

The skills training our youth really need... Employability

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) approximately 3.3-million of the 10.3-million young people aged between 14-24 years were not in employment, education or training in the first quarter of 2018.



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This implies that close to one in three young South Africans in this age group were disengaged from the labour market. More than 10% of the graduates aged 25–34 years could not find a job, despite their education. The burden of unemployment is also concentrated amongst the youth as they account for 63.5% of the total number of unemployed persons.

Lack of employability skills

Dr Karina de Bruin, JvR Academy managing director, says these results are a “sad reality”, despite efforts over the years to improve the plight of South Africa’s future generations. “The education system focuses on subject and functional competencies. And that should indeed be the case,” she says. “One should be able to read, write, calculate, understand history, geography and science. All these subjects contribute to potential career and personal development.”

However, a crucial element of career and personal development is employability and the skills that make one employable. The employability skills listed by employers include: problem-solving, initiative and self-motivation, coping with pressure, teamwork, ability to learn and adapt, valuing diversity and negotiating skills.

“The education system is lacking when it comes to this aspect of employability. We should also not forget that the individual is as important in determining employability.”

Responsibility for one’s own development

De Bruin refers to a Malaysian study which demonstrates that “self-concept, participation in career development activities, and industrial training” play the biggest role in terms of the acquisition of employability skills.

The first two elements are solely related to the individual. She says another aspect that should be added is self-directedness: taking responsibility for one's own development. Young people need to look for opportunities to develop their work and functional skills, but also to obtain behavioural competencies that will contribute to finding and keeping a job. "Employability skills are often overlooked when attempts are made to make the youth economically active."

Many people have become involved in youth initiatives, simply because it seems to be the right thing to do. There is a lot of talking, just to advance their own careers. "If we look at the huge numbers of young people who go untouched by many of the youth bodies, it is indeed unsettling," De Bruin remarks.

Small steps for future change

"My philosophy in terms of people development has always been that you only need to touch one or two people... They go back to their communities and make a difference in the lives of those around them as well."

De Bruin believes simple and small changes is achievable to have meaningful long-term effects. One step is to infuse the education curriculum with employability skills development, another is to enhance communication channels between important role players so that everybody starts putting words into action.

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