



**TRACK AND TRACER REPORT
FOR THE 2024/25 FINANCIAL YEAR**

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FOR THE 2024/25 FINANCIAL YEARS**

Abbreviations

AA	Accounting Authority
AET	Adult Education and Training
AR	Absorption Rate
CATHSSETA	Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
INSETA	Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority's
IT	Information Technology
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
NNSDP	National Skills Development Plan
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
NSF	National Skills Fund
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act No. 1 of 1999
PTO	Paid Time Off
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Survey
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SARS	South African Revenue Service
SASSETA	Services Sector Education Training Authority
SDA	Skills Development Act
SDLA	Skills Development Levies Act
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
SRDG	Social Relief of Distress Grant
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
UJ AI	University of Johannesburg Artificial Intelligence
UoT	Universities of Technology UoTs
WIL	work-integrated learning
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)

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Executive Summary

The Track and Tracer Report for the 2024/25 financial year evaluates the employment outcomes of learners who participated in the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) learning programmes. As a key player in the South African skills development landscape, CATHSSETA implements learnerships, internships, bursaries, and work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes to enhance workforce readiness and address critical skills shortages within its designated sub-sectors. This report presents a comprehensive assessment of these interventions, focusing on learners pathways upon completion of the CATHSSETA interventions and the alignment of training with labour market demands.

The study employed a quantitative methodology, collecting data from 319 learners who completed the interviews and 30 employers who responded to the structured surveys. There were 231 unemployed learners, 15 employed learners and 13 learners who were in full time study who participated in the interviews.

Findings indicate significant disparities in employment outcomes, with 58.5% of respondents who answered the question securing full-time employment, while others remained in fixed-term contracts (24%) or casual work (10%). Although many learners benefited from skills development interventions, challenges such as lack of employer support, certification delays, and mismatches between training and job opportunities persisted. Additionally, the study highlights gender and racial imbalances in access to training and employment, with female participants constituting 64% of respondents which is in line with the CATHSSETA targets, yet often facing barriers to career advancement.

One of the critical concerns identified was the low rate of employer contributions to social benefits, with 92% of respondents not receiving medical aid support, 82% lacking employer pension contributions, and 62% reporting no Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) contributions. These findings underscore that graduates are securing casual employments which does not entail employment benefits, and the need for stronger regulatory enforcement and employer engagement to improve working conditions and job security for programme graduates.

Provincial disparities in training access were also observed, with Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal accounting for over 60% of total programme participation, while provinces with high unemployment rates, such as the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, had significantly lower representation. The report further highlights a rural-urban divide, with only 32% of participants are coming from the rural areas, limiting opportunities for workforce integration in less industrialised regions.

Despite these challenges, training programmes contributed to improved employability, with 51% of participants securing jobs immediately upon completion and an additional 29% finding employment within three months. However, 31% of employers indicated concerns about the job proficiency of graduates, citing a lack of hands-on experience and industry-specific skills. Moreover, only 67% of learners reported applying their acquired skills in their current roles, indicating a gap between training content and practical job requirements.

To address these gaps, the report provides targeted recommendations, including expanding employer partnerships, enhancing work-integrated learning opportunities, improving rural training accessibility, strengthening certification processes, and aligning training with high-demand occupations. It also emphasises the importance of post-programme support, including career coaching, job placement assistance, and entrepreneurship development initiatives.

Overall, the findings underscore the critical role of CATHSSETA's skills development initiatives in addressing unemployment and labour market mismatches. However, strategic enhancements are necessary to maximise programme effectiveness, improve employment retention, and ensure equitable access to training opportunities across all provinces and demographic groups. CATHSSETA can strengthen its contribution to South Africa's human capital development, fostering sustainable employment, economic growth, and social mobility by implementing the proposed recommendations.

1. Introduction

The Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) is mandated to facilitate skills development within its designated sub-sectors as outlined in the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 as amended (SDA). As a public entity operating under the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), CATHSSETA implements structured training interventions to address skills shortages and enhance workforce readiness across the arts, culture, conservation, gaming, hospitality, sport, and tourism industries.

Aligned with both the National Development Plan 2023 (National Planning Commission, 2013) and the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030, CATHSSETA's programmes—including learnerships, internships, work-integrated learning (WIL), and bursaries—aim to bridge the gap between education and employment. These interventions are essential in a labour market characterised by high youth unemployment, skills mismatches, and structural barriers to workforce integration. Given the evolving economic landscape, it is imperative to assess whether these learning initiatives effectively equip participants with job-relevant skills and improve their employability and career progression.

This Track and Tracer study was commissioned to evaluate the employment outcomes of learners who completed CATHSSETA-funded training programmes during the 2023/24 financial year. By systematically tracking graduates' post-training experiences, the study provides evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of skills development initiatives, highlighting key successes, persistent challenges, and opportunities for programme enhancement.

1.1 Constitutional, Legislative, and Policy Mandate

CATHSSETA's operations are guided by a robust legal and policy framework that underpins the country's skills development agenda. The foundation of this framework is provided by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, which enshrines the right to education for all citizens. Section 29 of the Constitution stipulates that every South African has the right to basic and further education, underscoring the state's obligation to make education progressively available and accessible through reasonable measures. This constitutional

provision lays the groundwork for policies aimed at promoting skills development and human capital investment as key drivers of economic and social progress.

The Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 (SDA), as amended, serves as the enabling legislation for the establishment and functioning of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). This Act defines the legislative mandate of SETAs and outlines their responsibilities in facilitating industry-relevant training programmes. It also mandates the development of a Sector Skills Plan (SSP) to ensure that training initiatives are aligned with the needs of the labour market. In addition, the SDA requires SETAs to enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with DHET, which provides the framework for performance monitoring and evaluation. Through these mechanisms, the SDA ensures that SETAs, including CATHSSETA, play an active role in addressing skills shortages and fostering workforce development.

The Skills Development Levies Act No. 9 of 1999 (SDLA) complements the SDA by establishing a funding mechanism for skills development initiatives. The Act prescribes how skills development levies are collected through the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and allocated to the National Skills Fund (NSF) and SETAs. It further stipulates the proportion of funds directed toward the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and outlines the permissible uses of these funds, as governed by the SDA and the accompanying SETA Grant Regulations.

The SETA Grant Regulations of 2012 were developed in accordance with the SDA and provide specific guidelines on the disbursement of funds received by SETAs. These regulations require SETAs to set measurable outputs and targets in their Annual Performance Plans (APPs) and demonstrate how they will contribute to achieving the objectives of the NSDP and the SSP. By ensuring accountability and alignment with national priorities, the Grant Regulations play a crucial role in optimizing the impact of skills development funding.

Another key legislative framework that informs CATHSSETA's operations is the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008 (NQFA). This Act established the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which provides a structured and integrated approach to education and training in South Africa. The NQF aims to facilitate learner access, mobility, and progression within the education and training system while enhancing the quality of qualifications. It also seeks to redress past inequalities by promoting inclusivity and equitable participation in skills development opportunities.

In addition to these frameworks, the Public Finance Management Act No. 1 of 1999 (PFMA) sets out financial governance requirements for public entities, including SETAs. The PFMA classifies SETAs as Schedule 3A public entities and mandates strict financial accountability

and transparency in their operations. It designates the Board of a SETA as the Accounting Authority (AA) responsible for ensuring sound financial management, while the Minister of Higher Education and Training serves as the Executive Authority overseeing SETA performance.

1.2 CATHSSETA Learning Programmes

As part of its mandate, CATHSSETA implements a range of learning programmes designed to equip learners with industry-relevant skills and enhance their employability. These programmes include learnerships, internships, work-integrated learning (WIL) placements, bursaries, and skills programmes.

1.2.1 Learnership Programme

A learnership is a structured work-based **learning programme** that combines practical workplace experience with theoretical instruction to equip learners with industry-relevant skills and competencies. Typically, the programme consists of 30% theoretical learning and 70% practical workplace training, ensuring that learners gain both academic knowledge and hands-on experience (DHET, 2021).

A learnership is a tripartite agreement involving the learner, the employer, and an accredited training provider. Each stakeholder has clearly defined roles, which are formalised in a written contract. The learner commits to completing both the academic and workplace components within the stipulated period. The employer provides structured on-the-job training under the guidance of a mentor, ensuring that the learner applies theoretical concepts in a real-world setting. The training provider, accredited by the relevant Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA), delivers the formal learning component, assesses learner progress, and ensures compliance with National Qualifications Framework (NQF) standards.

The programme is structured to develop a broad range of competencies, including technical expertise, occupational-specific skills, and essential life skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Learnerships are particularly effective in enhancing workplace readiness, improving employment prospects, and bridging skills gaps in priority economic sectors (Kruss et al., 2014).

The core objective of a learnership programme is to provide learners with an opportunity to earn an NQF-registered qualification while simultaneously gaining relevant work experience. By integrating structured learning with industry exposure, learnerships play a crucial role in

preparing individuals for sustainable employment, particularly in sectors where skills shortages persist.

Beyond technical training, learnerships serve as a mechanism for redressing historical inequalities in access to education and employment. Many previously disadvantaged individuals, particularly youth and first-time job seekers, face significant barriers to entering the formal workforce. Learnerships offer a structured pathway for these individuals to acquire the skills, experience, and professional networks necessary to secure stable employment (Powell & Reddy, 2016).

Additionally, learnerships contribute to workforce productivity and economic growth by aligning training outcomes with industry demands. Employers benefit from a skilled pipeline of employees, reducing recruitment costs and ensuring that new entrants are competent in their respective roles. Moreover, research indicates that individuals who complete learnerships have significantly higher employment rates than those who lack practical industry exposure (Ismail, 2018).

By fostering a culture of lifelong learning and continuous professional development, learnerships also encourage career progression. Many graduates of learnership programmes pursue further education or specialised training, advancing within their respective fields. The programme's ability to combine theoretical knowledge with experiential learning ensures that participants develop both technical proficiency and workplace adaptability, making them highly employable in the labour market.

1.2.2 Internship Programme

An **internship programme** is a structured workplace-based training initiative designed for graduates from universities and universities of technology (UoTs). The primary objective is to provide graduates with practical industry experience, allowing them to apply their academic knowledge in a real-world work environment. By offering structured on-the-job learning opportunities, internships serve as an essential bridge between higher education and formal employment, particularly for graduates with limited work experience (DHET, 2021).

Internships are instrumental in fast-tracking high-level skills development and enhancing employability, especially in fields where practical exposure is a prerequisite for entry into the labour market. Many graduates complete their degrees with strong theoretical foundations but lack hands-on experience, making it difficult for them to transition into full-time employment. Internship programmes help address this challenge by providing graduates with sector-

specific competencies, improving their confidence, workplace adaptability, and professional readiness (Ismail, 2018).

Unlike learnerships, which are formally structured and regulated with defined learning outcomes, internships tend to be more flexible. The employer determines the content, scope, and duration of the programme, which can range from 12 to 24 months. The absence of fixed curricula allows for greater customisation, enabling interns to gain experience relevant to industry-specific demands. However, this flexibility also means that the quality and depth of learning may vary depending on the organisation's capacity to provide structured mentorship and skills development (CHE, 2021).

The primary benefit for graduates participating in internship programmes includes first-hand workplace experience, which enhances career prospects and competency development. Employers also benefit from the opportunity to assess and train potential long-term employees, reducing recruitment risks while fostering a pipeline of skilled professionals (Powell & Reddy, 2016).

Internships focus on work experience in fields identified as scarce and/or critical skills sectors. By exposing graduates to real-world work environments, the programme ensures that interns develop occupational and professional competencies that align with market needs. The structured nature of internships enables participants to apply theoretical knowledge, refine technical expertise, and cultivate essential soft skills, such as interpersonal communication, professional confidence, self-efficacy, and adaptability (Ismail, 2018).

Internship placements are typically full-time and hosted by government institutions, private sector organizations, or non-governmental entities. The duration of an internship can range from 12 to 24 months, depending on sectoral demands and employer requirements. Upon completion, interns are expected to have gained competency in work-related tasks, improved their problem-solving abilities, and strengthened their understanding of professional workplace dynamics (DHET, 2022).

Studies indicate that graduates who complete structured internship programmes are significantly more likely to secure long-term employment compared to those who enter the labour market without prior work experience. Research also suggests that internships contribute to improved career trajectories, enabling graduates to transition into professional roles more seamlessly (Cloete, 2021).

By providing structured industry exposure, internship programmes play a pivotal role in addressing skills mismatches, enhancing employment readiness, and fostering economic inclusion among young graduates. Expanding access to high-quality internships remains a

key priority for South Africa's skills development agenda, particularly in the context of rising youth unemployment and industry-driven workforce demands (Stats SA, 2023).

1.2.3 Work-integrated learning (WIL) Programme

The **Work-integrated learning** (WIL) programme, particularly those for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college students, are designed to provide learners with structured workplace experience that enhances their employment prospects and professional competencies. By bridging the gap between theory and practical application, WIL serves as a pathway to formal employment or self-employment. Through industry exposure, learners develop relevant technical skills, workplace adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. This structured learning approach ensures that TVET students are equipped with both occupational expertise and essential soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking (CHE, 2021).

TVET qualifications typically span three years, preparing students for specialised technical and vocational careers. In some cases, graduates may articulate to a University of Technology (UoT) or pursue advanced training in their field (DHET, 2022). WIL provides practical industry exposure, which is an essential component of TVET qualifications. Placements typically last up to 18 months, enabling learners to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world settings and gain valuable work experience. These placements are facilitated through partnerships between TVET institutions, employers, and industry bodies, ensuring alignment with curriculum requirements.

Upon completion, learners are expected to have gained relevant competencies that meet industry standards, improving their employability (Cloete, 2021). Research indicates that TVET graduates who undergo structured workplace learning have a significantly higher chance of securing long-term employment compared to those without such exposure (Powell & Reddy, 2016). The programme also fosters entrepreneurial skills, preparing learners to engage in self-employment or business ventures in their respective fields (DHET, 2022). By integrating workplace experience with education, WIL reduces skills mismatches, strengthens industry-academic linkages, and contributes to South Africa's skilled workforce.

In addition to these interventions, CATHSSETA administers a bursary programme. The primary objective of a bursary programme is to expand access to higher education for previously disadvantaged learners while addressing skills shortages within critical economic sectors, both within the Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality, and Sport sectors and across South

Africa more broadly. By providing financial support to eligible learners, bursary programmes help remove financial barriers to tertiary education, thereby fostering a more inclusive and skilled workforce.

1.2.4 Bursary Programme

Bursary programme contribute to the development of a continuous supply of skilled professionals in occupations classified as scarce and critical skills (DHET, 2021). These initiatives are particularly crucial in sectors where specialised expertise is in high demand, ensuring that industry-specific training gaps are addressed. Beyond workforce development, bursary schemes also play a pivotal role in improving service delivery within the public sector, where skills shortages are often most pronounced.

