

YOUTH PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract. In South Africa, the field of youth entrepreneurship is confronted with considerable obstacles, many of which are rooted in the country's historical economic inequalities, which were further exacerbated by the apartheid era. This study aims to gain insight into the perceptions of youth regarding entrepreneurship by employing the Entrepreneurial Event Theory (EET) to analyse these perceptions through the lenses of desirability, feasibility, and propensity to act. EET was used to provide a structured understanding of how attitudes towards entrepreneurship, perceived capability and propensity to act influence entrepreneurial engagement. The thematic analysis of qualitative data from semi-structured interviews revealed that while South African youth have a strong desire to use entrepreneurship to address unemployment and economic inequality, their active engagement is limited. Participants expressed high aspirations for entrepreneurship due to its potential for financial independence and personal fulfilment. Nevertheless, this enthusiasm is tempered by perceived feasibility concerns, including challenges related to financial resources, regulatory complexities, and intense market competition. Moreover, the propensity to act varies; some young people demonstrate a proactive attitude, while others are hesitant due to perceived risks and systemic barriers. The study recommends integrating comprehensive entrepreneurship education across all educational levels, launching national and community-level campaigns to promote an entrepreneurial culture and showcase success stories, and advocating for policies to enhance access to funding. These measures aim to improve the overall feasibility and increase the propensity to act among South African youth, thereby fostering a more vibrant entrepreneurial landscape.

Keywords: youth entrepreneurship, South Africa, challenges, opportunities, awareness, policy, education, innovation.

JEL Classification: L26, I20, O30

1. Introduction

Mkrtchyan and Galoyan (2020) highlight the key role of youth entrepreneurship in social development, emphasising its ability to contribute to higher employment and living standards. Similarly, Bezerra et al. (2017) argue that entrepreneurship is critical for young people to achieve economic independence, reduce reliance on government social welfare programmes, and promote personal and national progress. Despite these acknowledged benefits, youth participation in entrepreneurial activities remains significantly low in South Africa and in various global regions. Elizabeth (2020) further highlights the fragile and nascent state of entrepreneurial engagement among South African youth. Belas et al. (2019) add that the entrepreneurial environment significantly influences the prevalence of entrepreneurial activity

in an economy and shapes attitudes towards entrepreneurship, despite potential challenges arising from economic conditions or government support. Kharjan and Das (2023) advocate for increased awareness and support mechanisms, including training programmes, funding opportunities, and institutional programmes to promote youth entrepreneurship. Echoing these sentiments, Kew (2013) highlights the urgent need for job creation, particularly to address the disproportionately high youth unemployment rates in South Africa, which exceed the national average. Williams and Hoyorka (2013) highlight the critical need to address low youth engagement in entrepreneurship in the face of challenging economic conditions, emphasising the need for concerted efforts by various stakeholders. Furthermore, Djordjevi et al. (2021) emphasise the potential of entrepreneurship

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as a transformative force in addressing youth unemployment. Nevertheless, the extent of youth engagement and their perceptions of entrepreneurship in developing countries, including South Africa, remains underexplored. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to examine in depth the perceptions of South African youth towards entrepreneurship, focusing on their attitudes towards their entrepreneurial capabilities, their awareness and recognition of entrepreneurial opportunities, and the extent of their networks with other entrepreneurs.

2. Literature Review

Matricano (2020) posits that defining entrepreneurship has been a challenging endeavour since its inception, with numerous attempts made to encapsulate its essence. The majority of scholars concur that entrepreneurship can be elucidated through the application of diverse theoretical lenses. Schumpeter defines entrepreneurs as individuals who exploit market opportunities through organisational or technological innovations. This concept can be traced back to Cantillon's use of the term in 1755 to describe those who purchase inputs at one price, transform them, and sell the resulting output at a profit. Both definitions emphasise the entrepreneurial act of seizing opportunities through innovative means. Matricano (2020) additionally proposes that entrepreneurship is an ongoing process driven by the pursuit of profit through the identification, selection, and exploitation of opportunities. This process occurs over time as individuals navigate their contexts and industries, taking actions and building networks in pursuit of desired outcomes. Although the phases of identification, selection, and exploitation provide a framework, the duration of each phase and the overall process vary considerably, making it challenging to generalise how individuals perceive and engage with opportunities.

