

Work readiness and experience is key to youth employment

By [Rajan Naidoo](#)

22 Jul 2021

More than 1.5 million South Africans with post-school qualifications are without work. First time work seekers, many of these bright youngsters remain unemployed or underemployed and most will end up taking jobs unrelated to their education just to make a living.



Source: Photo by RF_._studio from [Pexels](#)

Though talented and intelligent, these graduates are simply not work ready. Employers are reluctant to offer these young people jobs because they have no work history and are unlikely to yield massive value in their first year of employment.

In addition to these graduates, there are also many first-time work seekers who don't have post-school qualifications. Armed with Grade 12, they have an even smaller chance at landing a job. And, the situation is even more dire for the many young South Africans without a Grade 12. This all adds to the massive youth unemployment and unemployability that is entrenched in our economy.

There are a number of factors that impact employability and offers some workable solutions:

1. **Work-ready skills:** Most of the youngsters looking for jobs lack the work-ready technical skills that can yield a return on investment for employers in the first 12 months. This includes life skills relating to workplace maturity and include an understanding of work relationships, labour rights, performance management, personal financial management, long term goal setting and career orientation.

2. **Career guidance:** We need to ensure that youngsters studying tertiary qualifications choose courses that are relevant to the job market and will assist the candidate in becoming economically active. Career guidance is paramount for young people to understand their choice relative to the economic demand and their aptitude.
3. **Relaxed labour legislation:** South Africa needs to introduce legislation that allows employers (particularly small businesses) a reduced labour risk when employing first time work seekers with no job references and work history, at least for the first 12 months.
4. **Bridging programmes:** We need to strengthen and fund learnership and internship programmes to assist in bridging the skills, experience and work readiness gap for first time workers. These programmes must have components that provide work readiness life skills.
5. **Focus on the outcome:** B-BBEE in its design is laudable, but many corporates apply a begrudging compliance mentality with minimal care to ensure the investment they make in the skills component is indeed lifechanging for the beneficiary. This also applies to Enterprise and Supplier development. Partnering with the right skills provider is not just about the lowest cost and tax savings but also about sustainable, positive outcomes for the beneficiaries.
6. **Simple, low-cost solutions:** B-BBEE and other funding initiatives must be geared to address the economic futures of young people. For low-skilled and under-educated youth, we need to create skills through lower-level learnerships and entrepreneurial opportunities. One example is cooking with basic business skills, training that will allow a youngster to run a street food outlet. This does however require support in skills, logistics and equipment. At a relatively low-cost though, we could create an economically active young person who will become financially independent. This is but one example among many of a simple low-cost solution that is scalable.

Given the recent unrest in South Africa, it is more important than ever that we do everything possible to create employment opportunities for our youth.

The answer is simple: every stakeholder, be it business, labour, government or civil society must embrace and acknowledge the gravity of our youth unemployment challenge and conduct themselves in a way that will deliver a collective solution rather than the narrow, self-interested manner that is the focus for most. The social impact of unemployment doesn't only create victims of the poor but touches all our lives – and this touchpoint will only intensify with the growing inequality until it again reaches critical mass for a meltdown.

We can change our nation's current trajectory. Many of the solutions are simple but require a dramatic change in our values and principles across all sectors of our society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajan Naidoo is the Managing Director of EduPower Skills Academy