For unemployed youth, bursaries serve as a pathway to obtaining formal qualifications, equipping them with job-ready competencies that enhance their employability and promote economic inclusion. For employed individuals, bursary funding facilitates career progression, allowing beneficiaries to upgrade their qualifications and skills, which in turn enhances productivity and innovation within organisations. The bursary is a monetary award made towards learner fees. This intervention is a grant awarded to unemployed learners enrolled in qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF level 5 - 8) and employed learners enrolled on part or full qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (CATHSSETA, 2024). Employers also benefit, as bursary support for staff development encourages ongoing professional learning and aligns workforce capabilities with industry demands, particularly in fields experiencing acute skills shortages.

CATHSSETA's bursary intervention supports both employed and unemployed learners by providing financial assistance for higher education and technical vocational training. Recipients of these bursaries are enrolled in accredited institutions, ensuring that their training is aligned with national skills development priorities and sectoral workforce demands (CATHSSETA, 2024).

By enhancing access to education, bursary programmes contribute to improved career prospects for beneficiaries. Upon completing their studies, bursary holders are expected to apply their skills within their respective fields, thereby addressing labour market demands and fostering economic growth. The skills acquired through bursary-funded education are strategically targeted at mid and high-level qualifications, which strengthen industry expertise and innovation capacity.

In addition to technical and occupational competencies, bursary recipients also develop essential soft skills, including management, leadership, and interpersonal relationship-building skills. These competencies are increasingly recognised as critical success factors in the modern workplace, enhancing professional adaptability and team collaboration.

1.2.5 Skills Programme

Finally, skills programmes offer short-term training interventions that provide learners with unit-standard-based qualifications. These programmes are often tailored to meet employer-specific skills needs and can contribute to a full NQF qualification when learners complete additional unit standards over time.

A learner may obtain credits towards a registered qualification through completing appropriate skills programmes. Skills programmes are an easy and effective way to upskill your people. These programmes enable them to apply their new knowledge in your workplace immediately.

Skill development programmes are beneficial for a range of individuals, including students, job seekers, and professionals looking to advance their careers or transition to new fields. They can be offered by educational institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private companies.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to:

- Objective 1: Determine the pathways of learners who have completed the Learning programmes intervention.
- Objective 2: Determine the relevance of the Learning Programmes interventions among beneficiaries.
- Objective 3: Determine the perception of the learning programmes interventions among beneficiaries.
- Objective 4: Determine the programmes challenges and success thus far.

1.4 Significance of the Study

South Africa's high unemployment rate—particularly among youth (41%) and first-time job seekers—necessitates targeted skills development strategies to improve workforce absorption (Statistics South Africa, 2024). While Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) play a vital role in bridging the skills gap, there remains limited data on the long-term effectiveness of their programmes.

Tracer studies serve as critical evaluation tools, offering quantitative insights into graduate employment patterns, industry feedback, and systemic training gaps. This study contributes to the broader discourse on skills development, informing policy adjustments, curriculum enhancements, and employer partnerships to strengthen job placement outcomes.

Findings from this study will be instrumental in guiding CATHSSETA's strategic planning, ensuring that training investments yield sustainable employment opportunities and contribute meaningfully to South Africa's socioeconomic development.

1.5 Structure of the Report

- The report is structured as follows:
- Chapter 1: Introduction – Provides background to the track and tracer study with focus on the legislative and policy frameworks guiding skills development.
- Chapter 2: Literature Review – Examines employment trends, youth unemployment, the role of SETAs, and the importance of tracer studies in evaluating skills development effectiveness.
- Chapter 3: Methodology – Details the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and analytical framework.
- Chapter 4: Presentation and Interpretation of the Result – Presents the analysis emanating from the study based on the four objectives underpinning the tracking and tracer study.
- Chapter 5: Discussion of the findings and recommendations – Outlines actionable strategies to enhance programme impact, including policy reforms, industry engagement, and learner support mechanisms.
- Chapter 6: Conclusion – Summarises key findings and their implications for future skills development initiatives.

This Track and Tracer Study serves as a benchmark for assessing training effectiveness, offering data-driven recommendations to refine CATHSSETA's approach to workforce

development. By addressing identified gaps and enhancing programme alignment with labour market needs, CATHSSETA can play a pivotal role in building a skilled, competitive, and employable workforce for South Africa's future economic growth.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2. Introduction

The literature review examines employment trends, the role of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in addressing unemployment, and the importance of track and tracer studies in evaluating training effectiveness. It further assesses the impact of skills development interventions on employment outcomes within CATHSSETA subsectors, alongside their contribution to socio-economic development. The chapter also explores youth employment trends, current employment benefits in South Africa, and strategies to combat unemployment. By synthesising existing literature and empirical data, this chapter provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between skills development and employment creation.

2.1 Employment Status in South Africa

The South African labour market experienced a mixture of positive and challenging trends in the fourth quarter of 2024. According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2024), there was a net increase in employment, signalling some degree of economic recovery. However, this was accompanied by a contraction in the labour force, largely due to a rise in discouraged work-seekers and individuals not actively participating in the job market. This suggests that, while more people are securing employment, others have lost confidence in job prospects, leading to reduced labour market participation.

Despite this dual dynamic, the official unemployment rate declined to 31.9%, compared to 32.1% in the previous quarter (Stats SA, 2024). Additionally, the expanded unemployment rate, which includes discouraged job-seekers, also did not change from previous quarter, 41.9%, reflecting a broader reduction in joblessness. A key contributing factor to this positive shift in the employment 90, 000, in the fourth quarter indicating that job absorption in specific sectors has improved.

A sectoral breakdown reveals that community services, finance, and trade were the primary drivers of employment growth, with these industries absorbing a significant share of new labour entrants (Stats SA, 2024). The construction sector, in particular, benefitted from infrastructure investments, while community services employment was bolstered by public

sector job expansion. Conversely, finance, private households, and manufacturing recorded job losses, highlighting economic shifts and declining employment demand in some industries.

At a regional level, employment growth was unevenly distributed across provinces. The Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, recorded notable job gains, whereas Free State, North West and Limpopo experienced employment declines (Stats SA, 2024). This geographic disparity emphasises the need for targeted economic interventions that address region-specific labour market conditions.

2.1.1 Youth Unemployment: Persistent Challenges Amid Marginal Improvements

Youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing issues in South Africa's labour market. The 15 to 34-year-old demographic continues to face significant barriers to employment, including limited work experience, skills mismatches, and declining labour absorption rates (National Treasury, 2023). However, recent data indicates marginal progress in youth employment rates.

The youth (15-34 years) remain vulnerable in the labour market. The results for the fourth quarter of 2024 show that the total number of unemployed youth decreased by 133 000 to 4,7 million, while employed youth recorded an increase of 37 000 to 5,8 million. As a result, the youth unemployment rate decreased from 45,5% in the third quarter of 2024 to 44,6% in the fourth quarter of 2024 (Stats SA, 2024).

Although this incremental improvement is encouraging, youth unemployment remains alarmingly high and requires urgent policy interventions. The chronic lack of entry-level job opportunities, a mismatch between education outputs and industry needs, and structural labour market rigidities continue to hinder meaningful youth employment integration (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2022).

To address these challenges, policymakers must expand work-integrated learning programmes, enhance vocational training pathways, and incentivise employers to absorb more young workers (Kruss et al., 2014). The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) also presents an opportunity to equip young job seekers with digital skills that align with future job market demands (UJ AI & Big Data Institute, 2023).

2.1.2 Structural Trends and Persistent Labour Market Challenges

While declining unemployment rates and rising job creation are positive indicators, structural challenges continue to undermine labour market stability. One of the most concerning trends is the contraction of the labour force, with a decline of 79,000 individuals actively seeking employment (Stats SA, 2024). This trend, driven by a rise in discouraged work-seekers and economically inactive individuals, highlights deepening structural weaknesses within the labour market. A shrinking workforce reduces overall economic productivity and may lead to long-term underemployment risks.

Another persistent challenge is the dominance of informal sector employment, which absorbs a significant proportion of new jobs. While the informal economy provides income opportunities for many, it often lacks social protection, job security, and pathways for long-term career growth (National Treasury, 2023). This can create a cycle of precarious employment, where workers remain trapped in low-paying, unstable jobs without prospects for advancement or skills development.

2.1.3 Positive Employment Trends and Opportunities for Growth

Despite persistent labour market weaknesses, several positive trends highlight opportunities for sustained job creation and economic inclusion. The increase in employment, culture, arts, tourism, hospitality and sport sector, reflects a growing demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour (DHET, 2022).

The decline in overall unemployment rates suggests that job market conditions are improving, albeit at a gradual pace. Lower unemployment rates indicate that more individuals are securing employment, which may positively impact household income stability and economic resilience.

Additionally, regional employment disparities provide opportunities for targeted interventions. Provinces that experienced strong job growth, such as Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal can serve as models for localised employment strategies, focusing on sector-specific economic drivers (Stats SA, 2024).

2.1.4 Addressing Youth Employment Barriers and Informal Labour Market Vulnerabilities

To tackle youth unemployment effectively, stakeholders must prioritise workforce development initiatives that focus on job readiness, skills alignment, and employment incentives (Kruss et al., 2014). Expanding learnerships, internships, and entrepreneurship development programmes can help bridge the education-to-employment gap (DHET, 2022).

Simultaneously, efforts should be made to formalise segments of the informal labour market, ensuring that workers have access to social protection, skills development, and career progression pathways. Investing in digital transformation initiatives and expanding access to remote work opportunities can also enhance labour market accessibility for young job seekers (UJ AI & Big Data Institute, 2023).

In summary, the South African labour market in the third quarter of 2024 showed signs of recovery, with lower unemployment rates and job growth in key sectors. However, persistent youth unemployment, labour force contraction, and informal sector vulnerabilities continue to challenge sustained economic growth. Moving forward, strategic policy interventions must focus on upskilling the workforce, expanding digital job opportunities, and strengthening employer-education partnerships. Addressing labour market disparities and structural weaknesses will be critical to ensuring a more inclusive and resilient employment landscape.

2.2 The role of SETAs in Responding to Unemployment

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET), published in 2013, articulates South Africa's strategic vision for transforming its education landscape by 2030. This policy framework emphasises three foundational principles: integration, articulation, and quality. The effective implementation of these principles is deemed essential for dismantling the remnants of apartheid-era educational disparities and fostering a society equipped with the skills necessary for employment and improved living standards.

Integration within the PSET system refers to the creation of a cohesive network where all educational institutions function as interconnected components of a unified whole. This encompasses Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, universities, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), financial bodies like the National Skills Fund (NSF) and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), as well as quality assurance entities such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Quality

Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). SETAs, in particular, play a pivotal role by offering competency-based qualifications, facilitating learnerships, and implementing skills development programmes that align with industry demands. Their sector-specific expertise ensures that training initiatives are tailored to the unique needs of various industries, thereby enhancing workforce readiness and productivity (Nzimande, 2024).

Articulation within the PSET framework ensures that all qualifications are structured to provide clear, progressive pathways for learners. This design allows individuals to enter the education system at levels corresponding to their current competencies and advance seamlessly through higher National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels. Such a system is inclusive, accommodating learners who have completed Grade 12, those who did not finish secondary education, early school leavers, and even individuals with no formal schooling. The goal is to eliminate educational dead ends, enabling every learner to achieve qualifications that meet or exceed the equivalent of Grade 12.

Quality in education and training is paramount. The White Paper (DoE, 1995) asserts that mere access to education is insufficient; the focus must be on providing high-calibre education and training that can effectively combat poverty and inequality. SETAs are instrumental in this regard, as they are tasked with collecting precise data on sector-specific skill requirements and workforce competencies. This information is critical for developing strategies that are both relevant and responsive to the evolving economic landscape. Moreover, a quality education system is holistic, aiming to cultivate not only job-specific skills but also responsible citizens who are ethically grounded, innovative, and capable of contributing meaningfully to a democratic society.

The National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030 further delineates the role of SETAs in addressing unemployment and fostering economic growth. The NSDP emphasises the importance of identifying occupations that are in high demand and ensuring that the PSET system is responsive to these occupational shortages. SETAs are entrusted with bridging the gap between education and the labour market by facilitating workplace-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships and learnerships, that are directly aligned with industry needs. This alignment is crucial for equipping the workforce with skills that are immediately applicable, thereby enhancing employability and productivity (Fourie et al., 2024).

Despite the strategic frameworks in place, the SETA system faces significant challenges. Critiques have been raised regarding inefficiencies and misalignments between qualifications offered and actual job market demands. Concerns include the distortion of SETAs' intended purpose, leading to scenarios where funding does not effectively reach those in need.

Addressing these issues necessitates a concerted effort to realign SETA functions with their foundational objectives, ensuring that resources are utilised efficiently to maximise impact on unemployment and skills development.

In summary, CATHSSETA is particularly integral to South Africa's strategy for reducing unemployment through targeted skills development. By adhering to the principles outlined in the White Paper for PSET and the directives of the NSDP 2030, and by addressing existing systemic challenges, CATHSSETA can enhance their effectiveness in creating a skilled workforce that meets the demands of the economy, thereby contributing to national growth and the upliftment of society.

2.3 The Role and Importance of Track and Tracer Studies

Tracer studies, also known as graduate destination surveys, are pivotal tools in assessing the impact of educational programmes by tracking the trajectories of graduates' post-completion. These studies provide invaluable insights into the relevance of training received, employment status, and the alignment between educational outcomes and labour market demands. In the context of South Africa's evolving educational landscape, tracer studies have become instrumental in informing policy decisions and enhancing the quality of education.

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013) underscores the necessity of robust partnerships between educational institutions and employers. It emphasises that practical workplace experience, facilitated through initiatives like Work Integrated Learning (WIL), is essential for students transitioning into the labour market. Such collaborations ensure that curricula remain responsive to industry needs, thereby enhancing graduate employability.

Employers today seek graduates who not only possess academic knowledge but also demonstrate adaptability, critical thinking, and the ability to integrate seamlessly into workplace cultures. Studies have highlighted a gap between the skills imparted by academic institutions and those demanded by employers, particularly in areas such as problem-solving, creative thinking, and adaptability (Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). This disparity underscores the importance of tracer studies in identifying specific competencies that require emphasis within educational programmes.

A comprehensive understanding of employability extends beyond basic skills. Rothwell and Arnold (2007) propose a multifaceted model encompassing individual attributes, academic performance, and awareness of labour market dynamics. This perspective aligns with findings

that emphasise the need for graduates to develop competencies in communication, teamwork, and continuous learning to navigate the complexities of modern workplaces (GVI, 2023).

In the South African context, the implementation of tracer studies has been instrumental in addressing challenges related to higher education transformation and graduate employability. Research indicates that these studies provide critical data for quality assurance, curriculum development, and policy formulation, thereby enhancing the responsiveness of educational institutions to socio-economic needs (Senekal & Munro, 2019).

Finally, tracer studies serve as essential instruments in bridging the gap between education and employment. By systematically tracking graduate outcomes, these studies inform continuous improvements in educational quality, ensure alignment with labour market requirements, and ultimately contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation.

2.4 Skills Development Interventions

Skills development is globally recognised as a pivotal driver for productive employment, enhanced productivity, private-sector advancement, inclusive economic growth, and poverty alleviation. In South Africa, this focus has intensified, especially in the wake of economic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to operational disruptions across various sectors, including the closure of educational institutions, which in turn affected both entrepreneurial activities and the continuous learning opportunities essential for knowledge and skill enhancement.

