

**Evaluating the effectiveness of training programmes in enhancing employability and reducing unemployment in South Africa: A training programmes and employability perspective.**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Corporate Strategy, at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research paper evaluates the effectiveness of SETAs in enhancing employability and addressing unemployment in South Africa. Despite SETAs being established two and a half decades ago, to skills the nation and link the unemployed with potential employers, through the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, unemployment, particularly amongst the youth, keeps on increasing. The study is anchored by the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory and it explored whether SETA training programmes effectively contribute to improving participants' employability and how employer involvement influences programme outcomes.

The study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative design, seeking to capture rich, contextual insights into the subjective experiences and interpretations of training effectiveness. Semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, including those who have participated in SETA training programmes before, SETA officials, and employer representatives from four selected SETAs, CETA, MerSETA, SASSETA and Services SETA.

This study advances the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that the relationship between training and employability is not solely determined by individual skill acquisition, but is significantly mediated by several other external factors such as the availability of jobs in the market, institutional efficiency, governance structures, and employer collaboration, and systems to actually track and trace those who have invested in skills acquisition (through participation in training programmes). Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory adopts the view that investment in human capital through education and training directly leads to enhanced productivity and employment outcomes, however, findings from this study reveal that in developing economies such as South Africa, the translation of human capital into economic opportunity is contingent upon systemic and structural conditions.

Through the thematic analysis, which was deployed in this study, it was revealed that SETA training programmes enhance participants' employability positively, through giving participants practical experience and workplace exposure. Findings also revealed that systematic challenges such as submitting of WSPs from employers for compliance reasons, and weak post-training tracking systems. The involvement of employers in the design of training SETA programmes was also revealed as a vital factor of training programme effectiveness, with collaborative design and implementation leading to more sustainable employability outcomes.

Recommendations advocate for development of tracking and tracing systems which will provide accurate account of the effectiveness of SETA training in addressing unemployment in South Africa. More and meaningful inclusion and participation is also recommended.

**Keywords:** Employability, SETA, Human Capital Theory, Training Programmes, Unemployment.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Worden (2012) defines apartheid as a system of institutionalised segregation and unequal treatment based on race, imposed by the white minority upon the black majority in South Africa. In 1948, a certain Hendrik Verwoerd formally and legally introduced apartheid policy in South Africa, he referred to it as “policy of good neighbourliness.” This policy discriminated, illtreated and deprived black people of good education opportunities, which made majority of the people in the country not exposed of certain opportunities.

Officially, apartheid ended in 1994 with South Africa’s shift from an apartheid state to a democratic one. In 1996, a new constitution was adopted, and its preamble acknowledges the injustices of the past. In 1998, the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998) was enacted, leading to the formation of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). By 2000, the Department of Labour (DoL) had set up 25 SETAs to integrate education, professional training, and career opportunities by equipping individuals with industry-relevant skills.

In his 2022 state of the nation address, the President of South Africa, His Excellency President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, described the triple challenges of South Africa as unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Zizzamia (2020) stated that unemployment is a key determinant of poverty in South Africa and labour market inequalities reflect deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities. Social movements, particularly those that advocate for the interest of the youths, continue to make a call for the President to declare youth unemployment a national crisis. The abnormality of high unemployment rate, which Zizzamia (2020) argue that they lead to the other two challenges, support the calls and decisions made by the South African Government to put in place policies to address this challenge. According to Zizzamia (2020) countries which are faced by the high unemployment challenge, employment and employability of their citizens is almost universally held up as the key to achieving meaningful poverty reduction.

Despite several policy initiatives and institutional reforms aimed at addressing the imbalances of the past, improving employability and fostering inclusive economic growth, unemployment figures continue to rise, reaching levels that have prompted national concern. Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], (2024) reported that as of Q3 of 2024, the country’s official unemployment rate stood at 32.1%, with unemployment affecting mostly young people. According to the National Planning Commission (2023), this not only constitutes a significant socio-economic burden but also impedes the nation's potential for economic growth and development, which

talks to the business relevance of this study. Amongst the initiatives implemented to address this challenge is the introduction of the SETAs.

The SETAs, through the broader skills development framework in South Africa was conceptualised to respond to the country's chronic unemployment through systematic training, workplace exposure, and industry-aligned capacity development. SETAs were therefore established to serve as intermediaries between learners, employers, and training providers, ensuring that skills development interventions address sector-specific skills shortages. SETAs have various skills programmes aimed at providing participants with practical experience so that they can be employable or remain in their employs. Examples of SETA skills programmes include, but not limited to, apprenticeships internships, learnerships and skills programmes. This study focused on the first three. However, questions persist regarding the actual effectiveness of these training programmes in producing employable individuals and reducing unemployment.

The employment market in South Africa is characterised by several challenges such as structural inequalities emanating from the ills of apartheid, sectoral volatility, and lack of skills required. This is position SETAs as strategic player to address these challenges. In the past five years, policies such as the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030, the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), and the National Development Plan (NDP), have put at the core of addressing the high unemployment rate in the country. SETAs are central to the effectiveness of these policies.

However, despite these policy intentions, scholars and policy analysts argue that South Africa's skills ecosystem continues to encounter systemic challenges. According to Govender (2022) these challenges include a misalignment between training provision and labour market demands and fragmented coordination among institutions.

Given this context, this study critically investigated the role of SETAs in addressing South Africa's unemployment crisis. Specifically, it examines whether SETA-aligned training programmes effectively contribute to improving the employability of participants. It also evaluates the alignment between these programmes and labour market demands, as well as the degree to which employer engagement influences programme quality and outcomes. This is because Dachner et al. (2021) supported by Auerbach and Green (2024) have pointed out that skills development must be understood not only in terms of technical knowledge transfer but also as a strategic response to systemic exclusion and economic inequality. In this regard, SETAs hold both symbolic and practical significance in shaping a more inclusive and responsive skills development ecosystem.

## 1.2. Background

According to Papier et al. (2023) ever since the new democratic government in South Africa in 1994, the government wanted to reform skills development in the country as a means of addressing the imbalances of the past, especially in employment. The establishment of SETAs was a response to the skills deficit inherited from South Africa's apartheid era. Horwitz et al. (2002) argued that apartheid left a significant portion of the population without access to quality education and training opportunities.

Papier et al. (2023) stated that in the last 25 years, the democratic government, notwithstanding its flaws, have intentionally recognised and supported the SETAs, as integral to increasing employability of previously marginalised groups, especially for the youth, more so the graduates. According to Stats SA (2023) the youth in South Africa are the most affected population group regarding unemployment. The youth may be regarded as the neglected group because of its high unemployment rate, this study sought to explore the role that SETAs and their skills development programmes, especially their training programmes, are playing in addressing unemployment in the country.

Established to close the gap between educational outcomes and industry demands, SETAs are mandated to develop, implement and fund, training programs, and promote learnerships and apprenticeships. The expectation is that through these interventions, SETAs will equip individuals with the skills required by the labour market, thereby contributing to a reduction in unemployment.

Despite their long-standing presence in the country's skills development landscape, SETAs have faced mounting criticism regarding their effectiveness and accountability. Dachner et al. (2021) argue that while access to training opportunities have seen an increase, the quality of training needs to be investigated. Furthermore, Dachner et al. (2021) raise concerns regarding the relevance and alignment of training programmes with labour market requirements, and the extent and role of employer involvement in training design and implementation.

At the core of this study is the Human Capital Theory, which, according to Weisbrod (1962) asserts that investing in education and skills development leads to higher individual productivity and labour market value. The South African government, through funding of the SETAs, is investing in education and skills development of the unemployed, the motivation of this study was to explore if merely investing in education and skills development addresses the unemployment question.

According to Moganedi and Sithole (2020), SETA training programmes are designed to increase the quantity and quality of the South African workforce, which should improve the employability of participants. This is also the classical view of the Becker (1964) Human Capital theory, the anchor of this study, that investment in human capital yield positive economic outcomes. Despite the investments in training programmes by SETAs, unemployment, according to Stas SA (2024), keeps going up. SETAs report a number of participants in their training programmes each year, however the unemployment rate is not significantly changing as it should. The study was therefore positioned to provide an empirical assessment of the effectiveness of SETA training programme in addressing the high unemployment in the country.

Habiyaremye et al. (2022) argued that the current contemporary skills development in South Africa is premised on the traditional theory of market failure. Habiyaremye et al. (2022) stated that the assumption of this theory is that the high rate of unemployment, particularly amongst the youth, is caused by a shortage of skills required in the labour market. However, Bhorat et al. (2014) critiqued this argument by stating that a closer analysis of the structural composition of the country's economy reveals that the persistence of high youth unemployment rates reflects more pervasive structural distortions leading to a middle-income trap rather than a temporary market failure.

Habiyaremye et, al (2022) found that to bridge the labour market demand skills gap in South Africa and to address the unemployment challenge, training programmes should be implemented. Habiyaremye et, al (2022) argued that main reason for high unemployment faced by the youth is lack of skills needed in the market to make them employable and equipping the youth with those skills and qualifications will make them employable. SETAs, every year, implement various skills training programmes, designed to improve the employability of the participants, this study explored if training programmes implemented yield positive results of making participants employable.

This study critically examined both the criticisms and commendations of the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, with a specific focus on its relevance and applicability to the relationship between training programs and the employability of trainees, which served as the core constructs of this research. Thus, while the theoretical rationale for training programmes remains valid, a critical empirical examination of their actual impact on employability is urgently needed. This study is designed to address this question and offered recommendation on how to ensure future effectiveness of SETA training programs in addressing unemployment.

### **1.3. Research significance**

#### **1.3.1. Theoretical Significance**

The theoretical relevance of this study is that it contributes to the scholarly debates on the effects of the human capital theory on employability and economic participation. The study contributes to testing and possibly refining existing theory which are related to the human capital theory.

Thus, this study aimed to contributing to the growing body of knowledge that interrogates the relationship between skills development initiatives and employability outcomes. While much of the literature continue to rely on the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, this research engaged with its limitations by incorporating empirical findings from alternative research formulated views. In doing so, this study offers a deeper and more detailed perspective of how training interventions can—and cannot—translate into employment opportunities under constrained economic conditions.

Thus, empirical results from the study show that SETA training programmes effectively enhance participants' skills, confidence, and job readiness; however, bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak monitoring mechanisms, and limited employer absorption undermine the potential returns on these human capital investments. This finding extends the Becker (1964) through highlighting the importance other external factors which may have not been mentioned, in the original Human Capital Theory by Becker (1964). This study aligns with Dachner et al., (2021) and Auerbach & Green (2024) who all argue that employability of individuals is not only influenced by the competencies which individuals poses, however, there are external structural and systematic enablers, such as availability of jobs, quality and labour market alignment of training programmes, and employer involvement in the design of training programmes.

Dachner et al. (2021) states that majority of employees' development initiatives are short-term focused, however, most of these are not directed to sustainable employment opportunities. Thus, making the existing literature on training programmes and corporate strategy, limited. According to Dachner et al. (2021) there might be lack of theories and frameworks that assists in strategically aligning skills development institutions' interventions and the industry's evolving needs, particularly in addressing scares and critical skills needs.

The role of SETAs is theoretically and practically important. Papier et al. (2023) acknowledged that SETAs are strategically positioned to not only develop skills, but to also assist the government address the triple challenges of high unemployment, high inequality and poverty.

The importance of this study in relation to theory is that it addresses the critiques of the anchor of this study, the Human Capital Theory.

This study advances the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that the relationship between training and employability is not solely determined by individual skill acquisition, but is significantly mediated by several other external factors such as the availability of jobs in the market, institutional efficiency, governance structures, and employer collaboration, and systems to actually track and trace those who have invested in skills acquisition (through participation in training programmes). Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory adopts the view that investment in human capital through education and training directly leads to enhanced productivity and employment outcomes, however, findings from this study reveal that in developing economies such as South Africa, the translation of human capital into economic opportunity is contingent upon systemic and structural conditions.

### **1.3.2. Business Relevance of the Research**

Stats SA (2023) reported that a quarter (25%) of all the employment in the economy of South Africa is skilled jobs. Rothwell (2015) defined skilled jobs as jobs which are specialised in nature and require certain knowledge level, and or particular skills set and abilities. The fact that 25% of the employed people are skilled workers mean that businesses in the country are dependent on readily available and skilled workforce to maximise their performance, which will increase productivity and grow the economy.

SETAs are mandated to develop and implement sector-specific skills development strategies. Understanding the effectiveness of SETAs directly impacts businesses' ability to access the talent they need. According to Stats SA (2023) skills gaps and shortages hinders business expansion and competitiveness. This study contributes in identify areas for improvement in training programmes. This directly benefits businesses by providing a pipeline of qualified potential employees.

According to the Skills Development Act 9 of 1999, all businesses and employers who have a payroll exceeding R500 000 per annum should pay 1% of their total payroll to SARS as a skills levy. A total of 80% of the 1% get to be distributed to SETAs. The case that is being made here is that businesses indirectly invest in SETAs and should realise their returns, through quality recruits. This study evaluated the effectiveness of SETAs in addressing unemployment, thus providing quality recruits to employers, this study provided insights into whether these investments are yielding the desired outcomes in terms of improving skills to offer businesses and reducing unemployment

This research will also assist the South African Revenue Services (SARS) make an informed decision about the future of the skills levies paid by businesses. SARS collects all Skills Development Levies (SDLs) of which 80% goes to the SETAs. According to the SARS (2024) more than R227 million was paid to SARS for the skills levies. This implies that SETAs received more than R181 millions.

Horwitz (2013) found that South Africa is suffering not only just high unemployment rate, but also high skills shortages. One of the business relevance of this study is that it provides recommendations to prevent skills shortages which affects businesses negatively. Addressing the identified challenges which prevents the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing unemployment in South Africa, this study helps businesses understand the role of collaboration in solving societal problems. Pereira et al. (2020) stated that for businesses to thrive, they need equipped human resources. This statement underscores the importance of

the quality of SETA training programmes in ensuring that businesses thrive in South Africa, which will lead to more job creation.

By improving the employability of SETA graduates, businesses benefit from a larger, more capable labour pool, which can improve the quality of their hires, therefore from a business and policy perspective, this study holds significant practical value. With high unemployment posing a threat to social stability, productivity, and economic transformation, effective skills development systems are essential. The findings of this study contribute to evidence-based insights to inform policy reform, improve training quality, and strengthen collaboration between SETAs, employers, and government stakeholders.

#### **1.4. Research Aim and Objectives**

##### **1.4.1. Research Aim**

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of SETAs in increasing the employability of trainees, with a focus on the relevance, and impact of training programmes on the employability of trainees, and the role of employer involvement in shaping training outcomes.

##### **1.4.2. Research Objectives**

**Research objective 1:** To determine the extent to which training programmes enhance the employability of their participants.

**Research objective 2:** To identify significant obstacles and opportunities affecting the effectiveness of training programmes in addressing unemployment.

**Research objective 3:** To assess how employer and industry involvement influence the relationship between training programmes and employability outcomes.

## **1.5. Research Setting**

SETAs offer a strategically significant and contextually grounded research setting for assessing the efficiency of training programmes in enhancing participant employability. Powell and McGrath (2019) state that due to the nature of the establishment of SETAs in that they are established under an act of parliament, they are mandated to report to parliament about their work. Powell and McGrath (2019) further state that this makes SETAs uniquely mandated to provide reliable information on the assessment and tracking of SETA's programme participants. Goga and van der Westhuizen (2012) argue that unlike generic training providers, SETAs are statutory bodies mandated to design and implement sector-specific skills development strategies in response to both historical injustices, the persistently high levels of poverty and unemployment and current labour market demands. In their evaluation of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1997, Moganedi and Sithole (2020) highlight that SETAs were launched with the expectation of driving a skills revolution to correct historical inequalities. Using them as a research setting will give an opportunity to explore if skills acquired through SETA-aligned training programmes lead to employment.

Given these considerations, SETAs provide a rich and dynamic research environment for assessing the effectiveness of training programs in enhancing employability. Their structured approach to skills development, industry collaboration, and legislative backing ensures that findings from such research can contribute to policy refinement and improved workforce integration strategies.

## **1.6. Document outline**

The following chapter is a literature review grounded in Human Capital Theory, followed by the methodology chapter detailing the chosen qualitative approach, methods of and collection and analysing of data, as well as ethical considerations, it is then followed by the results and findings chapter, then the summary and conclusion chapter.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review.**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the foundational theories and concepts that inform the research approach. The literature review is anchored on the Becker's (1964) Human Capital Theory, which argues that developing individual's education, training, and skills makes them more productive, ultimately fostering economic growth and societal progress.

This literature review is based on the two important constructs which are central to this study. Those key constructs are training programmes and employability. First, it examines the design, implementation, and impact of training programmes, exploring whether these initiatives are effectively aligned with labour market needs. Second, it evaluates the concept of employability, considering how training programmes influence the ability of trainees to secure and sustain employment in an evolving economic environment. The review further explores how the interaction between these constructs, moderated by factors such as employer involvement and institutional quality, influences employment outcomes.

Although this study is focused on the two main constructs, training programmes and employability, the section commences with a discussion of the Human Capital Theory and its impact and relevance to skills development strategies. It then delves into the interplay between these constructs, exploring the extent to which training programmes support and correspond with the core ideas and theoretical framework of Human Capital Theory and contribute to reducing unemployment in South Africa.

By analysing both supportive and critical scholarly perspectives, the literature review identifies key challenges and opportunities with the training programmes and employability relationship. It also highlights gaps in current research, particularly regarding the empirical evaluation of training programmes' impact on unemployment reduction, thereby guiding this study in terms of the research possible questions.

Notwithstanding the importance of this study focusing, almost selectively, on training and employability, it begins by situating these constructs within the broader theoretical discourse of HCT. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how well training programmes reflect the core principles of human capital theory and the extent to which they contribute to addressing structural unemployment in South Africa. By examining the interplay between training, employability, and the labour market, this chapter lays the foundation for evaluating whether current skills development efforts, particularly through SETAs, are achieving their intended objectives.

## 2.2. The Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory serves as the primary theoretical lens for examining the link between skills development and outcomes in the labour market. Initially introduced by Schultz (1961) and later refined by Becker (1964), the theory maintains that investing in education, training, and skill acquisition increases individuals' productivity and earning capacity, ultimately yielding benefits for both the individual and the wider economy. Schultz (1961), and Becker (1964) maintained the idea that individuals can gain skills (human capital) that will make them more productive, this enhanced productivity then leads to greater income.

The theory gained significant recognition following the publication of Becker's influential work, *Human Capital*, in 1964. The Human Capital Theory which emphasises the magnitude of investing in human resources, such as education and training, for economic growth, is a suitable anchor for this study. Becker (1964) argues that individuals who receive training and education accumulate valuable competencies that make them more attractive to employers, leading to higher employment rates, improved wages, and increased national productivity. In this view, unemployment is often interpreted as a symptom of insufficient investment in human capital, while training and education are seen as corrective measures to address skills mismatches in the labour market.

In highlighting the importance and value of investing in human capital for economic prospective, Breit and Hirsch (2009) stated that Becker argued that the growth of any country's economy lies in that nation's human capital. Breit and Hirsch (2009) stated that human capital analysis puts individuals at the centre of attention in the economy. According to Breit and Hirsch (2009), economy is moved by people, the determination of whether the economy is rich or poor is the people, and human capital is a major aspect of productivity and well-being of people. In support of the views by Becker (1964), Breit and Hirsch (2009) stated that to improve individuals' economic prospects, investment in human capital, through skills and knowledge acquisition, is vital.

According to Ho and Alcorso (2004) formal education and on the job training, similar to SETA training programmes, are the sharpest tools in the development of human capital. Ho and Alcorso (2004) further stated that human capital is also developed in the context of informal learning on the job and in daily living and civic participation. Ho and Alcorso (2004) stated that human capital theory has become the prevailing wisdom within academic and business circles for explaining the economic success of individuals, organisations and nations. Ho and Alcorso (2004) argued that the difference between physical and human capital is that the former depreciates through use while the latter depreciates through lack of use.

Formal education and training regarding the actual job have been identified as effective tools to develop human capital by Ho and Alcorso (2004). This supports the call by the human capital theory that all expenses which are associated with education and training should be viewed as an investment rather than a cost. According to Becker (1964), majority of individuals believe that getting a good education can get them a good job. Human capital theory proposes that educational level is positively correlated with income. What is more, it specifies that education increases skills that, in turn, increase productivity, and higher productivity is then rewarded through higher earnings. The view by Becker (1964) is supported by Bowles and Gintis (1975) by affirming that acquisition of formal education and training enhances employees' productivity, which leads to significant effects on income in a positive manner.

According to Deming (2022) the human capital theory is now being accepted that investment in education and training has a positive impact in one's prospects. Just like any other investment, the cost of education and training are paid now while the benefits are maximised at a later stage. Deming (2022) argued that although the benefits of education and training are not only realised in monetary value, the relationship between education and training and future earnings are the most important. Deming (2022) argued that those who invest in their education and training, are most likely to have a much bigger economic slice, in a form of incomes, than those who do not. This statement aligns with the foundations of the human capital theory.