Kuratko and Morris (2018) posit that entrepreneurship is a pivotal driver of economic advancement, fostering the generation of wealth, income, and an enhanced social quality of life. Scholars such as Bosma et al. (2018) endorse this perspective, underscoring the part played by entrepreneurship in promoting both social and economic advancement. This recognition has prompted increased interest from academic and political quarters, particularly in addressing contemporary social and economic challenges through entrepreneurial initiatives. Productive entrepreneurship, which focuses on creating new wealth through radical innovations that challenge existing norms and improve products, processes or services, contrasts with unproductive entrepreneurship, which seeks only to capture existing wealth. In essence, the relationship between economic

development and entrepreneurship is profound and globally recognised. It underscores the need for entrepreneurial participation, especially among youth, to drive innovation and effectively address pressing societal needs. In South Africa, there is a notable discrepancy in entrepreneurial activity across racial groups. Specifically, White and Asian communities demonstrate a higher propensity for entrepreneurial initiation compared to Coloured and Black communities. This disparity highlights the influence of broader socio-economic factors on entrepreneurial engagement (Government Gazette, 2018). The process of perceiving entrepreneurial opportunities, as described by Matricano (2020), encompasses how individuals interact with innovations and recognise potential entrepreneurial ventures. However, defining and generalising these opportunities remains a complex task in academic discourse, leaving questions about what constitutes opportunity perception unanswered.

3. Entrepreneurship Approaches

The field of entrepreneurship research employs a range of theoretical approaches to gain insight into the phenomena under study. The four primary perspectives are teleological, psychological, contextual, and relational entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2017). The **teleological approach** is concerned with the entrepreneurial intent to introduce new technologies, products, or enter new markets (Klyver et al., 2011). It emphasises the proactive role of entrepreneurs in driving innovation and market change. **Psychological approaches** examine the influence of individual characteristics, including risk propensity, need for achievement, and tolerance for ambiguity, on entrepreneurial behaviour (Hmieleski & Corbett, 2008; Rauch & Frese, 2007). An understanding of these psychological traits facilitates the prediction of entrepreneurial intentions and success. **Contextual approaches** consider environmental factors at the regional, national or local level that either facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial activity (Welter, 2011). Positive contexts, such as supportive policies and infrastructure, are contrasted with hostile environments characterised by regulatory burdens and economic instability. Finally, the **relational approach** considers the function of networks and relationships in facilitating entrepreneurial opportunities (Welter et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial networks offer access to resources, guidance, and market prospects that are vital for venture success.

4. Entrepreneurial Challenges

Senou and Manda (2022) posit that entrepreneurship is a pivotal factor in addressing the employment

needs of the rapidly expanding youth labour force in developing countries such as South Africa. Nevertheless, considerable obstacles, including restricted access to financial resources, impede the success of young entrepreneurs in their nascent business endeavours. A study conducted in Benin by Senou and Manda (2020) identified education level, poverty, age, prior experience, social status, presence of a banking relationship, and familiarity with the agricultural sector as key determinants influencing youth access to finance in rural areas. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that enhanced access to finance enhances the probability of youth participation in entrepreneurial activities by an average of 15.2%. In order to address these financial challenges, it is recommended that policy makers implement strategies to enhance youth access to finance. This encompasses the promotion of more lenient credit criteria for financial institutions to consider for young entrepreneurs, who frequently lack the necessary collateral. Furthermore, alternative security measures that are accessible to young people should be explored, given that many do not possess regular employment or fixed assets that can serve as collateral. It would be beneficial to implement government grants and other financial support initiatives that are tailored for youth entrepreneurship. In a separate study conducted in Mali, Koloma (2021) investigated the impact of factors influencing youth financial inclusion on their propensity to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. The findings indicated that higher levels of education, family background, possession of a bank account, and employment status were significant determinants facilitating youth access to loan finance. The impediments to enhanced financial inclusion among the younger demographic included financial constraints, the elevated costs of financial services, and the perception that savings were superfluous. It is notable that access to loans and savings has been found to have a positive influence on the willingness of young people to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Loans are preferred to savings due to the lengthy process of accumulating sufficient savings. The phenomenon of entrepreneurship in South Africa can be observed through two distinct lenses: latent entrepreneurship, which encompasses individuals who intend to start their own businesses, and actual entrepreneurship, which refers to individuals who are actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Notwithstanding South Africa's status as a leading economy in Africa, the rate of youth entrepreneurship remains strikingly low (Fatoki & Chindonga, 2011). This study focuses on the youth demographic, exploring both those already involved in entrepreneurship and those aspiring to enter the field. It is of the utmost importance to gain an understanding of these perspectives in order to identify the barriers and

