, young women are more affected by unemployment than young males (Khuluvhe & Netshifhefhe, 2022).

Even with their practical experience, TVET college graduates struggle to find employment once they graduate (SASSETA, 2018). Some students drop out before earning their degrees, which contributes to the sluggish entry of TVET graduates into the workforce (Garraway et al.,2015). The growth in unemployment among TVET college graduates is attributed to skill mismatches between the supply of skills and employee expectations (Mkize, 2022). It is difficult for TVET college graduates in South Africa to participate in the economy because they lack the technical skills and practical experience required by the labor market (James, 2022). Similar to other businesses such as the tourist sector, the TVET college curriculum in South Africa has not advanced at the same rapid rate, which has increased the unemployment rate for TVET college graduates (Tripney & Hombrados, 2013). Mabunda and Frick (2020) contend that the lack of knowledge about the credentials that TVET colleges provide their students inhibits the private sector from accepting job applications from graduates of these institutions. My solution to this issue is that TVET colleges should involve the corporate sector in creating their curricula. This will help TVET institutions understand the types of TVET college graduates that businesses need.

According to Papier (2017), the lack of adequate equipment for practical training in TVET colleges causes graduates to lack the technical skills required by the industry, which affects their ability to find jobs. In addition, youth unemployment in South Africa is complicated and problematic regardless of the education and institutions from which a young person graduate (Madimabe & Omodan, 2021; Matabane et al., 2022; Sibiya & Nyembezi, 2018). The lack of initiative in developing nations' TVET college curricula to provide students with the skills required by industry, as claimed by Singh and Tolessa (2019), correlates with a greater rate of unemployment among TVET college graduates.

Graduates must have special work skills, such as interpersonal, communication, and soft skills, to participate in labor-intensive jobs. Because they lack the work abilities that the labor market demands, TVET college graduates are not absorbed in labor skills (Ayonmike & Okeke, 2016). Legg-Jack (2018) notes that TVET college graduates lack technical expertise because they lack the equipment for practical training and workshops for their students. Consequently, TVET college graduates are more likely to be unemployed because potential employers are reluctant to provide mentorship and training to TVET college graduates. Nazron et al. (2017) claimed that the lack of methods for TVET institutions to collaborate with companies leads to higher unemployment among TVET college graduates.

According to Khambule (2019), TVET college students lack awareness of employment opportunities that match their potential qualifications while they are studying, which results in them graduating with no jobs. Young people must be informed about job options to make informed professional decisions to address graduate unemployment (Mncayi & Dunga, 2016; Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023). PWC (2015) found a severe lack of critical abilities among TVET college graduates. This is because the technical knowledge provided in these institutions is not keeping up with economic growth, which makes TVET college graduates less employable.

Graduate employability is determined by home institutions, and graduates from wealthy and well-connected families are more likely to find work, whereas graduates from poor families struggle because they have no family member who can influence the hiring process (Yasin et al., 2019). According to Laruni (2015), tribalism has a significant likelihood of limiting graduate career options. Furthermore, when compared with other ethnic groups in Uganda, young Banyankole people are more easily hired in government departments. Having identified a study gap, the researcher attempted to shed light on the factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates to propose a solution to the problem in the Vhembe region, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The objective of this study was to determine the factors that contribute to youth unemployment among TVET college graduates in Vhembe, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates and suggest a way forward toward reducing the problem in the Vhembe district, Limpopo

Province, South Africa, this study adopts Classical Marxism as a theoretical framework. Classical Marxism was developed in the mid-19th century by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (Burbules and Carlos, 2000). According to Mullen (1986), Classical Marxism views unemployment as centrally linked to the capitalist mode of production, and addressing it requires state intervention in the form of real social wages, unemployment benefits, and the welfare system. Peters and Besley (2013) argued that employment is central and important to one's self-concept and sense of well-being. Employment is a means of survival for individuals and plays an essential role in their identity. However, capitalism, as a system of private ownership of the means of production, deprives people of the opportunity for employment, which is essential for self-worth. The application of Classical Marxism in the present study is to argue that unemployment among TVET college graduates in the Vhembe district is purposely caused by capitalists' mode of production, whereby capitalists, owners of big retailers, and big businesses in the Vhembe district are concerned about making a profit, i.e., job creation in the Vhembe district. The capitalist mode of production in the Vhembe district overlooks TVET college graduates and hires people with no qualifications or with no matric, those in possession of matric, with the intention of avoiding paying TVET college graduates' reasonable salaries and exploiting individuals with no post-matric qualifications by not offering them fair compensation. Therefore, to reduce unemployment among TVET colleagues based on Classical Marxism, the state that in this case is the Vhembe district municipality in the context of this study needs to develop intervention strategies such as fostering partnerships with capitalists (business owners) so that they can provide TVET college graduates with an internship to gain work experience while earning a salary.