Doppelt (2019) argue that human capital plays an important role in the income earned by employees. Doppelt (2019) argued that organisations are aware of this, and at times, use it to their benefit. Doppelt (2019) highlighted the importance of investing in human capital for everyone. Doppelt (2019) stated that organisations that thrive in underpaying employees will find it difficult to exploit employees if all employees in the labour market are highly educated and trained. Doppelt (2019) argued that this will not lead to organisations not employing anyone, which will lead to increased unemployment, but it will lead to employees getting incomes that they deserve, thus realising their return on investment from their education and training. This is what the human capital theory is all about. Doppelt (2019) stated that the benefits of investing in education and training are greater to both employers and employees, than not to invest in human capital.

Wright (2021) stated that in an era where organisations are in continuous competition, through globalisation, it is high time that organisation strategise their human capital. Wright (2021) argued that employees who invest in their human capital, as proposed by the human capital theory, will be ahead of their competitors, as strategic economic thinking is the solution.

In the modern era, there has been a need to revisit the Human Capital Theory to assess if it still fit to the current economic conditions. Marginson (2019) argues that although investing in human capital remain critical, the quality standard and significance of education and training are equally important in influencing employment outcomes. Furthermore, Acemoglu and Restrepo (2018) emphasise that human capital must be adaptive to technological changes and the evolving needs of the labour market to maintain its value. This statement implies that for the training programmes to be seen to be effective, they need to consider what the market needs and provide programmes which addresses what is needed.

Marginson (2019) highlight that training and development of individuals alone may not suffice if structural labour market issues such as limited job creation, economic stagnation, and mismatches between skills supply and demand are not simultaneously addressed. Given this background, this research will be anchored around the Human Capital Theory to evaluate whether training programmes effectively augment the employability of trainees, thereby influencing the reduction of unemployment.

The Human Capital Theory has faced critiques since its inception. Bowles and Gintis (1975) contended that the theory, originally conceived to mitigate economic class struggles, paradoxically reinforced class differentiation, thereby failing to achieve its intended purpose. Bowles and Gintis (1975) further argued that this theory just states that those with the means will develop themselves and advance economically and those without will remain in the same economic class. This critique remains pertinent in contemporary discussions, as Auerbach and Green (2024) assert that the theory insufficiently addresses the significance of the quality of training interventions necessary to attain desired outcomes, such as employment. Instead, the theory broadly suggests that investments in human development invariably yield positive economic results. According to Auerbach and Green (2024), the theory falls short in clarifying the mechanisms through which education enhances productivity. Additionally, it fails to account for the growing disparity in salaries and the influence of social status.

The critiques presented by Bowles and Gintis (1975) and Auerbach and Green (2024) align with this study, while SETAs provide financial resources, they do not inherently ensure the quality of training interventions required to enhance the employability of participants.

Ray et al. (2022) note that over the past decade, Human Capital Theory has been widely recognised for its role in highlighting the strong relationship between investing in education and training and fostering economic growth. This argument by Ray et al. (2022) aligns with the Human Capital Theory that in the past decade, investment in human capital development have led to measurable economic benefits.

According to the understanding of Fix (2018) regarding the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, individual income is the result of human capital. As the critiques and challenging of the Human Capital Theory, Fix (2018) also challenged the assumptions made by the theory. Fix (2018) found that human capital theory's claims are dubious at best. In most cases, human capital theory is either not supported by evidence, is so vague that it is untestable, or is based on circular reasoning.

According to Leary (2019), the Human Capital Theory mainly focuses on just the positivity and benefits that investment in education has. Leary (2019) further stated that this view of the Human Capital Theory overlooks other external social and broader areas of personal developments, attributed by, amongst other things, societal and cultural events. Leary (2019) argued that education has a broader fulfilment than what is captured by measures of economic benefits and fulfilments. The recognition of the multi-faceted role of human capital in realising economic benefits have increased to be influential in policy discussions. Leary (2019) concluded that in principle, the Human Capital Theory does not address the slow economic growth which will allow for quality and sustainable job creation, which are vital for individuals and their well beings as well as that of the communities they live in.

Marginson (2019) contends that a substantial body of literature attributes socially differentiated educational outcomes primarily to pre-existing inequalities and the stratification inherent in educational institutions. These factors are viewed as more significant determinants than individual decisions regarding self-investment in education, highlighting the profound influence of social inequities on shaping aspirations.

Marchiori, et al (2022) mentioned that human capital plays a huge role in organisational performance. According to Powell and Dent-Micallef (1997) the expertise of organisations to coordinate their human capital has a relevant role in achieving superior performance. Marchiori, et al (2022) argued that organisations who invest in their human capital often performed better than organisation who do not. This statement vindicates the classical view of Becker (1964) that investment in human capital leads to more productivity. More productivity leads to improved organisational performance. However, Marchiori, et al (2022) also pointed that there are other factors which contributes to organisational performance apart from investing in human capital. Marchiori, et al (2022) identified the influence that an organisational culture of encouraging innovativeness has on the performance of organisations.

According to Fix (2018) Human capital theory is greedy reductionist, as it offers extremely simple principles that purport to explain everyone's wages, all the time. It posits a universal connection between human capital, productivity, and income. Fix (2018) concluded by stating

that analysing this assumption of Human Capital Theory, productivity differences between individuals cannot be measured objectively.

Welch (1975) also critiqued the Human Capital theory's assumption. According to Welch (1975) the Human Capital Theory is used when it simplifies interpretation of complex phenomena and reject it when it conceals more than it reveals. Welch (1975) further argued that the Human Capital Theory is based on presumption that labour skills are both durable and malleable, which is not how labour markets operate. In the context of this study, the critiques of the Human Capital Theory were addressed and the importance of in human capital for better economic returns is highlighted.

Stevens (1999) highlighted the role that the Human Capital theory played in the training policy decisions of the UK. Stevens (1999) argued that the UK government relied on the Human Capital Theory to adopt a variety of policies intended to redress a problem of under-investment in training programmes which lead to employability. Kessler and Lülfesmann (2006) on the other hand argued that countries should only invest in training programmes which addresses labour market skills requirements. This study explored the effectiveness of the investment that the South African government made in SETAs, in relation to employability of participants.

### **2.3. Training Programmes**

Jackson and Bridgstock (2020) defined training programmes as extracurricular activities such as internships, learnerships, job-placements, or any participation in professional events, which accumulates practical experiences instrumental in bridging the divide between academic learning and real-life application, thereby enhancing their knowledge and employability. Jackson and Bridgstock (2020) argued that exposure to the real world is paramount employability of graduates. Finally, Jackson and Bridgstock (2020) training programmes allows for tertiary students to be exposed to their industries while allowing for participants to gain practical skills, augmenting their preparedness for the labour market.

Kolb (1984) proposed that learning takes place in a four stages cycle. Kolb (1984) argued that individuals learn through concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Kolb (1984) stated that learning is a process involving individuals experiences, reflections and abilities to use what individuals have learned into practice. According to Kolb (1984) the most effective way of learning is when learners apply theoretical knowledge in a practical context. As Jackson and Bridgstock (2020) stated that training programmes are designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This makes training programmes very vital to not only acquiring and experiencing new learnings, but also an opportunity for application of theory into practice. Kolb (1964) stated that training programmes allows for knowledge creation through transformation of experience.

Kolb (1984) developed the experiential learning theory which suggested that individuals engage with information in two ways. According to Kolb (1984) individuals grasp the experience and then they transform it into practice, through application. The experiential learning theory underscores the importance of practical application of theoretical learnings into practice. Kolb (1984) highlight that it is important to have the theory and the application as these two go hand in hand. This highlights the importance of investing in human capital as proposed by Becker (1964) to increase one's economic earnings.

Nadler and Nadler (2012) stated that training programmes should be designed to ensure that participants learn about current and future requirements of their jobs or career aspirations. Nadler and Nadler (2012) argued that although the design of training programme is important, the attitude of learners is equally important. Nadler and Nadler (2012) stated that learners should support the effectiveness of training programmes not by just attending the training programmes, but by being intentional learners. Nadler and Nadler (2012) stated that training programmes should be designed with identified learning objectives and time frames for learners to achieve those objectives. Learners should be willing to achieve these objectives.

Recent scholarship continues to affirm the pivotal role of training and skills development programmes in fostering both workforce productivity and broader economic advancement. As organisations navigate increasingly dynamic labour markets, the strategic design and delivery of training programmes have become vital for aligning workforce capabilities with evolving industry needs. Garavan et al. (2021) assert that well-designed training interventions can significantly enhance employee performance and organisational outcomes, particularly when these programmes are tailored to close specific skill gaps. This underscores the importance of relevance and intentionality in training programme design.

However, the growing emphasis on training efficacy has not overshadowed persistent concerns about inclusivity and impact. Fabian and Despotović (2020) caution that, despite their positive contributions to employment outcomes, many skills development initiatives continue to fall short in ensuring equitable access and addressing the varied learning needs of diverse participant groups. Inequities in resource allocation and programme reach remain central issues, potentially limiting the transformative potential of training interventions.

From a theoretical perspective, Noe (2020) defines training as a structured and systematic process aimed at enhancing individual knowledge, skills, and competencies for improved role performance. This conceptualisation closely aligns with the principles of Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in human development, through education and training, translate into higher individual productivity and economic value. In this view, training programmes serve not only as operational tools for capability development but also as strategic levers for socio-economic mobility and national competitiveness.

Moreover, current debates around employability emphasise the centrality of future-facing skills. Succi and Canovi (2019) argue that both current and anticipated skills are essential for graduates and job seekers to remain competitive in today's labour market. This highlights the obligation of training institutions to deliver programmes that are responsive to industry demands and designed with a forward-looking orientation. Succi and Canovi (2019) further argue that most employers increasingly prioritise candidates who demonstrate adaptability and relevant competencies, making it essential for training institutions to allocate resources toward the development of high-demand skill sets.

Nonetheless, critical voices in the literature caution against the short-term nature of many training programmes. Dachner et al. (2021) observe that a significant portion of existing interventions tend to focus on immediate skill delivery without ensuring long-term employability or labour market integration. Dachner et al. (2021) argue that the lack of a cohesive strategic framework often hinders the alignment of training quality with the ever-evolving demands of

the employment sector. According to Dachner et al. (2021) this misalignment, in turn, undermines the effectiveness of training as a tool for addressing persistent unemployment.

Khan et al. (2025) argued that tertiary institutions have a responsibility to equip their graduates with industry-relevant skills to prepare them for the workforce. Khan et al. (2025) further highlighted the importance of tertiary institutions to collaborate with other institutions who supplement what tertiary institutions might lack. In the case of this study, SETA training programmes should be designed in collaboration between SETAs, tertiary institutions, and industries. Khan et al. (2025) found that tertiary institutions students appreciate supplementary training programmes which are designed to make them employable.

Khan et al. (2025) reported that training programmes which are designed in collaboration with all industry players tend to yield more substantial employability outcomes for training participants. Khan et al. (2025) further acknowledged the gap to assess the effectiveness of all training programmes against what they are designed to solve. Matha (2024) reported that collaboration between employers and SETAs should go beyond WSP documents, which she argued that are not effective.

Jackson and Tomlinson (2021) highlighted the importance of the experience of practical training programmes in increasing the employability of participants, including those who are often perceived as qualified but not experienced. Jackson and Tomlinson (2021) further stated that opportunities for training programmes cultivate valuable knowledge nodes, thereby enhancing student learning and employability.

According to Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) individual participants, teams, employers and communities, all derived benefits from training programmes. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) argue that participants benefit through acquisition of skills and knowledge, teams benefit through improved productivity, employers benefit through increased income, which is derived from increased productivity, communities benefit by having an increased number of people who are participating in formal economies. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) state that for individuals to derive the greatest benefit, of enhanced employability, training programmes should address both technical and soft skills needed in the labour market. In summary, what Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) argued is that the benefits of training programmes should not only be viewed from one angle of participants or just that of employers. According to Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) the benefits of training programmes are not just for the workplace, but the entire society benefit from training programmes.

According to Butler and Loblely (2016), training programmes have both social and economic benefits. Butler and Loblely (2016) argued that training programmes should not only be evaluated from an economic perspective, but social elements also must be considered.

According to Brown (2002), training programmes must be designed based on thorough assessments of needs. According to Brown (2002) training programmes should be designed and implemented to address specific skills gaps, which should be identified by the industry. Brown (2002) argued that training programmes should not be designed and implemented because of popularity of because training programme providers are chasing numbers. Brown (2002) further argued that no matter how the training provider like certain training programmes, if those programmes are not going to address specific skills gap in that industry, those training programmes should not be implemented.

Brown (2002) defined training programmes needs assessment a process of getting information on what training skills gaps required and how those skills gaps can be addressed. Conducting needs assessment is fundamental to the success of a training program. According to Brown (2002), training providers who design and implement training programmes without being informed by the training programmes needs analysis run the risk of overdoing training, doing too little training, or missing the point completely. Brown (2002) made it clear that training programmes succeed only when they are informed by accurate and reliable training programmes needs assessment. This implies that training programmes which are not informed by any skills assessment, run the risk of not being effective.

Blanchard and Thacker (2023) argued that over and above conducting thorough training programmes needs assessments, to ensure effectiveness of training programmes should follow the ADDIE model. Blanchard and Thacker (2023) stated that the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) ensures effectiveness for training programmes. Blanchard and Thacker (2023) also highlighted the importance of trainees' attitude in ensuring the effectiveness of training programmes, by stating that the success of training programmes should not be left to just training providers, trainees have the equal responsibility. In line with Becker (1964), Blanchard and Thacker (2023) view training programmes as a strategic investment into the future for participants.

Carlisle et al. (2019) reported that well designed training programmes are effective and improve productivity. This underscores the importance of training programmes needs analysis as described by Brown (2002). Carlisle et al. (2019) argued that training programmes which participants are not forced to participate in are more effective than training programmes which forces participants to be part of. The argument by Carlisle et al. (2019) emphasised that

organisations which invest in their human capital, through training programmes, amongst other things, and participants who genuinely participate in developing themselves, significantly strengthen the link between training programmes and performance outcomes.

Tharenou (2010) argued motivation is one of the success factors of training programmes. According to Tharenou (2010), training participants will derive more value of the training programme if they are willing and have hunger to participate in a training programme. Tharenou (2010) argue that training programme providers can put learners at the centre of the training programme, the training programme can be aligned with the required competencies, but if the participants do not want to participate in the training programme, that training programme will not be effective in addressing what it is ought to. According to Tharenou (2010) the motivation for training programmes influences the level of participation and the employability of participants.

According to Ramos and Harris (2012) governments across the world are investing in training and development initiatives, inclusive of training programmes to ensure that their citizens remain globally competitive, enhance employability and to grow their economies. South Africa does this through the SETAs and the various programmes that SETAs offer in this regard. Ramos and Harris (2012) stated that the outcomes of training programmes are mostly measured according to productivity, increase, employability and promotion. This is inline with the human capital theory.

In summary, while training and skills development remain indispensable to enhancing employability and economic growth, the literature underscores the need for equity, strategic alignment, and future-oriented programme design. As such, training initiatives must evolve beyond basic knowledge transfer to become integrative, demand-driven systems capable of bridging the gap between education and sustainable employment.

## **2.4. Employability of trainees**

Employability is defined by Knight and Yorke (2006) as the ability of an individual to attract and maintain formal employment status. Knight and Yorke (2006) stated that attracting the employment status requires a range of skills, knowledge, experiences and attributes, which prospective employers look for when making an employment decision. Knight and Yorke (2006) view employability not as an ending thing, but a lifelong process, which emphasises the prospective employee's ability to adapt and be proactive in engaging with intense and ever-changing labour market demands. This view by Knight and Yorke (2006) underscores the importance of investing in human capital for the purposes of being attractive to prospective employers. This is the argument that Becker (1964) made in stating that investment in continuous learning and the ability to navigate changing employment conditions makes people more employable.

Fugate et al. (2004) conceptualised employability as a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realise career opportunities. Fugate et al. (2004) further argued that employability enables inter jobs movements, both within and between various employers. Although employability does not assure actual employment, Fugate et al. (2004) contended that it enhances an individual's likelihood of gaining meaningful employment.

From a Human Capital Theory perspective, the attributes by Knight and Yorke (2006) identify represent the accumulated capital that makes an individual more competitive and desirable to employers, ultimately increasing their employability and potential for sustained engagement in the workforce. This attributes further aligns with Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory foundational view that investments in human capital enhances individual's productivity and economic value, this reinforces the view that employability is shaped not only by qualifications but by the strategic accumulation of relevant competencies.

Glerum and Judge (2021) agree that skills development programmes increase access to learning opportunities, but do not guarantee employability unless they are closely aligned with labour market needs. However, the extent to which training programmes lead or enhances employability needs to be investigated. Behera and Gaur (2022) on the other hand, concluded that solely emphasising education without addressing skill demands, or focusing solely on employment while neglecting relevant education and training would not be sufficient to achieve the intended outcomes of improving employability through training programmes.

The classical view of the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory is that an investment in human capital through education and experience, should automatically lead to employability. This

classical view is of the assumption that all things are equal, implying that training programmes are designed appropriately implemented to address the labour market demands. In practice, the effectiveness of such investments is mediated by institutional efficiency, economic context, and the relevance of the skills developed. Behera and Gaur (2022) stated that there is a need to further investigate strategies to address the mismatch between industry requirements and the skills possessed by graduates.

Byrne (2020) argued that the employability of graduates is not entirely dependent on completion of their qualifications. Byrne (2020) found that factors such as type of qualifications, geographical economic status, and the availability of jobs, play a role in employability.

Clarke (2017) stated that graduate employability has become a key driver for universities in developed economies. Clarke (2017) further stated that governments in these economies have adopted a range of strategies to ensure employability of graduates, these include but not limited to forcing universities to include practical elements in their qualifications. In the Context of South Africa, this study found that other training participants participated in SETA training as part of the requirements to fulfil their qualification. This is to enhance the employability of participants. Clarke (2017) found that graduates who participated in training programmes during or post their studies, reported to have increased their employability.

Byrne (2020) noted that countries in the developing economies have come to be more progressively alarmed with improving the employability of their young people. According to Stats SA (2024) South Africa's population is mainly made up of young people, aged 15 to 35. Byrne (2020) developing economies are more interested in ensuring that graduates are employable, post completion of their tertiary studies, and are putting systems in place to ensure that the gap between tertiary and workplace is bridged. SETAs, in South Africa, are constitutionally mandated to bridge the gap which is acknowledged by Byrne (2020) through various initiatives such as training programmes targeted at graduates.

Cotes and Ugarte (2021) states that the mismatch of the skills developed by training institutions and those required by the market can be attributed to lack of coordination between training institutions and industries. According to Abdullah (2009), these structural challenges contribute to reducing the impact and effectiveness of training institutions. This is supported by Cotes and Ugarte (2021) who stated that training institutions need to implement training programmes which are aligned to current industry needs, and not just implement initiatives for the sake of implementing them in enormous numbers. Furthermore, Ambrosini and Bowman (2009) mention that strategic renewal will allow training institutions to adapt their initiatives to evolving industry demands and maintain long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

Clarke (2017) developed a framework which argued that the employability of trainees should not only be understood from participation, but other factors should be considered too. This supports Auerbach and Green (2024) notion that investment alone might not be enough. Harvey (2010) noted that employability should not be viewed as an achievement for employers, but as an indication of the ability of the unemployed, including but not limited to the graduates, to get employment. The measure of employment is further discussed below.

Harvey (2010) argued that the measure of employability should not only focus on the term, particularly long-term employability. Although Harvey (2010) acknowledged that the measure for employability is clear, in terms of either employable or not, other individual factors should also be considered when employability is being measured. Harvey (2010) stated that other employees, for different reasons, intentionally would not take certain employment opportunities or long-term employment opportunities, that, he continued, should not be construed as them being unemployable. In the case of this study, although the focus is on employability of SETA training programmes' participants, it is worth mentioning that all participants were interested in being employable and employed.

Tymon (2013) mentioned that the responsibility of employability is not only resting on graduates who want to be employed, but businesses are also responsible for the employability of prospective employees. This supports the classical Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory of investing in the development of skills yields maximum economic benefits. Tymon (2013) businesses are aware of the role that they need to play, and others play it perfectly than others, that is why businesses invest in human capital of either their staff or prospective employees, by means of offering study assistance packages.

Nauta et al (2010) identified factors which promote employability for prospective employees. Amongst these factors are company values, culture, and job satisfaction. The factors by Nauta et al (2010) is a vindication of Tymon (2013) who stated that the responsibility of employability is not only on those who are seeking for employment, but also those who are seeking for employees.

Nickson et al. (2012) argued that attainment of tertiary qualifications is not entirely enough to secure employment for graduates. Nickson et al. (2012) called for the graduates to supplement their academic knowledge with practical experience to enhance their employability. In the context of South Africa, SETAs offer training programmes to address what Nickson et al. (2012) is calling for. Nickson et al. (2012) further argued that almost every job, has an experience requirement element, including entry level jobs. Completion of SETA training programmes offer trainees opportunities to acquire this requirement.