opportunities present within the entrepreneurial landscape. In comparison to global benchmarks, South Africa's Total Entrepreneurship Activity (TEA), which measures the proportion of the working-age population engaged in starting or managing businesses, is ranked among the lowest globally (Orford et al., 2003). This is at odds with the country's flourishing economy and plethora of thriving businesses, indicating untapped potential and pervasive systemic obstacles impeding youth entrepreneurship.

5. Role of Entrepreneurship Education in Shaping Youth's Perceptions

Ramirez and Alberto (2020) highlight the increasing focus on entrepreneurship within university education, signalling a growing interest in understanding its impact on youth entrepreneurial intentions. In a study conducted by Cera et al. (2020) in a Balkan country, the critical role of entrepreneurship education in fostering intentions to start businesses among young people was underscored. Despite this emerging interest, the field still lacks comprehensive research, with significant gaps remaining in understanding which aspects of education most significantly influence entrepreneurship. Mackiewicz and Kurczewska (2023) posit that individuals with diverse educational and professional backgrounds are more likely to succeed as entrepreneurs, underscoring the broader impact of education on entrepreneurial intentions and venture success. The availability of educational opportunities has a significant impact on the way in which young people perceive entrepreneurship. Restricted access to education and professional experience can act as a substantial impediment to entrepreneurial aspirations among young people, underscoring the necessity for inclusive educational policies that foster entrepreneurship at all levels of education. Mendonca et al. (2022) observe a global proliferation of entrepreneurship education, ascribing favourable economic consequences to these initiatives, which were heretofore undervalued in conventional curricula. Although some advancement has been achieved in incorporating entrepreneurship components into diverse academic fields at higher education institutions, the methodology remains fragmented and lacks a comprehensive orientation towards fostering an entrepreneurial spirit among students (Idowu & Omobolane, 2019). This transition is pivotal in guiding students away from a conventional employability-centric mindset and towards entrepreneurial pursuits. It challenges the established educational paradigms that have traditionally prioritised the production of skilled employees for established industries. Furthermore, Aslan et al. (2016) noted a lack of entrepreneurial inclination among Asian youth, which they attributed to unfavourable

circumstances, despite their demonstrated potential for entrepreneurial success. Kharjan and Das (2023) argue for an expansion of training opportunities with the aim of equipping young people with the requisite skills and support to engage in a range of entrepreneurial activities. They highlight the necessity of implementing follow-up mechanisms to guarantee the practical application of acquired knowledge. In South Africa, where access to tertiary education is limited for a significant proportion of the youth population, the promotion of entrepreneurship education at the primary and secondary levels is crucial to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture from an early age (Ramdas, 2010). This approach is designed to engage with the largest possible number of young people who may not pursue higher education but who have the potential to become entrepreneurs. Kharjan and Das (2023) emphasise the importance of entrepreneurship education, financial assistance and ongoing training in motivating young people to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. Their findings indicate a positive correlation between exposure to business studies and the choice of an entrepreneurial career among students.

Theoretical framework. Entrepreneurial Event Theory (EET), as developed by Shapero and Sokol (1982), posits that the decision to embark upon a new venture is influenced by three key factors: perceived desirability, perceived feasibility and propensity to act. Prior research has demonstrated the applicability of EET in understanding entrepreneurial behaviour among diverse populations. This study extends the application of EET to South African youth, examining the manner in which their perceptions of desirability and feasibility, along with their propensity to act, shape their entrepreneurial intentions. **Perceived desirability** refers to the extent to which an individual finds the idea of starting a business attractive. It is influenced by personal attitudes, cultural values and social norms. For example, if entrepreneurship is highly valued and encouraged within a community, individuals are more likely to view it positively. **Perceived feasibility** can be defined as an individual's belief in their capability to start and run a business successfully. The formation of this perception is influenced by a number of factors, including self-confidence, skills, knowledge and access to resources. If young people possess the requisite skills and resources, they are more likely to consider entrepreneurship as a viable option. The **propensity to act** can be defined as the individual's inclination to take action and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities. Such propensities may be shaped by an individual's personality traits, past experiences, and their general disposition towards risk-taking and proactive action.