MATERIALS and METHODS

Study design and area

This study adopts a qualitative approach. All the methods were performed using a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate for this study because it provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of the issues of interest. In addition, the qualitative approach assists the researcher in exploring aspects of this phenomenon through relevant participants (Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach is appropriate in this study because it helped me gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of young TVET college graduates and advance the existing body of knowledge concerning the factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates. The study was conducted in the Vhembe district of Limpopo Province, South Africa, which is predominantly inhabited by Venda and Tsonga speakers. The population is estimated to exceed 1.1 million and is distributed among 274,480 households (Vhembe District Municipality Website, 2023).

Study population and sampling techniques

The study participants were a group of unemployed TVET college graduates aged 20–34 years who had graduated between 2018 and 2022 and were sampled from the Vhembe district

municipality. Twenty unemployed TVET college graduates participated in this study. This total sample was determined by data saturation, a point at which the researcher decided to stop interviewing the participants because they gave the same response. The demographic information of TVET college graduates is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participating TVET Graduates

Demographic characteristics		<i>f</i>
Gender of TVET College graduates	Male	12
	Female	8
Age of TVET college graduates	30–34 years	6
	25-30 years old	11
	20-25 years old	3
Level of qualification	N6 in Business Management	11
	N6 in Management Assistance	6
	N6 in Hospitality	2
	N6 in Marketing	1
TVET college graduate disability	Visual impairment	0
	Hearing impairment	0
	Physical/Physical Disability	0
Total		20

The qualifications that the participants possessed included N6 in Business Management, Management Assistance, Hospitality, and Marketing. Participants were sampled through purposive and snowball sampling. The researcher first used purposive sampling because it allows for the identification and selection of participants who know or have experienced a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Young unemployed TVET college graduates sampled in this study know the factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates. Thereafter, snowball sampling was used in this study. Participants who were sampled through purposive sampling acted as gatekeepers in the sampling of another participant. Snowball sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which participants are recruited by other participants to form part of the sample or study (Bryman et al., 2014). The identified TVET college graduates referred the researcher to other unemployed TVET college graduates.

Data collection

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 20 unemployed TVET college graduates ranging in age from 20 to 34. Data were collected in two primary local languages (Tshivenda and Xitsonga), and audio recordings were made in the native language and then transcribed into English. Transcripts were checked for completeness and accuracy. Semi-

structured individual interviews are qualitative data-gathering methods in which questions are asked within a prepared topic framework (Bryman et al., 2014). Because of its potential to capture participants' feelings and thoughts during the interview, a semi-structured individual interview seemed appropriate in the current study. The following questions (Table 1) were asked to collect information on the numerous factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates and to provide a solution to the problem in the Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Table 2.

Semi-structured individual interview guide.

Interview questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does TVET college curricula and mismatches of needed skills in industries contribute to unemployment among TVET college graduates? • How does the lack of partnership between TVET colleges and stakeholders in youth development contribute to unemployment among TVET college graduates? • What factors fuel the unemployment rate among TVET college graduates? • What is the way forward toward reducing the problem of TVET college graduates' unemployment in the Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, South Africa?

Data analysis techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed for richer and more in-depth epistemological viewpoints. Thematic analyzes represent insights gained from the coding process that classifies raw qualitative data (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The following six steps of thematic analysis were applied in the present study: (1) I familiarized myself with the data by reading through transcripts and notes that were taken during the interview and by taking note of the position's reflections. During this step, I further listened to the participants' recorded audio to familiarize them with the data they had provided; (2) I generated initial codes to apply to the data and transcribed the verbal data gathered from the participants' interviews in a sequential form. In this step, the initial coding of the complete data set was performed, followed by the identification of emerging patterns. (3) I consolidated all the codes into potential themes, read the transcript that contained the transcribed data from all the participants, and highlighted sentences and phrases that were meaningful in answering the research questions. (4) I reviewed and checked the themes that were identified. I reviewed the highlighted data on the transcript to determine whether it was linked to the aim of the study and to check how it addressed the research question. The data that were not linked to the research questions were eliminated. (5) I applied appropriate names and descriptions, and in step five, the researcher named each set of data, and the information that was connected was grouped to form patterns. (6) I drafted and refined the final report. This final step involved

writing the final report, which entailed linking the various themes that emanated from the participants' responses.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the University of South Africa Research Committee, College of Education, drawn from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) project, which is registered at the University of South Africa under the reference number 2018/03/14 90060059MC. I gave the participants informed permission forms and advised them that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at any time. To protect the information gathered from the participants, pseudonyms were used.