Becker (1964) noted that a central conceptual theme in the employability discourse concerns human capital theory, which initially posited that acquiring skills and knowledge via education and training can enhance an individual's productive capacity by positioning these dimensions as a form of capital.

Gritz (1993) found that training programmes have a positive impact not only on employability but also on the quality of employability. This supports the call by Becker (1964) to invest in human capital now and enjoy the benefits later. According to Gritz (1993) training programmes not only enhances workforce stability but also plays a role in ensuring that participants remain employed for a longer time. This is in support of Becker (1964) that investment in human capital led to increased incomes.

Consequently, employability as a construct must be understood not merely as a by-product of training, but as the result of an ecosystem that includes effective programme design, stakeholder collaboration, and strong institutional support. In this study, employability served as the primary outcome variable against which the effectiveness of SETA training programmes was be evaluated. Employment was a relevant metric to measure the effectiveness of SETAs because SETAs programmes are designed to do exactly that.

## **2.5. Theorising the Relationship Between Training Programmes and Employability**

The relationship between training programmes and the employability of trainees is central to the Human Capital Theory. The theory proposes a direct, positive correlation: as individuals receive quality education and skills training, their chances of employment and productivity should increase.

Ashenfelter (1978) stated their support for training programmes because they reduce inflation by skilling more people which alleviate skills shortages, and that they reduce unemployment by offering temporary means of income. Ashenfelter (1978) argued that organisations who are concerned about skills shortages and nations who are experiencing unemployment challenges should invest in training programmes. Ashenfelter (1978) further stated that training programmes alleviate unemployment in most nations, however, the earnings for individuals participating in training programmes should be substantive.

According to Ostmeier and Strobel (2022) training programmes have expanded access to training opportunities, they do not consistently result in improved employment outcomes. Ostmeier and Strobel (2022) attribute the skills mismatch mentioned by Cotes and Ugarte (2021) to stem from poor training programme alignment with industry needs, limited employer participation.

Ostmeier and Strobel (2022) state that insufficient participation from the industry is a contributor to the skills misalignment challenge. Ostmeier and Strobel (2022) states that some employers are reluctant to engage with skills programme providers, perceiving the bureaucratic process as cumbersome and ineffective. This lack of collaboration limits the ability of development institutions to design programs that meet industry-specific requirements. Ostmeier and Strobel (2022) are of the view that providers of training programmes, particularly those with high coordination and stakeholder management systems in place, are vital in linking the unemployed with prospective employers through supporting them with the necessary skills needed in the workplace. Ostmeier and Strobel (2022) conclude their views by stating that training institutions cannot act like islands and what to develop skills without inputs from people who need the skills.

According to Gómez and Luna (2023) training programmes which are based on addressing the identified competency enhances the employability of participants. This highlights the importance of designing training programmes to address specific competencies which are required in the labour market just as Brown (2002) described. Gómez and Luna (2023) found that training programmes which are aligned to industry competencies enhance employability.

Sotiriadou et al. (2020) state that from the theoretical standpoint, the relationship between training programmes and employability is best understood as conditional rather than automatic. Quality, relevance, and labour market responsiveness are critical mediators in the training-employability linkage. Cotes and Ugarte (2021) states that although the Human Capital Theory posits that the development in human capital will yield positive outcomes, training programme quality and labour market alignment is key.

Recent studies underscore that the relationship between skills development and employability is far more complex than originally envisioned in the Human Capital Theory. While the theory suggests that training should increase productivity and job readiness, scholars such as Glerum and Judge (2021) argue that unless training is closely aligned with labour market demands, it does not necessarily lead to improved employment outcomes. Behera and Gaur (2022) further contend that focusing solely on education without considering the skill demands of industry, or vice versa, results in suboptimal employability outcomes. This highlights the need for a nuanced, evidence-based investigation into how training interventions translate into employment opportunities. Arranz et al. (2022) found that collaboration between tertiary institutions and industries is an essential strategy for addressing these challenges to bridge the gap between the skills being developed and the skills required by the markets.

In addition, the Cotes and Ugarte (2021) stated that a persistent mismatch between the skills developed by training institutions and those required by industry, a gap often attributed to insufficient coordination and collaboration. While frameworks exist to guide curriculum design and programme delivery, Ambrosini and Bowman (2009) suggest that without strategic renewal and continuous industry feedback, training institutions risk becoming outdated and ineffective. Cotes and Ugarte (2021) further identified a need for future research to examine how training programmes can be better integrated into broader employment ecosystems, with a focus on programme quality, employer partnerships, and measurable employability outcomes, rather than training volume alone, exists.

Khare (2023) noted that developing human resources for the new age industrial transformation is a long-term dynamic and continuous process of skilling, deskilling and reskilling for sustainable employability. While Khare (2023) also acknowledged the increased demand for extremely educated human resources for businesses to succeed in creating and maintaining competitive advantage, The only theory available to achieve what Khare (2023) is advocating for is the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory. Khare (2023) argued that to achieve sustainable, meaningful and dynamic employability, skills programmes which link graduates, particularly the youth, to sustainable employment, skills programmes which appeal to these

should be implemented. SETA training programmes are designed exactly for this, hence this study is important as it has provided the evaluation of SETA training programmes in attaining what Khare (2023) is proposing.

The above call by Khare (2023) is supported by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 clearly reflect the above ideology with the aim of “full and productive employment and decent work for all” as embedded in its Goal 8. The aim to “substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training” calls for concerted efforts to provide for a sustainable skill-based education responsive to dynamic work-based needs.

Khare (2023) further stated that Covid-19 further deepened the challenges faced by linking training programmes to employability. Khare (2023) indicated that post the Covid-19 pandemic, many firms have either closed shops or have scaled down in employing graduates from school or giving them work readiness training programmes.

Ramos and Harris (2012) found that training programmes which are supported by the industry and addressed required competencies has a positive effect on wages, while training programs with job placements increase employment probability for individuals. Ramos and Harris (2012) further argued that training programmes impact is not universal. Ramos and Harris (2012) stated that the individual impact of training programmes is moderated by the type of training programmes, motivation of participants and the competencies that the training programme sought to train for.

This study sought to fill this gap by evaluating the relationship between training programmes quality and trainee employability, using Human Capital Theory as a guiding framework. It aims to identify both the challenges and opportunities in leveraging as a strategic tool for tackling unemployment in South Africa.

## **Chapter 3: Research questions**

### **3.1. The following research questions guided the study:**

#### **3.1.1. Research Question 1:**

To what extent do SETA training programmes enhance the employability of their participants?

Dachner et al. (2021) highlight a critical gap in the length, content and implementation of training programmes. Dachner et al. (2021) argue that most training programmes are short-term in nature and lacks proves that it leads to employment.

#### **3.1.2. Research question 2:**

How does employer and industry involvement influence the relationship between SETA training programmes and employability outcomes?

Cotes and Ugarte (2021) identify a significant gap in the coordination between training institutions and industry, which undermines the effectiveness of training programmes. According to Cotes and Ugarte (2021) despite substantial investment in training initiatives, this is mostly done in isolation by the training provider without consulting the industry.

#### **3.1.3. Research Question 3:**

What are the key challenges and opportunities affecting the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing the employability of trainees?

As far back as 2009, Abdullah (2009) identified training institutions' governance as one of stumbling blocks to effective implementation of skills development initiatives. Abdullah (2009) states that lack of governance limits training institutions' ability to invest in comprehensive training programs and this can result in infectives of training institutions like SETA.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology.**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Dawson (2019) describes research methodology as the essential framework that guides research, detailing the inclusive strategy for conducting the study. It is of great importance in guiding the research process by determining the appropriate data collection methods.

The methodology, which was adopted, by the researcher, to explore the effectiveness of SETAs in addressing unemployment in South Africa will be outlined in this chapter. The chapter describes the paradigm, design, strategy, population and sampling, data collection instrument and methods, data analysis, research quality and rigour, limitations and delimitations and the considerations of ethics. Anchored around the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, the research sought to evaluate the extent to which training programmes enhance employability and meet labour market demands, thus addressing the unemployment challenge in South Africa.

### **4.2. Research Paradigm**

The study was anchored in the interpretivist paradigm. Creswell and Cresswell (2023) state that interpretivist paradigm is based on the perspective that reality is shaped by social interactions and is most effectively comprehended through individuals' subjective experiences. This paradigm afforded the researcher to explore the perspectives of trainees, employers, and the training provider regarding the effectiveness of training programs and how these programs influence employability. According to Saunders et al. (2019) interpretivism emphasises sense-giving from participants' perspectives. This was the most suitable and appropriate for this study as it was aimed at understanding the complex social phenomena of unemployment and how SETA training programmes influenced the employability outcomes of participants.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that the interpretivist paradigm affiliate well with the constructivist epistemology, the latter suggest that that knowledge is developed through interaction and interpretation rather than objective measurement. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) on the other hand mentioned that interpretivist research is often qualitative in nature, relying on interviews, observations, and thematic analysis to explore participants' lived experiences. This paradigm was the best to answer the research question.

### **4.3. Research Design**

A qualitative research design was employed to achieve the research objectives. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023) qualitative research focuses on exploring the perspectives and interpretations that individuals and groups hold regarding a social issue. This design is well-

compatible for facilitating a thorough and detailed exploration of how training programmes impact participants' employability and the role of employer involvement in shaping outcomes.

It is important to note that the nature of this study was intended for contributing to the current scholarly debate which led to humble contributions to theory building. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) noted that research that is qualitative in nature is, in particular, important for the role that it plays in contributing to creation of new insights to existing theories and contribute to the scholarly debates. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) further mentioned that qualitative research are important to bring an understanding where existing theories are not really completely capturing real-world complexities. Thus, with the current existing literature on training and employability, which is very much limited, strongly relies on classical theories like the Becker (1964) Human Capital theory, the study noted a need to contribute to more context-specific understandings that reflect the lived experiences and challenges faced by trainees and training institutions. In this regard, SETAs require not just validation of existing frameworks, but the generation as well as development of grounded, evidence-based insights that can inform policy reform and practice.

#### **4.4. Research Strategy**

This study employed a semi-structured interview as a research strategy. Brinkmann (2014) defines semi-structured interviews as an approach in qualitative research which integrates structured open-ended questions while allowing adaptability for deeper exploration of participant responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that semi-structured interviews offer a structured framework while allowing flexibility to explore participants' responses in greater depth. Through interviews, a deep understanding of participants lived experiences was gained, perceptions, and opinions on the effectiveness of training programs. This strategy was facilitated a rich understanding of the factors that influence the relationship between training programs, particularly SETA programs, and employability.

#### **4.5. Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study comprised of trainees who have completed training programs facilitated by SETAs, employers and SETA officials. Participants who are directly involved with or impacted by SETA programmes were selected using purposive sampling. Creswell and Creswell (2023) defines purposive sampling as sampling which entails choosing participants on the basis of a predetermined criteria aligned with the research questions. For trainees, the selection criteria included having completed a SETA-accredited training program within the past three years. For employers, the criteria included having participated in SETA-accredited or aligned training programs in the past three years. For SETA officials, it included

SETA officials who work or have worked with designing, delivering or monitoring training programmes.

**List of all 21 South African SETAs**

NO	ACRONYM	FULL NAME OF SETA
1	AgriSETA	Agriculture Sector Education and Training Authority
2	BANKSETA	Banking Sector Education and Training Authority
3	CATHS SETA	Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Education and Training Authority
4	CETA	Construction Education and Training Authority
5	CHIETA	Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority
6	ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Education and Training Authority
7	EWSETA	Energy Sector Education and Training Authority
8	FASSETA	Financial and Accounting Services Education and Training Authority
9	FOODBEV	Food and Beverages Sector Education and Training Authority
10	FP&M SETA	Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority
11	HWSETA	Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority
12	INSETA	Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority
13	LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
14	MERSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
15	MICT	Media, Advertising, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority
16	MQA	Mining Qualifications Authority
17	PSETA	Public Services Sector Education and Training Authority
18	SASSETA	Security and Safety Sector Education and Training Authority
19	SERVICES SETA	Services Sector Education and Training Authority
20	TETA	Transport Education and Training Authority
21	W&RSETA	Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority

**Figure 1: List of 21 SETAs**  
Source: Intercept Consulting and Training Solutions

Of the 21 SETAs in the country, four SETAs were selected for this research. The selected SETAs are Construction SETA (CETA); MerSETA, SASSESTA, and Services SETA. This selection was guided by the principles of purposive sampling, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2023), who describe this method as the deliberate selection of participants or cases that are most informative and relevant to the research objectives. Services SETA (2024) reported that the Services SETA is the largest SETA in terms of the areas it covers, including its sub-sectors. SASSETA on the other hand has the highest number of private sector players, in security companies, these are the players that can hire the trainees. The CETA and MerSETA are significant contributors to the employment outcomes of entry level positions, as reported by the Statistics South Africa (2024).

This decision of including these four SETAs was further grounded on the observation that although SETAs differ in their sectoral focus, they are structurally similar and operate under the same legislative and strategic mandate of the Skills Development Act. Their shared

mandate ensures consistency in their roles and processes. Hence, insights from these four SETAs can offer credible and transferable understanding across the SETA ecosystem.

To ensure a balanced and manageable dataset, four trainees from each of the four SETAs were selected, yielding a total of 16 trainee participants. According to Guest et al. (2020) because qualitative study focusses on exploration and understanding a phenomenon, this number is consistent as has prioritised depth over breadth. Research by Vasileiou et al. (2018) confirmed that data saturation, which is the point at which no new themes emerge, can often be achieved with 12–20 participants in homogenous populations. Since the study's aim was to contribute to theory-building insights, rather than statistical generalisation, the sample was well suited for exploring diverse individual experiences.

Lastly, one training programme manager and one employer representative from each SETA were interviewed, bringing the total sample size to 24 participants. This made a triadic structure, which comprise of trainees, SETA officials, and employers. Saunders et al. (2019) stated that triadic structure will ensure data triangulation, which enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

#### **4.6. Data Collection Instrument**

To facilitate rich, nuanced insights from participants, a semi-structured interview guide was thoughtfully developed and employed. This approach allowed for consistency across interviews while providing the flexibility to explore individual perspectives in greater depth. The guide of the interview comprised of open-ended questions intended to elicit participants' experiences and perspectives related to training programs and employability. The interview guides were formulated in alignment with the study's research questions and informed by insights drawn from the existing literature. Two trainees who have just concluded a training programme and one manager were used to pre-test the instrument to confirm its clarity and appropriateness. The tool was slightly amended after these sessions as they provided some insights which the original tool did not explicitly capture. The interview guide was flexible, allowing the researcher to adapt questions and probes based on the flow of the conversation and the emerging themes. To ensure accurate analysis, interviews were recorded, with participant consent, and transcribed word for word.

#### **4.7. Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis for this study refers to the primary element being examined to understand the effectiveness of training programmes in enhancing employability. In this study, the unit of analysis is the individual trainee who has participated in a SETA-aligned training programme.

By focusing on the individual, the study sought to capture rich, contextual insights into how trainees perceive the training's influence on their employability and job readiness. This is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm of the study as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2023) which prioritises individual experiences, interpretations, and meanings. While employers and training providers are also interviewed to enhance the triangulation of data, the central focus remains on the lived experiences of the individual trainees as the primary unit through which training effectiveness, which leads or not lead to employment, is evaluated. Therefore, the unit of observation was the same as the unit of analysis.

#### **4.8. Data Collection method**

Data in this study was gathered by means of conducting comprehensive, semi-structured interviews, which were conducted on a virtual platform (teams) and in-person, depending on participants' availability and preference. With participants' consent, interviews were recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Interviews were expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes, however only one fell outside this, as it went over the 45 minutes threshold. Notes were documented during and directly following the interviews to record contextual details and preliminary insights. Transcription was done in ways, one was done by teams, after every meeting. The other one was done through turbo-scribe app. The accuracy of the transcription was checked through comparing what the apps have done and the notes that the researcher took during the interviews. The transcripts are saved in PDF format and are password protected to prevent unwanted access to the files and to comply with POPIA and stored on cloud and in the researcher's personal laptop. See table 1 below.

**Table 1: List of training participants' interview lengths and number of transcript pages**

<b>SETA training participants</b>				
<b>ID</b>	<b>Interview duration</b>	<b>Pages transcribed</b>	<b>Number of words</b>	<b>Software used to transcribe</b>
ST 1	11:59	11	1899	Teams
ST 2	25:35	5	2594	TurboScribe.ai
ST 3	28:26	20	3343	Teams
ST 4	25:00	20	3681	Teams
ST 5	21:44	5	2192	TurboScribe.ai
ST 6	35:38	5	3686	TurboScribe.ai
ST 7	35:54	7	3382	TurboScribe.ai
ST 8	18:19	5	2466	TurboScribe.ai
ST 9	29:06	7	3885	TurboScribe.ai
ST 11	31:00	7	3753	TurboScribe.ai
ST 12	41:52	26	6302	Teams
ST 13	32:44	7	3547	TurboScribe.ai
ST 14	19:18 and 07:53	15 + 7	2714 + 1168	Teams
ST 15	16:14	12	1973	Teams
ST 16	20:26	5	2447	TurboScribe.ai

Source: Author's own construct

**Table 2: List of SETA representatives' interview lengths and number of transcript pages**

<b>SETA representatives</b>				
<b>ID</b>	<b>Interview duration</b>	<b>Pages transcribed</b>	<b>Number of words</b>	<b>Software used to transcribe</b>
SR 1	34:32	25	5054	Teams
SR 2	41:13	34	5938	Teams
SR 3	19:04	15	3356	Teams
SR 4	22:51	14	2556	Teams

Source: Author's own construct

**Table 3: List of employer’s representatives’ interview lengths and number of transcript pages**

Employer representatives				
ID	Interview duration	Pages transcribed	Number of words	Software used to transcribe
ER 1	20:01	5	3453	TurboScribe.ai
ER 2	23:13	13	2459	Teams
ER 3	17:55	12	2320	Teams
ER 4	17:24	15	2267	Teams

Source: Author’s own construct

#### **4.9. Data Analysis**

Creswell and Creswell (2023) explain that data analysis entails a structured examination process to interpret and analyse data to find significant patterns, form conclusions, and inform choices. According to Bryman (2016) data analysis allows researchers to interpret the data collected and answer research questions in a structured and meaningful way.

Thematic analysis was applied to examine the collected data. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as an approach that focuses on recognising, examining, and presenting recurring patterns or themes within the data. The process included transcription where audio recordings were transliterated word-for-word; Familiarisation whereby the researcher gained familiarity with the data through repeated reading and review; Coding which involved data being coded to identify meaningful segments; Theme development, codes were grouped to identify overarching themes; Themes underwent a process of review and refinement; finally the final themes were presented with supporting quotes from the participants as a report. Atlas.ti software was used to assist with the organisation and analysis of the data.

#### **4.10. Research Quality and Rigour**

Hair et al. (2010) states that the quality of research can be assured by validity and reliability. Hair et al. (2010) clarifies that validity indicates the degree to which a concept, conclusion, or measurement is well-supported and accurately reflects reality. It reflects the extent to which a test or research study accurately assesses what it is intended to evaluate. Lane et al. (2023) explain reliability as the consistency and dependability of a measurement tool or method. To ensure research quality and rigor, several measures will be taken:

- **Credibility:** Creswell and Creswell (2023) define credibility as the trustworthiness and accuracy of findings, ensuring that they authentically capture participants' experiences

and viewpoints. It was established through prolonged engagement with the data, member checking, and thick descriptions to provide rich contextual detail.

- **Transferability:** According to Saunders et al. (2019), transferability denotes the degree to which research findings are applicable to different contexts or environments beyond the original study. In this study, it was ensured by offering comprehensive descriptions of the context of the study and unique traits of participants, enabling readers to evaluate the relevance of the findings in different settings.
- **Dependability:** Dependability was preserved by building an audit trail that records the research process, encompassing data collection procedures, analytical decisions, and the researcher's reflective practices.
- **Confirmability:** Confirmability was enhanced by grounding the findings in the data and providing clear evidence for the interpretations.

#### **4.11. Study limitations and delimitations**

Due to its qualitative approach, the study's findings have limited generalisability to broader populations who may be affected by the unemployment challenge but may not have been exposed to SETA training programmes. The reliance of participants on self-conveyed data, which may be affected by recall bias or social desirability poses another limitation to this study. The focus on SETA-aligned training programs in South Africa may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

The study was delimited to focus specifically on the perspectives of trainees, employers, and training providers directly involved with SETA-aligned training programs.

#### **4.12. Project Timeline**

The timeline for this research project was developed to ensure the systematic and timely completion of each phase of the study, from proposal development to final report submission. The stages are structured to reflect the iterative nature of qualitative research and to accommodate the flexible and reflective processes involved in theory-building. A total project duration of 10 months is planned, spanning from February 2025 when the research methodology individual assignment was due, which I regard it as an initial draft proposal to November 2025, when the final report is due.