Methods

This study employed an exploratory research design to comprehensively investigate the phenomenon under study without presumptions about definitive outcomes (Bhasin, 2020). In accordance with Saunders et al. (2007) classification of research strategies, a survey approach was selected, incorporating qualitative data collection methods. The study focused on South African youth, who constitute approximately 20.6 million individuals, representing 35.7% of the total population (Ndodo, 2022). Purposive sampling was employed to select 12 participants who were deemed to be best suited to providing in-depth insights into the perspectives of young people on entrepreneurship. The study observed a high level of enthusiasm and willingness among the youth participants to engage, resulting in a strong response rate. Data collection was primarily through structured online interviews to account for geographical dispersion and participant preferences. Thematic analysis, guided by Creswell's (2014) framework, facilitated the systematic identification of key themes and sub-themes from interview transcripts, notes, and audio recordings to comprehensively interpret findings. Ethical considerations, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the study.

Results

The thematic analysis identified a number of central themes that structure the presentation of the findings. These themes cover a wide range of aspects related to youth entrepreneurship in South Africa. They include exploring young people's perceptions of entrepreneurship, their motivations and aspirations for starting a business, and their perceptions of opportunities and challenges. The analysis also looks at common challenges faced by young entrepreneurs, such as securing finance and navigating market dynamics. It examines the life experiences of young entrepreneurs, their strategies, successes and failures. Furthermore, it assesses the ability of young people to sustain their businesses over time, taking into account factors such as management skills and support networks. It also explores the level of youth engagement in entrepreneurship, the impact of South Africa's historic apartheid system on entrepreneurship, and the role of education in shaping entrepreneurial attitudes and skills. Together, these thematic areas offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics of youth entrepreneurship, highlighting both the challenges that need to be addressed and the opportunities that can be harnessed through effective policies and practices.

Theme 1: Youth Perceptions Towards Entrepreneurship

Notwithstanding the obstacles inherent in the business environment and the dominant knowledge and mental schemas pertaining to entrepreneurship, the outlook of young people with regard to entrepreneurship remains predominantly optimistic. Rather than abdicating responsibility entirely to the government or other stakeholders, young people are gradually engaging in a process that holds promise for future success. The initiation of this process necessitates a positive mindset and accurate perceptions. Participants 1 and 5 emphasised the following:

Participant 1: *"Entrepreneurship is a lucrative field that demands more mentorship, coaching, and an incentivized culture of innovation."*

Participant 5: *"I hold positive perceptions towards entrepreneurship in South Africa because I believe it offers the best solution to issues like unemployment and has a positive impact on the economy."*

However, despite their positive outlook, young people also believe that challenges outweigh opportunities in the country's entrepreneurship sector. To overcome this perception, it is necessary to highlight success stories rather than flood the media with negative news that attracts more attention. Such distorted perceptions can deter others from entering the entrepreneurial landscape, as they consider it too difficult. Participants 4, 7, 8, and 10 affirmed:

Participant 4: *"There is hope for improvement, but changes are necessary, such as revising regulations to favour young entrepreneurs and creating a more supportive environment with accessible funding."*

Participant 7: *"Undoubtedly, while we have freedom and access to opportunities, succeeding in this industry is challenging."*

Participant 8: *"Yes, some of us are still facing struggles."*

Participant 10: *"It's tough without connections; the environment isn't conducive."*

The findings suggest that the prevailing perception among young people is that the economic environment presents more challenges than opportunities. Nevertheless, their constructive outlook on entrepreneurship suggests the possibility of advancement, contingent on the provision of sufficient support. The following theme examines participants' awareness of opportunities and challenges in South African entrepreneurship in greater depth.