The pandemic-induced closures, however, also unveiled opportunities for the expansion of virtual education. The adoption of e-learning platforms became a critical strategy to ensure the uninterrupted distribution of knowledge and training. This shift not only maintained educational continuity but also highlighted the potential of digital learning modalities to reach broader audiences, thereby democratising access to education.

Empirical evidence underscores the economic benefits of skills development. A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicates that each additional year of education can boost African learners' earnings by up to 11.4%, the highest return on education globally. This statistic emphasises the profound impact that investment in education and skill acquisition can have on individual income levels and, by extension, on national economic growth (OECD, 2024).

In South Africa, the urgency for robust skills development programmes is further accentuated by the high unemployment rates. As of the second quarter of 2024, the unemployment rate

stood at 33.5%, with youth unemployment (ages 15 to 24) alarmingly high at 60.8%. These figures highlight the critical need for targeted interventions that equip the workforce, particularly the youth, with relevant skills that align with market demands (World bank, 2024).

To address these challenges, South Africa has implemented several initiatives aimed at bridging the skills gap. The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) play a pivotal role in this endeavour by identifying and addressing the skills demands within their respective sectors. Their approach encompasses several key strategies:

Engagement with Workplaces: SETAs actively collaborate with employers to gather detailed data on the current skills of the workforce and anticipate future needs. This is achieved through structured templates and regular consultations, ensuring that training programmes are aligned with industry requirements. For instance, the Education, Training and Development Practices SETA (ETDP SETA), in its 2023/24 Annual Report, emphasises the importance of such partnerships in tailoring effective skills development initiatives (ETDP SETA, 2024).

Stakeholder Collaboration: Beyond employers, SETAs engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders—including labour unions, governmental bodies, and industry associations—to gain insights into sectoral trends and future skill demands. This collaborative approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the labour market, facilitating proactive planning and intervention. The Local Government SETA (LGSETA), in its 2024/25 Sector Skills Plan, highlights the significance of such stakeholder engagement in shaping responsive skills development strategies (LGSETA, 2024).

Continuous Analysis of Sectoral Trends: By perpetually analysing data from workplace engagements and stakeholder inputs, SETAs can identify emerging trends and align their programmes with national policy priorities. This dynamic approach allows for the adaptation of training initiatives to meet evolving economic and technological landscapes. The Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services SETA (MerSETA), in its 2024/25 Sector Skills Plan, underscores the necessity of such ongoing analysis to remain attuned to industry shifts (MerSETA, 2024).

Guiding Skills Supply: SETAs utilise the insights gained from their analyses to steer the educational and training ecosystem, ensuring that the supply of skills matches the demand. This involves influencing curriculum development, promoting specific qualifications, and supporting institutions that deliver relevant training. The Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA), in its 2024/25 Sector Skills Plan, details how such guidance is vital for cultivating a workforce equipped to meet public sector needs (PSETA, 2024).

Management of Levy-Grant Systems: Through the administration of levy-grant mechanisms, SETAs collect funds from employers to finance skills development programmes. This system ensures that financial resources are allocated effectively, prioritising high-quality qualifications and practical workplace experiences. The Services SETA, as outlined on its official website, delineates its role in facilitating such programmes to enhance both employed and unemployed learners' competencies (Services SETA, 2024).

Targeted Training Initiatives: Recognising the diverse needs of the workforce, SETAs design programmes catering to current employees, students poised to enter the job market, and the unemployed. These initiatives are informed by labour market analyses and are integral to career guidance efforts, assisting individuals in mapping out their educational and professional trajectories. The ETDP SETA's research reports provide insights into how such targeted training addresses specific sectoral skill gaps. (ETDP SETA, 2024).

Enhancing Institutional Capacity: SETAs are committed to bolstering both public and private educational institutions' abilities to deliver pertinent and high-quality training. This includes providing support for curriculum development, educator training, and infrastructure improvements, thereby ensuring that training providers can meet the evolving demands of the labour market. The Services SETA's strategic documents outline efforts to enhance institutional capacity, ensuring the delivery of quality education and training. (Services SETA, 2024)

In summary, SETAs are instrumental in orchestrating a cohesive skills development framework in South Africa. Through meticulous data collection, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic funding, they ensure that the nation's workforce is well-equipped to drive economic prosperity and social advancement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Design

Evaluation design serves as a structured and systematic plan that guides research by outlining clear objectives, methodologies, and techniques essential to achieving research goals (Khanday, 2023). Specifically, this study adopted an outcome evaluation design, which is an approach aimed at determining the effectiveness of a programme by measuring its actual outcomes against predefined objectives. Outcome evaluation focuses on assessing the changes or benefits resulting directly from the intervention - in this case, the funded learning programmes by CATHSSETA. This evaluation approach guided the tracer study by establishing clear indicators of success related to employment outcomes, such as employment status, job relevance, career advancement, and income improvements among participants. The tracer study employed a quantitative research methodology, utilising structured survey instruments to systematically measure these outcomes. By adopting outcome evaluation, the study was able to objectively evaluate the extent to which the CATHSSETA learning programmes contributed to positive employment results among learners, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of the funded initiatives.

The study involved administering structured questionnaires using the CATI system to 319 learners who participated in CATHSSETA programmes and 30 employers who hosted and supported these learners. This approach enabled the collection of quantifiable data regarding employment status, further education, and training effectiveness. By utilising a survey-based methodology, the study provided statistically valid insights into the relationship between CATHSSETA training interventions and employment trends.

3.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedures used to identify, collect, process, and analyse data relevant to a study (Potgieter, 2017). This study employed a quantitative survey research design, which is effective for collecting structured responses from a large sample of participants. Quantitative research emphasises objective measurement, numerical analysis, and statistical interpretation, making it suitable for evaluating trends and relationships within employment data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The survey technique was selected to ensure the collection of standardised, quantifiable data. The study utilised two distinct structured questionnaires—one designed for learners and

another for employers. These questionnaires focused on assessing employment status, skill application, career progression, and perceptions of training effectiveness. The structured nature of the survey facilitated statistical comparisons and trend analysis, ensuring that the findings were both representative and generalisable.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using computer assisted telephonic interviews (CATI) for all study participants. Computer-Assisted Telephonic Interviews (CATI) is a survey methodology that involves conducting structured telephone interviews guided by computer software. Interviewers follow standardised questionnaires displayed on a computer screen and input responses directly into a digital database in real-time. This approach ensures consistency, accuracy, and efficiency in data collection. CATI systems automate aspects like dialling numbers, scheduling call-backs, and managing participant data, which significantly streamlines the interviewing process.

The questionnaire was piloted with a group of 10 learners to ensure clarity and reliability. The pilot interviews confirmed that questions were clear and understandable, with minor adjustments made to improve phrasing and sequencing based on participants' feedback. Data from the pilot were analysed qualitatively to refine wording, eliminate ambiguities, and improve the overall validity and reliability of the survey instrument. No data from the pilot interviews were included in the final analysis; instead, they were used exclusively to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the survey instrument.

Each questionnaire was designed to cover the objectives of the tracer and track study to: determine the pathways of learners who have completed the Learning programmes intervention (i.e., how many learners are employed overall, how many learners are employed and self-employed, how many learners are studying, how many learners are unemployed and the reasons thereof and the type and quality of employment provided, time taken to acquire employment and challenges associated with self-employment and unemployment); determine the relevance of the Learning Programmes interventions among beneficiaries (i.e., are the programmes aligned, are the learners able to apply and use what they have learned, do employers feel that learners are well equipped); determine the perception of the learning programmes interventions among beneficiaries (i.e., learners and employers overview of the programme as well as satisfaction and likelihood to recommend the programme); and determine the programmes challenges and success thus far.

3.4 Target Population

The target population comprised all learners who participated in CATHSSETA's learnerships, internships, Work Integrated Learning (WIL), bursaries, and skills programmes during the 2023/24 financial year. The total population of eligible participants who completed training was 3105 learners across various subsectors, along with a range of host employers who facilitated workplace-based training.

The study sought to survey a representative sample of 319 learners out of the database of 3105 learners and 30 employers from a database of 90 ensuring a balanced assessment of training outcomes and employer perspectives. The total database sampling was used.

3.5 Sampling Method

A database of 3105 was used where all learners were contacted where possible to ensure adequate representation of different CATHSSETA learning programmes and subsectors. Stratification was based on the type of training programme (learnership, internship, WIL, bursary, or skills programme) and employment sector to account for variations in career outcomes.

The final respondents included 319 learners and 30 employers of a database of 90 employers, making a total of 349 respondents as shown in Table 1. This sample size was sufficient to achieve statistically valid conclusions regarding program effectiveness.

Table 1: Learners and Employers Interviewed

Stakeholder Type	Actual Respondents
Number of learners on the database	4433
Number of learners with contact details	3104
Participants in the interviews	342
Number of learners (Beneficiaries) who completed all questions of interviews	319
Employers who participated in the interviews	30
No unemployed learners who participated in interviews	231
No of learners studying full time	13
No employed learners who participated in the interviews	15
No of learners who did not respond to employment question	60

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected survey data was analysed using descriptive statistical techniques in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and pivot tables, were used to summarise key trends in employment outcomes, programme satisfaction, and further education pursuits. The dataset was cleaned to remove incomplete or inconsistent responses, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of findings. Pivot tables were utilised to systematically explore patterns within the data, structured according to the study's predefined evaluation objectives. This approach ensured that data analysis directly addressed the specific outcomes intended by the evaluation framework. Consequently, assessments were made explicitly against objectives related to employment status, skills relevance, skills utilisation, career progression, and other specified outcome indicators, maintaining coherence and clarity throughout the analysis process.

3.7 Limitations and Challenges

Several challenges were encountered during the study. One key limitation was the availability and accuracy of participant contact details. While CATHSSETA provided a comprehensive database, some learners' contact details were outdated or incorrect, resulting in lower response rates and potential non-response bias and this was mitigated by using all the learners on the database to illicit a response. The database consisted of 4433 learners and only 3104 contactable learners of which 319 completed the survey. The target of 30 employers was reached. This limitation impacted the representativeness and generalisability of the findings, as responses might not fully reflect the experiences of all targeted learners. However, the high employer response rate helped offset this issue to some extent by ensuring sufficient employer input through a process of triangulation of the information. Additionally, the absence of comparative sector-specific benchmarks was a challenge, limiting contextual analysis. To address this, the study utilised national employment data as a reference point, thereby providing a broader context to interpret and validate findings.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the study to ensure participant confidentiality, informed consent, and data protection. Confidentiality and anonymity was upheld by ensuring

that personal information remained secure, and responses were anonymised to protect participants' identities. Informed consent was obtained after participants were briefed on the study's objectives, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research process was conducted with full transparency, ensuring that participants understood how their data would be used. No personal identifiers were used in the final analysis, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards

Data security measures were implemented to protect the collected information, with access restricted to authorised research personnel. Triangulation was used to enhance research validity and integrity by employing multiple data collection methods. The inclusion of both learner and employer interviews ensured a balanced perspective on the outcomes of CATHSSETA learning programmes.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the evaluation design used in the tracer study, highlighting the adoption of a quantitative survey approach to systematically evaluate employment outcomes and the effectiveness of CATHSSETA programmes. A structured survey technique was employed, ensuring measurable insights into learner experiences and career trajectories.

A total of 319 learners and 30 employers participated, providing statistically significant data on employment status, further education, and perceptions of training programmes. Statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential techniques, ensuring the robustness of findings.

Despite challenges related to response rates and data availability, rigorous sampling, data cleaning, and follow-up techniques enhanced the reliability of the study. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, ensuring confidentiality and data integrity. This methodology establishes a solid foundation for the study's findings, providing valuable insights into the impact of CATHSSETA training programmes on employment and socio-economic development.

The next chapter presents the research findings, analysing the impact of CATHSSETA's skills development interventions on workforce readiness, employment rates, and socio-economic progress.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Interpretation of the Results

4. Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the findings structured according to the study's clearly defined objectives, evaluating the employment outcomes of learners who participated in CATHSSETA-funded programmes. Each objective is systematically addressed, linking empirical findings directly to relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

Objective 1: Determine the pathways of learners who have completed the Learning Programmes intervention. The analysis includes comprehensive data on the employment status of learners, distinguishing between employed, self-employed, learners engaged in further studies, and unemployed learners, along with reasons for unemployment. It also examines the type and quality of employment, the duration taken to secure employment, and challenges associated with self-employment and unemployment. These findings are contextualised with relevant literature on labour market integration and unemployment trends (StatsSA, 2022).

Objective 2: Determine the relevance of the Learning Programmes interventions among beneficiaries. The study evaluates whether the programmes align with industry needs, if learners effectively apply their acquired skills, and employer perspectives on learner readiness. Findings highlight the relevance and applicability of training, supported by literature that emphasises the importance of aligning education and skills training with industry expectations (Kraak, 2019).

Objective 3: Determine the perception of the learning programmes interventions among beneficiaries. This section captures learners' and employers' overall perceptions of programme effectiveness, satisfaction levels, and the likelihood of recommending the programmes to others. This analysis is reinforced by existing research on stakeholder satisfaction and programme perception within vocational education (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004).

Objective 4: Determine the programme's challenges and successes thus far an assessment is made of key challenges and successes identified through participant and employer feedback. These insights are critically compared with broader literature addressing challenges in vocational training programmes and the factors contributing to their success (Van Broekhuizen & van der Berg, 2017).

The structured, objective-based approach adopted ensures clarity and coherence in the analysis, providing evidence-based insights that inform strategic recommendations to

enhance programme effectiveness, strengthen employer collaboration, and improve learner employability outcomes.

4. Objective 1: Determine the Pathways of Learners who have Completed the Learning Programmes Intervention

4.1.1 Employment Pathways

The employment pathways of participants in the CATHSSETA skills development programmes reveal concerning trends regarding post-training labour market integration as shown in Figure 1 below. The overwhelming majority of participants (50%) remain employed after programme completion, indicating significant gains in transitioning from skills training to sustainable employment. This finding aligns with broader national labour market trends where skills play a major part in employment, although youth unemployment remains one of the highest globally, standing at 41.5% in Q4 of 2024 (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2024). The structural barriers to employment, including limited job creation, a skills mismatch between training and industry demands, and slow economic growth, continue to undermine the effectiveness of skills development initiatives (National Treasury, 2023).

