

## **Introduction**

The definition of an unemployed person is someone of working age (16 and up), jobless, able and available to work, and actively looking for a job. This means anyone without a job who is reaching out to contacts about jobs or applying to positions. This definition of unemployment is specific and rigid, it doesn't just include "anyone who doesn't have a job."

Both unemployed and employed people make up the labor force, or the subset of the population that is both able and interested in working. Not included in the labor force are citizens not looking for jobs, for example, a stay-at-home mom, a college student, or a discouraged worker, someone who has stopped looking for work because they believe no work is available.

Studying all that with an open mind that, we ought to understand youth unemployment is a major challenge in economies like South Africa characterised by a young, growing population.

Therefore our essay will try using relevant literature, journal articles to critique the challenge of youth unemployment in South Africa.

Information will be structured under the following sub-headings: Defining and knowing what is unemployment & youth unemployment, finding theories to understand youth unemployment, what youth unemployment is in South Africa, what causes youth unemployment, and what are the challenges emanating from youth unemployment, with the aims to find solutions in addressing the youth unemployment challenge.

## **What Is Unemployment?**

We may call it with fancy names and give it attachments, but The Lumen Learning Course (2005) is of the view that Unemployment moreover can also be alluded to as simply joblessness, a scenario that happens when individuals are without work and are effectively looking for a business. They further illustrate that amid periods of subsidence, an economy ordinarily encounters increasing unemployment rates. Hence

we see the numerous proposed causes, results, and arrangements for unemployment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

On the other hand, Chappelow (2020) argues that Unemployment occurs when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work. Adding that unemployment is often used as a measure of the health of the economy. Supporting the thought, Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt (2011) point out the extraordinary prevalence of unemployment and worklessness as perhaps the single most important contributor to the persistence of social exclusion on a large and momentous scale.

Measured by the unemployment rate, which is basically the number of unemployed people divided by the number of people within the labor force, points sourced from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) which goes on to lay more information on the impact of unemployment on the economy.

- Unemployment occurs when workers who want to work are unable to find jobs, which lowers economic output; however, they still require subsistence.
- High rates of unemployment are a signal of economic distress, but extremely low rates of unemployment may signal an overheated economy.
- Unemployment can be classified as frictional, cyclical, structural, or institutional.
- Unemployment data are collected and published by government agencies in a variety of ways.

### **Understanding Unemployment**

With all things considered, it is of utmost importance for us to understand that Unemployment is a key economic indicator mainly since it signals the ability (or inability) of workers to readily obtain gainful work to contribute to the productive output of the economy (Chappelow, 2020).

This trend may be ascribed to the impact of the world recession on output growth and employment, to structural changes in production as well as to the diminishing marginal utility of labor as a result of cost pressures, a suggestion by Van Aardt (2012). With more unemployed workers mean less total economic production will take place than

might have otherwise. And unlike idle capital, unemployed workers still need to maintain at least subsistence consumption during their period of unemployment (Chappelow, 2020).

Chappelow (2020) further alludes to his statement pointing out that an economy with high unemployment has lower output without a proportional decline in the need for basic consumption. Meaning High, persistent unemployment can signal serious distress in an economy leading to social and political upheaval.

### **Youth Unemployment**

Unemployment is clustered and categorized based on the average populace of active job-seekers without employment. Whereas, within that cluster of categories' we can safely find the number of the unemployed youth, through sampling out our overall data. With "Youth" formally and academically derived simply as those individuals within a populace falling within the " $\geq$  or  $>$  18 up to  $<$  or  $\leq$  29 years" parameter. Therefore, with real statistical data at our disposal, we can adamantly speculate, opine, suggest nor pass a critique about almost everything relating to Youth unemployment (Yu, 2013).

Hence, the research objectives of the essay assignment are solely attributed to the abilities to examine challenges incapacitating and depriving liaising between youth figures. With which Yu (2013) agrees that these challenges might be brought by being economically dis-stressed as a country, mainly as a result of youth unemployment. Therefore, by observing and contrasting the South African diaspora as a point of interest. The focus now will be selectively on the youths, for the remainder and prolongment of the essay.

However, as we proceed, we learn from Clark and Summers (1982) that at any given moment almost 2 million teenagers aged 16-19 are unemployed. Another 600,000 are out of school and neither working nor looking for work. Yu (2013) adds to the argument singling out that, the teenage unemployment problem is not the lack of desire to hold jobs, but the inability to find work. Hence shortages of jobs appear to be the only

explanation for the large responsiveness of employment to changes in demand (Yu, 2013).

