

What can we do to solve the education-to-employment dilemma?

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In order to find employment after matric, learners need to be empowered with relevant skills. These can only be delivered via close collaboration between the schools, the public and private sectors.



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South Africa is facing an unemployment crisis largely due to the lack of relevant and adequate skills among the country's youth. Simply put, the youth are not equipped to find employment and make a success of their careers.

At present, the local unemployment rate sits at around 27% and, more dire, is the youth unemployment (those aged 15 to 34) at 39%, according to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA). However, it is worth noting that the education-to-employment issue is not unique to our country. A report put out by McKinsey & Company indicated that 27% of European employers could not fill a vacancy due to a lack of skilled applicants. The report also indicates that 74% of European educators believed they were providing learners with the necessary skills required to find employment, however, that sentiment was not shared by youths and employers alike.

Back home, solving this problem will not be easy, and requires greater collaboration between government, industry, education providers, educators and learners. Our education system needs to develop into an ecosystem specifically designed to prepare the youth to find employment.

Establish requirements

Meaningful dialogue is also needed in order to discover what skills are required for each industry. Once these are identified, syllabi must be adapted to deliver these skills in a relevant manner. Teachers will also need additional training to enable them to deliver the work in a way that will excite and help learners to learn. The private sector can get involved by providing the additional training teachers may require.

It is critical that teachers begin to relate subject matter back to real world examples, so that students are not simply presented with abstract concepts but rather something that is notable in the country's two weakest subjects, namely maths and science.

Soft skills

At the same time, we need to empower students with the “soft skills” that will assist them in the 21st century workplace. A good example of this is collaborative skills, since they will need to understand the concept of teamwork to be successful in a job. Therefore, providing them with opportunities to obtain grades through group work, rather than only as an individual, can provide them with this kind of grounding.

It is equally critical for better methods of learner evaluation to be established, as constant assessment of their learning curve will be crucial to their success. By establishing where each learner sits on that curve, and comparing it to where they should be, it becomes possible to take the necessary steps required to rectify any challenges they may have in this regard.

Technology

Technology can certainly play a pivotal role in this regard, as it will not only provide learners with the necessary learning materials, but it will enable educators to individually assess each learner and help them get back on the correct trajectory.

South Africa also faces the obstacle of a significant digital divide, so if we are to universally implement the necessary technology across our schooling system, we will undoubtedly require greater collaboration with the technology industry.

If we are to overcome the crisis, it is imperative that we ensure that the youth is adequately prepared for life after formal education. Such preparation is possible, but it will require close collaboration and complete acceptance from educators, learners and both the public and private sector.

The time has come for all of us to pull together if we are to overcome the enormous challenge set before us. The future of our country, literally, depends on it.

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