RESULTS

This study explored the factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates and recommended a way forward toward reducing the problem in the Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Three main themes and six subthemes were generated. The participants noted that the factors that determine youth unemployment are complex and not the same. The themes and sub-themes that emerged during the interview are presented as follows:

Curriculum and skills mismatch

Curriculum and skill mismatch surfaced as a major subject, with individuals describing various situations. The responses of the participants to a question about curriculum and skill mismatch as factors determining youth unemployment among TVET college graduates were inconsistent. Some participants argued that the TVET college curriculum was not meeting market need in South Africa, notably in the Vhembe district. Other participants contested the notion that the curriculum was not responsive to market needs. This primary theme covered the subthemes of skills gap and skills obsolescence.

Skills gap

The participants reported that there is a skills gap in the market because the TVET college curriculum does not provide them with the necessary abilities to compete in an ever-changing industry. Participants additionally indicated that such a skill gap is mostly motivated by a lack of collaboration between industry and TVET colleges. According to the participants, the lack of collaboration is based on the idea that TVET colleges build curricula without knowing what the sector needs because industries are not participating in curriculum development. Some participants succinctly described the situation as follows:

“When we send out CVs out companies are not shortlisting us because they think the level of qualifications, we have is not what their companies want. I think this is caused by colleges not asking companies about the skills that their companies need before offering certain qualifications” (Vuthlari, male TVET college graduate).

“Things have changed, as most companies have changed how they do business. Most of the companies are not hiring TVET college graduates because they think we do not have the

skills that they need because of the training we received at the college” (Nduo, male TVET college graduate).

“I was doing Business Management Qualification at the TVET college; throughout the course, it was very rare for us to go to computer lessons where we could do it practically. If we complete the qualifications without having computer skills, then the companies are not willing to risk hiring us because they will have to train us on how to use computers, something that we should have been trained at the college” (Nkensani, female TVET college graduate).

On the basis of the responses given by the participants, the participants concluded that the curriculum and skills mismatch had an adverse influence on unemployment among TVET college graduates in the Vhembe district. Participants reported that firms are not recruiting young graduates from TVET colleges because companies believe these graduates lack the abilities required to execute required occupations due to the TVET college curriculum. As a result, hiring these graduates will have a significant impact on the company’s dynamism and production.

Skills obsolescence

Several participants claimed that they had difficulties finding employment in their chosen field of study because they felt they lacked the requisite knowledge and abilities to find better employment. Furthermore, participants believe that their current skill level from TVET college will not allow them to perform essential jobs efficiently in the market. This sentiment is succinctly expressed as follows:

“Every day we hear experts saying that the youth need skills that will enable them to find jobs; they talk about artificial intelligence and the internet of things empowered by the fourth industrial revolution, but at college, we are never being taught about all these things. Yet everyone expects us to know all of these things, this is unfair, and companies need us to have skills in all of these things, yet the curriculum is silent about this”(Dakalo, male TVET college graduate).

The response above from the participant is a clear indication of the frustrations that the participant feels and has toward the curriculum offered at the TVET college, which is not responding to the skills needed in the market in the era of the fourth industrial revolution. Because the curriculum not responding to the digital age, participants struggle to secure employment.

“I think we complete our qualifications with the right skills to go to the market and execute the task effectively but because the market is changing fast, and it takes us as youth years to secure employment that makes us forget what we learned in the classroom, and this even kills out confidence and passion to look for employment”(Mulalo, male TVET college graduate).

“After I completed my N6 in 2018, I stayed unemployed until I got a three-month contract at the supermarket. While I was working, I struggled to apply what I had learned in college because it took me so many years to find employment. After three months, my fixed-term

contract was not renewed, which I suspect was because during that period I was not performing well. So, staying for years without finding a job makes us forget what we have been trained for and later struggle to search for employment because we give up and feel we no longer possess the necessary skills that the market needs” (Ndzalama, female TVET college graduate).

The above responses of the participants in the interviews refute the claims that TVET college graduates are unable to secure employment because of a lack of skills. The participants indicated that they had completed their qualifications with the required skills. However, staying at home for years without finding employment makes them forget the skills they had learned. This makes them give up on searching for employment because they started doubting their skills to perform the work, particularly in the digital age where creativity and innovation are in demand.