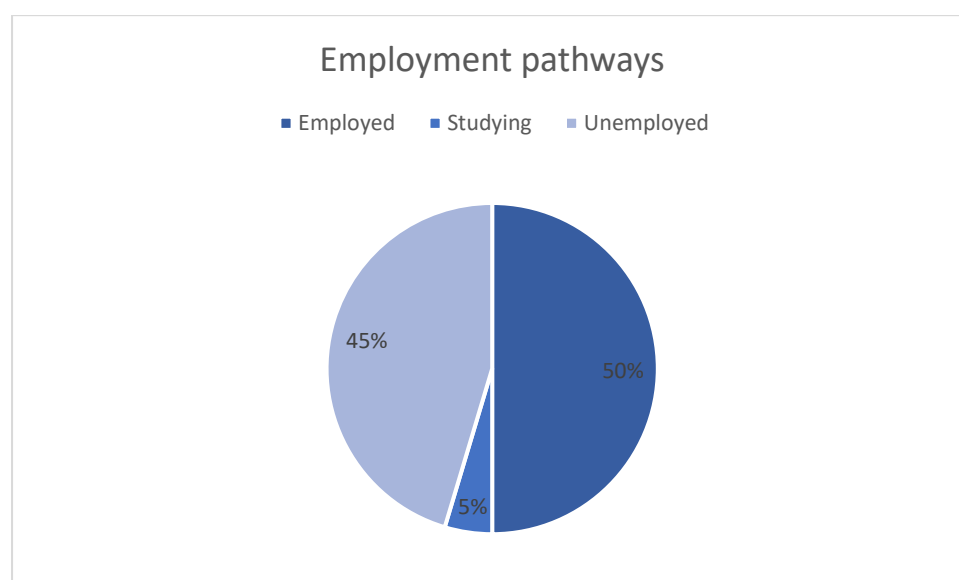


Figure 1: Employment Pathways

There are 45% of participants reported being unemployed, highlighting the limited labour market absorption of programme graduates. This aligns with previous research indicating that

while sector education and training authorities (SETAs) play a vital role in workforce development, the lack of industry linkages and employer commitments often results in skills programmes failing to secure meaningful employment outcomes (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The success of learnerships and internships depends heavily on employer participation in skills transfer and job placement, yet many industries remain hesitant to absorb new entrants due to the costs of training, economic uncertainty, and a lack of incentives to hire inexperienced workers (DHET, 2023).

A small fraction (5%) of participants opted to pursue full-time studies after completing their training. This suggests that for some, skills development programmes serve as a stepping stone to further education rather than direct employment. While upskilling is crucial for long-term employability, it also raises concerns about whether the initial training provided adequately prepares participants for the job market or merely exposes gaps in their competencies (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021).

The findings reinforce the argument that skills development interventions require stronger alignment with employer needs and job market realities. While the intention of SETA-led programmes is to enhance employability, the persistently high unemployment rate among graduates underscores the need for a more integrated approach. This includes improved collaboration between training institutions and industries, enhanced workplace exposure during training, and more targeted interventions that align with high-demand occupations (National Planning Commission, 2023).

4.1.2 Employment Type

The distribution of employment types among programme participants highlights critical structural challenges in the South African labour market. The majority of those who secured employment (59%) were in full-time positions, reflecting a relatively positive outcome for those who transitioned successfully into stable employment – Figure 2. However, a substantial portion (24%) of participants were employed on fixed-term contracts, which raises concerns about job security and long-term career progression. Fixed-term employment is often associated with precarious work conditions, limited benefits, and uncertainty about future employment prospects, particularly in economies with high structural unemployment (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023).

The prevalence of casual or seasonal employment (10%) suggests that a significant number of participants face difficulties in securing stable work. This aligns with broader trends in South

Africa, where a considerable share of the workforce remains in informal or temporary employment due to rigid labour regulations and limited job creation in key sectors (National Treasury, 2023). While casual employment provides short-term income opportunities, it often lacks pathways for career advancement and sustainable livelihoods, reinforcing cycles of underemployment and job insecurity (Bhorat et al., 2021).

Part-time employment (7%) remains the least common form of work among programme participants. While part-time jobs can offer flexibility, they are often involuntary in high-unemployment economies, where workers accept reduced hours due to a lack of full-time opportunities. This further reflects the broader labour market constraints where demand for skilled and permanent jobs far outstrips supply (Stats SA, 2024).

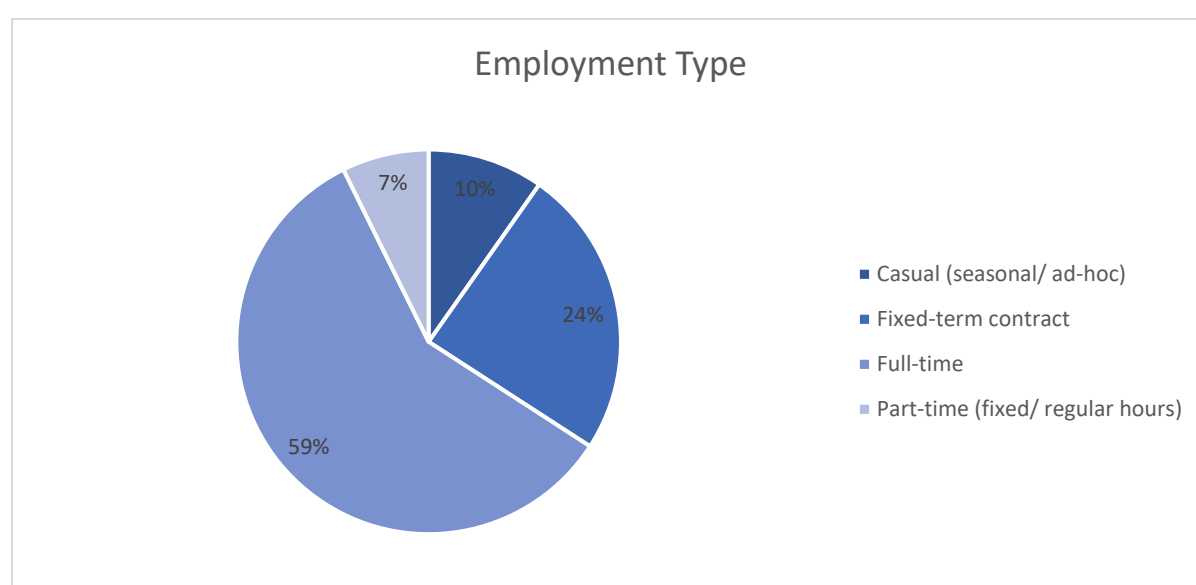


Figure 2: Employment Type

The findings underscore the need for skills development programmes to integrate job placement support and employer engagement strategies that enhance long-term employment outcomes. While training programmes contribute to employability, their impact is limited if the labour market does not absorb graduates into stable positions. Strengthening work-integrated learning models, increasing industry collaboration, and improving pathways to permanent employment must be prioritised to ensure sustainable labour market integration (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

4..1.3 Employer Pension Fund Contributions

As shown in Figure 3, the findings indicate that only 17% of learners reported receiving employer pension fund contributions, while an overwhelming 83% did not benefit from such

provisions. This disparity underscores the precarious nature of employment among programme participants and reflects broader trends in South Africa's labour market, where a significant portion of the workforce operates in non-standard or informal employment without adequate social protection (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023).

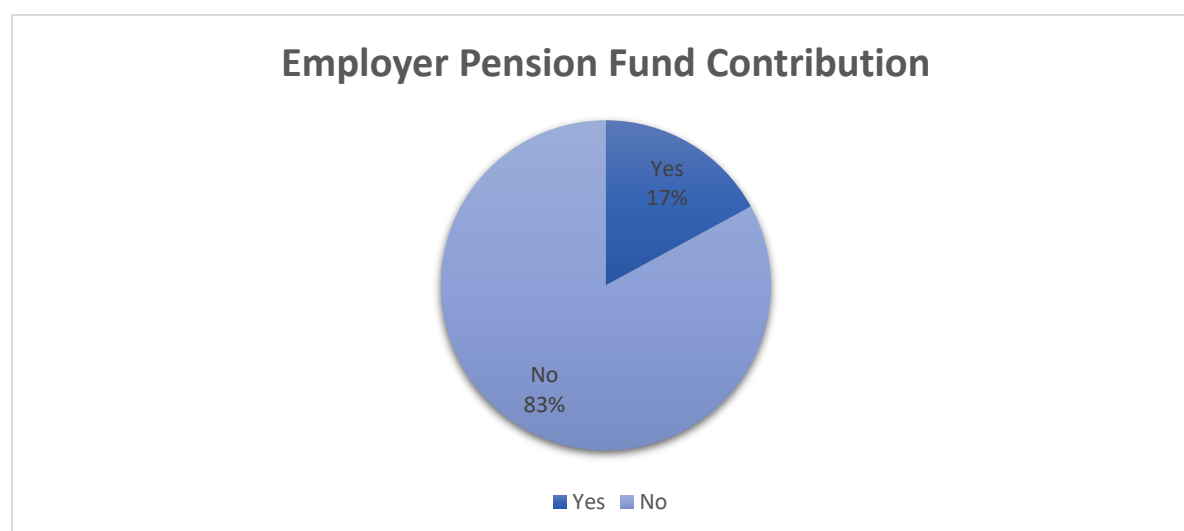


Figure 3: Employer Pension Fund Contribution

Pension fund contributions are a critical component of long-term financial security and retirement planning. The absence of employer contributions places a financial burden on employees, increasing the likelihood of economic vulnerability in later years. In South Africa, where high unemployment and underemployment persist, many workers prioritise short-term income over long-term savings, exacerbating financial insecurity in retirement (National Treasury, 2023). The lack of pension benefits also suggests that many programme participants are employed in precarious, contract-based, or informal jobs, which typically do not offer retirement savings schemes (Bhorat et al., 2022).

This trend aligns with research highlighting the growing informalisation of employment in South Africa, particularly among young workers and those in low-skilled occupations. Without structured employer benefits, such as pension contributions, workers face long-term financial instability, contributing to intergenerational poverty cycles (Stats SA, 2024). The high proportion of learners without pension contributions also raises concerns about labour market inequalities, as workers in lower-income and entry-level positions are less likely to access employer-sponsored retirement savings compared to their counterparts in formal, permanent employment (World Bank, 2023).

4.1.4 Employer UIF Contributions

The findings reveal that only 31% of learners reported that their employers contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), while 62% indicated that their employers do not make these contributions, and 7% were uncertain, as shown in Figure 4. This suggests a significant gap in compliance with South Africa's labour laws, particularly regarding social security provisions for workers. The UIF is a critical mechanism for providing short-term financial relief to employees who become unemployed, sick, or are on maternity leave (Department of Employment and Labour, 2023). The absence of employer contributions for a majority of participants raises concerns about the vulnerability of workers in times of job loss or economic instability.

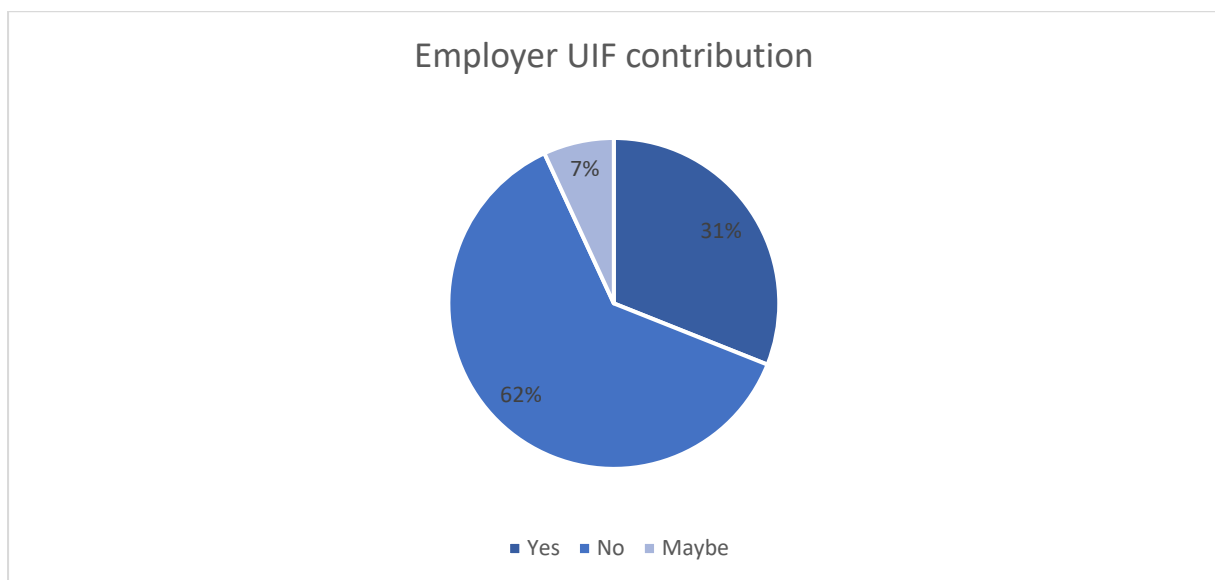


Figure 4: Employer UIF Contribution

High levels of non-compliance with UIF contributions are often linked to informal and precarious employment, where workers are not fully integrated into the formal labour system (Bhorat et al., 2022). In South Africa, the informal sector remains a significant employer, particularly for young people and those in low-skilled jobs. The lack of UIF contributions suggests that many programme participants may be working in informal or contract-based roles that do not offer standard employee benefits. This is problematic as it limits workers' access to unemployment relief, increasing financial insecurity and reliance on social assistance programmes (Stats SA, 2024).

Another factor contributing to the low UIF coverage is employer non-compliance or lack of awareness among employees about their rights. Research indicates that many workers, particularly in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are unaware of UIF deductions and entitlements (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023). The presence of a “maybe” response category in the findings further highlights a gap in employee knowledge regarding UIF contributions, reinforcing the need for increased awareness and enforcement of compliance regulations.

4.1.5 Employer Medical Aid Contributions

As shown in Figure 5, the findings indicate that only 8% of learners receive employer contributions towards medical aid, while a striking 92% do not. This suggests that the majority of learners in the study do not benefit from employer-supported healthcare coverage, raising concerns about financial security and access to medical services. Employer-provided medical aid is an essential component of decent work and social protection, reducing financial barriers to healthcare and improving employee well-being (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023). The absence of employer contributions means that many workers must rely on out-of-pocket payments, state healthcare services, or remain without medical coverage altogether.

The low rate of employer-provided medical aid contributions aligns with broader labour market trends in South Africa, where a significant proportion of the workforce is engaged in informal or non-standard employment. Research shows that in developing economies, access to employer-sponsored healthcare benefits is primarily limited to those in high-skilled, permanent positions, while low-skilled, contract, and informal workers often lack such protections (Bhorat et al., 2022). The high percentage of workers without medical aid contributions suggests that many programme participants may be in precarious employment conditions, limiting their access to critical benefits that enhance job security and quality of life.