Furthermore, citing Clark and Summers (1982) on their beliefs, we can say it is only about 60% of all teenagers and 25% of black youths who are out of school and are employed. Stressing out the importance of these high rates of joblessness which have been a source of concern to both economists and policymakers. But what can we say, because if unemployment were simply a matter of instability, there would be little reason to expect it to respond strongly to aggregate demand (Yu, 2013).

### **Theories to Understand Youth Unemployment**

The unemployment rate among the age group 15 to 34 in South Africa has been growing over the past three years. This is reminiscent of global trends in youth unemployment becoming a topical issue in many countries in the world as the figures soar (Van Aardt, 2012).

Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt (2011) argue that, development of youth depends very much on employment. Employment is a key factor in the transition from youth to adulthood and from dependence to independence. Unsuccessful or prolonged transitions from school to work impose high psychological and social costs far in excess of the loss of income associated with the unemployment (Mlatsheni, & Leibbrandt, 2011).

However, in a developing country context, such as that found in South Africa, educated youth are not necessarily guaranteed employment Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt (2011) argue. On top of the matter Van Aardt (2012) preludes that the youth unemployment challenges in South Africa are closely related to the inability of young people to obtain employment owing to their lack of experience, which is all too often compounded by a lack of skills.

Van Aardt (2012) hypothesis on the important cause of high youth unemployment that extends even to relatively better educated youth, being that the economy is not able to generate enough formal sector jobs to absorb new labor market entrants. The result is a growing cohort of young people with severely limited access to formal sector employment, and limited means to do anything about this (Yu, 2013).

This highlights the importance of policies directed at the demand side of the labor market given the lack of job creation in the formal sector to policies that promote entrepreneurship, as of Mlatsheni and Leibbrandt (2011). Such a focus is well-founded, as most new jobs for youth in Africa are generated through entrepreneurship, unlike in the informal sector (Mlatsheni & Leibbrandt, 2011)

### **THE EDUCATION THEORY**

Some of the young work seekers are not well educated, thus dropped out of school early, due to reasons such as poverty and an inability to cope with studies, points out Yu (2013). As the economy demands highly-skilled labor due to capital deepening and technological advancements, an incomplete secondary education is insufficient to guarantee employment (Yu, 2013).

Profoundly Yu (2013) is of the view that despite increases in the number of youth who are in school over time, over the last several decades, a substantial and steady percentage of youth who are not in school and not in the labor force remains.

The relatively inexperienced and less educated youths who struggle to find employment in the formal sector could still survive by engaging in informal sector activities (Yu, 2013). Nonetheless, informal employment is hindered by various barriers to entry, ranging from crime to lack of access to formal or even informal credit, lack of access to infrastructure and services, insufficient provision of training facilities, and lack of provision of market access and business development programmers (Yu, 2013).

Moreover, the existence of some of these barriers are attributed to the government support programmers on small, medium and microenterprises being biased towards the groups of small and medium-sized enterprises, bypassing microenterprises and the informal enterprises (Yu, 2013).

Yu (2013) also justifies on the Sector Education and Training Authorities with which they tend to prioritize the needs of those paying the skills levy (which goes towards the National Skills Fund); that is, the registered enterprises in the formal economy. Therefore, the development and growth of the informal enterprises and their subsequent

contribution towards employment creation, including youth employment, are inhibited (Yu, 2013).

Finally, Yu (2013) concludes his projections pointing out other possible reasons accounting for youth unemployment. Yu (2013) points out the economic recession (whereby the youth workers are more likely to be laid off at times of financial difficulties, as indicated by the fact that the employment elasticity of economic growth between 1995 and 2011 was only 0.42 for the youths but 0.68 in the case of adults) and employment discrimination against the young work seekers, especially the previously disadvantaged groups (Yu, 2013).

### **THE JUDICIAL CONTEXT (“CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM”)**

Mroz and Savage (2006) take us to a judicial context, claiming that involvement with the criminal justice system is another cause of disconnection among youth. Criminal justice involvement peaks in the teenage years and declines in the early twenties, but can have lasting impacts (Mroz & Savage, 2006). Of course, those incarcerated are, by definition, detached from the labor market.

Furthermore, addition on the matter by Mroz and Savage (2006) is based on the view that youth involved in the juvenile justice system often have trouble transitioning into adulthood. Criminal justice involvement interrupts connections to school, family, and work (Mroz and Savage, 2006). Involvement in the system itself exposes youth to negative influences and increases the likelihood of further involvement in criminal activities.