Lack of partnerships

Lack of partnership was also identified as a major theme. Participants stressed the lack of partnership between TVET colleges and stakeholders in youth development as a factor influencing TVET college graduates’ unemployment rates. According to one participant, TVET colleges in the Vhembe area are not collaborating with district stakeholders who have interventions in place to prevent youth unemployment.

Not collaborating with relevant stakeholders

Minimising youth unemployment will necessitate coordination with TVET colleges and important partners responsible for youth development, not only in the Vhembe district but also in other districts in South Africa. The participants stressed that the district’s colleges lacked institutional methods for developing strong partnerships with relevant stakeholders that could provide TVET college graduates with job prospects once they completed their qualifications. Some participants succinctly described the situation as follows:

“When we complete our N6 qualifications, we are expected to do practicals for 18 months to receive our national diploma. These 18 months of practicals were also an opportunity for us to gain work experience, but we failed to get a place to do practicals, because colleges did not partner with relevant stakeholders who would give us the opportunity”(Teko, male TVET college graduate).

“Some institutions collaborate with small companies so that when students complete their studies, they are absorbed by these small companies. But management at TVET colleges are not concerned about that; hence, we struggle to find employment”(Tiyani, female TVET college graduate).

According to the remarks above, participants struggle to obtain work because TVET colleges do not collaborate with industry, particularly small enterprises, that will offer them job opportunities after they complete their education. In addition to the replies of the participants, the inability of TVET College to develop institutional methods for developing strong partnerships with enterprises in the local area is a major factor determining unemployment among TVET college graduates.

“The economy is not growing in a way that it can create so many jobs, which means not all of us will find employment. However, venturing into entrepreneurship can address youth unemployment. The challenge is while we are still struggling, we lack information on how to start businesses because colleges do not invite relevant stakeholders such as SEDA and the NYDA to come and give us information on how to start a business so when we struggle to find employment, we can start our own business” (Ntsuxeko, female TVET college graduate). Another participant perceived that the rise of unemployment among TVET college graduates is a result of colleges not inviting stakeholders responsible for fostering youth entrepreneurship to campus before they complete their studies to implement information-sharing sessions about business opportunities and how to start businesses.

Discrimination

Some participants additionally cited discrimination as a factor determining the unemployment rate of TVET college graduates. The participants revealed that they face discrimination in terms of employment opportunities in the Vhembe district based on where they studied, who they know, and where they originate from. This primary theme featured the subthemes nepotism and tribalism.

Discrimination by institutional perceptions

Several of the participants mentioned that they had been trying to look for employment; however, the potential employer denied them opportunities because people who studied at the TVET colleges were perceived as slow learners compared to those who went into the universities. One participant initially stated that because he was constantly undermined because he studied at the TVET college “I remember I once went to submit my CV to a certain company and then I was asked at which university I had obtained my degree. I told the manager that I received my N6 at the college, and then the manager said to me that he wanted university graduates with business management qualifications. Then, I lost the opportunity because I did not go to university. I think this is a result of the wrong perceptions within our society that people who went to the TVET colleges are not smart compared to those who went to universities”(Hlulani, male TVET college graduate). The participants perceived that companies preferred to hire university graduates over TVET college graduates, which is motivated by the stereotype in society that people who go to universities are more intelligent than those who go to the TVET colleges.

“I recall when I was looking for a place to do practicals, the manager at the store didn’t understand the process of TVET college graduates expected to do practicals for 18 months and then get a diploma. She ends up saying to me that at this shop, we have graduates from the university who are doing practicals. Then, I was not allowed to do practicals that would help me gain work experience. So, I think being studied at the TVET colleges denies us the opportunity to find employment” (Vuyelo, female TVET college graduate).

The above statement from the participant indicates the stigma associated with being TVET college graduates due to the perception that they are inferior to university graduates, which stands in their way of finding decent employment.

Nepotism

The participants mentioned that nepotism in their district is rife; therefore, participants with no relatives that are in a position of influence struggle to find employment. In addition, people in the position of hiring, such as managers, provide preferences to their relatives and overlook people with the relevant skills to perform the task. Some participants aptly explained this situation as follows:

“I feel like I am struggling to find employment because I do not have relatives in influential positions who can manipulate the system for me to find jobs. Some of my former classmates who have relatives have jobs because their relatives gave them jobs” (Nomas, female TVET college graduate).