Theme 2: Awareness of Opportunities and Challenges

The objective of this section is to investigate whether young people are more aware of the challenges that exist in the contemporary business environment than of the opportunities that are available to them. It is therefore crucial to gain an understanding of

this awareness in order to determine whether the issue lies in the unique dynamics of South Africa's environment, its historical context, or simply in perceptions that can be addressed through targeted information or programmes. The participants indicated that they were more aware of the difficulties they encountered when entering entrepreneurship than of the opportunities available to them. This perception can be a deterrent for some people who are not sufficiently motivated. Participants 5, 7 and 8 made the following comments:

Participant 5: *"Youth entrepreneurship in South Africa faces both challenges and opportunities. While historical legacies and economic disparities pose obstacles, there are also positive initiatives that foster a conducive environment for entrepreneurial growth."*

Participant 7: *"There is more awareness of challenges than opportunities."* Participant 8: *"Yes, I believe young people are more aware and cautious of challenges than opportunities, which may explain why not all aspiring entrepreneurs proceed with their plans."*

The findings highlight that while opportunities exist within the environment, young people are more aware of the potential challenges that could impede their entrepreneurial success. Such constraints frequently result in feelings of restriction and diminished empowerment among young aspiring entrepreneurs. Participant 10 added:

Participant 10: *"Yes, it seems there are more challenges than opportunities in the country. Social media and news platforms often highlight negative news, shaping perceptions and conversations around challenges rather than opportunities."*

The responses indicate that, prior to engaging in entrepreneurial activities, young people are predominantly aware of the challenges they face rather than the opportunities available to them. This awareness is shaped by discourse within their peer groups, representations in the media, and the perception of insufficient efforts by stakeholders to create ample opportunities for youth. Consequently, opportunities, whether in funding or business ventures themselves, may remain unidentified due to the prevailing focus on challenges. This perception underscores the necessity to strike a balance between narratives and the promotion of awareness of existing opportunities, with the aim of fostering youth entrepreneurship. The following section examines the specific challenges commonly perceived or faced by young entrepreneurs.

Theme 3: Common Challenges Faced by the Youth

This section aimed to examine the prevalent challenges encountered by young entrepreneurs. A primary challenge identified was the lack of financial support necessary to initiate business ventures.

The establishment of a business frequently necessitates the availability of substantial initial capital, a prerequisite that can prove intimidating for individuals lacking substantial savings or access to funding opportunities. It was acknowledged by participants that although opportunities exist within the South African business environment, the subsequent challenge of navigating the path forward after identifying an opportunity remains a significant obstacle. Key challenges include difficulties in accessing finance, gaining the necessary expertise, fighting crime, navigating the strict regulatory framework and competing with larger enterprises. Participants 3, 7, 9, and 10 elaborated:

Participant 3: *"Access to funding, whether through loans, venture capital, or government grants, is critical for entrepreneurs to establish and expand their businesses. Regulatory frameworks, ease of doing business, and government policies also significantly impact success."*

Participant 7: *"Crime, power outages, and inadequate government support pose significant challenges. Securing funding, building a customer base, and ensuring safety from criminal activities are ongoing concerns."*

Participant 9: *"The economic and social conditions in South Africa contribute to the high failure rates of youth businesses. Challenges include crime incidents impacting business operations, political unrest leading to property damage, and inadequate levels of education in entrepreneurship and digital literacy."*

Participant 10: *"I have experienced entrepreneurship first-hand in South Africa. Despite my efforts, competing with companies offering lower prices and gaining trust from customers proved challenging. Access to markets and dealing with intimidation from larger organizations were also notable obstacles."*

The discussion highlighted that while young entrepreneurs can identify opportunities, they are hampered by these multifaceted challenges to move forward at this stage. Security concerns, including intimidation and criminal activity targeting entrepreneurs, emerged as persistent issues affecting business sustainability. Moreover, the presence of larger corporations in the market was identified as a significant impediment to competition. These challenges collectively illustrate the intricate landscape that young entrepreneurs must navigate in South Africa. The following section presents a detailed examination of the lived experiences of youth entrepreneurs, offering a more nuanced understanding of their personal journeys and strategies.