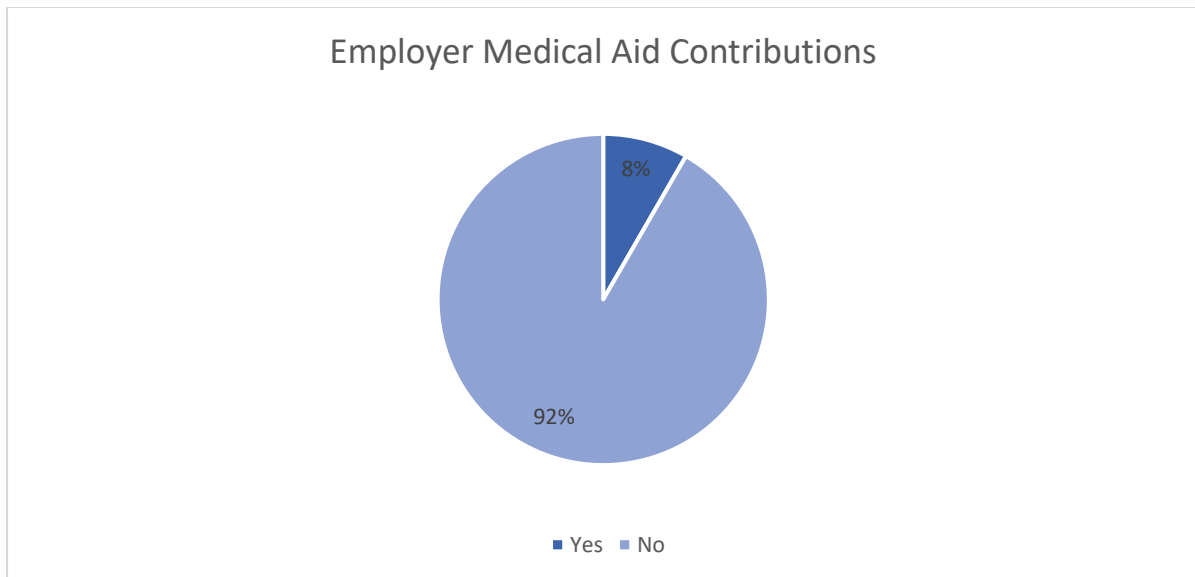


Figure 5: Medical Aid Contributions

The exclusion of workers from employer-provided medical aid also exacerbates economic inequality, as lower-income earners are more likely to depend on overburdened public healthcare services (Stats SA, 2024). Without employer support, individuals face increased health-related financial burdens, which can lead to delays in seeking medical care, poorer health outcomes, and higher absenteeism in the workplace (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2023).

4.1.6 Reasons for Not Finding a Job

In Figure 6, the findings indicate that 90% of respondents attribute their unemployment to a lack of job opportunities, highlighting the structural nature of unemployment in South Africa. This aligns with broader labour market trends where job scarcity, rather than individual shortcomings, remains the primary barrier to employment (Bhorat et al., 2022). The South African economy has struggled to generate sufficient employment, with a persistently high official unemployment rate exceeding 30% (Stats SA, 2024). Economic stagnation, coupled with declining labour absorption rates, has contributed to the limited availability of jobs, particularly for young graduates and entry-level workers (National Treasury, 2023).

A small proportion of respondents (4%) indicated an unwillingness to relocate for work, suggesting that geographical mobility constraints further exacerbate unemployment. Literature suggests that relocation decisions are often influenced by financial limitations, family obligations, and concerns over quality of life in new locations (Turok & Visagie, 2021). Given that job opportunities are often concentrated in urban centres, individuals in rural and

peripheral areas face additional challenges in securing employment. This reinforces the need for targeted interventions to decentralise economic opportunities and improve labour mobility through affordable housing and transportation policies.

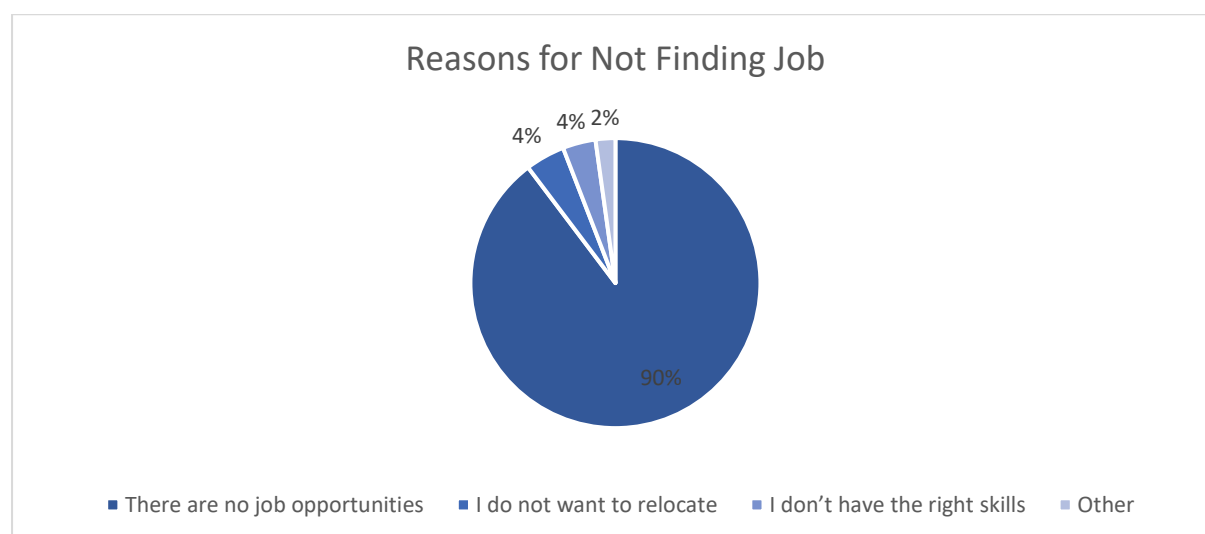


Figure 6: Reason for Not Finding Job

The fact that 2% of respondents cited a lack of skills as a barrier to employment reflects concerns about skills mismatches between job seekers and labour market demands. While skills development interventions, such as learnerships and internships, are designed to bridge this gap, the persistence of structural unemployment suggests that training programmes may not always align with evolving industry needs (DHET, 2023). The mismatch between graduate qualifications and industry expectations has been widely documented, with research indicating that many training programmes do not adequately equip learners with the competencies required by employers (Kruss et al., 2022). This highlights the necessity of strengthening linkages between education institutions, training providers, and industry stakeholders to ensure that skills development efforts are demand-driven.

The 4% of respondents who selected "Other" may encompass a range of factors, including discrimination, workplace requirements such as prior experience, or economic constraints that prevent them from actively searching for jobs. Studies have shown that job seekers often face institutional barriers such as nepotism, racial and gender bias, and a lack of social networks, all of which limit employment prospects, particularly for disadvantaged groups (ILO, 2023).

The overwhelming percentage of respondents identifying job scarcity as the main reason for unemployment underscores the urgency of structural economic reforms. While skills development and training remain critical, they must be complemented by policies that

stimulate job creation, promote entrepreneurship, and encourage investment in labour-intensive sectors.

4.1.7 Time Taken to Find a Job After Completing Studies

The findings indicate that 51% of graduates found employment immediately after completing their studies, while 29% secured jobs within three months – Figure 7. This suggests that a significant proportion of graduates were well-integrated into the labour market, highlighting the effectiveness of work-integrated learning (WIL) and vocational training in improving employability. Research suggests that graduates who undergo structured workplace exposure, such as internships and learnerships, are more likely to transition smoothly into employment due to their practical experience and industry-specific skills (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The immediate absorption of more than half of the graduates further underscores the importance of demand-driven skills development that aligns with industry needs (OECD, 2023).

The 15% of graduates who found employment between three to six months post-graduation may reflect challenges in matching job seekers to available opportunities. Labour market frictions, including delays in recruitment processes, limited access to employment networks, and the time required for job searches, often contribute to prolonged job-seeking periods (Bhorat et al., 2022). However, the fact that a substantial proportion of graduates found employment within a relatively short period suggests a favourable demand for their qualifications, particularly in sectors with skills shortages.

A small but notable portion of respondents (4%) took between six months and a year to secure employment, while 1% remained unemployed for over 12 months. Long-term unemployment among graduates remains a pressing concern, as extended joblessness can lead to skill depreciation, decreased motivation, and reduced employability (Turok & Visagie, 2021). Studies have shown that young graduates who struggle to find work within the first year after completing their studies face greater difficulties in securing employment in the long term, as employers may perceive them as lacking relevant experience or industry readiness (ILO, 2023).

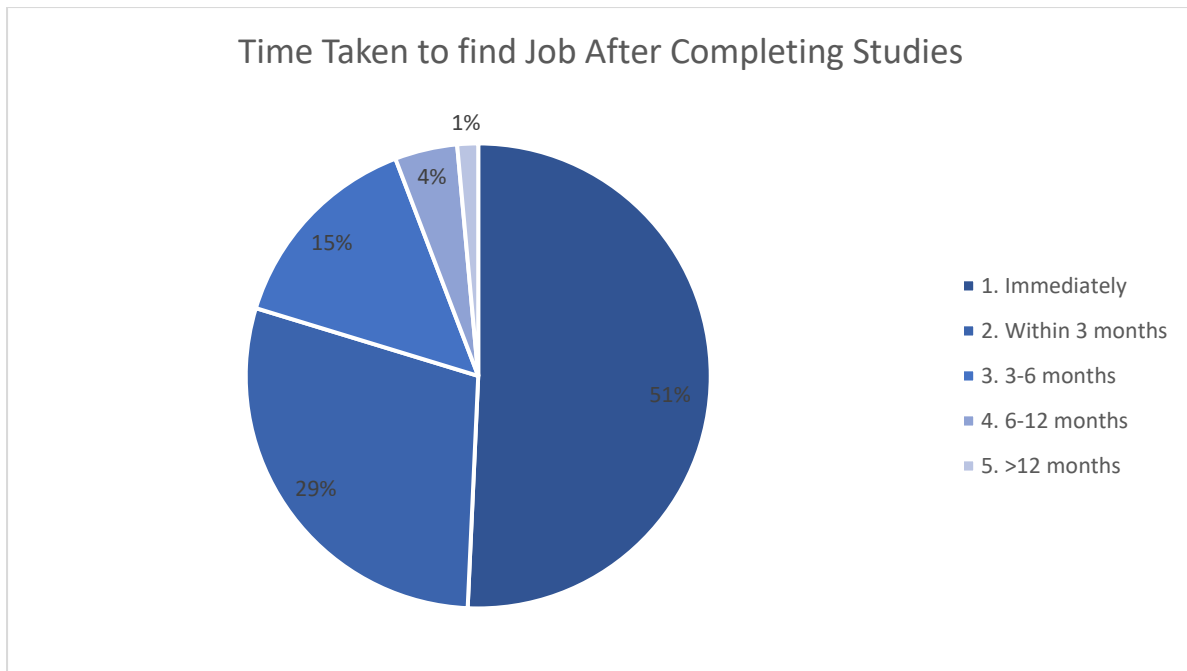


Figure 7: Time Taken to find Job After Completing Studies

4.1.8 Reasons for Further Studies

The findings reveal that the primary motivation for further studies is to improve the chances of finding a job, with 31% of respondents citing this as their main reason as depicted in Figure 8. This aligns with global trends where job market competitiveness compels individuals to seek additional qualifications to enhance employability (OECD, 2023). The literature underscores that in economies with high unemployment rates, further education serves as a coping mechanism, as individuals attempt to differentiate themselves in an oversaturated labour market (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

Achieving a higher qualification and increasing knowledge and understanding of the industry were each reported by 19% of respondents as key drivers for further studies. This suggests a recognition that specialised knowledge and academic credentials play a significant role in career progression. Research indicates that advanced qualifications are associated with higher wages and greater job security, particularly in knowledge-intensive industries (ILO, 2023). However, the extent to which additional qualifications translate into employment depends on the alignment between education and industry needs. Mismatches between qualifications and job market demands can result in overqualification, where individuals possess skills exceeding the requirements of available jobs, leading to underemployment (Bhorat et al., 2022).

Expanding career opportunities (7%) and obtaining a better job (8%) also emerged as notable factors, suggesting that many individuals view further studies as a means of upward mobility. Studies have found that lifelong learning and professional development contribute significantly to career adaptability and progression, especially in fast-evolving industries affected by digital transformation (World Economic Forum, 2023). However, the relatively low proportion of individuals pursuing further studies to improve promotion opportunities (4%) may indicate that career advancement mechanisms within many workplaces remain limited, requiring broader organisational and policy interventions to facilitate upward mobility.

The findings also highlight a smaller proportion of respondents (4%) pursuing further studies for personal interest in a subject area or to earn more money. While financial motivation is a recognised driver of educational investment, structural labour market constraints in South Africa may mean that individuals prioritise employment security over income maximisation (Turok & Visagie, 2021). The literature suggests that while higher education can enhance earning potential, the wage premium varies across industries, and returns on education are not always guaranteed in economies with persistent skills mismatches (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2023).

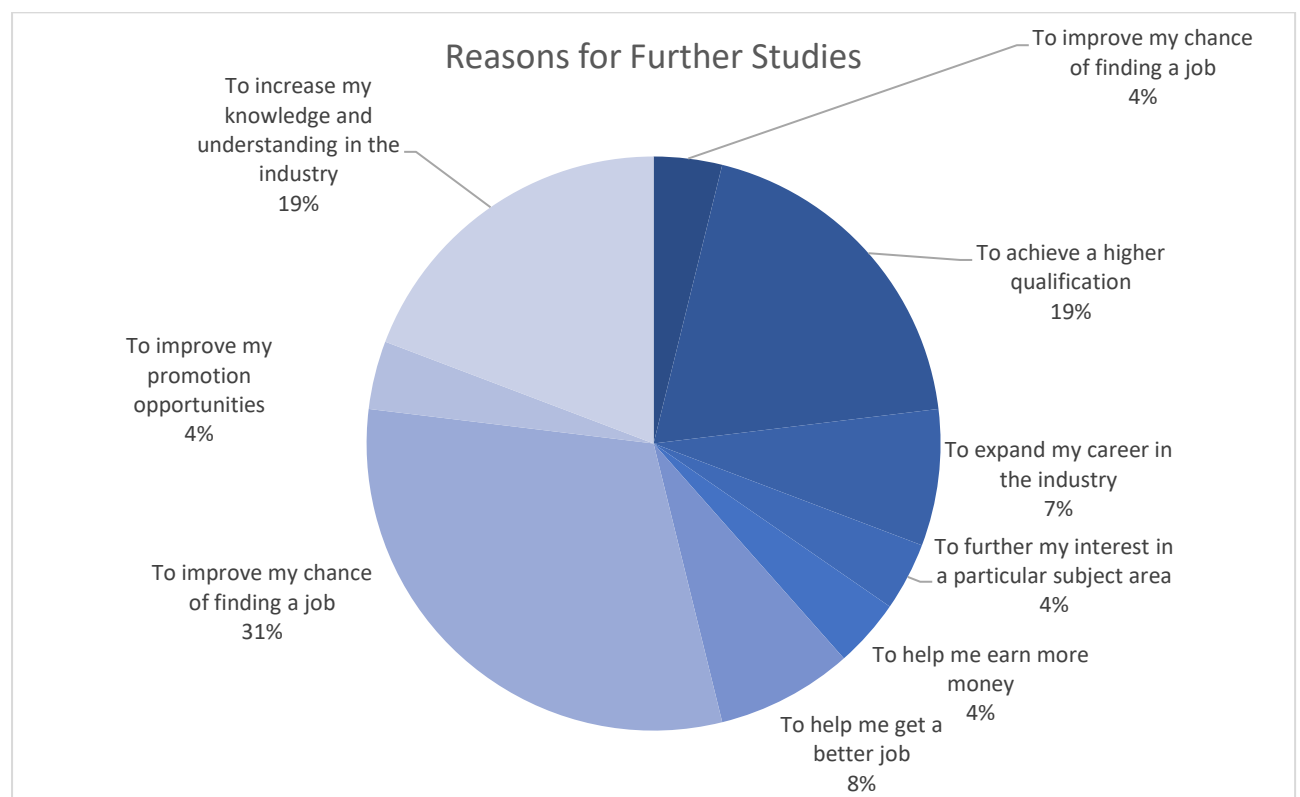


Figure 8: Reasons for Further Studies

These findings underscore the need for education policies that strengthen the link between academic qualifications and labour market demands. There is a growing need to integrate work-based learning and employer partnerships into educational programmes to ensure that qualifications are not only academically rigorous but also industry-relevant. Addressing these structural gaps will be critical in ensuring that further studies translate into tangible employment benefits for individuals in South Africa's evolving labour market.