The summary of the time is as follows: The submission of the initial draft proposal in February; initial meeting with the Supervisor in April; Working on and submitting the proposal in May; Obtaining ethical clearance and pilot testing of the interview guides and conducting interviews in July; Transcription and preparation of data in August; Analysing data in September; writing

findings, discussions, recommendations and conclusion in October; Review and refine the paper within the first two weeks of November; Final submission on the last week of November.

#### **4.13. Ethical Considerations**

Considerations of ethics are paramount in this research. Thus, the Researcher secured ethical clearance from GIBS Business School before commencing with data collection. Participants were expected to provide informed consent, confirming that they understand the study's purpose and are aware of their right to discontinue participation at any stage. Participants' identities are safeguarded to ensure both anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Gathered data is stored securely and utilised exclusively to support the objectives of this study in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

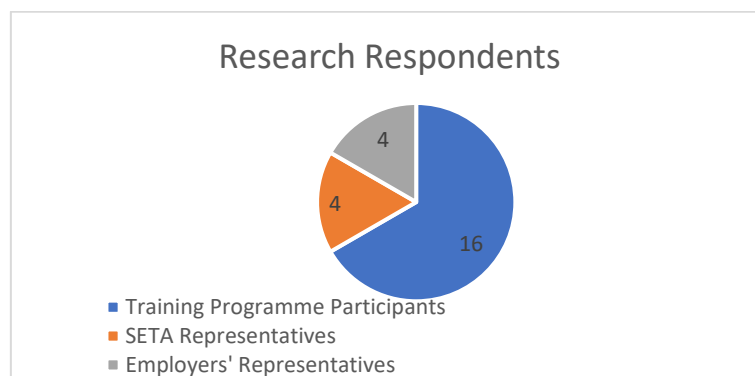
## Chapter 5: Results and Findings

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the interviews conducted with all three research participants, being those who have participated in SETA trainings, SETA officials, and employers' representatives. The purpose of this chapter is to provide insights into how training programmes influence employability outcomes. The results are organised into thematic categories, guided by the research objectives, reflecting participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges encountered during their various experiences with SETA training programmes. Direct quotes from participants are included to illustrate the findings, responses are identified using alphanumeric codes (ST for SETA Trainees, ER for Employer Representatives, and SR for SETA Representatives) to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

### 5.2. Respondents Demographics

The total respondents of this study were 24, comprising of 16 respondents who previously participated in SETA training programmes. Of the 16 previous participants, four participated in more than one SETA training programme. All participants hold a post matric qualification, ranging from higher certificates to bachelor's degrees. Four SETA representatives were also respondents in the study, they hold or have held training programmes aligned management positions in their respective SETAs. Three of the four respondents were males and one female. Three are still working in the SETA environment while one having retired. The last category of respondents were employers responsible. These are responsible for implementing SETA training programmes on behalf of SETAs. There were three females and one male, collectively they have more than 15 years' experience in implementing SETA training programmes. The pie chart below depicts the demographics of participants. See figure 1 and tables 2 to 4 below.



**Figure 2: Pie chat representing demographics of participants**

Source: Author's own construct

**Table 4: List of SETA training programme participants**

ID	Type of skills programme	Gender	Duration	Employability outcome	SETA
ST 1	Internship	F	12 months	Employed	CETA
ST 2	Learnership and Internship	F	6 months learnership and 12 months internship	Employed	Agri and SASSETA
ST 3	Internship	M	12 months	Employed	MerSETA
ST 4	Internship	F	6 months	Employed	MerSETA
ST 5	Internship	M	20 Months	Employed	SASSETA
ST 6	Learnership and Internship	M	6 months learnership and 24 months internship	Unemployed	MICT, Services SETA
ST 7	Internship	M	6 months learnership and 12 months internship	Employed	MerSETA
ST 8	Internship	F	24 months	Employed	Services SETA
ST 9	Learnership	M	12 months	Employed	MICT
ST 10	Internship	M	18 months	Employed	SASSETA
ST 11	Internship	M	6 months	Unemployed	MerSETA
ST 12	Internship	M	12 months	Employed	SASSETA
ST 13	Learnership and Internship	F	Both 12 months	Unemployed	MICT, Services SETA
ST 14	Internship	F	24 months	Employed	Services SETA
ST 15	Learnership	F	12 months	Unemployed	MICT
ST 16	Internship	F	12 Months	Employed	CETA

Source: Author's own construct

**Table 5: List of SETA representatives and their years of work experience**

ID	Sector	Role in SETA	Year of Experience
SR 1	CETA	Researcher: Learning programmes	8
SR 2	MerSETA	Learning programmes Quality Assurance	38
SR 3	SASSETA	Learning Programmes Manager	6
SR 4	Services SETA	Learning Programme Manager	5
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>57</b>

Source: Author's own construct

**Table 6: List of employers' representatives and their years of work experience**

ID	Sector	Position	Years of Experience
ER 1	SASSETA	Senior Personnel Practitioner: ETD	12
ER 2	CETA	HRD Associate	7
ER 3	Services SETA	HCD Project Manager	5
ER 4	MerSETA	HR Officer	12
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>36</b>

Source: Author's own construct

### **5.3. Results and findings from Trainees**

#### **5.3.1. Training Expectations**

This theme emerged as a critical lens through which participants expressed their hopes before participating in a SETA training programme. This theme explored what the trainees wanted to achieve in the training programme and what they experienced. This theme will also contribute to shaping training programmes in future.

Trainees expressed that they participated in SETA training programmes, particularly the internships, because they wanted to apply what they have learned at school, while also gaining workplace experience. While all trainees expressed that the SETA training programmes that they participated in met their expectations, majority of the trainees' participants revealed that their expectations were exceeded.

*"I was expecting to learn how the workplace operates, particularly in my areas of expertise and an opportunity to apply what I learned in school, in practice." ST 3*

This statement by ST 3 reflects a strong desire for experiential learning and practical exposure within the workplace. It underscores the expectation that training programmes should not only offer theoretical knowledge but also provide meaningful opportunities to apply academic learning in real-world contexts. This highlights the importance of aligning training interventions with participants' fields of study to enhance relevance, skill development, and ultimately, employability.

These are views were also shared by another participant who revealed that they had a strong view that the training programme that they participated on will give them practical exposure to how the "the real world" works. Participant ST 8 revealed that tertiary education only provided them with theory, and employers want practical experience. This respondent revealed that their expectations of the SETA training programmes were met.

*"It was for me to gain experience in the internal audit field, basically because in the university we deal only with theory. So, when coming to the internship, I wanted the practical side of internal audit" ST 8*

The statements from these respondents reveal that various SETA training programmes continue to meet the expectations of the participants. The participants above came with certain expectations about the programme that they participated on, and those expectations were met. This implies that SETA training programmes are most likely being designed and implemented with the expectations of prospective participants in mind.

However, there were participants who indicated that when they started their training programme, they had no expectations, whatsoever because they had no theoretical qualifications aligned to the training programme. One respondent indicated that they took this opportunity because they wanted to explore their potential and decide if this is in line with what they like and would like to do for a living.

*I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where, which course do I want to go for.* ST 9

The statement by ST 9 highlighted the importance of SETAs to offer training opportunities to address specific sectorial skills. However, respondent ST 9 later revealed that during the training programme, they developed interest on the training programme.

*“So, I started falling in love with programming in general.”* ST 9

This statement suggests that although the participant had no clue about the subject matter that they were being trained on, the quality of training made them like it.

Other respondents also indicated that they were, and some are still open, to any opportunities that come their ways that can make them earn an income. Participants revealed that they participated in some of the SETA training programmes, not because the training programme opportunity aligned with what they have studied at tertiary, but because the training programme provided an opportunity to earn an income. One training programme participant responded as follows, when asked what their expectations with one SETA training programme which were they participated in.

*“I'll just be honest on this one, the learnership I got it was because I was at home, I was not doing anything.”* ST 2

Moreover, respondents also revealed that even if opportunities were not aligned with what they studied, they found value during the training programmes and gained valuable experiences. Findings revealed that the value that participants derived from training programmes was because the latter matter the former's expectations.

*“I expected that I would learn how to plant because I had no idea how to plant and yeah, that's what I got.”* ST 2

The above statement by ST 2 suggests that their expectations were met. This implies that the SETA training programme achieved what is sought to achieve. This participated also

mentioned that they can now plant vegetables in their homes and feed their families because of the skills acquired on the SETA training programme.

Although there is a silver lining from these two participants responses, their stories highlight that SETAs may be implementing training programmes just to chase their targets. Meaning that anyone who is available and can assist SETAs to meet their quantitative targets, will be given training programmes opportunities.

Overall, participants expectations with various SETA training programmes were met. Participants revealed positive reviews about various elements that they were expecting from their different training programmes.

*“My expectation was, the practical application what we had been taught at school or the training, we had at school. Applying them in real life situations, and being mentored throughout the programme, you know.” ST 11*

Employability being the core element of this study, also came up as one of the expectations from training programme participants. Results revealed that although not everyone who participated in a training programme, in this study, is employed, their expectations of employability were met.

*“After completing the learnership, they had offered me employment with the company that I was working with, but then I couldn't take it due to personal reasons.” ST 15*

*“Also, we also did a Six Sigma project which is another certificate that's very important. So, if maybe you did a project from start to finish and made some improvements on those projects then. It's also something that you could put on your CV, and if you have that certificate, it opens up a lot of job opportunity for you.” ST 4*

### 5.3.2. Training Experience

This theme captures participants' reflections on the quality, relevance, and overall experience of SETA-aligned training programmes. This theme is important because it reveals how the lived experiences of trainees, both positive and challenging, shape perceptions of SETAs' effectiveness. By examining these experiences, the research aimed to identify practical insights into how training can be improved to better equip individuals for employment and ensure that SETAs deliver meaningful impact in addressing unemployment.

All trainees expressed satisfaction with the overall quality and relevance of the training programmes that they participated in. Trainees felt that the programmes aligned well with their academic backgrounds and industry expectations. Several noted that the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience enhanced their confidence in performing job-related tasks where they were placed.

They felt that training programmes aligned well with their academic backgrounds and industry expectations. Several participants noted that the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience enhanced their confidence in performing job-related tasks. Participant ST 4 highlighted that the programme exposed them to the entire value chain of vehicle manufacturing.

*"The experience was amazing, the training programme exposed me to different automotive components manufactures in the Eastern Cape, from all tiers, giving me an opportunity to experience the entire value chain, as taught in the university."* ST 4.

The perspective shared by ST 4 suggests that trainees derive a sense of satisfaction when their practical activities align with their academic background or field of study. Furthermore, the manner in which training is delivered and managed significantly influences how trainees perceive and engage with the overall learning experience.

Throughout the interviews, participant revealed that their experiences with SETA training programmes gave them the exposure and the opportunities to apply what they have learned at tertiary in practice. Respondents revealed that they were given "real" and challenging work. One participant revealed that they did not even feel like they were participating in a training programme, they felt like they were part of the staff.

*"I didn't even feel like it was an internship, I felt like one of the family members of the company because I was trusted with high profile employees such as CEO, HR, Finance so I didn't even feel like I'm doing an internship."* ST 6

Respondents also revealed that their SETA training programmes exposed them to further professional skills development opportunities. Respondents indicated that their SETA training programmes integrated them to their various workplaces and it was easy for them to settle to their workplace.

*“The candidate development programme was linked to professional development and allowed me to register as a candidate project manager, as I pursue my PR.” ST 1*

Continuous professional development plays an important role in employability of technical graduates. Respondents revealed their training programmes had this element.

Respondents also revealed that they believed and experienced that the SETA training programmes which they participated in provided them with current to the labour market demand. One respondent revealed that their CV started to stand out when they included the experiences and training received during their SETA training programme participation.

*“One of the big things that they looked on my CV was that I've Six Sigma project training and application, which made my CV to stand out.” ST 7*

Another respondent alluded to the same experience. Respondent ST 9 indicated that the experience of their SETA training programme was wonderful, and it exposed them to a lot that they were not even aware of.

*Oh, the experience was just amazing, you know, cause, gives you an exposure to areas that you didn't even know that exist. ST 9*

One respondent revealed that their SETA training programme experience was restricted due to certain company policies. The respondent mentioned that this contributed to overall experience about the training programme. According to the respondent, the restrictions prevent them to get exposed to certain aspects of the training programme.

*“The internship didn't expose me to payroll, which is another area that I wanted to venture into. So yeah, it wasn't helpful in terms of that, the rotation was not that flexible” ST14*

The statement by ST 14 above implies that there might be areas of development regarding certain training programmes. ST 14 indicated that the decision of not fully exposing them to certain areas within their training programme contributed to them taking a different career path within the same industry.

### 5.3.3. Employability outcomes

This theme directly responds to the core objective of the study: to critically examine the role of SETA training programmes in addressing unemployment in South Africa. It explores how participation in these programmes influences beneficiaries' readiness for the labour market, their ability to secure employment, and their overall career trajectory. By focusing on employability outcomes, the research aims to assess not only the immediate impact of training interventions but also their long-term value in enhancing job prospects and economic inclusion for participants.

While not all trainees who participated in the study are currently employed, the majority indicated that they have secured jobs, either with the organisations that provided their training or in other workplaces. Among those employed, there was a consistent view that the training programme played a meaningful role in enhancing their employability and contributed positively to their ability to access job opportunities. This suggests that SETA-supported interventions may have a tangible impact on workforce integration. ST 3 conveyed their appreciation to a certain SETA for the role they have played in them getting employment.

*“The internship I participated in definitely played a role in me getting this job, because without this internship I wouldn't have known my current employer and the role they play in the sector.” ST3*

Another respondent revealed that their participation in a SETA training programme has changed their employability status in a positive light. This participant indicated that before their participation in a SETA training, their CV was not even getting noticed, however, this changed after they have participated in an internship.

*“I can say that the training programme was very relevant because after the internship programme, I was marketable in the market. So, I've had several interviews and offers of which some I declined the offers.” ST 5*

Respondents who got employed by the companies who offered them the SETA training programmes revealed that the training programme played a huge role in them getting the jobs. One participant revealed that immediately when their training programme ended, they were there was an opening and they were employed.

*So after also I did my internship at lumotech for like 6 months and then immediately after six months they interviewed me for a position because there was a position that was open there for ATPM junior engineer, so I applied for it, and they interviewed me and I got the job. ST 4*

The few that are unfortunately currently unemployed, even post participation in a SETA training programme highlighted that although they are unemployed, the SETA training programme that they participate in played a role in enhancing their employability, as they are now their CVs are being recognised and being called to interviews. ST 6 spoke positively of the SETA programmes, even though unemployed currently.

*“These programmes do enhance employability, but due to the current economic conditions in the country, employers are unable to absorb more interns into permanent roles.”* ST 6

Another respondent revealed that due to their foreign status in the country, although they believe that the training programme equipped them with necessary skills to be employed, they are unable to secure employment due to their foreign status. This respondent further revealed that they have opted to start a business which can employ other people in future.

*Okay, for me, personally, noting that I'm a foreigner, right, so I've been dealing with, immigration laws. So, it is really going to be difficult for me to find employment. I'm doing my own stuff, though, but in terms of employment for me, it is not going to happen.* ST 11

One participant expressed concern that some organisations appear to use interns primarily as a source of low-cost labour, with little intention of offering permanent employment thereafter. This perception suggests that, despite interns often performing tasks equivalent to those of full-time employees, their contributions are not adequately recognised or rewarded. As a result, the potential of internship programmes to serve as meaningful pathways to employment is undermined, raising questions about the ethical and developmental value of such placements within the broader context of addressing unemployment.

*“I was one of the best candidates for the training programme. I believe that they never accepted or they never gave back to the effort which I gave them actually because as much as I was a student, on a training programme, I was supposed to be mentored but I was the one who was mentoring other participants. Meaning I was too good to with what I was doing but they never gave me a permanent employment, so I felt like the whole training programme thing it was just a phrase of pushing whatever they are pushing, using us.”* ST 6

The above phrase by ST 6 expressed a view that even employers would take in training participants for other reasons other than training them for employment. Contrary to this view is that the training received by ST 6 was so good that it made the participant to also share the training programmes with other participants.

#### **5.4. Results and findings from employers' representatives**

Employers' representative played a significant role in this study as they offered a perspective of both trainers, in that trainees were being trained by employers; and the other role of being prospective employers. Insights were given by employees who manage SETA training programmes on behalf of employers.

##### **5.4.1. Alignment and relevance of SETA training programmes to industry needs.**

This theme explores the extent to which SETA training programmes are aligned with current industry and labour demands. The theme reflects employer's views on whether the skills acquired through SETA training programmes are relevant, practical, and responsive to their evolving needs as employers.

All four employers' representatives shared a view that the SETA training programmes that they implemented and managed was aligned to what they and other employers out there are looking for. All respondents in this category indicated that the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) which they compile and submit to their respective SETAs inform the training agenda of their respective SETAs. All four participants said that they wrote proposals for their SETAs to fund their SETA training programmes. Their proposals, one employer representative said, are addressing the skills that the sector needs, hence their programmes are aligned with the needs of the market.

*“Through the WSP, the sector develops the Sector Skills Plan (SSP), a document which outlined how the sector will address the skills needed in that particular sector and our proposal to the SETA was structured that way.” ER 2.*

Respondents' consistence agreement that SETA training programmes are aligned with industry needs requirements, indicate that respondents have a strong understanding of what are the industry requirements. The interactions between SETAs and employers in various platforms came out as one of the means used to ensure alignment. Employers' representatives revealed that they believe that training programmes delivered by their employers were aligned with industry skills requirements.

One participant revealed that to show that their training programmes are aligned with industry skills requirements, their industry reported a lack of females in technical areas. This responded revealed that their employer's training programme is designed to address it.

*“They are aligned with industry needs and are designed to close identified skills gaps.” ER 2*

The statement by ER 2 suggests that the alignment of the training programmes with industry requirements brings out the value in both the training programmes and the employers. ER 4 indicated that there is value that their employer derives from delivering SETA training programmes. ST 4 revealed that due to the current financial conditions of their entity, training programmes bring a lot of reprieve as the entity can use the training programme participants to support and deliver on their mandate.

*“The SETA training programme helps with building internal capacity, assisting with augmenting the capacity that we currently do not have.” ER 3*

Another respondent also strongly conveyed that their SETA training programmes are very much aligned with the requirements of their industry. The respondent revealed that the SETA leaves it to employers, as the industry to inform it what are the skills requirements and how can this be translated into training programmes.

*“It is aligned, because most of the time, how can I put it? SASSETA employers inform SASSETA the skills required on the market. We give SASSETA the skills that we need, then SASSETA runs with it, and then that's it.” ER 1*

ER 3 indicated that although the SETA training programmes that their employer has implemented is addressing the sectorial needs, at times this may not be accurate because it mainly if not entirely based on the WSP submission.

*“Submission of WSP documents may not reflect the needs of the sector, other entities do not submit while others submit for the compliance purposes without actually diagnose the skills that their organisations need.” ER 4.*

These sentiments by ER 3 not only indicate that although the training programmes have an intention to address the skills requirements of the employers and industry, but it might also not necessarily be accurate at all times due to the manner in which the data is being collected (through a WSP which contributes to the SSP).

Respondents revealed that the alignment of SETA training programmes to industry requirements is a responsibility of both SETAs and the industry. Respondents further revealed that industry play their part by informing the SETA of the requirements through various means, including but not limited to the submission of WSPs every year. Respondents also indicated that the more SETA training programmes are aligned with current and future industry skills requirements, the more value these programmes bring to the industry.

#### **5.4.2. Employer involvement in SETA training programme design and implementation**

This theme examines the extent to which employers are engaged in shaping and delivering SETA training programmes. It reflects employers' views on whether they play an active role in designing the outcomes of a training programme.

Employer's involvement in SETA training programme design and implementation emerged as both a strength and a challenge. While employer's representatives acknowledged strong partnerships between SETAs and their organisations, they also pointed to fragmented inclusion in decision making and misaligned expectations. ER 4 stated that often their inputs in meetings are overlooked by SETA officials because they are chasing numbers.

*“SETAs often call us to meetings, however when its time to implement training programmes our inputs as employers are minimal, if at all. SETAs are looking for numbers” ER 4.*

According to ER 4, the involvement in the actual designing and implementation of the SETA training programme was not much, apart from submitting the required reports such as the WSP document which outlines the skills plan for the entity. This limited involvement by ER 4 displays the lack of coordinated collaboration between SETAs and the industry. When asked if they were involved in designing and implementing their latest SETA training programme, this is how ER 4 responded.

*“Not much except for my role, was when we were recruiting the interns and also in terms of reporting. That was my involvement.” ER 4*

These sentiments were shared by ER 2 who also indicated that their role as the employer was extremely minimal, particularly in the designing of the SETA training programme. ER 2 revealed that the design decision is currently being done by the SETA, with the employers just providing the skills requirements. ER 2, further, indicated that as employers, their main role is currently implementation of training programmes, and some sort of evaluating the programme as it goes. When asked how involved were they in designing, implementing, or evaluating training content, this is how ER 2 responded.