Therefore, suggesting that time incarcerated may lead to worse labor-market outcomes when released, due to less work experience and human capital as well as the stigma with employers of incarceration (Mroz & Savage, 2006). Studies suggest incarceration as a juvenile or adult leads to diminished labor-market outcomes and a host of additional issues that could also affect employment including worse health, diminished social relationships and community connections, and increased likelihood of recidivism (Mroz & Savage, 2006).

### **THE ALCOHOL AND “SHEBEENS” THEORY**

Alcoholism among youth is a particular concern, given that at least half of SAs population are categorized as young people, under 35 (Seggie, 2012).

Seggie (2012) further alludes, citing that surveys have shown alcohol use among our youth is common and increases with age for both males and females. There is also a tendency to more harmful binge drinking (Seggie, 2012).

He further points out the reasons for use and misuse of alcohol which include peer pressure and a desire to fit in, poor home environs and boredom, ignorance of alcohol's harms, and the relative cheapness of alcohol products and their ease of access (Seggie, 2012). High youth unemployment rates must be an exacerbating factor, Seggie (2012) believes.

And in SA, alcohol is easily purchased from bottle stores, supermarkets, bars and shebeens and other unlicensed liquor outlets, which outnumber licensed ones, particularly in disadvantaged communities (Seggie, 2012).

### **Youth Unemployment in South Africa**

Kanbur and Svejnar, (2009) take our sight back, starting in the 1970s, where they believe youth unemployment has been rising at a steady rate in South Africa. Hence today, South Africa is ranked as the fourth country with the highest percentage of unemployed youth in the world. As of 2014, 52.6% of the people aged 15–24 actively looking for a job were unemployed (World Bank 2014).

Furthermore, Mlatsheni and Sandrine (2002) are of the view that youth unemployment is unequally distributed throughout different segments of the population. While unemployment between young white's amounts to 12%, this number skyrockets to a troubling 70% between young blacks. Kanbur and Svejnar, (2009) suspect it may be that remnant effects of the apartheid era have led to jobs centers being located farther away from typical homes of black communities compared to white communities.

This, lingering discrimination, and unequal backgrounds are among the many reasons for the lopsided distribution of unemployment among young white and black South Africans (Kanbur & Svejnar, 2009).

Thus The higher pay of larger firms, in addition to the costs of employment (such as transport or housing costs), make it almost unfeasible for some youth to accept lower paying jobs from smaller firms. Thus, many of the youth in South Africa choose to remain unemployed until they are able to find a job at a larger firm (Rankin, & Roberts, 2011).

Statistic South Africa (2020) has recorded data for the first quarter of 2020, with over 20.4 million young people aged 15 to 34 years, accounting for 63.3% of the total number of unemployed persons. Therefore, yielding an unemployment rate in the region of 43.2% in the 1st quarter of 2020 (STATS SA, 2020).

Therefore, averaging the data by categories, STATS SA (2020) represented the youth aged 15 to 24 years as the most vulnerable in the South African labor market as the unemployment rate among this age group was 59.0% in the 1st quarter of 2020. Likewise, among graduates in this age group, the unemployment rate was 33.1% during this period compared to 24.6% in the 4th quarter of 2019, an increase of 8.5 percentage points quarter-on-quarter (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

### **Causes of Youth Unemployment**

There are multiple and complex causes behind youth unemployment. Among them, the quality and relevance of education, inflexible labour market and regulations, which in turn create a situation of assistance and dependency, are the main causes discussed today.

Up until 1994, numerous market distortions were caused by the industrial and social policies of the Apartheid government, with the effects of these distortions remaining evident in South Africa today. Import Substitution Industrialisation induced an uncompetitive, capitalintensive economy, from which the majority of South Africans were excluded due to racial spatial policy and other measures (National Planning Commission, 2011:5).

The relevant legacies of the Apartheid economy upon democratisation were uncompetitive primary and secondary industries which have consistently shed jobs since 1994<sup>1</sup> (National Planning Commission, 2011:13), and an unskilled, spatially



misaligned labour force, with the majority of South Africans having been denied quality education (National Planning Commission, 2012:110, 114).

South African economic growth has occurred largely in skills-intensive sectors, such as the financial and business services sector (Hausmann, 2008). It is generally accepted that the primary cause for South Africa's widespread unemployment today is a structural mismatch between the skills the modern South African economy demands, and the skills it supplies (Hausmann, 2008) (National Planning Commission, 2011:15), with the ratio of skilled to unskilled employment having changed from 35:65 between 1970 and 1975, to 53:46 between 2000 and 2002 (Ligthelm, 2006:42).

The shortage of suitable jobs has been compounded by significant increases in labour force growth since 1994 (Hausmann, 2008). As already described, South African youth are low-skilled, and the skills mismatch that applies to the broader South African economy applies particularly to them.