“I have been applying for jobs at the municipality for years now, even EPWP posts , but I can’t get them because I do not have a relative working at the municipality that can help me find a job there. People with no post-matric qualifications are hired at the municipality because they have relatives who are politicians and hire them without following proper procedures” (George, male TVET college graduate).

From the above statements, it is clear that the participants believed that regardless of their post-matric qualifications, they are struggling to secure employment even if it is a temporary job because they do not have relatives working in companies or municipalities who can hire them. In addition, it also emerged that politicians in municipalities influence the hiring process in favour of their relatives, and this contributes to unemployment among participants who do not come from the families of politicians who can influence the process in their favor

Tribalism

Tribalism was noted by the participants as a pathological phenomenon that determines the rise of youth unemployment in the Vhembe district, which requires urgent attention if the district intends to accelerate youth empowerment. Participants further noted that it is difficult to find employment, particularly in the retail sector and hospitality, if one does not come from the Vhavenda tribe. One participant stated that her inability to speak Tshivenda had disadvantaged her from finding employment in a supermarket. Another participant revealed that... “I am a Tsonga-speaking person. I once submitted my CV to a supermarket with two friends who were Tshivenda-speaking. All of them were hired without qualifications. I, with a qualification, was not hired nor even called for an interview. It was clear that my only sin was not ethnicity. (Thato, male TVET college graduate”

Yet another participant claimed that being a Tsonga-speaking person living with Vhavenda-speaking people prevented her from finding employment in the municipality after submitting her CV several times. She aptly explained this situation as follows:

“I live with Vhavenda-speaking people because my husband is a Venda-speaking person. I have been applying for jobs in the municipality. I have never received a call for interviews, whereas others have. The most dominant tribe in the municipality are Vhavenda-speaking people, particularly those in strategic positions. So, such thing is preventing me and others to find employment”(Tendo, female TVET college graduate).

From the above statements, it is assumed that tribalism poses a permanent threat to youth economic participation in the Vhembe district. Addressing this societal issue requires a commitment to ethical human resources and strong ethical leadership in the Vhembe district.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the factors that determine youth unemployment among young TVET college graduates and to recommend a way forward toward reducing the problem in the Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study found many underlying factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates. For example, the findings show that unemployment among TVET colleges in the Vhembe district is associated with a skills gap whereby graduates lack the necessary skills needed in the market to perform and execute the task. This is a result of the outdated curriculum offered at the TVET college that does not address the industry's needs. This is in line with earlier research that TVET college graduates struggle to find employment because of skills mismatches between the supply of skills and what the employees need (Mkize, 2022). The complexity of the phenomenon discerned in the findings is also reflected in earlier research. Other researchers have previously stated that TVET college graduates struggle to secure decent employment because of the lack of innovative and technical skills that companies are looking for in this era (Ayonmike & Okeke, 2016). This study further revealed that TVET college graduates complete their studies with relevant skills and knowledge gained through TVET college courses; however, because they stay for years without practical experience, they end up lagging in knowledge needed in various industries, which remains a major barrier for them to find employment. According to Legg-Jack (2018) not having the right expertise and skills required in the market is among other reasons for TVET college graduates to find it difficult to find employment in their area of study.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the lack of institutional strategies for forming a partnership with major stakeholders in youth economic development by TVET colleges contributes to the unemployment rate of TVET college graduates. Furthermore, TVET colleges fail to develop strong partnerships with companies that can offer graduate job opportunities. This study supports the views of Nazron et al. (2017), who argued that TVET colleges lack a plan on how to partner with industries that can play an important role in job creation for graduates. Entrepreneurship can play an important role in job creation among youth because for the youth to understand the importance of entrepreneurship, they need information about entrepreneurship. However, this study found that TVET college graduates, regardless of their knowledge in their field of study, struggle to start their own business. This is because TVET

colleges fail to invite relevant stakeholders on campus before these young people complete their studies so that they can provide them with entrepreneurial-related information. This resonates with Bauman and Lucy (2019), who stated that institutions of higher learning in South Africa are not taking advantage of entrepreneurial potential in job creation for graduates.

The findings of this study further extend their results by revealing how discrimination fuels the unemployment rate among TVET college graduates. In addition, the study revealed that companies are not hiring TVET college graduates in favour of university graduates. This is motivated by the perception that companies have about TVET colleges not offering their graduates the right skills. This is consistent with the results of Mabunda and Frick (2020), who purported an association between TVET college graduates' unemployment and companies not hiring TVET college graduates because of inadequate information about the courses that TVET colleges offer their students.