*“Not in designing, I am mostly involved in the implementation of SETA training programmes and also provide monthly and quarterly evaluation reports regrading the programme to the SETA”. ER 2*

ER 4 revealed the same sentiments with ER 2 that they are mostly involved in the implementation of SETA training programmes and not so much during the designing stage.

*“In implementation, we would plan on what the journey we are going to take the interns on, the impact and the outcome of the internship programme will have on training participants and how the reporting will be conducted.”* ER 4

ER 3 shared a different experience, stating that they were involved in the design and implementation of their SETA training programme. ER 3 revealed that they would formally, through a letter, inform their SETA of the training programme requirements. ER 3 responded in the following manner when asked about their involvement in the designing and implementation of their SETA training programme.

*“Well, I was 100% involved through everything, including consolidating the requirements.”*

ER 3

ER 4 further expressed that the involvement of employers in the design is unquestionable, however there is a room for improvement when it comes to the rolling out of the programmes on the ground. Respondents agreed that strong partnerships exist, but they are often undermined by limited influence in decision-making and a perceived focus on meeting numerical targets over quality outcomes.

ER 2 in revealing an area of improvement when it comes to the involvement of employers in the designing of SETA programmes, indicated that programmes should be co-designed so that stumbling blocks should be identified and addressed by both parties. ER 2 further revealed that other role players in the industry should also be involved in the designing of SETA training programmes, especially when they have roles to play in the SETA training programme being a success.

*There is a huge area of improvement. The way SETA training programmes are designed are not benefiting both the participants and the employers. Going forward employers and built environment professional councils should also be involved in designing SETA training programmes, as these training programmes has professional councils' requirements.* ER 2

Although ER 1 revealed that they are involved in the designing of SETA training programmes, they have also noted that there is an area of improvement. ER 1 indicated that there is a room to further develop and improve the involvement of their entity in SETA training programme design. ER 1 also revealed that their SETA need to improve their systems so that the involvement can not only improve but can also be simplified.

*“It needs to be improved a lot, number one, systems and technology must be improved.”* ER1

### 5.4.3. Employer perspective on participants' job readiness

This theme captures insights from employers' representatives regarding the state of readiness of the trainees for the workplace. It reflects how employers perceive the skills, attitudes, and overall competence of trainees upon entering the job market.

All of the employers' representatives who participate in this study reported that they have hired SETA training participants before. Respondents revealed that they actually use SETA training programmes as feeders to their entry level jobs. These sentiments by employers' representatives reveal a positive perspective of job readiness of the training programme participants by employers in the industry.

One respondent indicated that their entity has hired training programme participants before. The respondent revealed that training participants were hired across the various business units in their entity. This participant also revealed that although they currently occupy a strategic skills development position in the entity, they were recruited from a SETA training programme. When asked if their entity has employed any individuals who completed SETA training programmes before, this is how they responded.

*"Yes, a number of interns have been hired in the entity. I, myself, is one of the number of employees who entered the entity as interns and were given employability either during or post their internship programme. The number of interns who have been employed is more than 15 that I know of, myself included."* ER 2.

Another respondent to the same question in a similar manner. ER 3 indicated that their entity believed that their SETA training participants are ready for employment even when their training programme has not ended. This indicated that the ER 3's employer took the SETA training programme seriously and are vested in the objectivity of employability.

*"Yes, previously we have hired SETA training programme participants before, we have about maybe more than 10. Ten interns that were converted into either officials or officers."* ER 3

The sentiments expressed by ER 2 and ER 3 were not different from the sentiments shared by ER 1 and ER 4. The latter respondents revealed that they, too, have employed SETA training programmes before. ER 1 revealed that 10% of SETA training programmes participants are normally employed in every cohort by their employer, after they have concluded their training programme. ER 4, without giving the actual figure, revealed that their employer also has a positive employability rate of their SETA training participants. These findings express a positive perspective that employers have on participants' employability.

Employers' representatives were given a scale of 1 to 10 to rate the state of readiness of the trainees upon completion of their SETA training programme. None of the four employers' representatives rated the trainees below a seven. This suggests that employers believe that the trainees are ready for employment post SETA training participation.

Respondent ER 2 revealed that their perspective on the job readiness of SETA training programme participants is positive because they work with the participants and can see some of the work that participants produce. ER 2 indicated that there is nothing that they can fault SETA training participants on when it comes to job readiness.

*"Notwithstanding that these are mostly fresh students from varsity, when it comes to job readiness, I give them a ten out of ten."* ER 2

ER 4 rated SETA training programme participants' job readiness an eight out of ten. This sends a message that ER 4's employer is of the view that SETA training programme participants are ready to be employed by anyone in the industry.

*"I rate them eight to nine out of ten."* ER 4

ER 1 and ER 3 emphasised that SETA training programmes participants are ready for employability because of their eager to be employed. Both of these respondents revealed that the drive that the participants have is sometimes stronger and bigger than the drive and motivation that those are already in the employ have.

*"I can give them a seven out of ten. Most of them are ready and hungry. And again, I think being new in the field, and they have too much hunger for success. So, they give their, 100%, all of their best. Better than us, the old employed employees, which we are lacking."*

ER 1

*"I think they are good. I would rate them ten out of ten, actually. The reason being that the hunger of them to learn everything is huge. You know, I think usually we see that gap, like when some of them leave. That's when you can see that, oh, actually, this person was instrumental."* ER 3

Employee representatives gave the employability and job readiness of SETA training participants a good review. All respondents spoke positively about the participants indicating that from their personal interactives with SETA training participants, they are quite confident that they are ready for employment. The positive perspectives by employers on their employability signals that SETA training programmes are making participants employable.

#### **5.4.4. Training programmes success factors**

This theme explores employers perspective on the key elements that make a training programme successful.

On this theme, participants provided different perspectives. One touched on the administrative elements, one touched on training programmes conclusion, one said the success factors include successful completion of the programme, while the other expressed that the success of training programmes is based on the employability of participants during or post training programmes participation.

ER 2 revealed that SETA programme success factors should include a good monitoring and evaluation systems implemented by both parties. ER 2 stated that when both parties are equally vested in the success of the training programme, it becomes easy to make it a success.

*“The key success factors for SETA training programmes are monitoring and evaluation systems put in place by the employer and the SETA.” ER 2*

ER 4 revealed that their SETA training programme success factors include, amongst other things, successful recruitment of correct participants. ER 4 indicated that when the correct participants are recruited, the success rate of training programmes improve. ER 4 expressed that with their experience of overseeing training programmes in the workplace, they cannot overemphasise the importance of giving the opportunity to relevant people.

*“When a training programme is matched with participants’ qualifications and career aspirations, the training programme is bound be successful and lead to employability for the participants.” ER 4*

ER 3 revealed that key success factors for SETA training programmes include the employer an effective implementation plan for the training programme before it starts. ER 3 also revealed that employers should have an implementation plan which specifies what the participants will be doing for the duration of the training programme.

*“For an internship to be successful, it needs to make sure that the transferring of skills is well planned on how it's going to be done. You know, it's good to have a plan that when these people come and start working, you know, you have a plan for their training programme and how the training programme will unfold.” ER 3*

ER 1 revealed that for any SETA training programme, which is designed to make participants employable, to be deemed successful, that training programme should lead to employability for participants. ER indicated that the main purpose of SETA training programme is to lead to employability for participants or any other form which will make the participant to be economically active. These sentiments appeared consistently across all respondents in this category.

*For an internship to be deemed successful for participants, those people should be able to be employed, particularly in the sector that they did their internship.* ER 1

Respondents further revealed that even if training participants drop out during the programme, for an employment activity, that should also be deemed as a success. ER 2 put this statement in a very nice way, when they expressed that SETAs and employers should not chase the quantity of participants who complete the programme, but should also celebrate when participants leave training programmes for better employment outcomes.

*“A programme is set to be successful if it can make participants gets job, even if it means they drop out of the programme to do so.”* ER 2.

#### **5.4.5. Recommended improvements and future role of employers**

This theme explores employers' representatives' suggestions for strengthening the impact of SETA training programmes through enhanced employer involvement. It reflects on the perceived gaps in current practices and highlights opportunities for employers to play a more strategic and collaborative role in shaping training outcomes.

Respondents in this category revealed that to ensure the effectiveness of SETA training programme in addressing unemployment in the country, both SETAs and employers should be equally vested in addressing this challenge. Respondents indicated that it should not be seen that it is the responsibility of one party and not the other, to address this challenge.

*SETAs, employers and professional councils should all be responsible for the success of SETA training programmes in addressing unemployment in the country. ER 2*

ER 3 revealed an unpopular finding that, areas of improving the effectiveness of SETA training programmes also include the participants as well. ER 3 stated that participants must also be made aware of their role in ensuring that they are employable during and or post SETA training programme participation. This finding by ER 3 underscores that the responsibility of SETA training programmes' effectiveness lies not with one party, even those who training programmes are designed to benefit, must play the ball.

*"The willingness to grow from, especially from their side. Yeah, I think it will be that the willingness to improve their skills, you know, it might be in different ways, either in training or more on the job, like training, so to make to ensure that they are ready for probably the next employer that wants to employ them." ER 3*

ER 4 on the other hand revealed that an area of improvement in ensuring that SETA training programmes are effective in addressing high unemployment rate in the country, is have training programmes which lead directly to jobs. ER 4 indicated that, notwithstanding that not all SETA training programmes' participants will be employed by the employer who is giving them training, but training programmes should be designed with employability goal in mind.

*"Companies must own the programmes. Also, companies must be able to employ the participants. Absorb these kids. You know, you're spending money on them, training them, giving them skills. And then at the end you let them go? I mean, for what?" ER 4*

The areas of recommendation as identified by employer representatives speak to ensuring that training programmes are effective. Responds are calling for all payers to play ball.

All employers' representatives agreed that although the current role of employer involvement in SETA training is acknowledged, a strong view from all participants emerged that, this can be improved. ER 1 indicated that the employers, must play more critical role in in developing not just implementation.

*“Employers role must not only be seen to be important when it comes to placing trainees for workplace experience, employers must play more critical role in designing the programmes beyond just supplying raw data in the form of a WSP document.” ER 1*

All employers' representatives stated that the improvement in the role of the employer in SETA training programmes will address many challenges that employers face in implementing the programmes. Employers' representatives indicated that administrative and logistical challenges, including funding delays and limited communication between SETA and host organisations will be addressed if the role of the employer is redefined to be more than host organisations.

*“Once SETA has gotten the targeted number of trainees, they often drop the ball, and employers must see to finish with the implementing challenges.” ER 2*

Employer representatives agree about their future role in ensuring the effectiveness of SETA training programmes. Respondents revealed that employers must, in future, and to ensure the effectiveness of SETA training programmes to leading to employability, play an actively visible role in SETA training programmes discussions and planning.

ER 1 further revealed the future role of employers in ensuring the effectiveness of SETA training programmes is to ensure that they develop skills for the future, not just the skills that are needed now. ER 1 stated that there is a lot that is changing in their industry and employers should prepare for these changes through improved various strategic skills development initiatives.

*The Department hosts career exhibitions every year, which last for the whole week in a particular province. The aim of these exhibitions is to attract young people into the Department and the industry, the good thing is that the SETA is part of these exhibitions and plays an active role in them. ER 1*

The sentiments above were also expressed by ER 2. ER 2 revealed that the future role of employers should not just be to host SETA training programme participants, but to actively encourage young people to consider careers in their industry. They do this through exhibitions.

## **5.5. Results and findings from SETAs representatives**

SETAs, as the custodians of training programmes, provided much needed perspectives on the effectiveness of their training programmes in addressing the high unemployment in the country, particularly amongst the youth. Participants in this category had almost 60 years combined experience within the SETAs. This quality assured the responses that they provided in this research. One participant has over 37 years SETA experience, working for SETAs from the time they were referred to as training boards.

### **5.5.1. Alignment of training with labour market needs**

This theme explores the extent to which SETA representatives believe that their training programmes are responsive to current and future skills demand in their respective sectors and or cross sectors. The theme reflects SETA representatives' perceptions of how well their training programmes make participants employable.

All respondents echoed that the identification and design of training programmes are primarily informed by sector skills plans, which are developed through continuous labour market research and industry engagement. All SETA representatives revealed that because their respective industries are involved in this process, the training programmes that gets to be developed addresses what the industry, through respective employers, is looking for.

*“The sector skills plan is informed by workplace skills plans submitted by employers from the sectors.” SR 4*

The above sentiments by SR 4 demonstrates the structured efforts by SETAs to align their training programmes with sectoral skills demands. It must be noted that this will yield positive results if the documents that makes up the sector skills plan are done properly and accurately and not just as a compliance exercise. SR 1 stated that should WSPs be completed for compliance reasons, the alignment between training programmes and labour market demands will not be solved.

*“Despite the platforms made available for collaboration between SETAs and employers, mismatches between training outputs and actual job opportunities persist due to the inaccurate data that is sent to SETAs through various platforms such as WSPs.” SR 1.*

All SETA representatives indicated that their respective SETAs have a research office whose responsibilities, amongst others is to identify the top skills gaps and priority occupations in their respective sectors, which then inform how SETA training programmes are structured.

SR 2 revealed that SETAs develop a year or five years' sector skills plan which informs what training programmes SETAs would be implementing in that period. SR 2 revealed that, over and above this, SETAs conduct research to augment what the sector skills plan might have missed. SR 2 indicated that to ensure alignment of SETA training programmes with labour market demands, various stakeholders are encouraged to participate in shaping training programmes in their industry. This respondent also revealed that the president of the country, guided by his advisors, can also influence this alignment of SETA training programmes with labour market demands.

*“For example, during the state of the nation addressed by the president would identify certain areas, and the SETAs will also look at it and then make funding available to address it, through skills programmes.” SR 2*

SR 2 revealed that employers/industries must play active role in identifying current and future skills requirements for their industries. SR 2 also revealed that higher education institutions also have a role to play in ensuring the alignment of SETA training programmes to labour market demands and what type of SETA training programmes should be implemented.

*“For example, for technical skills, the Department of Higher Education will then request the SETAs to implement more technical skills training programmes like apprenticeships, which will address the technical skills shortage needed in the labour market.” SR 2*

Another SETA representative echoed the same sentiments of involving the industry as means to ensure that SETA training programmes are aligned with industry requirements. SR 3 revealed that it is important for the industry (employers) to take SETAs' processes seriously and not participate in them for compliance purposes. SR 3 further indicated the submission of WSPs by employers should be done so thoroughly as this is what informs the sector skills plan, which SETAs use to implement training programmes.

*“Labour market alignment is ensured through industry participation in SETA training programmes discussions, and processes.” SR 3*

SR 1 further revealed that over and above the sector skills plan, SETAs are also guided by the list of hard to fill vacancies to align training programmes with labour market demands. SR 1 indicated that hard to fill vacancies indicate that there no people in the market with the skills that are needed to fill those vacancies and training programmes are designed to address this.

*“I engage the sector, and I need to come up with the top 10, how to fill vacancies, your skills gaps and then your pivotal list. Then based on the findings, then you design a training program” SR 1*

### **5.5.2. Training programme challenges**

This theme captures the challenges experienced by SETA representatives in their experiences with training programmes, which impact the effectiveness of training programmes.

Respondents raised various challenges that they have picked up as impediments to the effectiveness of their training programmes. Some challenges that respondents revealed are caused by learners themselves. Some respondents also revealed challenges that other respondents did not see them as challenges.

The most common challenge that respondent revealed, is the drop out of training programme participants. SR 2 indicated that the quality of recruitment of training programme participants contributes to this challenge. SR 2 further revealed that participants drop out of the programme for various reasons, however the most common reason of drop out is stipend related. When asked what are the training programmes that they have identified, this is how SR 2 responded.

*“The dropout of learners. Because normally you would find that training programme providers would start with a certain amount number of learners, but due to the fact that the learnership contracts normally is stipend base, and the learner then finds alternative employment and would leave the training programme. So, learner dropout is one of the challenges. The other challenge is obviously capacity within the SETAs.” SR 2*

SR 4 shared the sentiments of SR 2 regarding viewing SETA training programme participants’ drop out as a challenge. SR 4 indicated that this is one of the biggest challenges that they have seen training programmes providers experiencing. SR 4 also added the delay in releasing allowances to participants as one of the challenges.

*“Dropouts. It's the biggest challenge that we face and late payment of stipends. These are the two major challenges we face.” SR 4*

The other challenge which was identified by SR 2 is the lack of sufficient capacity from the SETAs. SR 2 indicated that this challenge contributes to the effectiveness of training programmes which ultimately affects the success of the training programme is addressing what it is intended to. SR 2 further indicated that SETA officials need to conduct sites and

verifications visits to quality assure the training programmes, due to lack of capacity this is sometimes not done.

SR 1 also the same sentiments about training programmes' participants drop out. SR 1 also linked this challenge to the high unemployment rate in the country, revealing that participants will take whatever comes their way to secure an income, and when something that better aligns with their career aspirations eventually come their way, they will leave the training programme which does not.

*“As the issue of training programmes' participants dropouts, that's one thing that I've noticed for me. And so, they're not robots because you see in South Africa, we have an issue with unemployment and now because of that, whatever opportunity that are getting, whether you are interested or not or you just you can you just take any opportunity.”* SR 1

SR 1 concluded by revealing that due to the current economic conditions and high unemployment rate, an unemployed individual qualified in construction, may end up taking a SETA training programme training for something totally different from construction. This sentiments by SR 1 is collaborated by SETA training programme participants who participated in this study and revealed that they participated in their various SETA training programmes because they were not doing anything and the opportunity was presented to them.

SR 3 revealed that one of the SETA training challenges that they have experienced is training programme providers not complying with the rules and regulations of the training programme. SR 3 indicated that SETAs set requirements for training programme providers to comply with, but some training programme providers bypass these requirements.

SR 3 further revealed that when SETAs go for site verifications before the implementation of a training programme, training programme providers would look like they have their acts together. All machinery and equipment needed for successful implementation of the programme will be there, but when the programme starts, those resources will not be there.

*“Training programmes providers ask their friends to borrow them the required equipment so they can pass the site visit requirement to implement a training programme.”* SR 3

The key issue that this study sought to address, unemployment, has been revealed by all SETA representatives as a challenge to ensuring SETA training programmes are effective. Respondents revealed that although SETA programmes are designed to address the very issues, structural challenges prevent it to.

### 5.5.3. Quality assurance and implementation challenges

This theme examines the effectiveness and consistency of quality assurance mechanisms within SETA-supported training programmes, as well as the practical challenges encountered during implementation. This theme emerged as a consistent concern across all respondents.

All respondents outlined rigorous accreditation and moderation procedures designed to ensure training compliance with relevant legislation.

*“The Skills Development Act, 97 of 1998 guide the design and development of our training programme. We ensure that we comply to the act and other standards such as the QCTO and SAQA.” SR 2.*

SR 4 revealed that they put extensive quality assurance processes to ensure the effectiveness of SETA training programmes. SR 4 indicated that SETAs ensure that all necessary equipment needed before implementation are in place.

*“And that also speaks to the training providers, even the right resources in terms of people who will facilitate equipment in terms of resources such as laptops and everything that's needed for, for the programme to run. This is done through site visits.” SR 4*

This finding by SR 4, however has been revealed by another participant that it may not be as effective as it is designed to be. SR 3 revealed that this quality assurance process of ensuring that the training programme providers has the required equipment, prior to implementation can be bypassed.

All respondents also acknowledged the existing areas of developments when it comes to ensuring that training providers (employers) are complying to all relevant legislations when it comes to SETA training programme implementation.

Respondents also expressed that it must be noted that SETAs do not implement training programmes, they, in the main offer funding to training providers to implement on behalf of SETAs.

*“Certain training providers (employers) often shortened programmes to cut costs, which compromises training quality and learner competence for workplace readiness.” SR 2*

The above sentiments by SR 2 underscores the importance of quality in SETA training programmes in their role to skill the nation and address unemployment in the country. These sentiments were supported by another respondent, SR 1, who said the following:

*“There is no way a training programme designed to be implemented for 12 months will yield positive results if it is implemented over six months.” SR 2*

Another quality assurance process that came out across the participants is accreditation status of training programme providers. Respondents revealed that SETA has a stringent accreditation requirement to all training programmes provider. Participants also revealed that this requirement cannot be bypassed as SETAs are the only ones that accredit training programme providers, to implement training programmes.

SR 2 also revealed that SETAs also provide quality assurance on the training received by the training programme participants before issuing them with certificates. SR 2 revealed that during implementation, participants are told that their experiences will be moderated by external moderators to assure the quality of the training programme. SR 2 further revealed that this quality assurance measure ensures that both the participants and the SETA training programme provider comply with all statutory requirements.

*“External moderation in this according to the SETA policy is basically to look at whether the training programme provider the learner has complied with the principles of assessment as set out in the SAQA Act.” SR 2*

Quality assurance emerged, from respondents, as one of the factors contributing to the effectiveness of SETA training programmes to addressing unemployment in the country. Respondents also revealed challenges which contribute to some of the quality assurance measures which have been put in place to not be effective.