The principal reason given by employers for their low youth employment is that with schooling not accurately indicating skill levels (National Treasury, 2011:16), unskilled inexperienced workers are seen as risky to employ, thus increasing their real cost (National Treasury, 2011:5-6). The causes of South African youth unemployment then, are a combination of deficient demand for labour, due to the increasingly skills-intensive orientation of the South African economy, and substandard supply, caused by the emergence of risky low-skilled youth.

### **From Education to Employment: The Skills Crisis**

The quality and relevance of education is often considered as the first root cause of youth unemployment (World Economic Forum, 2013). In 2010, in 25 out of 27 developed countries, the highest unemployment rate was among people with primary education or less. Yet, high education does not guarantee a decent job.

Beyond the necessity to ensure its access to all, education is not adequately tailored to the needs of the labour market, which in turn leads to two consequences: the inability for young people to find jobs and the inability for employers to hire the skills they need (Skills Development, 2008). Combined with the economic crisis and the lack of sufficient

job creation in many countries, it has resulted in high unemployment rates around the world and the development of a skills crisis (Skills Development, 2008).

Businesses witness a growing mismatch between the skills students learn in the education system and those required in the workplace (Skills Development, 2008). For many governments, a key question is how they can bridge this gap and ensure that young people are equipped with the skills employers are looking for (Skills Development, 2008).

### **Labour markets and regulations**

First, a high level of employment protection regulations causes employers to be cautious about hiring more than a minimum number of workers, since they cannot easily be laid off during a downturn, or fired if a new employee should turn out to be unmotivated or incompetent (Salvador & Killinger, 2008).

Second, the development of temporary forms of work such as internships, seasonal jobs and short term contracts have left young workers in precarious situations. Because their jobs are temporary contracts, youth are often the first to be laid off when a company downsizes (Morsy, 2012).

If they are laid off, youth are typically not eligible for redundancy payments because they only worked with the company for a short period of time (Furlong, 2012). Once this work ends, many find themselves unemployed and disadvantaged in the job search. However, some youth are entering work on a part-time basis during tertiary education (Furlong, 2012).

### **Assistance and dependency**

Many countries around the world provide income assistance to support unemployed youth until labour market and economic conditions improve (OECD, 2013). Although this support is strictly related to obligations in terms of active job search and training, it has led to an emerging debate on whether or not it creates dependency among the youth and has a detrimental effect on them (Furlong, 2009).

In September 2014, an announcement was made that there would be a cut in both housing and employment benefits for 18- to 21-year-olds by a staggered R300 to R2300, as a stimulus to reduce dependency on government assistance and redirect funding to targeted programmes for increased learning and training opportunities for them (Furlong, 2009).

### **Challenges Emanating From Youth Unemployment**

The 2013 International Labour Organization report shows that the number of employed youth declined by 22.9 million from 2008 to 2012 despite the growth of the youth population by 12 million for the same period (Mpofu, 2020).

The enormity of the problem of youth unemployment has made it a threat to the social, economic and political stability of most developing countries (Mpofu, 2020). Economically, youth unemployment has led to labor market instability, increased welfare costs, erosion of the tax base and unused investments in education and training (Mpofu, 2020). Socially, youth unemployment is not only of concern to the unemployed but also to the family members of the unemployed and the general society (Mpofu, 2020).

The problem of youth unemployment and under-employment poses complex economic, social and moral policy issues (Mpofu, 2020). The youth are undeniably among the most important formidable force and resource a country can have in order to boost its social and economic development (Mpofu, 2020).

In addition to Mpofu (2020), being in large number, the youth are energetic and if they are well coordinated and actively engaged in economic activities, could contribute significantly to socio-economic development (Mpofu, 2020). Though youth unemployment is among the major challenges facing both developed and developing countries in the world today, the problem is more acute in developing countries (Mpofu, 2020).

Unemployment has caused a surge in all sorts of vices including participation in politically motivated violence, spread of HIV/AIDS and drug abuse among the youth (Mpofu, 2020).

Youth unemployment has further contributed to the increase in international legal and illegal migration as unemployed youth go in search of decent employment as well as better life (Mpofu, 2020).

Evidence has also shown that youth unemployment results in malnutrition, mental illness and loss of self-confidence resulting in depression (Mpofu, 2020). It is also associated with high stress leading to persons committing suicide and poor physical health and heart attack in later life (Mpofu, 2020).

Hence youth unemployment also brings stress to the societies and families who after high investment in the youth education, expect them to be employed and hence contribute to the wellbeing of family and society (Mpofu, 2020).