4.1.9 Current Study Courses

The findings illustrate a diverse range of study courses pursued by learners, with hospitality (16%) emerging as the most popular field, followed by business administration (8%) and supply chain management (8%) as shown in Figure 9. This trend aligns with global labour market shifts, where service-oriented sectors, particularly hospitality and business administration, continue to experience demand for skilled professionals (OECD, 2023). The prominence of hospitality studies reflects the sector's role as a major contributor to employment and economic activity, particularly in tourism-driven economies such as South Africa (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021).

The presence of business administration and supply chain management among the most selected courses suggests that learners are increasingly recognising the importance of managerial and logistical skills in securing stable employment. As industries evolve due to digital transformation and globalisation, strong managerial competencies are becoming essential for navigating complex business environments (World Economic Forum, 2023). However, the relatively lower enrolment in ICT and marketing, at just 4%, raises concerns about whether students are aligning their educational pursuits with the skills required for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Research indicates that digital skills and data literacy are among the most sought-after competencies in modern labour markets, yet South Africa continues to face a digital skills gap that limits employment opportunities for young graduates (Bhorat et al., 2022).

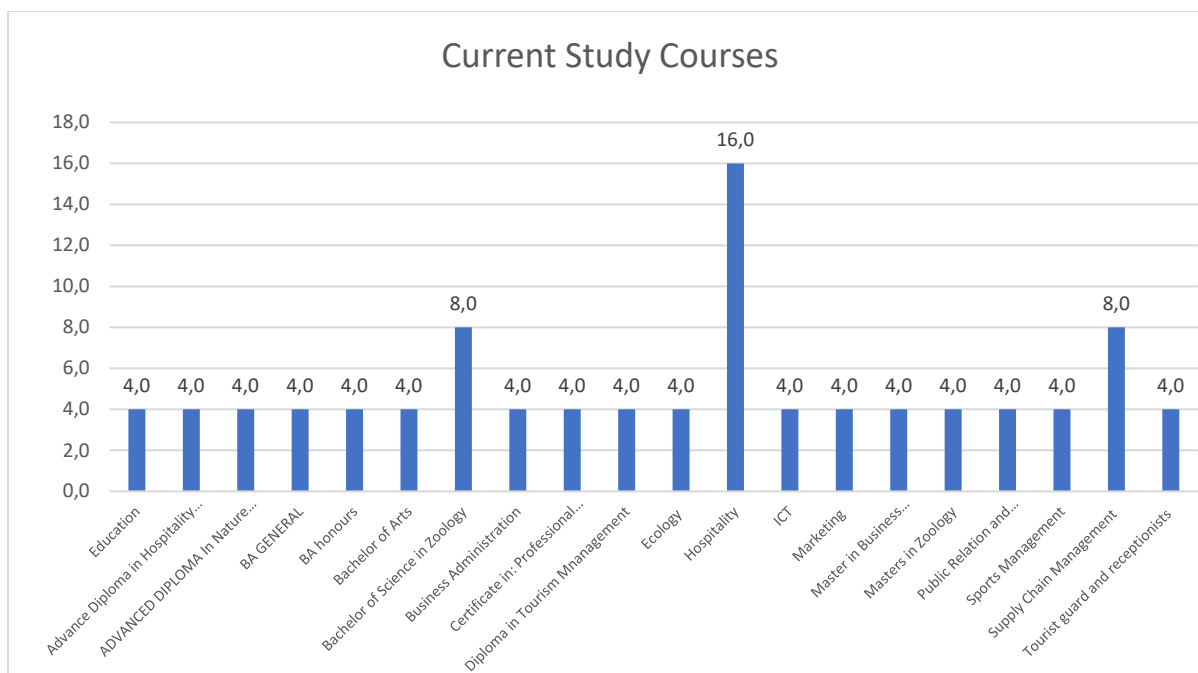


Figure 9: Current Study Courses

Notably, ecology, zoology, and conservation-related courses also feature in the selection, highlighting an awareness of sustainability and environmental concerns among learners. This is an encouraging trend given the growing emphasis on green economies and sustainable development in global policy agendas (ILO, 2023). However, employment absorption rates in these fields tend to be lower, as opportunities are often limited to government agencies, research institutions, and non-governmental organisations, which may not have the capacity to absorb all graduates (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

The findings further indicate limited interest in public relations, sports management, and professional cookery, despite these fields offering viable career pathways. This may reflect a lack of awareness about career progression in these industries or concerns about employment stability. Research suggests that career counselling and industry-academic partnerships play a critical role in ensuring that students make informed decisions about their studies and future career prospects (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

Overall, while the data demonstrates diversity in academic pursuits, it also highlights potential mismatches between learner choices and evolving labour market needs. There is a need for strengthened career guidance interventions to ensure that students select courses with high employment prospects. Additionally, higher education institutions and industry stakeholders must work together to ensure that graduates are equipped with the technical and soft skills necessary for the modern economy.

4.1.10 Employment Status

The employment status distribution reveals that 86% of respondents remain unemployed, with only 8% securing employment and 6% engaged in full-time studies. This is shown in Figure 10. This high unemployment rate aligns with South Africa's broader labour market crisis, where youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge (Stats SA, 2024). The finding suggests that despite participation in skills development programmes, many beneficiaries struggle to transition into the labour market, raising concerns about the effectiveness of these interventions in securing sustainable employment (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

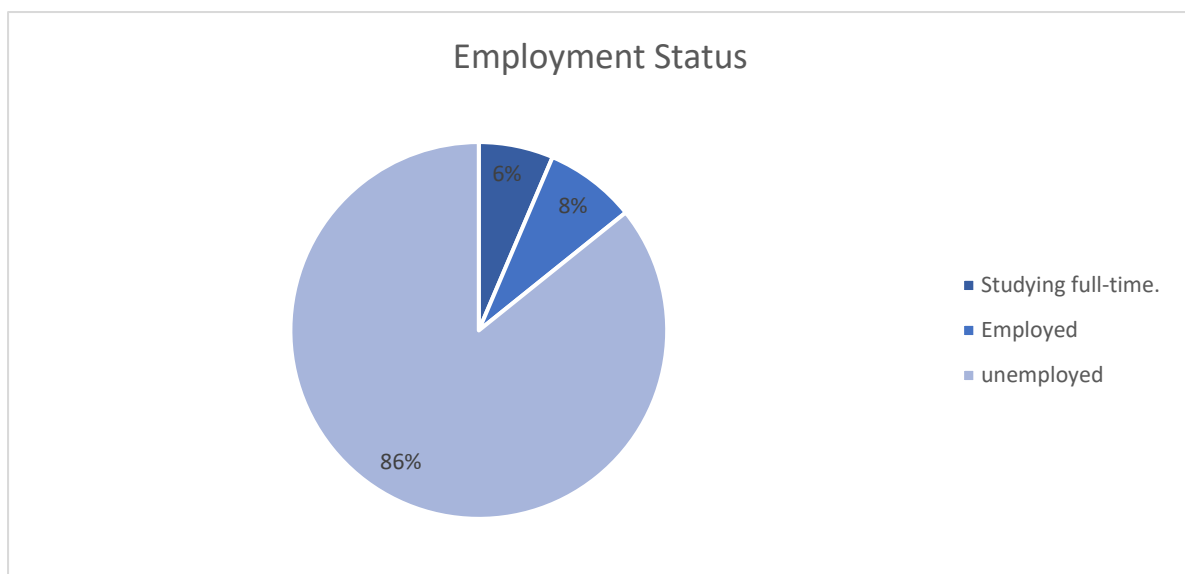


Figure 10: Employment Status

The low employment absorption rate may indicate a skills mismatch between programme graduates and industry needs. Research has shown that while training initiatives improve qualifications, they do not always translate into job opportunities if the skills acquired do not align with labour market demands (Bhorat et al., 2022). The Fourth Industrial Revolution has further complicated employment prospects, requiring a shift towards digital and technical competencies, yet many vocational training programmes continue to focus on traditional skill sets with limited adaptability to evolving industries (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The proportion of graduates pursuing further studies (6%) indicates that some learners are opting to strengthen their qualifications, possibly in response to the limited employment opportunities available. This is consistent with research highlighting that individuals in high-unemployment contexts often pursue additional education in an effort to improve their employability (OECD, 2023). However, further studies alone do not guarantee employment

unless accompanied by industry-driven curricula and practical work experience (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

The findings underscore the urgent need for structural reforms in skills development initiatives. While learnerships, internships, and skills programmes are intended to enhance employability, their impact remains limited unless they are tightly integrated with workplace demands. Strengthening partnerships between training institutions and employers, promoting entrepreneurship, and fostering digital literacy are crucial steps towards improving employment outcomes (ILO, 2023). Without such interventions, the transition from training to employment will remain constrained, perpetuating the cycle of youth unemployment.

4.1.11 Distribution of Learners Across Types of Organisations

The distribution of learners across different types of organisations indicates that 43.9% are employed in private enterprises, 37% in public entities, 12% in non-profit organisations, and only 7.3% in government roles as shown in Figure 11. This trend aligns with global labour market patterns, where private sector employment dominates due to its dynamic nature and capacity for job creation (ILO, 2023). The significant presence of learners in public entities suggests that government-related organisations still play a vital role in workforce absorption, particularly in regulated industries where state oversight is necessary (National Treasury, 2023).

The low percentage of learners employed within government structures highlights a critical challenge in public sector employment pathways. Public sector job availability is often constrained by budgetary limitations, slow recruitment processes, and rigid employment policies (Burger, 2021). This is concerning given that government jobs typically offer stable employment conditions and structured career progression opportunities. As suggested by McGrath and Powell (2022), expanding internship and learnership opportunities within government institutions could enhance skills transfer and job placement for graduates.

The 12% employment rate in non-profit organisations is indicative of the sector's role in community development and social impact work. However, employment in this sector is often constrained by funding limitations, making job security precarious (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2023). Strengthening public-private partnerships and increasing support for social enterprises could create more employment opportunities in this space.

The high percentage of learners employed in private enterprises reflects the sector's role in driving economic growth and employment. However, concerns regarding job quality, precarious contracts, and limited benefits persist (Turok & Visagie, 2021). Addressing these

challenges requires strengthened labour regulations and incentives for businesses to provide decent work conditions, as advocated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023). Encouraging structured graduate employment programmes and workplace learning initiatives within private enterprises would further enhance long-term career development.

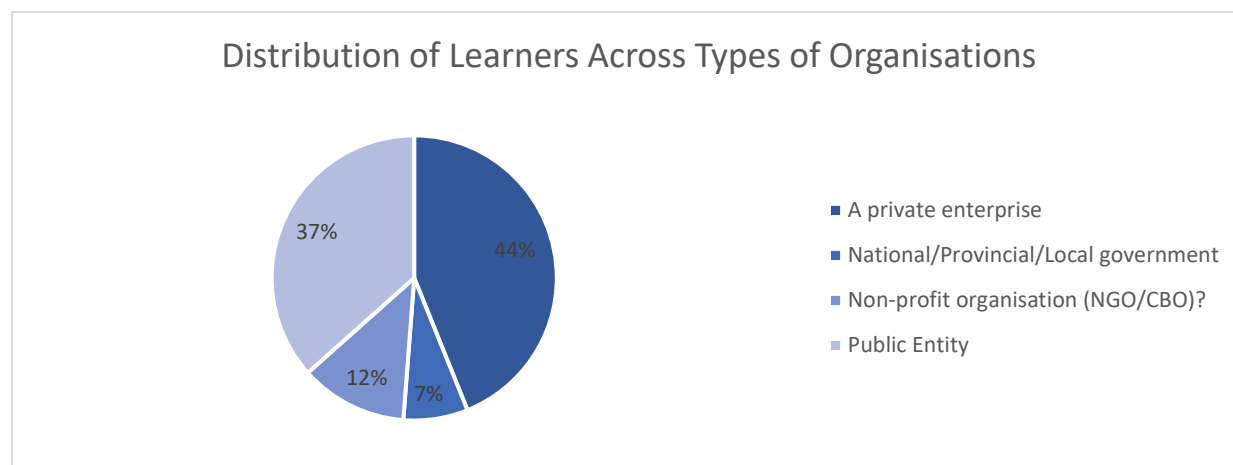


Figure 11: Distribution of learners across different types of organisations

4.2 Objective 2: Relevance of the Learning Programmes Interventions Among Beneficiaries

4.2.1 Learning Programme Beneficial

The data reveals that a substantial majority of respondents found the learning programme beneficial, with 50% rating it as "very useful" and 38% considering it "somewhat useful – as depicted in Figure 12. This suggests that the programme was largely effective in equipping participants with relevant skills and knowledge, aligning with literature that emphasises the importance of structured skills development in enhancing employability (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The high level of perceived usefulness may indicate strong industry alignment, practical components, and effective curriculum design, which are critical factors in bridging the skills gap (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021).

However, a small proportion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, with 2% finding the programme "not very useful" and 1% stating it was "not at all useful." While these figures are low, they highlight potential areas for improvement. Previous research suggests that skills development programmes can sometimes fail to meet learners' expectations due to mismatches between training content and industry needs, inadequate post-training support, or limited workplace exposure (ILO, 2023).

The 9% of respondents who remained neutral suggests some uncertainty or mixed experiences with the programme's impact. This could reflect variations in programme quality across different sectors or institutions. Studies by Powell and McGrath (2019) indicate that the effectiveness of vocational and technical training is often contingent on the availability of resources, trainer expertise, and opportunities for practical application. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the learning programme successfully met the needs of most participants, reinforcing its role in skills enhancement and employment readiness.