SR 3 revealed that just as SETAs have capacity constraints, training programme providers experience the same. SR 3 also revealed that, some SETA training programme providers deliberately understaff themselves so that they can maximise their profits for implementation of SETA training programmes. This view was also expressed by SR 2 who revealed that certain training programmes providers cut costs, which affects the quality of training programme delivery.

*“The staff shortage from training programmes providers affects the quality of training programmes.” SR 3*

Findings reveal that quality assurance is key to ensuring effectiveness. SETAs rely on strict legislation compliance from training providers, for this. The lack of adequate resources from both SETAs and training providers undermine the effectiveness of SETA training programmes.

#### **5.5.4. Tracking and evaluation of employment outcomes**

Another critical theme that emerged with these respondents was the lack of systematic post-training tracking of learner outcomes. The theme explores the mechanisms used to monitor and assess the employment outcomes of participants following their completion of SETA training programmes. This theme focuses on whether systems are in place to track employability and career progression post SETA training programmes participation. This theme provides an opportunity to understand how employment outcomes are evaluated is essential for determining the effectiveness of these interventions and for informing future programme improvements.

Two of the four SETA representatives expressed that their SETAs conduct periodic tracer studies, the data is inconsistent and not used effectively for policy adjustment. This is something that appears to be to be done for compliance purposes. SR 2 explained that *“we have a learner database and conduct online tracer surveys, but we mostly rely on self-reported information.”*

SR 1 also echoed the sentiments expressed above stating that SETA training programmes might be leading to more employment than it is being reported.

*“Without proper tracking and tracing of participants post participation, what gets reported as success for SETA training is not always accurate”* SR 1.

All respondents agreed that this is one area of improvement that SETAs need to take seriously. Respondents shared a view that the current mechanism for tracing, tracking and reporting on the employment and career progressing need to be reviewed and also taken seriously.

To improve the tracking and evaluation of employment outcomes, respondents proposed that all SETAs should establish a tracking and tracing office, to track and trace SETA programmes participants during and post programme participation. SR 1 suggested that SETAs tracing and tracking office should work closely with other government institutions.

*“Should participants be correctly traced and tracked, meaningful and correct data will be supplied to agencies such as the Stats SA, which will report accurate employment outcomes”* SR 1.

SR 3 stated that the success of SETA training programmes lies on the participants either being employed or starting sustainable businesses post SETA training programmes participation, and this information can only be accessible if participants are known where they are.

## 5.6. SETA Training programmes

This theme explores types of SETA training programmes that participants partook in and their views regarding these programmes' effectiveness in addressing unemployment. Of the 16 SETA training programmes respondents, two participated in SETA learnerships only, while others participated in SETA internships or both SETA internships and SETA learnerships.

Findings from training SETA training programme participants revealed that they learned valuable skills on their SETA training programmes. Findings further revealed that participants found value in skills programmes, even when those skills programmes were not aligned with their qualifications or career aspirations. One participant who took part in a training programme that had nothing to do with their qualifications indicated that the training programme advanced their career. As the employer who was offering the training programme saw the participant's potential and nurtured it. *So, I felt like it (the training programme) was a doorway for me to actually reach pinnacle of my career.* ST 16

Another SETA training programme highlight which came out from all respondents was the importance of having a SETA training programme exposure and experience as a job seeker. Respondents indicated that having a SETA training experience on their CVs make them more appealing to employers. This sentiment underscores the role that SETA training programme plays in employability prospects, particularly on the youth.

*"I went to a couple of interviews. There were a lot of interviews that I got, after participating in a SETA training programme, compared to when I had not taken part on the SETA training programme."* ST 12

ST 12 also revealed that the SETA training programme exposed them to how the traditional culture of command and control works. ST 12 revealed that prior to the SETA training programme exposure, they had no clue how their host employer conducts their business and their significance in the country. This finding reveals that SETA training programmes educate their participants not only about what they are expected to be educated on, but on other important areas of careers as well.

All participants expressed that they are of the view that SETA training programmes do lead to better employment prospects. Respondents who are currently employed expressed that the SETA training programme or programmes that they participated in played a significant role in them getting their current jobs. Respondents who are not employed expressed that SETA training programmes that they participated in have prepared them for future employment. All respondents indicated that SETA training programmes made them employable.

## **5.7. Themes from all study respondents**

### **5.7.1. Duration of training programmes**

In a consistent manner, this theme arose from all research respondents. The theme indicates shared views on the duration of SETA training programmes and how duration influences employment outcomes. Participants all agreed that the duration of training programmes should be aligned with entry level job requirements.

Respondents revealed that for SETA training programmes to be effective in addressing the high unemployment challenge, training programmes should be aligned with industry requirements. Findings from employers' representatives constantly revealed that industry entry level jobs require certain numbers of job experience, and that SETA training programmes should be aligned with this requirement. Findings from ER 1 revealed the respondent's commitment to aligning SETA training programmes with labour market requirements.

*"I fought for the duration, because before it was 12 months, then I fought for 24 months because of the entry level job requirements. It is now 24 months." ER 1*

The findings from ER 1 underscores the role that the duration of SETA training programme have in the employability of participants. Employers' representatives further reveal that employers and SETAs must ensure that the duration of training programmes is aligned with the entry level jobs' requirements.

Findings from ER 4 align with ER 1's findings. ER 4 revealed that if training programmes are going to be aligned with labour market demands, SETA training programmes' duration must be addressed and be aligned with industry requirements.

*"I feel the duration of their contracts is not enough to get them to ready and make it in the labour market." ER 4*

Findings from ER 2 showed alignment with findings from the respondents above. ER 2 indicated that the current duration of the SETA training programme that they are implementing and managing should align not only with the labour market requirements, but also with industry professional requirements.

*"The duration of the training programmes should be extended and linked to labour market and professional council registration requirements" ER 2*

Findings from all employers' representatives revealed that employers support the call that no SETA training programme should be less than 24 months. This was consistent with all of them.

A respondent representing a SETA indicated that although some SETA training programmes are short in nature, longer training programmes should be designed to cover at least two years of training. Findings from SR 3 revealed shorter SETA training programmes do not do much justice to participants. Findings from SR 4 revealed similar sentiments that there is a need to legislatively make SETA training programmes more than 12 months.

*“Twelve months duration is too short, internships should be 24 months long at the very least.” SR 3*

*“To increase their employability, I have spoken about the three years period, that SETA training programmes need to align with.” SR 4*

Respondents highlighted that the duration of SETA training programmes need to align with labour market requirements, particularly entry-level job requirements. Employers consistently emphasised that programme duration is critical, with strong support for extending training to at least 24 months to improve employability, for programmes which are shorter. These views were reiterated by respondents representing SETAs, who stated that training programmes which are short in duration are not as effective in addressing unemployment due to the entry level jobs' experience requirements. Findings revealed a strong call for longer training programmes.

SETA representatives reiterated these views, noting that shorter programmes are insufficient and advocating for longer, legislatively mandated durations to better prepare participants for the workforce.

Respondents who participated in SETA training programmes also revealed that one of the easiest things to do to align training programmes with labour market requirements, is the duration. Respondents revealed that of the requirements into entry level jobs are always there in job adverts, and SETA training programmes should align with those requirements. Training programme participants unanimously revealed that SETA training programmes should 24 months and above.

*“Twenty-four months is a fair duration and aligns with entry level job requirements.” ST 12*

*“Internship programmes should be 36 months long. Entry level jobs require three years working experience. SETA training programmes should align to this.” ST 14*

*“The six-month internship was too short, internships should at least be 24 months.” ST 4*

## 5.8. SETA training programme allowance (stipend)

The other theme that emerged strongly from all the categories of respondents was the training programmes' stipend. This theme expressed views on the role and impact of the stipend provided to participants on the effectiveness of training programmes.

Findings from SETA respondents revealed that due to the high unemployment in the country, the stipend element in SETA training programmes plays a significant role in ensuring that the training programme is effective. Respondents revealed that participants will drop out from a SETA training programme should they get an opportunity which has a better income than the stipend that SETA training programme that they are participating in is offering.

Findings from employers' representatives revealed that the issue of stipends is amongst the top success factors for SETAs' training programmes. Everything about stipend influence the effectiveness of SETAs' training programmes. ER 1 indicated that they had issues with their SETA when it came to the release of stipends to SETA training programmes participants. Findings from ER 1 indicated that stipends were not paid on time and they were not enough to cover basic needs for the SETA training programme participants.

*“The stipend, well, we understand that it is a stipend, and not a salary, but the stipends should be also enough to carry the interns through. Number one, accommodation, transport, and food. Because majority of the interns, were not based in the area where they were placed.” ER 1*

ER 1 also indicated that they are cognisant that SETAs are operative on limited budget and an increase in stipends may imply that the number of SETA training programme participants may ne to be reduced. ER 1 further revealed that on the same breath, SETAs must know that delayed and low stipends often lead to high dropout rates. This is a finding that was revealed by SETA representatives who participated in this study, that high dropout rates is an indication that the training programme was not a success.

Findings from ER 2 revealed that this respondent holds a different view from ER 1. ER 2 indicated that stipends for training programme participants should not be less than R5000 per month. ER 1, without naming the amount suggested that R5000 per month may be too little to cover for basic physiological needs as described above.

These diverse findings from the two participants revealed that employers are aware of the important role that stipends pay in the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing the high unemployment.

Consistent findings from SETAs' training programmes' participants unveiled that they are not happy with the stipends which they received. Findings revealed that participants are of the view that the stipends that they received were inadequate and created a financial barrier for participants. Echoing findings from ER1, findings from ST 4 revealed the importance of a stipend which covers basic cost of living during SETA training programme participation. ST 4 further explicitly revealed that the stipend was not motivating at all. ST 4 revealed that the stipend almost drove her to dropping out of the training programme.

*"My stipend was like R5000 per month, I travelled from Mpumalanga to the Eastern Cape for this opportunity and could not make ends meet."* ST 4

Findings from another SETA training programme participant echoed similar sentiments that stipends should cover basic needs. Although ST 3 indicated that for them, this was not deciding factor. ST 3 revealed that although their stipend was too little (R5000), they were not paying for much as they still lived with their parents who also supplemented the stipend.

*"I think if you straight out of varsity a starting point should be above R10 000. I know that might sound like a lot, but out of varsity, you must be able to have your accommodation, I think it should be between 10 and 15. That's my opinion on what at least you should be getting as stipend."* ST 3

Another interesting finding was that of ST 14 who revealed that internship stipends should at least be R15 000 per month. Findings from ST 14 revealed that interns are assisting host employers with additional human resources and this should be rewarded. This is a finding which was revealed by ER 1 who stated that training participants augment capacity for hosts.

*"I think maybe an entry level stipend should stop from at least R15 000." If you check what people who are in internships do, they do work that is done by permanent employees"* ST 14

The low stipend presents a challenge, especially for participants who may have to travel or support themselves in expensive urban areas. The primary value of the program, therefore, rests on the non-monetary benefit of gaining experience.

All SETA training programmes' participants agreed that the current various stipends that they received was not sufficient in carrying them through the programme. SETA representatives concurred that majority of programme dropouts are attributed to stipend challenges. Employers' representatives collectively expressed that stipends are important in making training programmes effective.

## 5.9. Chapter conclusion

Findings from the interviews which were conducted with participants inclusive of training programme participant, and SETA and employer representatives. This triad gave a multidimensional perspective on the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing unemployment in South Africa, while providing answers to the research questions.

The study was guided by the following research questions: To what extent do SETA training programmes enhance the employability of their participants; How does employer and industry involvement influence the relationship between training programmes and employability outcomes; and What are the key challenges and opportunities affecting the effectiveness of SETA programmes in addressing the employability of trainees?

In relation to the first research question, the results provide strong evidence that SETA training programmes significantly enhance participants' employability by equipping them with skills that employers are looking for. Majority of the respondents who participated in SETA training programmes reported that they are employed currently and SETA training programmes played a huge role in securing their jobs. Employers also indicated that training participants were ready to assume employment post training participation, with all of them rating them above 7/10 for work readiness.

When it comes to the second research question, results indicate that employer and industry involvement is a key determinant of whether SETA training programmes lead to employability outcomes. Employers' representatives reported that SETA training programmes, through strategic documents that various employers submit to SETAs, are aligned with industry requirements. However, they also reported that these strategic documents should accurate so that the requirements are correctly reported and labour market alignment is not distorted. Results demonstrated that significant employer and industry collaboration strengthens the employability outcomes, while minimal involvement or compliance-based engagement undermines SETA programme effectiveness.

Regarding the third research question, the results identified several structural and operational challenges which contribute to limiting the effectiveness of SETAs. Results also identified areas of improvement. Quality assurance processes, programme duration came out amongst the challenges limiting the effectiveness of SETAs in addressing unemployment. Establishing tracking and tracing offices and duration extensions came out as areas of improvement.

In summary, results show that SETA training programmes are instrumental in providing opportunities for accessing employment opportunities, there is a strong need for alignment

between SETAs and industries (employers) for greater effectiveness. Addressing data integrity, strengthening quality assurance, improving tracking and evaluation systems, and extending the duration of training programmes are essential steps toward enhancing SETAs' contribution to reducing unemployment and building a more sustainable and skilled workforce in South Africa.

## **Chapter 6: Discussions and Analysis**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter critically discusses the study's findings in relation to the research questions and existing literature. The chapter construes how findings from all respondents assist in understanding SETA training programmes' effectiveness in addressing unemployment in South Africa. The findings of research are anchored by Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, however, other views on how human acquire knowledge and skills; how they become employable; and how stakeholders (SETAs and employers) work together. This chapter further engages with contemporary critiques and theoretical extensions, acknowledging that employability is influenced not only by individual skill acquisition but also by the broader institutional context, the depth of industry collaboration, and the presence of supportive systemic structures, contrary to what Becker (1964) proposed.

## **6.2. Research Question 1: To what extent do training programmes enhance the employability of their participants?**

Findings, support the view that SETA training programmes, guided by the legislative mandate of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, to contribute positively to addressing, in the short term, the unemployment challenge. Through the findings, it is evident that SETA training programmes have contributed meaningfully to enhancing participants' employability. Participants, collectively and consistently, revealed that their participation in SETA training programmes have increased their chances of getting employed, even those who are currently unemployed

The findings reveal that SETA training programmes, just like in other developing countries, are an effective tool to enhance graduate employability. This finding is in line with the finding by Clarke (2017) that governments in developing countries have adopted post tertiary training programmes to enhance the employability of graduates. This finding implies the government of South Africa, in its decision to fund the SETAs to implement training programme to enhance employability, is justified. This, according to Clarke (2017) what countries like South Africa are doing and ought to do.

Findings precisely answered this research question in affirmative. SETA training programmes enhances the employability of participants. Findings from participants affirmed that SETA training programmes enhance employability; findings from SETA representatives, indicated that SETA training programmes enhance employability; findings from employers' representatives also affirmed that SETA training programmes enhance employability. Findings, therefore, informed the study that SETA training programmes are effective addressing unemployment.

Findings revealed that SETA training programmes are effective, however, other several factors contribute to the employability of SETA training programmes participants than just SETA training programmes. Findings revealed the issue of skills, stagnant economic growth, unavailability of jobs, quality and the duration of training programmes, stipend, participants' attitudes and motivation, mismatch amongst moderating factors to ensuring that SETA training programmes guarantee employability.

In terms of skills mismatch, these findings underscore the argument by Succi and Canovi (2019) that training programmes need to be responding to industry demands and designed with a forward-looking orientation. This finding implies that although SETA training programmes enhances the employability of participation, there are other moderating factors that must be taken into account to guarantee the effectiveness.

Study findings strongly support the foundational premise Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory that investments in training enhance participants' productive capacities and employability prospects. Trainees consistently emphasised that SETA programmes provided them with practical experience that complemented their tertiary education. For example, ST 8 noted:

*“In university we deal only with theory. So, when coming to the internship, I wanted the practical side... and that is what I got.”*

This confirms the assertion of Becker (1964) that that training translates education into labour-market-relevant competencies. Similarly, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning perspective is reflected in statements such as:

*“The experience was amazing... giving me the opportunity to experience the entire value chain, as taught in the university.”* ST 4

This finding demonstrate that SETA training programmes gives an opportunity to training participants to apply their theoretical learnings in practical context, thus facilitating facilitate the entire cycle of experiential learning, where theoretical knowledge is converted into practical competence as stated by Kolb (1984).

Many participants revealed that it is the SETA training programme that they participated that linked them with their current employer. This finding supports the conceptualisation of training programmes by Khare (2023) who argued that training programmes should bridge the vehicle that unemployed use to access opportunities which will link them to prospective employers. A major theme in the findings is that SETA training programmes significantly increase participants' likelihood of securing employment. Respondents frequently stated that SETA internships “opened doors,” improved their CVs, and exposed them to professional networks.

*“After the internship programme, I was marketable... I've had several interviews and offers.”*  
ST 5

This aligns with Clarke's (2017) argument that training programmes act as critical bridges between education and employment, and with Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) who maintain that both individuals and organisations benefit when training programmes build job-ready competencies. Findings from employer revealed that even employers benefit from training programmes as asserted by Aguinis and Kraiger (2009).

*“Participants assist with augmenting the capacity that we currently do not have.”* ER 3

The study found that employers believe that SETA training programmes enhance employability for training participants. Employers' representatives indicated that training programme participants become ready for employment post training programmes' participation. Employer representatives corroborated this, rating trainee job-readiness between 7/10 and 10/10. Such endorsements reflect a high level of employer confidence in SETA training participant, which is an important indicator of employability.

*"When it comes to job readiness, I give them ten out of ten."* ER 2

Findings further revealed that SETA training programmes provide a much-needed link between the training programme participants and prospective employees. The study revealed that SETA training programmes do enhance the employability of the participants. However, the study also found that there are other factors that contribute to this enhancement.

As stated above, the study found that the duration and the quality of SETA training programmes play important roles in enhancing employment for participants. Respondents stated that the quality of training programmes should be based on the skills that are needed in the market and training programmes should be designed to address those skills. This finding is supported by Marginson (2019) who argued that the quality and relevance of training programmes are as important as the training itself in getting the best outcomes out of the training programmes.

In terms of the duration, participants stated that the duration of training programmes should be aligned with entry level jobs' requirements.

*"I feel the duration of their contracts is not enough to get them to ready and make it in the labour market."* ER 4

This finding support Garavan et al. (2021) who argued that training programmes which are designed to close specific skills gaps enhance employability of participants. The study found that the level of experience required for entry level jobs is deter to employability. SETA training programmes should close gap to enhance employability of participants.

Although the majority gained employment, the study revealed structural issues affecting employability outcomes, such as, labour market absorption constraints, immigration status barriers, participants taking programmes for income rather than career alignment. This finding reflects Marginson's (2019) critique that human capital investments cannot yield employment in the absence of structural economic expansion.

*“These programmes do enhance employability, but due to the current economic conditions in the country, employers are unable to absorb more interns into permanent roles.” ST 6*

These findings support the argument by Borat et al. (2020) that the challenge of unemployability, which leads to high unemployment in South Africa is a structural challenge. The findings revealed that SETA training programmes, on their own, no matter how great they have been designed, are unable to guarantee employment.

Findings further revealed that participants who participate in SETA training programmes which are not aligned with career aspirations tend to drop out of the programme when something that is better aligned with them comes their way. Findings also revealed that training programmes participants who are participating for the stipend will drop out when a better income opportunity comes. These findings echo Cotes and Ugarte (2021), who argue that misalignment between training and market needs undermines long-term employability outcomes. The study found that some SETA training programmes participants were not vested in the training programme but participated anyways.

*“I got the learnership because I was at home doing nothing.” (ST 2)*

The contributors to enhancement of employability which are revealed by the findings support the contextual critique of HCT in developing economies, as highlighted by Naidoo and Govender (2022), which recognises that the mere existence of a qualification does not guarantee market readiness. Participants revealing that the fact that they are not employed post training participation does not mean that they are still unemployable. demonstrate that SETA training programmes significantly enhance employability, but not alone.

Although the study found Becker (1964) assumption that investment in human capital yields better employment with the better income, it was also revealed that factors such as quality of the programme, duration, stipend and external economic conditions all contribute to training programmes enhancing employability. This underscores the argument by Marginson (2019) that investment in human capital alone without taking other factors into account will not yield to better economic participation and earning as suggested by Becker (1964).

### **6.3. Research Question 2: How does SETAs and industry (employers) involvement influence the relationship between training programmes and employability outcomes?**

The findings revealed that there is some collaboration between SETAs and industry in various platforms regarding training programmes. The study found that significant employer and industry collaboration strengthens employability outcomes, whereas minimal or compliance-based engagement actively undermines programme effectiveness. The finding supports Khan et al. (2025) who argued that training programmes which are designed in collaboration with all industry players tend to yield more substantial employability outcomes for training participants.