Theme 4: Experience as an Entrepreneur

This topic aimed to explore whether young entrepreneurs, despite seeing more challenges than opportunities, continue to start businesses in this environment. The participants found that some of

them have indeed started their businesses, while others are determined to overcome obstacles and enter the entrepreneurial arena. Participants 5, 7, 8 and 9 shared their perspectives:

Participant 5: *"Having ventured into my own small business, I often feel overlooked, particularly when funding opportunities are not readily available."* Participant 8: *"I believe there is a scarcity of successful entrepreneurs willing to share their knowledge and experiences, which creates a restrictive environment."* Participant 9: *"I feel neglected because doors seem to close simply because I am new to the industry or lack a track record."*

Participant 7: *"Accessing funding remains a significant challenge for Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in South Africa. Despite government initiatives, the processes remain cumbersome and restrictive. As an SME operator, I feel constrained, and I believe more support is needed from the government, given the sector's substantial contribution to the economy."*

Many young entrepreneurs show an ability to identify viable business opportunities. However, challenges remain in accessing finance, acquiring the necessary expertise and competing with larger enterprises. There is a widespread feeling among young people that they are neglected when efforts to secure support from government and larger companies prove unsuccessful. Furthermore, larger firms are not regarded as sources of guidance and support, but rather as competitors who may resort to intimidation and other unfair practices to marginalise emerging businesses. This lack of mentorship and assistance contributes to the perception of a challenging business environment for young entrepreneurs. The subsequent theme examines whether youth believe they possess the capacity to sustain their businesses in the face of these obstacles.

Topic 5: Youth Capacity to Sustain Their Businesses

This theme examined the young people's perception of their ability to maintain businesses over time. The responses indicated a predominantly positive outlook, with 60% of participants affirming their belief in their capacity to run successful businesses, while 40% expressed uncertainty. It is noteworthy that no participants provided negative responses. Participants 3 and 7 shared their perspectives:

Participant 3: *"Let's strive diligently for a prosperous future. There's a saying that if you fear the scorching sun, you'll never become wealthy. We must work hard even when conditions are challenging, so that success accompanies us."* Participant 7: *"As a young black person, one must exert double effort, but with accessible opportunities, success is attainable. Many youths were marginalized during the apartheid era, hindering their entrepreneurial aspirations."*

The findings highlight that, despite the challenges they face, young people retain a positive outlook on their ability to succeed in entrepreneurship, which offers a promising foundation for the advancement of entrepreneurial activities within the country. This determination reflects a readiness to embrace entrepreneurship, even in the face of adversity. The subsequent theme (6) examines the extent of youth involvement in entrepreneurship activities.

Theme 6: Level of Youth Involvement in Entrepreneurship Activities

Expanding on the understanding of young people's capacity to sustain their own businesses, this theme explores their current participation in entrepreneurial activities. The findings show a marked lack of youth engagement in entrepreneurship, indicating room for improvement. Participants 8, 9, and 10 provided insights:

Participant 9: *"No, today's youth are not sufficiently involved in entrepreneurial activities. Corruption and dependency have become pervasive. Many young people still cling to the promises of 1994 without making decisive moves to progress."*

Participant 10: *"No, many young individuals believe that securing a full-time job is crucial for success in life. Thus, they prioritize job security over starting their own businesses. Additionally, the lack of accessible funding is a significant barrier."*

Participant 8: *"No, there's a lack of entrepreneurial knowledge and insufficient engagement. More proactive involvement is needed."*

The findings indicate a widespread lack of youth participation in entrepreneurship, which can be attributed to various socio-economic factors. Kew, Penny et al. (2013) highlight that, in line with global trends, South Africa is facing a severe youth unemployment crisis, exacerbated by inadequate youth entrepreneurship. This theme highlights the need for strategic interventions to increase youth participation in entrepreneurial activities. The following theme (7) examines the impact of South Africa's historical context on youth entrepreneurship.

Theme 7: Impact of the Historical Apartheid System

This theme explores perceptions of the lingering impact of South Africa's apartheid history on contemporary youth entrepreneurship. Participants reflected on the lingering impact of past racial segregation, discrimination and economic inequality on contemporary entrepreneurial opportunities. Several viewpoints were shared:

Participant 3: *"Yes, the historical apartheid system in South Africa has deeply influenced present-day youth*

entrepreneurship. The systemic racial segregation and economic inequalities from that era continue to shape our entrepreneurial landscape."