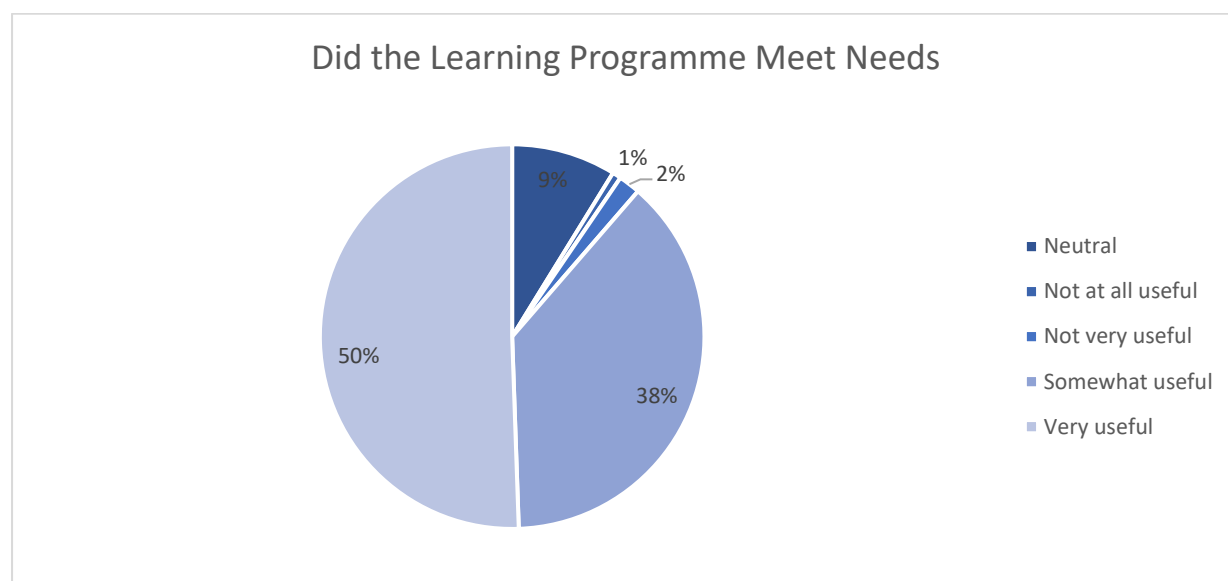


Figure 12: Learning programme Beneficial

4.2.2 Learners Use of Studies

The data indicates that 70% of learners are utilising their studies in their current employment or further career pursuits, while 30% report not using their acquired skills as shown in Figure 13. This finding suggests that the majority of programme graduates have successfully transitioned into roles that align with their training, reinforcing the effectiveness of skills development initiatives in enhancing employability (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Research on vocational education highlights that employment outcomes are significantly influenced by curriculum relevance, industry alignment, and practical work exposure, which may explain the positive application of studies by most learners (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021).

However, the 30% of respondents who are not applying their studies raise concerns about potential skills mismatches, lack of suitable job opportunities, or inadequate workplace integration. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) warns that skills underutilisation can result in job dissatisfaction, lower wages, and economic inefficiencies. A

study by Powell and McGrath (2019) also found that many graduates struggle to transition into relevant employment due to gaps in workplace readiness, lack of employer recognition of vocational qualifications, and limited career guidance. Addressing these issues requires stronger employer partnerships, structured career support mechanisms, and continuous curriculum updates to ensure alignment with evolving industry demands.

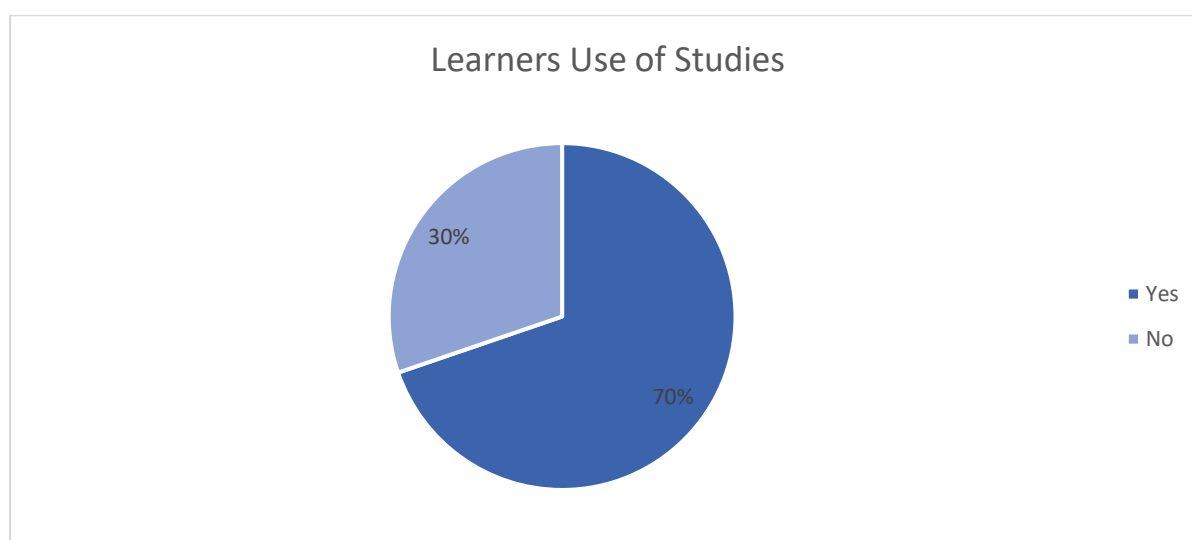


Figure 13: Learners Use of Studies

The findings suggest that while the programme is largely successful in equipping learners with market-relevant skills, additional efforts are needed to improve job-market absorption rates and ensure that all graduates can effectively leverage their qualifications in the workplace.

4.2.3 Course Alignment with Employment Needs

The findings illustrate that only 29% of learners perceive their courses as aligning with employment needs to a very great extent, while 25% believe there is no alignment at all. A further 25% indicate partial alignment, and 21% report minimal alignment – Figure 14. This mixed perception suggests that while some training programmes are meeting industry demands, a significant proportion of learners find their education insufficiently relevant to the labour market.

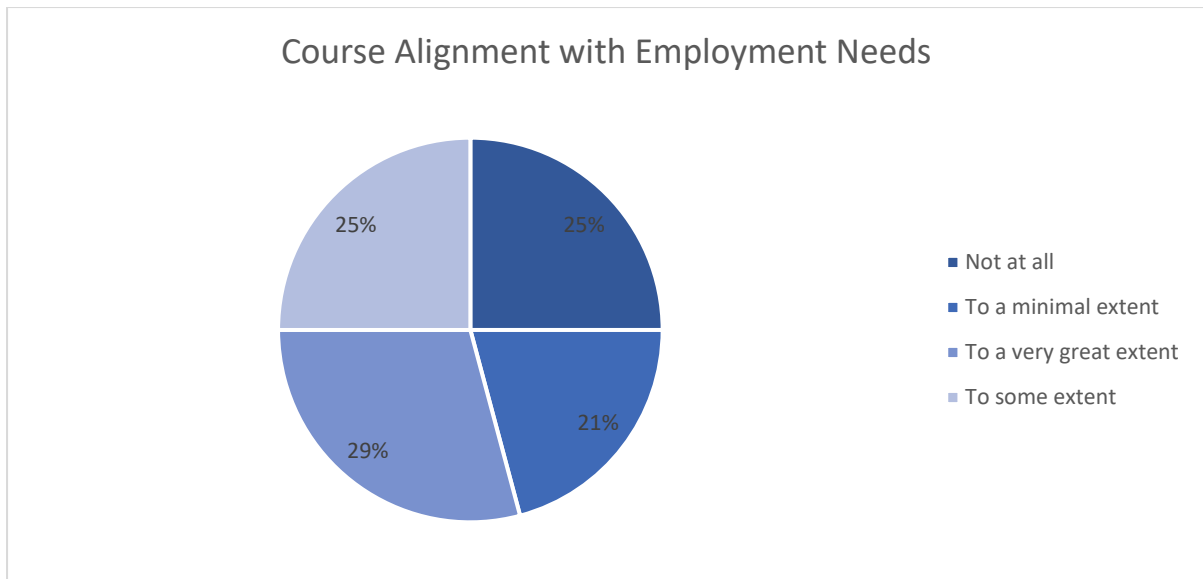


Figure 14: Course Alignment with Employment Needs

The literature on skills development and labour market outcomes highlights the importance of curriculum relevance in bridging the education-employment gap (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Effective vocational training programmes are expected to equip learners with industry-specific competencies, workplace experience, and transferable skills that enhance employability (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021). The low proportion of learners who see a strong alignment raises concerns about the responsiveness of training curricula to evolving economic and technological needs.

A mismatch between training content and job market requirements can contribute to underemployment and prolonged job searches (Powell & McGrath, 2019). The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) emphasises the need for continuous engagement between educational institutions and employers to ensure that courses remain relevant. Countries with strong vocational education and training systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, have demonstrated that structured apprenticeship models and employer-driven curriculum development significantly improve job placement rates (OECD, 2023).

4.2.4 Employer Perception of Job Proficiency

The findings presented in Figure 15 indicate that 43% of employers believe that all learners exhibit job proficiency upon completing their training, while 25% feel that most learners are proficient. However, 21% of employers report that only some learners meet job performance

expectations, and 11% express concerns about proficiency levels. This suggests that while a majority of learners demonstrate competence, a notable proportion may not be fully prepared to meet workplace demands.

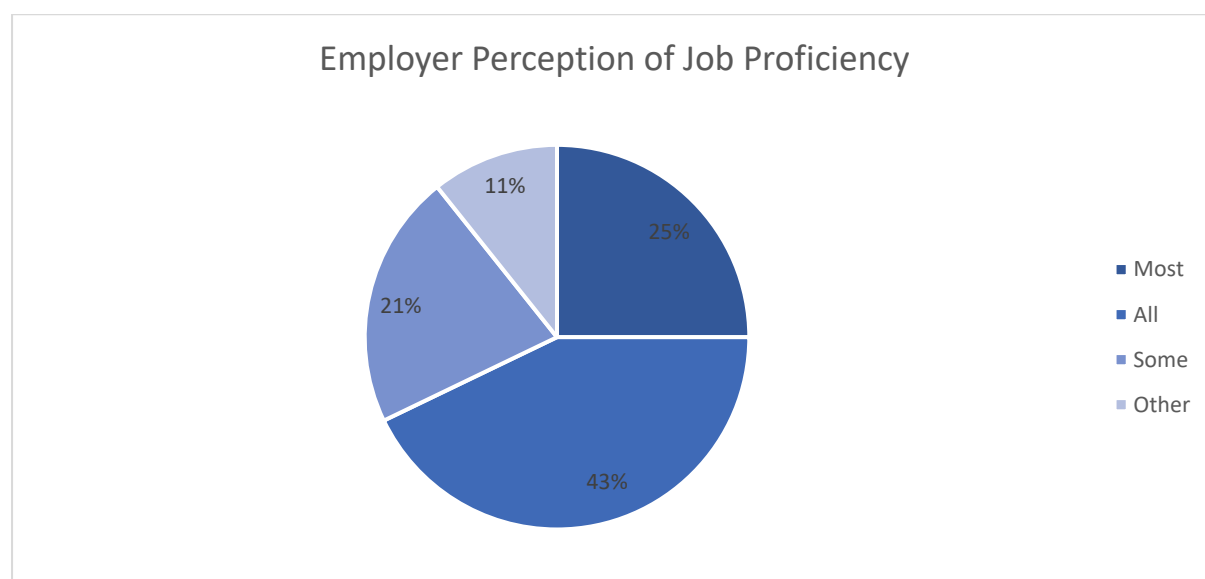


Figure 15: Employer Perception of Job Proficiency

Employer perceptions of job proficiency are critical in assessing the effectiveness of skills development programmes (ILO, 2023). Training initiatives should ideally equip learners with both technical and soft skills required in the labour market. However, the disparity in employer views suggests potential gaps in programme effectiveness, work-readiness training, or alignment with industry needs. Research indicates that work-integrated learning and hands-on training significantly enhance graduate employability and workplace adaptability (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The lack of uniform proficiency among learners highlights the need for continuous curriculum assessment and collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders.

Skills mismatches remain a global concern, particularly in developing economies where vocational education is not always aligned with employer expectations (OECD, 2023). South Africa's National Skills Development Strategy has emphasised the importance of employer engagement in training design to enhance work readiness (DHET, 2022). Countries with robust vocational education systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, incorporate structured apprenticeships and ongoing industry participation in curriculum development, ensuring a smoother transition from education to employment (Powell & McGrath, 2019).

The findings suggest a need for strengthening work-integrated learning, increasing employer involvement in programme design, and ensuring that learners acquire industry-relevant competencies. Without these improvements, some graduates may continue to struggle with job performance expectations, potentially contributing to underemployment and job turnover.

4.2.5 Employer Satisfaction with Programme

The findings as shown in Figure 16 reveal that 50% of employers are very satisfied with the programme, while 25% are satisfied, suggesting that three-quarters of employers view the initiative positively. However, 13% remain neutral, and another 12% express dissatisfaction, indicating that improvements may be necessary to fully align the programme with employer expectations. Employer satisfaction is a crucial metric in evaluating the effectiveness of skills development programmes, as it reflects how well training initiatives align with workplace demands and contribute to productivity (OECD, 2023).

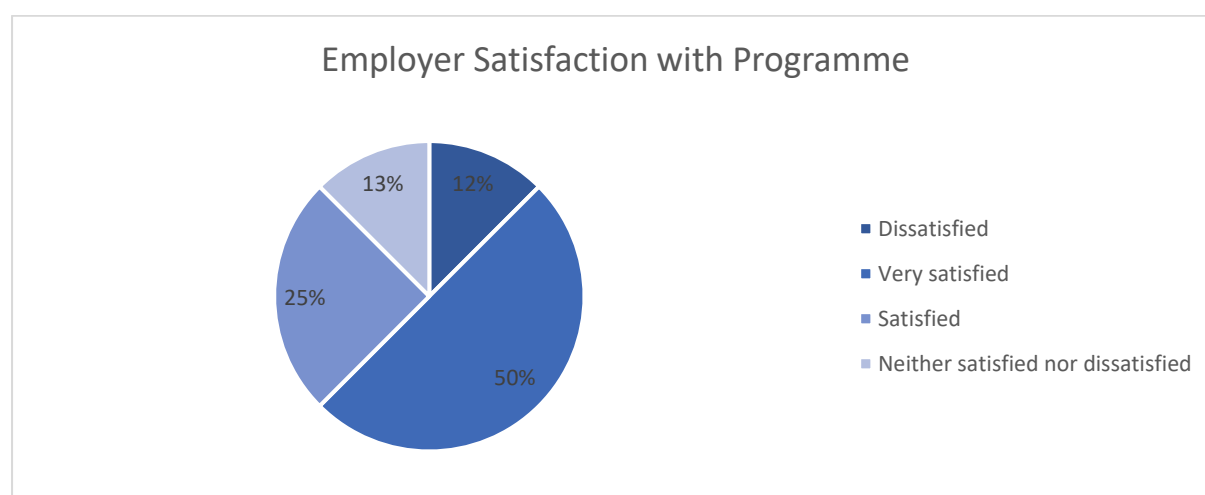


Figure 16: Employer Satisfaction with Programme

High satisfaction levels suggest that the programme successfully equips learners with relevant skills, enhancing their employability and workplace readiness. Research has shown that employer engagement in programme design significantly increases satisfaction levels by ensuring that training content is industry-relevant (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The dual-training system employed in countries such as Germany and Switzerland, where structured apprenticeships are embedded within vocational education, has been effective in maintaining high employer satisfaction (Powell & McGrath, 2019).