Respondents expressed that platforms and mechanisms exist for employers to participate in designing training programmes which will yield positive outcomes regarding employability prospects.

*“...platforms are made available for collaboration between SETAs and employers” SR 1*

Employer and industry involvement emerged as a critical determinant of programme effectiveness. SETA representatives revealed that programmes which are co-designed with industry partners tend to yield better employment outcomes due to improved alignment with current and future market needs. This finding is in line with Arranz et al. (2022) who found that collaboration between tertiary institutions and industries is significant in realising effectiveness of training programmes.

Findings from employers' representatives equally revealed that SETA training programmes which are designed in collaboration between SETAs and employers (industry) have been proven to have better effectiveness.

*“Labour market alignment is ensured through industry participation in SETA training programmes discussions, and processes.” SR 3*

This finding confirms Khan et al. (2025) who argue that multi-stakeholder involvement yields better training outcomes. The finding also supports the argument by Cotes and Ugarte (2021) that collaboration between training institutions and industry reduces skill mismatches and increases the effectiveness of trainings.

Some SETA respondents revealed on the other hand that the participation from industry players (employers) is not always consistent and when it is, it is sometimes tokenistic. Findings revealed that the collaboration is mostly limited to compliance rather than authentic strategic collaboration. SR 3 revealed that it is important for the industry (employers) to take SETAs'

processes seriously and not participate in them for compliance purposes. This corroborates Ostmeier and Strobel's (2022) observation that limited collaboration and engagement structures hinder effective partnership between training institutions and employers.

Results also supported a view by Ambrosini and Bowman (2009) that perhaps the current mechanisms of collaborations are not yielding positive outcomes as anticipated. SETA respondents revealed that the data collected through the submission of WSPs are often used to direct which training programmes should be implemented may be outdated as most employers submit these strategic documents just for mere compliance purposes. This also supports the recommendations made by Matha (2024) argued that the current technique used to identify sectorial skills needed in the market may need overhauling.

*“Submission of WSP documents may not reflect the needs of the sector, other entities do not submit while others submit for the compliance purposes.” ER 4.*

The findings also suggest that where SETAs have built strong partnerships with specific industries trainees' transition into employment was faster. This reinforces the notion advanced by Ambrosini and Bowman (2009) that dynamic collaboration between institutions and industry promotes strategic renewal and adaptability in training provision.

Conversely, in sectors with limited employer input, trainees reported difficulty finding jobs despite completing accredited programmes, illustrating the weakness of isolated human capital development. The findings underscore the argument by Gómez and Luna (2023) that training programmes which are aligned to industry competencies enhance employability.

Findings further revealed that the collaboration between SETAs and industries eliminate the disconnect between what SETA training programmes get implemented to address and the skills needed by the industries. Findings revealed that the collaborations lead to the involvement of industries in designing SETA training programmes, not just as implementing agencies, but as partners in the entire value chain, from conception to implementation. This finding is in support of Arranz et al. (2022) who argued that collaboration is essential in enhancing employability.

*“Well, I was 100% involved through everything, including consolidating the requirements.”*

ER 3

The findings revealed that the value of the human capital (the acquired skill) begins to erode when it lacks immediate specificity and context. This further amplifies the need to not just align

training programmes with industry needs, but the collaboration between SETAs and industries. SETA training programmes are tailored to close specific industry skills gaps, hence the usage of WSPs and SSPs. This aligns with Garavan et al. (2021) who highlighted the importance of training programmes to be tailored to close specific skill gaps.

Employers' representatives revealed that they pay skills levies to SETAs, this implied that employers contribute and invest in development of skills in the country. While Becker (1964) argued in his Human Capital Theory that investment in human capital should yield proportional returns. Findings expressed that without industry alignment, return on investment will not be fully realised.

Results, in answering the research question, showed that although there is a collaboration between SETAs and industry, it just needs to be strengthened. This is supported by Dachner et al. (2021) who stated that there is a lack of frameworks which strategically aligns training programmes with industry's evolving needs. Similarly, Behera and Gaur (2022) emphasise that when SETAs and employers operate in isolation, rather than through genuine partnership, the potential of training programmes to enhance employability is substantially diminished.

Findings further deepened Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory by integrating industry collaboration as a structural enabler. Findings revealed that although SETAs and industries do collaborate, and are inclusive, of each other, in their practices, this is not enough to ensure the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing unemployment. This supports the view by Auerbach and Green (2024) that investment in human capital alone might not be enough, to guarantee employability.

Findings revealed SETAs and industries should be intentional about involvement and collaboration, and this should be done not as a compliance requirement, but as an enabler to the effectiveness of SETA training programme in addressing unemployment. This implies that the collaboration should not only at the submission of WSPs or industries taking on SETA trainees on their premises, but also on strategic sessions of each other to address skills questions for the industries and how (training programmes) the skills questions will be addressed.

Findings revealed that participants who participated in SETA training programmes during their studies enhanced their employability. This finding affirms that training programmes enhance employability and corroborate findings by Clarke (2017) that graduates who participated in training programmes during or post their studies, reported to have increased their employability.

In terms of what this means for the theory, findings revealed that a moderating variable between training programmes and employability, that moderation variable being collaboration and involvement. The moderator has added a nuance to Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, suggesting that circumstantial factors such as involvement and collaboration have an influence on the return on human capital investment.

In closing, findings revealed that employer engagement and involvement serve as a moderating variable between SETA training programmes and employability of participants. However, fragmented involvement, limited co-design, and uneven absorption weaken the potential impact. Findings revealed that the more employers are involved, the higher the likelihood of positive impact of training programmes in addressing the high unemployment in the country.

#### **6.4. Research Question 3: What are the key challenges and opportunities affecting the effectiveness of SETA programmes in addressing employability?**

Findings revealed several challenges which can also be turned into opportunities of improvements. Findings across participants found that, misalignment of training programmes with labour market demand; participants' drop out; external economic conditions; and the absence of tracking and tracing systems for training programme participants affected the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing the high unemployment challenge.

Findings revealed that training programmes which are not aligned with current labour skills is one of the challenges affecting the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing high unemployment. Findings from employers' representatives identified skills mismatch as a hinder of SETA training programmes to enhancing employability of participants. Finding from one of the SETAs' representatives revealed that when participants are trained on skills which the industry does not need, participants will not be employable. These findings support Glerum and Judge (2021) argument that training programmes must be closely aligned with labour market demand for them to enhance employability.

Findings from SETA representatives also revealed that the mismatch between training programmes and labour market requirements is caused by lack of authentic participation of employers in SETA affirms. Findings from all SETA representatives revealed that SETA training programmes are informed by sector skills plans which are derived from WSPs submitted by employers. Findings from SR 1 revealed that some employers do not want to participate at all, while others send wrong information to the SETAs.

*“The mismatches between training outputs and actual job opportunities persist due to the inaccurate data that is sent to SETAs through various platforms such as WSPs.” SR 1.*

These findings underscore the importance of SETA-employer collaboration in designing training programmes. The findings also reiterate Cotes and Ugarte's (2021) argument that the mismatch of the skills developed by training institutions and those required by the market can be attributed to lack of coordination between training institutions and industries.

Findings from employers revealed that the WSP is still the strategic document used to inform SETAs of employers' skills needs. Employers' representatives revealed that they submit their WSPs to SETAs every year, so the labour skills requirements are relevant. However, Matha (2024) argued that the collection of labour skills requirements through WSP may need to be relooked. The challenge of SETA training programmes not aligned with labour market supports the call by Matha (2024) to overhaul what informs sector skills needs and sector skills plans.

Findings from SR 2 revealed that one of the main contributors to high participants' dropout is the duration of the training programme. Findings from SR 4 also revealed similar challenge.

*"Dropouts. It's the biggest challenge that we face." SR 4*

Findings from SR 2 and SR 4 are echoed by SR3 who stated that shorter training programmes hinder the effectiveness of same. This finding affirms the argument by Nickson et al. (2012) that training programmes duration should be aligned with the job experience requirements of entry level jobs.

The opportunity that the findings revealed is that the duration of SETA training programmes need to be aligned with what the industry require when employing for certain jobs. SR 4 revealed that:

*"To increase their employability, I have spoken about the three years period, that SETA training programmes need to align with." SR 4*

The findings also revealed that another factor leading to high dropout of participants is when training programmes' participants take the opportunity to because there is nothing else to do. Findings showed that participants would participate on training programmes without being motivated by anything, and when something that motivates them come along, they would quit the training programme.

*"I'll just be honest on this one, the learnership I got it was because I was at home, I was not doing anything." ST 2*

These findings support the argument by Tharenou (2010) that motivation of training programmes participation influence the participation of participants. Findings revealed that participants who are not motivated to be on the training programme tend to drop out quickly and easy than those who are not. Findings from ST 7 revealed that even when the stipend was low, due to motivation and the hunger to attain the experience of the SETA training programme, they stayed the course.

This finding from ST 7 support the argument by Carlisle et al. (2019) that participants' positive attitude regarding training programme participation makes training programmes effective. Findings from ST 7 also echo Nadler and Nadler's (2012) argument that the attitude of training programmes participants is as important as the alignment of the training programme to industry and labour market requirements.

Another challenge that the findings have revealed to affecting the effectiveness of SETA training programmes is the external conditions such as economic and other factors. Findings revealed that participants found value in investing their times to participate on SETA training programmes. Findings further revealed that majority of those who invested in SETA training programmes participated realised their returns on investment, through employment.

The above finding is, both, in support and contradiction of Deming (2022). The finding is in affirms Deming (2022) argument that investment in education and training has a positive impact in one's prospects. Findings revealed that all SETA training programmes participants' future has been impacted positively, by their participation. However, the finding above differs with Deming (2022) assertion that those who invest in participating in training programmes will have a much bigger slice in economic participation. Findings reveal that participation alone does not guarantee employability.

*“These programmes do enhance employability, but due to the current economic conditions in the country, employers are unable to absorb more interns into permanent roles.” ST 6*

Findings revealed that economic growth is needed for SETA training programmes to address the high unemployment challenge. Findings from SETA training programmes participants and employer's representative revealed that, although participants are ready for employment, during and post training, their employment is informed by the availability of jobs in the market, which is derived from economic growth. These findings affirm Marginson (2019) argument that training programme participation alone may not suffice if structural labour issues such as limited job creation, economic stagnation are not addressed. This implies that there is a need to grow the economy. The findings, supported by Marginson (2019) calls for the government to create conditions for economic growth, so that employment opportunities can be realised.

Findings revealed migration laws as another factor that challenges the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing the high unemployment challenge. Findings revealed that although SETA training participants are employable during and post training programme participation, laws governing employability of foreign national prevent them from being employed.

*“Noting that I'm a foreigner, I've been dealing with, immigration laws. So, it is really going to be difficult for me to find employment” ST 11*

The findings support the findings by Byrne (2020) that factors such as labour laws and economic status play a role in employability. This calls for the review of labour laws.

A key challenge lies in the incomplete tracking of post-training employment outcomes. As SETA representatives explained that learner databases exist, there is no centralised system to monitor participants' labour market progression. This aligns with findings by Abdullah (2009) and Powell (2019), who argue that weak monitoring frameworks lead to policy blind spots, where training output data is captured but actual employment impact remains unknown. This finding implies that SETA training programmes might be yielding positive results in linking the trainees to employment but not clearly reported.

*“Without proper tracking and tracing of participants post participation, what gets reported as success for SETA training is not always accurate” SR 1.*

The absence of longitudinal tracking prevents SETAs from adapting their programmes based on empirical outcomes, reducing their responsiveness to economic trends. Findings revealed that there are no tracking and tracing of participants during and post completion of training programmes. Findings from SETA representatives further revealed that when SETA training programmes participants can be located, not only will the SETAs and employers know of the true impact, but meaningful and correct data will be supplied to agencies such as the Stats SA, which will report accurate employment outcomes. These findings corroborate Fugate et al. (2004) assertion that tracking and tracing of employment prospects of participants provides accurate account of training programmes effectiveness.

This finding highlights an opportunity for not just improved administrative processes for SETAs but also improved processes for both SETAs, industries, universities and other stakeholders. One SETA representative highlighted that although training programmes are designed to address specific skills in specific industries, there are instances where participants leave the industry altogether, during and or post the training programme. Fugate et al. (2004) stated that to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the training programmes, it is mandatory to implement a proper tracking and monitoring system.

Findings identified an opportunity for SETAs to establish a tracking and monitoring office within their structures. This office will be responsible to track and trace SETA training programme participants during and post training participant. This function is said to be effective in accurate reporting of SETA training participant as reported by Fugate et al. (2004). The findings revealed that effectiveness or lack thereof, of SETA training programmes may be underreported due to unavailability of correct and updated employment status of individuals

*“We have a learner database and conduct online tracer surveys, but we mostly rely on self-reported information.” SR 2*

Opportunities. Through the findings, the researcher identified an opportunity for SETAs to relook at the collection of data that informs the SSPs. Perhaps there should be other means to collect skills that are required in the labour market than just the submission of WSPs. Matha (2024) supports this opportunity for new methods to detect skills needs in the industries. Matha (2024) stated that “the WSP data source is severely limited to undertake any functional employer-level analysis.” This opportunity aims to resolve one of the bureaucratic inefficiencies in SETA environment, which will contribute to improved SETA training programmed design and implementation.

Through proper involvement and cooperation, the quality of training programmes being designed will be realised. Through the respondents of both SETA and employers’ representatives, the deductions are that the involvement and cooperation between them have a positive impact on the effectiveness of training programmes in addressing high unemployment. One SETA respondent identified multiple channels that parties can use to improve on their cooperation and involvement. The opportunity here is that SETAs and industries must continuously engage on the platforms that have been created and take these platforms seriously as platforms for robust engagement for the betterment of employability outcomes of trainees. The above opportunity is supported by Garavan et al. (2021) who emphasised that training programmes which are designed to address industries’ challenges have the potential to substantially improve employability outcomes. Participants also recognised that collaboration among SETAs, higher education institutions, and employers could enhance the quality and employability relevance of training programmes.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings suggest that Human Capital Theory must be extended to consider institutional effectiveness, governance, and environmental adaptability. As noted by Auerbach and Green (2024), employability cannot be divorced from the socio-economic and policy structures that shape opportunity distribution. Therefore, the future of SETA training programme effectiveness lies in improving the bureaucratic efficiencies; coordinating collaboration and involvement; and implementing tracing and tracking mechanisms.

## **6.5. Theoretical relevance and contributions to theory**

The findings of this study affirm that SETA training programmes play a meaningful role in enhancing employability, yet their ultimate impact on reducing unemployment remains constrained by other external and systematic challenges. Supporting Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory, findings reveal that investment in human capital, through participating in SETA training programmes, improve the participants' employability. Participants indicated that the SETA Training programmes that they participated in made them employable and ready to enter the formal workplace. However, the findings revealed that training alone is insufficient to secure sustainable employment outcomes in the absence of structural and institutional support systems.

The study extends and refines the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory by identifying several mediating factors that determine the translation of skills into employment outcomes. These include bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak employer participation, and the absence of post-training tracking systems. The lack of tracking and tracing systems prevents the SETAs to accurately account for the employability status of the participants, during and post training participation. This challenge affirms critiques by Auerbach and Green (2024) and Dachner et al. (2021) that the employability of individuals is not only influenced by individual's investment in their education and training, but there are other external factors such as economic conditions, favouring the creation of jobs.

A key contribution of this study is the recognition that employer and industry involvement acts as a moderating variable between training and employability outcomes. Programmes co-designed and implemented with employers demonstrated stronger alignment with market needs and higher rates of employment absorption. This finding deepens the theoretical conversation by introducing collaboration and institutional efficiency as structural enablers within the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory. This finding, therefore, implies that for human capital to generate most favourable outcomes, it should be enhanced and enabled by strategic partnerships which are empowered to respond to contextual challenges.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the ongoing debate on the nature of employability by bridging Becker's (1964) classical Human Capital Theory with the more holistic Human Development approach articulated by Powell and McGrath (2019). While the framework by Becker (1964) highlighted economic benefit of investing in human capital, through skills acquisition, amongst other things, the perspective of human development position employability within a broader socio-institutional environment that encompasses social inclusion, equitable opportunity, and structural constraints.

Kolb (1984) experiential learning theory positing that learning occurs through the integration of experience, reflection, and application was validated. Findings revealed that participants highly valued the practical exposure they received. Many indicated that applying their academic knowledge in real workplace contexts enhanced their confidence, skills, and ability to perform job-related tasks. This confirms Kolb's (1984) assertion that learning is maximised when individuals apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings.

The findings of this study affirm the importance of skills development as a necessary component of employability, yet they simultaneously challenge the assumption, which is rooted in the core foundations of the human capital theory as developed by Becker (1964), that the acquisition of skills automatically results in employment. Instead, the evidence asserts the findings by Marginson (2019) by demonstrating that employability outcomes are shaped by a complex and structural labour market issues such as limited job creation, economic stagnation, and mismatches between skills supply and demand. Thus, the study underscores that skills development alone is insufficient; without supportive labour market conditions, economic growth, effective institutional coordination, and data-driven decision-making, the translation of training into meaningful employment remains limited.

This consolidative perspective associates with the need for a human capital framework which is context-sensitive, which will allow for recognition of the intersectionality of individual abilities and capabilities, administrative systems which are effective and efficient, and socio-economic conditions which are positive for the growing of economies for job creation, in developing economies such as South Africa.

In essence, the study contributes demonstrates that the current scholarly debate by reconceptualising employability as both an individual and institutional and societal construct, and by advancing a multi-dimensional understanding of the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory. The multi-dimension acknowledges how relational, structural, and governance factors mediate the effectiveness of training programmes in addressing unemployment.

In summary, this study demonstrates that SETA training programmes contribute substantially to the employability of participants. SETAs remain a viable vehicle for providing and linking the unemployed to prospective employers. Amongst the purposes of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 is to help those who are finding it difficult to get jobs and for employers to find qualified employees, through SETAs training programmes, both of these purposes are realised. For South Africa to realise the full potential of its skills development system, SETAs must strengthen partnerships, enhance accountability, and adopt adaptive strategies that link training to long-term employability and socio-economic growth.

## **Chapter 7: Summary and conclusions**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This final chapter pulls together everything the study has explored the effectiveness of SETAs training programme in addressing high unemployment in the country. In this chapter, all key elements of the study are tied up and brought together. These comprise of research purpose, research questions, methods of investigations, research findings, theoretical contributions, and the conclusions. The purpose and significance of this chapter is to reflect holistically on what the study revealed and why the findings matter. The chapter does not focus on reporting the findings, it focuses on making meaning from the findings, in the broader context of the unemployment challenge in South Africa and within scholarly discussions on employability, training effectiveness, and human capital development.

The study investigated the views and experiences of participants, employers, and SETA representatives concerning the implementation of SETA training programmes. Given South Africa's ongoing challenges of high unemployment, persistent skills shortages, and mismatches, particularly among young people, the effectiveness of these programmes has been the subject of considerable debate. The study wanted to understand the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in enhancing employability for participants.

The anchor of this study was the human capital theory by Becker (1964). This theory provided a conceptual lens for which the findings were used to interrogate the literature, and vice-versa. The anchor of this study situated the study within broader scholarly conversations on how investment in human capital, through various means, contribute to employability and higher economic returns. This chapter will also be guided the anchor in discovering how the findings from the study affirm, extend, or challenge the assertions made.

The chapter also reverts to the purpose of the study and contextual details to explain why the study was necessary, what gap it sought to address, and how the chosen research setting shaped the research questions and findings. While SETA training programmes are designed make the unemployable, employable, their success varies depending on programme design, institutional efficiency, employer engagement, and broader macroeconomic conditions. This study provides insights that can inform more effective policy, programme design, and implementation strategies.

Finally, the chapter identifies the study's contribution to theory, scholarly debate and policy. This chapter made mention of the policy contributions to the skills development framework in South Africa, as the study's contribution to addressing South Africa's triple challenges.

## **7.2. What did the research study and why does this matter?**

This research explored the effects of SETAs in addressing unemployment and enhancing employability in South Africa, a training programmes and employability perspective. South Africa has identified unemployment as one of its triple challenges, amongst poverty and inequality.

This research studied the extent to which SETA training programmes equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and practical exposure needed to enhance employability. The study centred on uncovering SETA training programmes participants lived experiences during their participation in SETA learnerships and or internships; the perspective of employers on the participants readiness for the workplace; and the insights into SETA training programme design, implementation, and monitoring from SETA representatives.

The study's unit of analysis was employability. The study explored the influence of SETA training programmes in enhancing the employability of participants. All SETA training programmes participants who participated in this study were university graduates and under the age of 35, in order to get a youth perspective on how the youth unemployment challenge can be addressed.

The focus on the youth graduates' participation in this study was intentional as South Africa is facings structural unemployment that disproportionately affects youth. Industries continue to report that they are experiencing skills shortages, while graduates continue to complain about discrimination to access the workplace due to lack of experience. SETA training programmes are designed to close this gap by providing both theoretical and practical experience. Assessing the effectiveness of these programmes is important for continuous improvement and ensuring that public investment in skills development yields meaningful outcomes.