Participant 4: *"Many still hold onto grievances from apartheid and view entrepreneurship through the lens of racial divide rather than equal opportunity."*

Participant 5: *"Certain industries remain dominated by specific racial groups, perpetuating disparities from the apartheid era."*

Participant 7: *"Despite our freedom and access to opportunities, succeeding in entrepreneurship remains challenging, partly due to the historical legacies."*

Participant 8: *"The apartheid regime marginalized Black people, limiting their access to business opportunities and resources. This legacy still affects how entrepreneurship is perceived and accessed today."*

The perceptions of the younger generation indicate that the legacy of apartheid continues to influence economic opportunities, perpetuating inequalities and affecting entrepreneurial aspirations. Simpeh (2011) supports this notion, highlighting how socio-economic backgrounds can influence entrepreneurial decisions. Despite nearly three decades having elapsed since the end of apartheid, its legacy persists, shaping perceptions of entitlement to resources and barriers to entry in entrepreneurship. While acknowledging these challenges, youth still express confidence in their ability to succeed in entrepreneurial endeavours, underscoring their resilience and determination to overcome historical barriers. Kharjan and Das (2023) argue for equitable access to financial support, training and confidence-building programmes to empower marginalised youth and promote entrepreneurial success. Theme 8 will explore the impact of entrepreneurship education on youth.

Theme 8: Entrepreneurship Education

Participants expressed a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship education, highlighting its crucial role in stimulating economic growth, tackling unemployment and providing young people with the necessary skills. Key messages included the integration of entrepreneurship into the secondary school curriculum and the missed opportunities due to the lack of such education at earlier stages. Participants 2, 9, and 10 shared:

Participant 2: *"The absence of entrepreneurship studies at the basic education level is glaringly evident and necessary."*

Participant 9: *"Entrepreneurship education must start early in high school to become a reality."*

Participant 10: *"Had I been taught about being an employer earlier, I would be further along now."*

The participants identified the influence of educational curricula that may have precluded certain individuals from active economic participation, thereby constraining their entrepreneurial aspirations. There was a consensus that entrepreneurship

education should commence at the foundational levels of education and extend beyond formal schooling to encompass broader communities. Abdurazzakov (2015) emphasises the significance of establishing technology parks, introducing entrepreneurship courses and training instructors to facilitate entrepreneurial activities in an era characterised by rapid technological advancement. In order to foster an entrepreneurial spirit in the future, it is necessary to unlearn historical impediments and to embrace entrepreneurship as a competitive domain in which success and failure coexist. This approach is designed to eliminate historical barriers and promote active economic participation among all segments of society, thereby creating opportunities for both current and future generations. Consequently, entrepreneurship education is identified as a crucial instrument for transforming perceptions and equipping young people with the capabilities to flourish in evolving economic contexts.

Summary of results

The findings provide a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial perceptions of South African youth analysed through the lens of EET:

– **Desirability.** A significant proportion of participants expressed a favourable view of entrepreneurship, perceiving it as a potential means of addressing unemployment and stimulating economic growth. This enthusiasm and belief in the benefits of entrepreneurship are evident. Nevertheless, societal challenges and a skewed media portrayal of entrepreneurship as more challenging than rewarding have the potential to diminish its appeal for some.

– **Feasibility.** The perceived feasibility of entrepreneurship among youth is shaped by the acknowledgement of substantial challenges, including difficulties in securing funding, navigating regulatory frameworks, and surmounting socio-economic barriers. Despite a robust conviction in their capacity for success, a considerable proportion of young people perceive themselves to be inadequately prepared, citing deficiencies in entrepreneurial education and support structures.

– **Propensity to act.** The likelihood of engaging in a given action varies among participants. Some individuals display a pronounced proclivity towards entrepreneurial pursuits, driven by their optimistic outlook and past experiences. Nevertheless, other individuals are dissuaded by perceived risks, systemic impediments, and the historical legacy of apartheid, which influences their inclination to engage in entrepreneurial pursuits.

6. Recommendations

Guided by Entrepreneurial Event Theory, this study illuminates the intricate factors that shape

youth entrepreneurship in South Africa. The findings indicate that, although entrepreneurship is perceived as a desirable activity, challenges related to its feasibility and the propensity of individuals to engage in it must be addressed. Based on the findings and information obtained from the study of youth entrepreneurship in South Africa, several practical recommendations can be made to create an environment conducive to the growth and success of young entrepreneurs:

Primarily, there is a critical need to raise awareness of entrepreneurship among young people. This involves the development and implementation of targeted information campaigns that highlight success stories of young entrepreneurs, describe available support mechanisms such as funding and mentoring programmes, and inform young people about the benefits and potential of entrepreneurship. Similar to national health awareness initiatives, these structured campaigns can effectively promote entrepreneurship as a viable career path.

