

Finding solutions to the complexities of 21st century youth unemployment

By [Gabriel Hamuy](#)

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There are many factors affecting the global youth unemployment crisis. Tackling the situation starts with offering equal access to quality education, understanding the barriers to skills development, practising new ways of teaching, as well as creating more economic opportunities for those not in employment, education or training (NEETs).

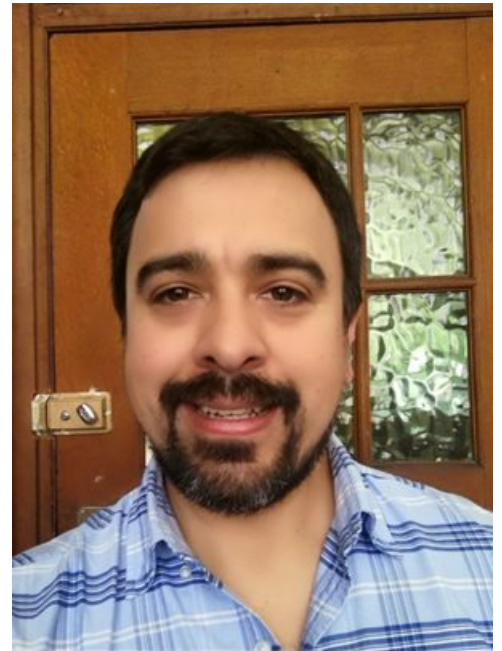
Why youth skills development matters

There has never been a more pressing time to acknowledge the importance of skills development for the benefit of, not only our young people, but for our country as a whole. Access to economic opportunities is a key driver for addressing the socio-economic challenges of a nation and, ultimately, putting an end to poverty.

We have the ability to strengthen youth capacity and curb the youth unemployment rate by empowering young people with the skills necessary for existing employment opportunities and entrepreneurship prospects.

The effects of Covid-19 on youth skills development

Whilst the youth unemployment rate in South Africa remains high (43%), with the youth being the most vulnerable in the labour market, the crisis of NEETs and youth unemployment has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. School closures during the national lockdown period meant that youth were not able to gain the critical skills needed for the workplace and the toll taken on business has led to the shedding of jobs and economic opportunities.



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Whilst, in some cases, learners have been able to study online, not all of South Africa's youth have been affected equally. It is the most vulnerable in our society who are impacted the hardest. And as Covid-19 drives digital transformation in the resourced education sector, this will continue to be a concern well beyond the pandemic. The digital divide is likely to widen.

Equal access to education

South Africa's Bill of Rights promises education as a basic human right for all – regardless of age, gender, race or religion. Education is one of the most powerful tools for the upliftment of a society, ensuring the development of well-rounded and productive citizens. It is a precondition for building sustainable livelihoods and resilient societies.

Through high-quality education we can achieve equal opportunities that advance prospects in a substantial way in the long term. As is often the case, the theory and the policy are not the problem.

Creating sustainable livelihoods in the 21st century

With the youth unemployment and NEETs rates on the rise, the time to shake things up in the classroom has come. According to StatsSA's [Quarterly Labour Force Survey \(QLFS\) Q3: 2020](#), "Compared to Q3: 2019, the percentage of young persons aged 15–34 years who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) increased by 2.6 percentage

points from 40.4% to 43.0% (out of 20.5 million) in Q3: 2020. The NEET rate for males increased by 3.1 percentage points, while for females the rate increased by 20 percentage points in Q3: 2020.”

As we look to teach new skills and ways of thinking that will be needed for the pending fourth industrial revolution, we also need to address the way we teach.

The role of educators is to prepare young people for the working world; to do this effectively requires finding interactive and engaging ways to teach, promote creativity and innovation, and build up the personal growth and self-esteem of learners. We should be teaching in a way that instils a lifelong love of learning in our future leaders.



Learn to Live School of Skills shares insights on project-based learning

19 Oct 2020



The power of project-based learning (PBL)

One of the ways we can achieve this is to introduce project-based learning (PBL) methodology in schools. Project-based learning encourages learners to think interdependently, communicate with clarity, manage impulsivity, take responsible actions and apply past knowledge to new experiences as they explore real-world challenges and apply what they learn in a dynamic classroom environment. An authentic learning process should be an interdependent process co-created and co-produced by learners and educators.

Learning is social – much of it is about conversation: doing, thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing. This method of teaching for the 21st century has been designed to create better work habits and attitudes toward learning, resulting in the long-term retention of skills, as well as improvements in grades and attendance. Project-based learning is not an end in itself, nor is it a passing fad: it is a well-researched and proven tool to facilitate the development and learning processes of our youth.

Removing the economic stressors that affect learning

In addition to equal education for all, in order to improve the lives of South Africa’s vulnerable children and at-risk youth, we should be looking to remove socio-economic stressors so that learners can truly focus on their studies. For example, the Salesian Institutes Learn to Live School of Skills provides three nutritious meals a day, covers transport costs to and from school, as well the costs of learning materials, and offers mental health programmes facilitated by social workers and occupational therapists. Reducing these stressors and the implementation of a new and innovative teaching methodology, we are finding that learners are finding their voices, attendance and discipline is improving, and confidence levels are increasing at a remarkable rate.



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The importance of niche industry skills in creating employment opportunities

As the job market continues to evolve, it is important to note that the demand for human capital in the labour market persists. And whilst the majority of learning curricula now focus on technology-driven roles, owing to the digital age and ‘jobs of the future’, ‘jobs of the past’ are not yet obsolete. By focusing on niche areas in the current labour market, we can make employment and entrepreneurship opportunities more accessible to NEETs.

The Salesian Institute Youth Projects programmes include 'Waves of Change', dedicated to maritime employment opportunities; the 'Porsche Mechatronics' programme, focused on the automotive industry; and the 'Learn to Live School of Skills', which concentrates on qualifications in hospitality, carpentry, hairdressing and more. These are still growing industries that will need skilled labour for many years to come. Not only does this provide opportunities for placement and possible employment straight out of school, but also offers great opportunities for entrepreneurship.

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