This study matters for many important reasons including contributing the addressing the high unemployment rate, particularly amongst the youth. The study provides insights to inform changes or maintaining the current initiatives aimed at addressing the unemployment challenge. The study also matters because it provides insights into strengthening industry competitiveness, through employers benefiting from more skills employees. The study also matters because of its social equity component. Effective training programmes empower individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to access employment opportunities and improve their socio-economic circumstances.

The importance of this study lies in its academic and practical debates contribution on how SETAs and skills development can be utilised as a vehicle to address unemployment.

### **7.3. What was the study context/setting and why does it matter?**

The study was situated within South Africa's national skills development framework, specifically focusing on SETA training programmes implemented within various organisations and industries. Industries represented by SETA representatives include CETA, MerSETA, SASSETA, and Services SETA. Employer representative from each of these SETAs, responsible, amongst other things, for implementing and managing SETA training programmes were included, as well as individuals who have participated in training programmes offered by one of these, and other SETAs.

This setting matters because South Africa's skills ecosystem is unique. SETAs are mandated by the Skills Development Act to identify sector skills needs, develop programmes, allocate funding, and monitor training programme implementation and report on the effectiveness of these programmes. The setting also matters because it enhances the credibility of the study by providing inputs from the whole triad of the SETA training programmes participants, employers and SETA representatives.

The socio-economic challenges faced by South Africa also makes this setting matter. South Africa is crippling the high unemployment challenge, particularly amongst the youth, the significant misalignment of skills produced by the education system and those required by the market, and the limited collaboration between SETAs and employers. This setting provided insight into resolving all these challenges.

This setting, informed by the triad identified above, directly provided meaningful insights into addressing the challenges and realising the opportunities that SETAs and their training programmes offer. Understanding the role and the importance of this setting is essential for interpreting the findings meaningfully.

#### **7.4. What did we already know or not know about the phenomenon?**

Before the study it was already known that apartheid existed in South Africa. This discriminatory system benefited the minority, while the majority were excluded from real economic participation. Before this study, it was already known the damaging effects of the apartheid system and how, till today, those effects are still felt by the previously marginalised. We also, knew before this study of the high unemployment, the high unemployment in South Africa is highly published, the current unemployment by the Statistics South Africa (2025) is 33%.

Through the literature, and prior, to this study, we already knew that the suggestion of human capital theory, where Becker (1964) posited that investment in education and training improve productivity, employability and earnings. The benefits and importance of experiential learning as suggested by Kolb (1984) that they provide a bridge between theoretical and practical application. Before this study, the role and influence of organisational structures, policies, and systems on training effectiveness, was already known. Literature, done prior to this study, revealed that training programmes improves the likelihood of employment. Goga & van der Westhuizen (2012) also established that SETAs play a positive role in making training and development opportunities available to people who did not have these opportunities before, thus upskilling individuals from the previously disadvantaged groups

Little was known or reported on the effectiveness of these training opportunities. What SETAs report on, each year, is the number of training programmes implemented and the number of participants, not the number of people who have gotten jobs, who have progressed or those who have been retained post SETA training participation. Additionally, not much was known about the involvement and collaboration of SETAs and employers affect the effectiveness of training programmes. We did not know how SETA training programme participants experienced SETA training programmes, and their views on whether SETA training programmes enhance employability. The different perspectives of workplace readiness from employers, was also not known or not fully understood. The effectiveness or lack thereof, of SETA quality assurance processes was not known, prior to this study.

The phenomenon of "employability through SETA programmes" had been discussed theoretically, but there was limited research offering an integrated perspective combining trainee, employer, and SETA experiences. This study therefore fills an important gap by offering multi-perspective insights into how SETA training works in practice.

This study addressed that gap by combining qualitative insights from multiple stakeholder perspectives to evaluate the determinants of the effectiveness of SETA training programme.

### **7.5. What specific questions did the study answer?**

In conducting the study to explore the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing the high unemployment in the country, the following three questions guided the study:

- Research Question 1: To what extent do training programmes enhance the employability of participants?
- Research question 2: How does employer and industry involvement influence the relationship between training programmes and employability outcomes?
- Research Question 3: What are the key challenges and opportunities affecting the effectiveness of SETA programmes in addressing the employability of trainees?

These research questions assisted the study with exploring matters which play a role in ensuring that SETA training programmes are effective in addressing unemployment in the country, while also identifying key challenges and opportunities in ensuring the effective of SETA training programmes.

## **7.6. How did the study answer these questions?**

This study, in attempt to get answers for the research questions, adopted a qualitative research design, which was underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm that emphasises understanding lived experiences and institutional processes from the perspectives of participants. The qualitative approach was the most suitable method for understanding the complexity of perceptions, behaviours, and institutional practices influencing employability.

To collect the data, semi-structured interview guides for SETA training participants, SETA and employers' representatives were designed and employed. These interviews were conducted virtually and in person with all the respondents.

To identify recurring themes and patterns from the collected data, thematic analysis was used using the atlas.ti software. Themes related to the effectiveness of training programmes and challenges associated with SETA training programmes, emerged through systematic coding. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification of patterns across participant responses.

The approach allowed for rich, context-sensitive insights into how SETA training programmes lead or not lead to employability outcomes. The reason for a qualitative methodology was to ensure that participants share their knowledge and experiences with SETA training programmes shaped by their roles within the value chain. The researcher upheld and maintained high standards of ethics, which included getting informed consent from participants and referring to participants as codes, these ensured that the study remains credible and has integrity.

Theory and data triangulation were employed. In terms of theory triangulation, drawing on human capital and experiential learning theories to interpret the value of SETA training programmes. Data triangulation was achieved by the triad of participants, and employers and SETA representatives.

### **7.7. What did the study find, and how did the researcher interpret what was found?**

Research results, from respondents, revealed that SETA training programmes have a positive effect on the employability of participants. Many participants secured employment after completing their programmes, often within host organisations. Those who did not secure employment reported that, SETA training programmes has put them in a better trajectory of getting employment. The study found that there are external factors that contribute to the employability of SETA training programmes participants.

Findings from employers revealed that participants of SETA training programmes are ready for the workplace. Employers gave participants scores of seven to nine out ten for workplace readiness.

the study also identified gaps, which if addressed can be opportunities that can lead to more effectiveness of SETA training programmes in addressing unemployment. Findings reveal that the famous six to eighteen months deration for SETA training programmes is not effective. The submission of WSPs which are incorrect, mislead the designing of SETA training programmes. The study found that learner drop out is amongst the biggest challenge. The lack of tracking and tracing systems was also found by this study.

The researcher, notwithstanding that there are other factors contributing to the employment guarantee, interpreted these findings as evidence of the effectiveness of SETA training programmes in enhancing employability. While training clearly enhances employability by building both theoretical and practical skills, the pathway to employment is mediated by other factors, including but not limited to the quality of the SETA training programme, economic conditions (availability of jobs), amongst others.

The findings affirm Human Capital Theory by demonstrating that training improves knowledge and capability, but they also illustrate that employability is not determined by training alone. Institutional Theory and Experiential Learning Theory provide complementary explanations for the varying levels of success observed among participants.

### **7.8. How does this contribute to the current scholarly debate regarding the phenomenon?**

This study provides an opportunity to contribute to the ever-growing scholarly debate on the relationship between skills development and employability outcomes, particularly in developing economies, such as South Africa. The study expands the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory by highlighting the roles that other factors such as strong collaboration and involvement between SETAs, industries, universities, government, etc, play in ensuring the effectiveness of skills development initiatives. The study expands on the theory by showing that the outcome of employability doesn't not solely depend on individual's skills development, in this case, participation on the training programmes, but on the quality of the training programmes, meaning, what is being offered vs what is being demanded by the industry. The study also enriches the discourse on the importance of growing the economy for job creation by providing empirical evidence that employability outcomes also depend on the availability of jobs. Finally, this study also gives an opportunity to add an African context to the global debate on skills development and employability, this is done by demonstrating how post-apartheid transformation imperatives intersect with market-oriented training policies.

These contributions by this study align with Powell and McGrath (2019) who stated that the approach to skills development should be in line with that of the development of humans and the societies they operate in. This situated skills and training and development within broader socio-economic and ethical objectives. The study thus bridges the gap between economic rationalism (skills as productivity tools) and social justice imperatives (skills as enablers of inclusion and dignity).

### **7.8.1 Why does this matter? What do we now know and what calls can be made for future research and for practice?**

South Africa has a huge unemployment rate, one of the highest in the world. The South African government have mandated SETA to skill the nation for either employment or to start businesses, to deal with the unemployment challenge. This study matters because it sought to assess the effectiveness of SETAs in addressing unemployment, looking specifically at the SETA training programmes. We now know that SETA training programmes have a positive impact in addressing the high unemployment rate in the country. However, SETA training programme participation alone cannot solve the unemployment challenge, the economy needs to grow to create jobs for the trained, those who are trained need to be tracked and traced to check where they are post training, and the training designed need to have involved the industry.

### **7.8.2. Practical implications**

The practical implications include strategic policy adjustments, where there is a need to prioritise the development of new policies, while reviewing existing policies, which should include incentives for those who train and those who employ SETA training participants. The integration of national systems databases is one of the practical implications of this study, where national databases linking SETA graduates to employment outcomes are crucial for evidence-based planning and should be made available. Improved quality assurance systems should be put in place to ensure that the training programmes which are being implemented are addressing what the labour markets are looking for. Collection of sectorial skills should be improved and the quality of what is being submitted should be tested and assured, this should improve the administration of SETAs not just the training programmes. One of the most important practical implications is the development of tracking and tracing systems where SETAs can be able to account for those who have participated in their programmes. Industry involvement and collaboration where SETAs, employers, Universities, Government, always work together to the benefit of the unemployed.

### **7.8.3. Future research directions**

Future research should look into the money that gets invested in SETAs and the outcomes that are derived from that. The outcomes of this research will advise if we should carry on with the SETAs in their current forms. Research is needed to study the movement between different SETAs by participants. This is because one industry might invest in individuals who will leave the industry as soon as something becomes available. This study will further, recommend what is to be done to prevent such issues. By examining whether SETA-funded

training leads to durable employability within the investing industry, the study could challenge the assumption that all training investments yield long-term sectoral returns. This future study will advance the Becker (1964) Human Capital Theory through integrating movements and retention as key variables in assessing return on investment. The movement of participants between SETAs and industries raises questions about sectoral loyalty and talent retention. Theoretically, this could lead to the development of a "sectoral stickiness" model, which explores how institutional structures influence whether trained individuals remain within the sector that invested in them.

## **7.9. Conclusion**

This chapter synthesised the research findings and positioned them within the broader academic discourse. The chapter confirmed, notwithstanding other contributing factors, that SETA training programmes positively enhance the employability of participants. This chapter demonstrated that SETA training programmes are effective in addressing the high unemployment in the country. The moderating factors preventing this effectiveness should be addressed. The study contributes new insights into how training is experienced, how employers perceive trainee readiness, and how institutional dynamics shape training outcomes.

In closure, this study demonstrates that SETA programmes make an important contribution to employability enhancement of participants. They are, however, constrained by external institutional and systematic challenges.

Although SETA and their training programmes play a massive role in addressing unemployment in the country. Findings from this study reaffirm that addressing this challenge fully and more effectively requires more than training, it demands a redefinition of SETA training programme success from “training numbers” to “sustainable employment outcomes,” economic growth for job creation, collaborative governance.

Through integrating insights from theory, policy, and practice, this research contributes to the growing body of evidence calling for a transformative, outcomes-driven skills development system capable of driving inclusive socio-economic growth.

## **7.10. Recommendations**

This study makes the following recommendations in ensuring that SETA training programmes enhance the employability of the training programme participants, thus addressing the high unemployment challenge in South Africa.

SETA training programmes should be designed to address the current and future industries' skills requirements. This will address the current skills mismatch between available skills and the required skills.

The duration and stipends of SETA training programmes should be reviewed. A universal legislated duration and stipend must be enforced. It is recommended that the duration should be aligned with the experiences need in the entry level jobs. The recommended stipend is R10 000 and above, per month. This study found that most current stipends do not cover the monthly cost of living for participants.

This study recommends that the government implement policies which are conducive to economic development and growth. This will contribute to more job creation for SETA training participants, thus addressing the high unemployment challenge.

This study recommends the overhaul of WSPs and SSPs. It is recommended that SETAs come up with another means of informing sectorial skills demands and plans.

The establishment of offices, within SETAs, to track, trace and locate movement of SETA training programme participants during and post participation is recommended. This will provide an accurate account of the effectiveness of training programmes for SETAs.

Increased involvement and collaboration between SETAs, employers, universities, labour, is recommended. It is recommended that all strategic partners should work together to ensure that the high unemployment challenge is addressed.

Finally, to the youth, this study strongly recommends that graduates participate in in SETA training programmes. This study found that SETA training programmes enhance the employability of participants.

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## **Annexture 1: Interview guide for trainees**

### **1. Introduction**

Introducing myself and the purpose of the study.

- Clearly stating that the interview is voluntary, and their responses will be kept confidential.
- Obtaining informed consent to audio-record the interview.
- Reassuring the participant that there are no right or wrong answers and encourage them to speak openly and honestly.

### **2. Section 1: Background Information**

Getting participant's information (e.g., age, gender, educational background)?

- Which SETA-accredited training program did you complete, and when did you complete it?
- What was the duration of the training program?
- What were your expectations of the training program before you started?

### **3. Section 2: Training Program Experience**

Getting information about the attended training programme.

- Can you describe your experience with the training program?
- What did you find most helpful? What did you find least helpful?
- How relevant was the training to the needs of the current labour market demands?
- Did the training provide you with skills that employers are looking for?
- Did the training program provide you with opportunities to apply what you learned in a practical setting?
- How would you rate the quality of the training you received?
- To what extent did the training program improve your knowledge and skills?

### **4. Section 3: Employability Outcomes**

- Did you find employment after completing the training program?
- If yes: How long did it take you to find employment?
- Is your current job related to the training you received?
- Do you believe the training program directly contributed to you getting the job?
- If no: Are you currently seeking employment?
- What challenges have you faced in finding employment?
- Do you believe the training program has helped you in your job search?

- In what ways did the training program enhance your employability?
- What skills do you think are most important for enhancing employability in your sector?
- Did the training program provide you with these skills?

#### **5. Section 4: Conclusion**

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience with the training program or your thoughts on employability?

## **Annexure 2: Interview guide for SETA Officials**

### **1. Introduction**

Introducing myself and the purpose of the study.

- Clearly stating that the interview is voluntary, and their responses will be kept confidential.
- Obtaining informed consent to audio-record the interview.
- Reassuring the participant that there are no right or wrong answers and encourage them to speak openly and honestly.

### **2. Section 1: Background Information**

Getting participant's information (e.g., age, gender, educational background)?

- Please describe your role and responsibilities at the SETA?
- How long have you been involved in managing training programmes
- How long have you been involved in managing training programmes?

### **3. Section 2: Training Programme Design & Relevance**

- What criteria are used to determine the skills or programmes to be offered?
- How do you ensure alignment of training programmes with labour market needs?
- What informs your training programme development decisions?

### **4. Section 3: Implementation & Quality Assurance**

- How are the training programmes implemented, and what quality assurance measures are in place?
- What challenges are commonly encountered during programme delivery?

### **5. Section 4: Employer Involvement and Monitoring**

- To what extent are employers or industry partners involved in designing or evaluating training programmes?
- What challenges or successes have you encountered in employer collaboration?
- Do you track post-training employment outcomes of trainees? If so, how?
- What indicators do you use to determine programme success?
- What have been your observations regarding the employability of trainees after programme completion?

**6. Section 5: Reflections and Recommendations**

- In your view, what makes a training programme truly effective?
- What would you recommend to improve SETA programmes' contribution to employability?

## **Annexture 3: Research Guide for employer representative**

### **1. Introduction**

- Clearly stating that the interview is voluntary, and their responses will be kept confidential. Obtaining informed consent to audio-record the interview.
- Reassuring the participant that there are no right or wrong answers and encourage them to speak openly and honestly.

### **2. Section 1: Background Information**

Getting participant's information (e.g. company name, position, etc)?

- Please tell us about your role and the industry you operate in.
- How are your interactions with a SETA?

### **3. Section 2: Engagement with SETAs**

- Has your organisation partnered with a SETA for training? If yes, please describe how.
- How involved were you in designing, implementing, or evaluating training content?
- Do you think the involvement needs to be improved?

### **4. Section 3: Assessment of Trainees**

- Have you hired any individuals who completed SETA-accredited training?
- How would you rate their readiness and performance upon employment?
- What specific skills or gaps have you observed?

### **5. Section 4: Relevance & Value of Training**

- Do you believe SETA training programmes are aligned with current industry needs?
- What value do you think these programmes bring to employers?

### **6. Section 5: Recommendations**

- What suggestions do you have for improving the relevance or impact of SETA training programmes?
- What role do you think employers should play in shaping future skills development?

### **7. Section 5: Reflections and Recommendations**

- In your view, what makes a training programme truly effective?
- What would you recommend to improve SETA programmes' contribution to employability?



**Table 7: Data Codes and themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Quotations</b>
<b>1. Training Programme Experience</b>	Quality of Training	Experiences of training relevance, depth, and usefulness	"In university we deal only with theory... in the internship, I learned the practical side." (Trainee)
	Workplace Exposure	Level and quality of exposure provided during SETA placement	"The experience was amazing... I experienced the whole value chain." (Trainee)
	Mentorship Support	Presence or absence of coaching during training	"There was no one guiding me, I had to figure things out alone." (Trainee)
	Administrative Delays	Stipend delays, poor communication, slow processing	"We sometimes went two months without stipends... we had no transport money." (Trainee)
	Programme Satisfaction	Overall perceptions of training value	"I became more confident and employable after the internship." (Trainee)
<b>2. Training Programme Expectations</b>	Career Aspirations	Expectations about employment or permanent placement	"I expected to get proper placement and possibly be absorbed." (Trainee)
	Skills Development	Desire to gain new or industry-specific skills	"I joined because I wanted to improve myself and gain skills." (Trainee)
	Employment Prospects	Hopes for job placement after completing programme	"We were told we might be hired, but it never happened." (Trainee)
	Programme Alignment	Expectation that training would match industry needs	"I thought the training would prepare me for real

			workplace requirements.” (Trainee)
<b>3. Employability Outcomes</b>	Improved Employability	Increased confidence, skills, readiness	“After the internship, I was marketable... I had many interviews.” (Trainee)
	Limited Absorption	Employer inability to hire due to budget constraints	“The economy is bad... they could not absorb us even though we performed well.” (Trainee)
	Structural Unemployment	Sector-wide lack of opportunities	“Even with skills, jobs are scarce... the problem is bigger than training.” (Trainee)
	CV and Credential Value	Enhanced portfolio or CV strength	“At least now I have something concrete to show employers.” (Trainee)
	Labour Market Barriers	Immigration issues, poor economic environment	“My permits delayed everything... I could not be hired.” (Trainee)
<b>4. Employer and SETA Involvement</b>	Employer Engagement	Degree of employer participation in training design and placement	“I am involved mostly in implementation, not designing programmes.” (Employer)
	SETA Communication	Effectiveness of communication channels with stakeholders	“We received no updates unless we called them.” (Employer)
	Quality Assurance	SETA monitoring of training providers	“We cannot do proper site visits... there are capacity constraints.” (SETA Official)
	Placement Partnerships	Collaboration between SETAs and	“We have hired more than 15 interns through

		employers for workplace learning	the programme.” (Employer)
<b>5. Systemic and Administrative Challenges</b>	Stipend Delays	Payment inconsistencies affecting participation	“Stipend issues caused many trainees to drop out.” (SETA Official)
	Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	Slow processes, unclear communication, excessive paperwork	“They kept moving me from one person to another.” (Trainee)
	Weak Data Quality	Poor WSP/SSP submissions leading to mismatched training	“Mismatches persist because employers submit inaccurate data.” (SETA Official)
	Training Provider Capacity	Low training provider quality or equipment shortages	“Providers sometimes borrow equipment just for verification.” (SETA Official)
	Limited SETA Capacity	Inadequate staffing for monitoring, verification, and oversight	“We don’t have enough capacity to monitor everyone.” (SETA Official)
<b>6. Opportunities for Improvement</b>	Strong Trainee Motivation	High willingness to learn and develop	“I want to build a future... that’s why I joined.” (Trainee)
	Strengthened Partnerships	Opportunity for SETAs and employers to co-design programmes	“Employers must play a more critical role beyond supplying raw data.” (Employer)
	Data-Driven Skills Planning	Using accurate labour market info for better programmes	“We need accurate information for our skills plans.” (SETA Official)
	Future-Oriented Skills	Training must anticipate technological and industry shifts	“Training should prepare for what the future occupations will look like.” (Employer)

	Better Quality Monitoring	Enhanced oversight of training providers	“Proper monitoring will improve consistency across programmes.” (SETA Official)

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