Mpofu (2020) concludes the thoughts with a note that there are also cases of youth who end up engaging in criminal activities, drug addiction and prostitution which takes them away from normal labor market activities. It is now normal in urban areas, to find young women and girls engaging in activities like prostitution (Mpofu, 2020).

Most of these acts emanate from the problem of youth unemployment (Mpofu, 2020). Even girls as young as 15 years engage in prostitution because some of them are orphans while others have been left behind by parents who have crossed the borders for greener pastures (Mpofu, 2020).

### **Solutions To Youth Unemployment**

In addition to some possible solutions, Yu (2013) advises on the need to be provision of more and better assistance to encourage job search, particularly in the poorer provinces where there is a higher incidence of discouraged workseekers.

For instance, Yu (2013), free assistance on writing curriculum vitas and preparing for job interviews; youth job advisory centres, job search workshops and counselling; job search assistance to improve the match of the skills of the youth unemployed and available vacancies; financial rewards such as providing transportation subsidies on evidence of job search (e.g. signed confirmation of interview); and arranging employers to arrive in the remote, poor areas to recruit people in the local labour offices, in order to

improve the youths motivation to seek work instead of simply giving up hope on finding jobs or only passively wait for word of a job from friends and relatives (Yu, 2013).

### **Support structures that promote youth entrepreneurship**

There is need for the establishment and strengthening of entrepreneurship education in schools and tertiary institutions to foster the development of an entrepreneurial culture among the youth to facilitate self-employment (Mpofu, 2020). Although there are support structures that promote youth entrepreneurship, there is still the need to assess the extent to which their contribution can lead to sustainable entrepreneurship which creates jobs for the active population(Mpofu, 2020).

Moreover Mpofu (2020) enlightens us on the current structures that promotes youth entrepreneurship which include the Ministry of Small and Micro Enterprises, Ministry of youth, Youth Council, vocational training centres and microfinance schemes like the Youth Fund. There are also other structures at Provincial levels and District levels(Mpofu, 2020).

### **Research**

The unavailability of relevant research into challenges like unemployment facing youth has led to a limitation of data to inform the development of viable solutions to resolve the problem(Mpofu, 2020). Although data generation may be a costly process for most developing countries, it is very crucial for the effective implementation of policy(Mpofu, 2020).

Without proper research and authentic data, policies passed may create unintended negative consequences(Mpofu, 2020). Only a few developing countries have reliable data on youth unemployment rates(Mpofu, 2020).

It is recommended that a more quantitative study that will be able to rank the impact of challenges identified should be conducted (Mpofu, 2020). This will help identify which impediments have more impact and which area or problem needs to be given resource priority(Mpofu, 2020).

### **Creating Conducive and Enabling Environment for Investment**

This entails creating an enabling environment for investment through reduction in the cost of doing business (Mpofu, 2020). There is the need to remove taxes and other unnecessary hurdles to the establishment of businesses (Mpofu, 2020).

This can be done through the creation of Special Economic Zones and reduction in tariffs (Mpofu, 2020). Improving relationships with the global world is also key in attracting investment.

These need to be addressed in order for prospective investors to have the assurance that youth is really open for business (Mpofu, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

A recent breakthrough is that, in the clothing industry, a three-year wage deal has been secured by the South African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union so that it becomes possible to pay new workers 20 to 30% less than existing workers in order to boost youth employment (Yu, 2013).

In contrast, the youth discouraged workseekers are more likely to reside in poorer provinces associated with lower employment likelihood, such as Limpopo and Eastern Cape, aged below 25 years, lowly educated, and have other household members receiving child grant or old-age pension income.

The youth wage subsidy is being proposed in South Africa to be provided to employers (i.e. supply-side subsidy) to increase youth labour demand and help offsetting the cost of on-the-job training. The work experience and training gained by the youths would improve their long-term employment prospects.

It seems that the former people, who are more educated and have previous work experience, are more likely to be the primary beneficiaries of the subsidy programme. The youth wage subsidy alone might not be sufficient to encourage them to seek work actively, nor to increase employers' demand for these people.

Finally, one of the most important long-term solutions to reduce youth unemployment is to reduce the size of the lowly educated youth labour force, by improving the school resources and quality of education (especially the former black schools), increasing the

enrolment and passes of mathematics and science, and reducing drop-out before Matric.

Without addressing these important issues, the youth wage subsidy programme and the above-mentioned assistance to encourage job search might end up merely decreasing the number of discouraged workseekers but increasing the number of narrow unemployed, while having a temporary and weak positive impact on youth employment, failing to address the important skills mismatch, structural unemployment problem.

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