Furthermore, it would be prudent to implement national and community-level entrepreneurship awareness campaigns. Such initiatives should comprise workshops, seminars and events designed to instill confidence in young people, emphasise their potential to drive meaningful change through entrepreneurial activities and challenge the notion that entrepreneurship is the preserve of certain demographics or requires significant resources.

Furthermore, the integration of entrepreneurship education into the formal education system, commencing at the primary and secondary levels, is of paramount importance. The curriculum should facilitate the acquisition of business skills and foster creativity, resilience, and problem-solving abilities, which are essential for entrepreneurial endeavours. It is also important to extend these educational programmes to out-of-school youth through community centres, vocational training institutes, and online platforms in order to reach a broader audience beyond the formal schooling system.

It is equally important to advocate for supportive policies that bolster youth entrepreneurship. This encompasses the simplification of regulatory procedures, the reduction of bureaucratic obstacles, and the encouragement of entrepreneurship through the implementation of measures such as tax incentives or grants. It is of the utmost importance that the government and the private sector work together to create an environment that is conducive to young entrepreneurs being able to flourish without encountering any significant obstacles.

Moreover, it is imperative to cultivate a culture of innovation and risk-taking among the younger generation. It is imperative to encourage a shift in mindset that views failure as an inherent aspect of

the entrepreneurial journey. Furthermore, providing support structures, such as incubators, accelerators, and networking platforms, where young entrepreneurs can learn from each other's experiences and access professional guidance, is of paramount importance.

It is evident that the role of the media in portraying positive narratives of youth entrepreneurship and showcasing successful role models is of significant importance. By disseminating examples of successful entrepreneurial endeavours and facilitating mentorship and knowledge-sharing opportunities, the media can motivate other young people to pursue entrepreneurial careers.

It is imperative that young people are empowered through initiatives that encourage ownership and initiative in their economic futures. It is of the utmost importance to provide young people with platforms through which they can voice their entrepreneurial ideas, collaborate on projects, and access resources to transform these ideas into viable businesses. This is a crucial step in fostering a sense of agency and responsibility.

The objective of these recommendations is to establish a supportive ecosystem in South Africa that will enable young people to realise their potential, overcome challenges, and make a substantial contribution to economic growth and job creation. By investing in awareness, education, supportive policies and a culture of innovation, South Africa can cultivate a new generation of resilient and successful entrepreneurs who will drive positive change in their communities and beyond.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study illuminates the current landscape of youth entrepreneurship in South Africa, revealing a nuanced picture marked by both challenges and potential. The low level of engagement in entrepreneurship among the youth population can be attributed to a multitude of obstacles they face,

compounded by enduring socio-economic disparities that are rooted in the country's apartheid history. These historical legacies continue to exert a significant influence on the manner in which young people engage in entrepreneurial activities in the present day, frequently necessitating the provision of enhanced support and resources to facilitate their success. Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges, the study revealed a favourable disposition among the younger generation towards entrepreneurship. This suggests a considerable degree of self-assurance and a sense of obligation among young people to tackle pressing issues such as unemployment through entrepreneurial endeavours. Nevertheless, it became apparent that young people are more aware of the difficulties than the possibilities open to them, which underscores the necessity for targeted initiatives to improve awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities. The recommendations in this section seek to address these challenges in a comprehensive manner. Key among them is the expansion of entrepreneurship education at all levels of education to equip young South Africans with the necessary skills and mindset to thrive in a competitive economy. In addition, tailored support mechanisms that meet the specific needs of young entrepreneurs are needed to mitigate challenges and promote success. Ultimately, the study highlights the urgent need for concerted efforts by government, educational institutions, the private sector and communities to create an enabling environment in which youth entrepreneurship can flourish. The implementation of these recommendations, coupled with the instillation of a mindset of empowerment and initiative among the younger generation of South Africans, has the potential to unlock the full economic and societal potential of the country's youth population. The present moment offers young people the chance to grasp opportunities and embark on entrepreneurial endeavours, thereby making a constructive contribution to South Africa's future prosperity.

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