This study also offered novel insights into the determination of youth unemployment among TVET college graduates in the Vhembe district. However, extending these findings, a broader range of factors that determine TVET college graduates' unemployment were discovered, including nepotism and tribalism. TVET college graduates struggle to find decent employment because of the prevalence of nepotism in their area. Furthermore, those with no relatives in hiring or strategic positions continue to face the burden of unemployment compared with those with connected relatives. The findings of this study concur with those of Yasin et al. (2019), who argued that financially strong families can easily influence the hiring process for their graduate relatives to get a job in the public sector. In terms of tribalism, the study findings revealed that some TVET college graduates are marginalized and find it difficult to find employment because they belong to a certain ethnic group with fewer people in the hiring process. These findings support the work of Laruni (2015), who argues that tribalism is a complex societal issue in some parts of Africa that fuels youth unemployment. For instance, in Uganda, youth who belong to the Banyankole have a much higher chance of finding decent employment in the public sector. Nepotism (favoritism based on family relationships) and tribalism (favoritism based on ethnic or cultural affiliations) hinder fair employment opportunities for TVET graduates. Addressing these issues is crucial to create a level playing field for all graduates, regardless of their backgrounds. The findings of this study support Classical Marxism theory when it argues that capitalists' mode of production is the major cause of unemployment. In the context of this study, capitalists' mode of production involves big companies in Vhembe districts that are not hiring TVET college graduates in favor of university students regardless of the technical skills that TVET college graduates possess. In addition to eradicating the problem of unemployment among TVET college graduates, there is a need for state intervention. The state must have a long-term solution to address the youth unemployment rate, which hurts the social welfare of the youth and the community at large.

The study limitation is that due to time limits and financial constraints, I could not interview more participants, and the study was conducted in one district in Limpopo province .

Therefore, the study findings cannot be generalized to other provinces in South Africa. Another limitation was that some participants seemed mentally affected by being graduates and unable to find employment. Therefore, I had to be extra careful in asking questions, particularly follow-up questions.

Factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates in Vhembe district, Limpopo Province, South Africa, explained and executed in this study should be prioritized to ensure that unemployment among TVET graduates in the Vhembe district and elsewhere is reduced and intervention is put in place to accelerate youth employment. The Vhembe District Municipality must play a vital role in job creation, particularly among TVET college graduates residing in the Vhembe district. Vhembe districts need to have a TVET college graduate job fund, and the Vhembe district municipality can provide incentives to industries such as retailers, hospitals, agriculture, and small businesses that offer internships for TVET college graduates. This proposed job fund will reduce unemployment among TVET college graduates. Other researchers wishing to research the topic of this study should consider replicating it in different provinces in South Africa. Future researchers should also consider conducting longitudinal studies to examine the interventions that can be implemented to reduce unemployment among TVET college graduates.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings revealed a variety of factors that determine youth unemployment among TVET college graduates in the Vhembe district. Furthermore, the study revealed that TVET college graduates struggle to secure employment because of a lack of partnership between the TVET college and industrial companies that are supposed to hire graduates. This study highlights the importance of bridging the gap between skills mismatches that occur when graduates' skills do not align with the needs of the job market. This can lead to unemployment by ensuring that the skills taught in TVET colleges match the demands of employers. The findings of this study relate to those of previous studies on the same issue. However, this study is unique and contributes to a new body of knowledge by demonstrating other areas that previous studies did not cover. This new area includes nepotism and tribalism among other factors that determine TVET college unemployment in the Vhembe district, since the previous study in this area generally focused on the entire youth. This study calls upon the industry, the Vhembe TVET college partnerships, which will result in the development of job-specific skills. This means that Vhembe TVET College will only offer a program that meets the job-specific skills the industry needs. The TVET college curriculum needs to be revitalized so that it can integrate the skills needed in the era of the fourth industrial revolution, such as soft and digital skills. The fourth industrial revolution has brought about significant technological advancements. Equipping TVET graduates with digital skills and the ability to adapt to emerging technologies is essential for their employability. Integrating these skills into the curriculum can help graduates stay competitive in the job market. Vhembe TVET College should partner with the National Youth Development Agency.

The NYDA will visit Vhembe TVET College to give presentations about their business development opportunities to encourage students to venture into entrepreneurship once they receive their qualifications. This partnership will accelerate youth economic development in the Vhembe district. There is a need for new youth development strategies that focus on TVET college graduates' employability in South Africa.

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