However, the presence of dissatisfied employers highlights potential challenges such as skills mismatches, insufficient practical training, or inadequate support mechanisms. Studies indicate that dissatisfaction often arises when graduates lack the soft skills, problem-solving abilities, and adaptability required in modern workplaces (World Economic Forum, 2023).

4.3. Objective 3: Perception of the Learning Programmes Interventions Among Beneficiaries

4.3.1 Programme Usefulness

The findings in Figure 17 suggest that a significant proportion of learners found the programme useful. High ratings in programme usefulness indicate that the training provided aligns, at least to some degree, with the skills required in the job market. This reflects positively on the programme's structure and delivery, showing that the curriculum and practical components contribute to employability. However, lower ratings from some participants highlight possible gaps in skill transferability, work placement opportunities, or industry alignment. Literature suggests that training interventions are most effective when they incorporate industry-specific skill development and practical exposure (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Therefore, while the programme appears beneficial to many, further refinements may be necessary to address employability challenges faced by certain cohorts.

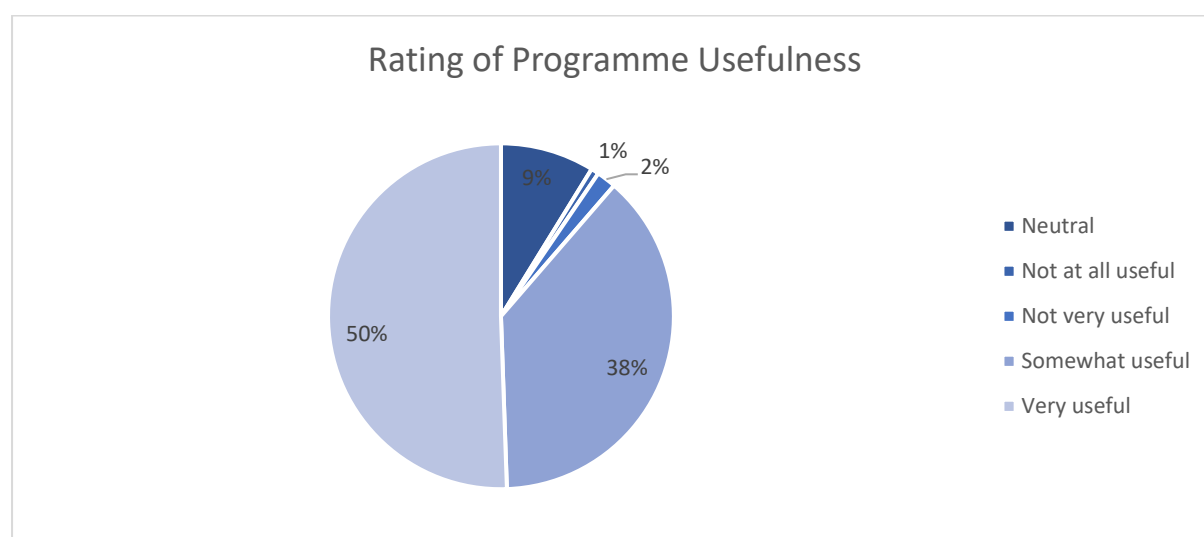


Figure 17: Rating of Programme Usefulness

4.3.2 Willingness to Recommend the Programme

The findings in Figure 18 illustrate whether learners would recommend the programme to others, serving as a key indicator of overall satisfaction. A high percentage of positive recommendations suggests that most participants found value in the training received. Research by Wedekind and Mutereko (2021) indicates that learners who perceive a skills programme as useful and job-relevant are more likely to endorse it. Conversely, any reluctance to recommend the programme may point to concerns about post-training employment opportunities, skills mismatches, or limited career progression prospects.

Ensuring continuous employer engagement in programme design and job placement efforts can enhance the programme's credibility and impact.

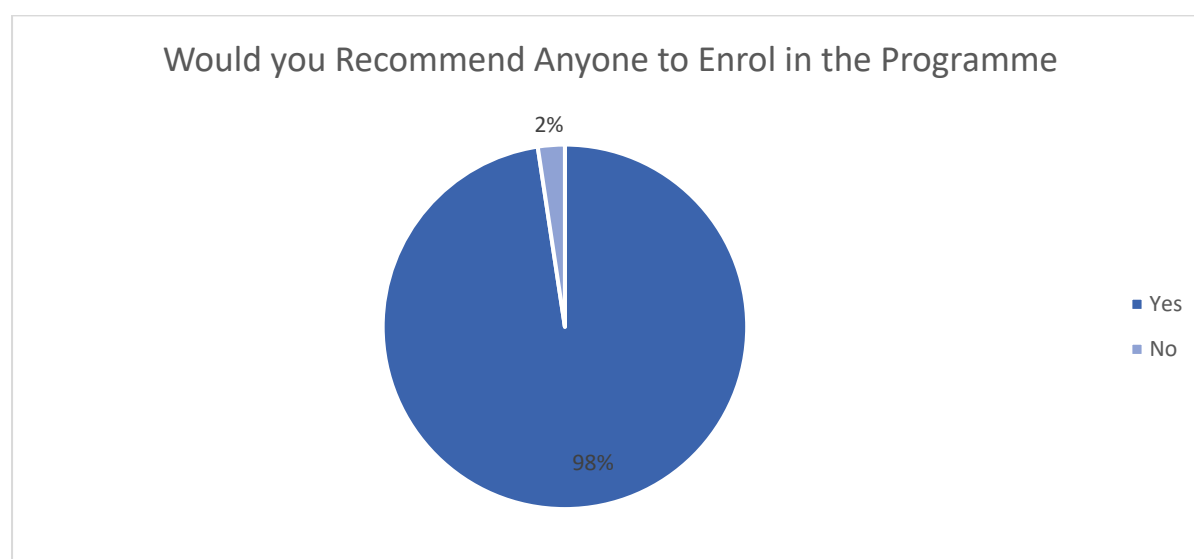


Figure 18: Recommend Anyone to Enrol in the Programme

4.3.3 Career Pathway Provision

The results from Figure 19 assess whether learners believe the programme provided them with a clear career trajectory. A strong affirmation suggests that the programme effectively facilitates career growth, skill development, and marketability. However, a notable proportion of respondents expressing uncertainty or disagreement suggests that some learners struggle to see a direct link between the training and their career aspirations. Research by the International Labour Organisation (2023) highlights that vocational education programmes are most effective when linked to well-defined career pathways, industry-recognised certifications, and employment opportunities. Strengthening career counselling, job placement support, and industry collaborations could help ensure that more learners transition smoothly from training to sustainable employment.

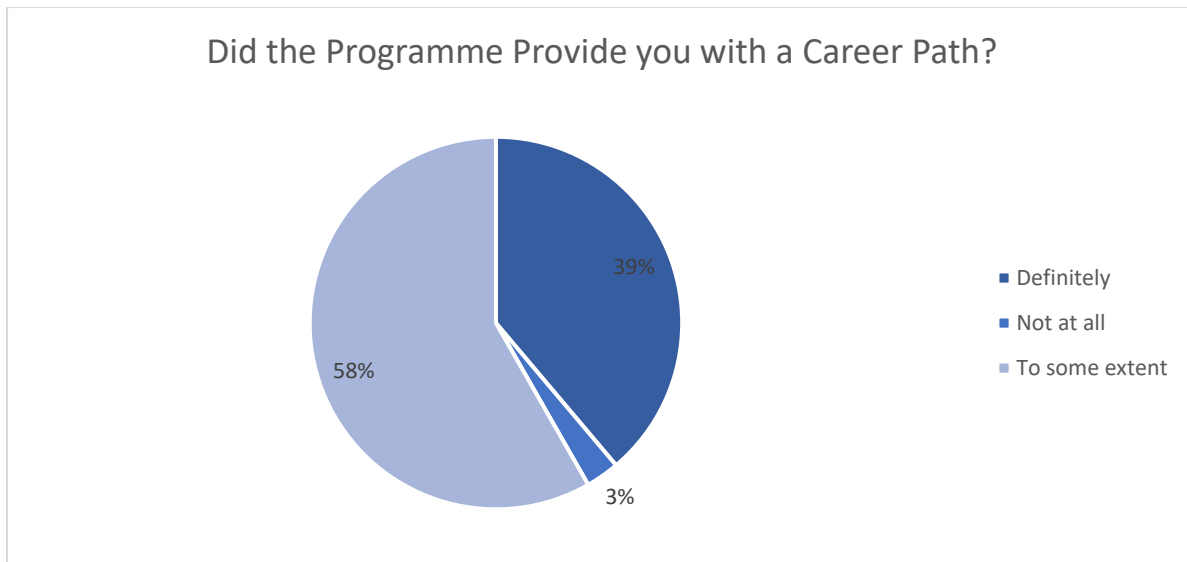


Figure 19: Programme Provide with a Career Path

The overall perception of the learning programme interventions is generally positive, with many learners recognising the programme's value. However, the variation in responses suggests that some participants face challenges in translating their training into tangible employment outcomes. The findings reinforce the need for continued industry collaboration, curriculum adaptation to evolving job market needs, and enhanced support mechanisms for learners post-training. Addressing these factors can improve programme effectiveness, leading to higher employability and better career progression outcomes for participants.

4.4 Objective 4: Programmes Challenges and Successes

4.4.1 Certification and Employability

The pie chart illustrates the proportion of learners who received certification after completing their training programmes. The data reveals a concerning trend: only 38% of participants obtained certification, while 62% did not receive formal recognition of their training – Figure 20. This has significant implications for the effectiveness of the skills development initiatives, particularly in light of the literature emphasising the importance of certification in enhancing employability (Kruss et al., 2014; DHET, 2022).

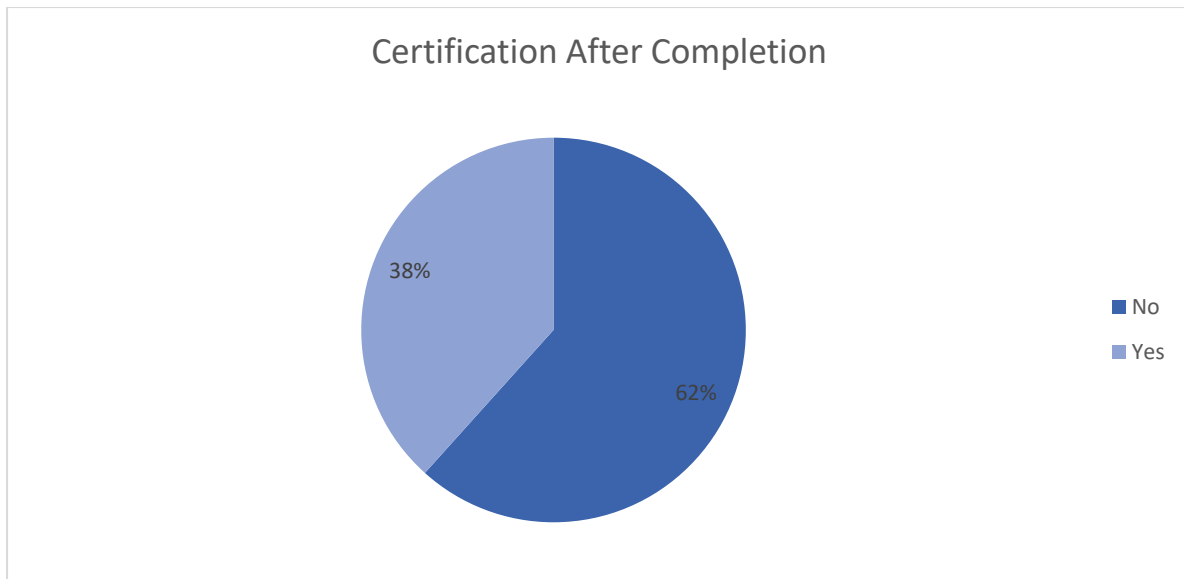


Figure 20: Certification and Employability

Certification serves as a formal validation of skills acquisition, which is critical for learners seeking to transition into employment (Rogan & Reynolds, 2019). The low certification rate observed in this study raises questions about programme effectiveness, administrative inefficiencies, and potential barriers to certification. Employers often require proof of competency, and without formal documentation, many learners may struggle to leverage their training for job opportunities (OECD, 2024).

4.4.2 Programme Representation

The programme representation pie chart illustrates the distribution of learners across various training initiatives, highlighting the prominence of learnerships (33%) and internships (33%), followed by TVET Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) (21%), bursaries (8%), and skills programmes (5%) as shown in Figure 21. These findings align with national skills development policies, which prioritise structured workplace-based training to enhance employability (DHET, 2023).

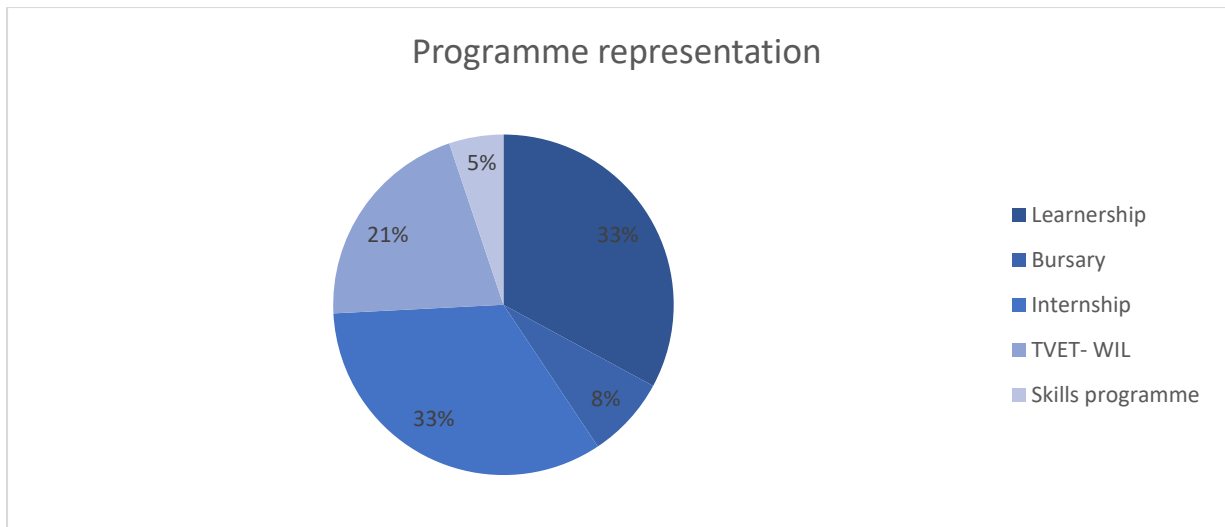


Figure 21: Programme Representation

4.4.3 The Prevalence of NQF Level 6 Learners

The NQF levels of learners in Figure 22 provides insight into the educational qualifications of participants in the skills development programmes. The majority of learners fall within NQF Level 6 (39%), followed by NQF Level 4 (21%) and NQF Level 5 (15%). These findings indicate a strong representation of individuals with post-secondary qualifications, highlighting the emphasis on diploma and degree-level training within the CATHSSETA programmes.

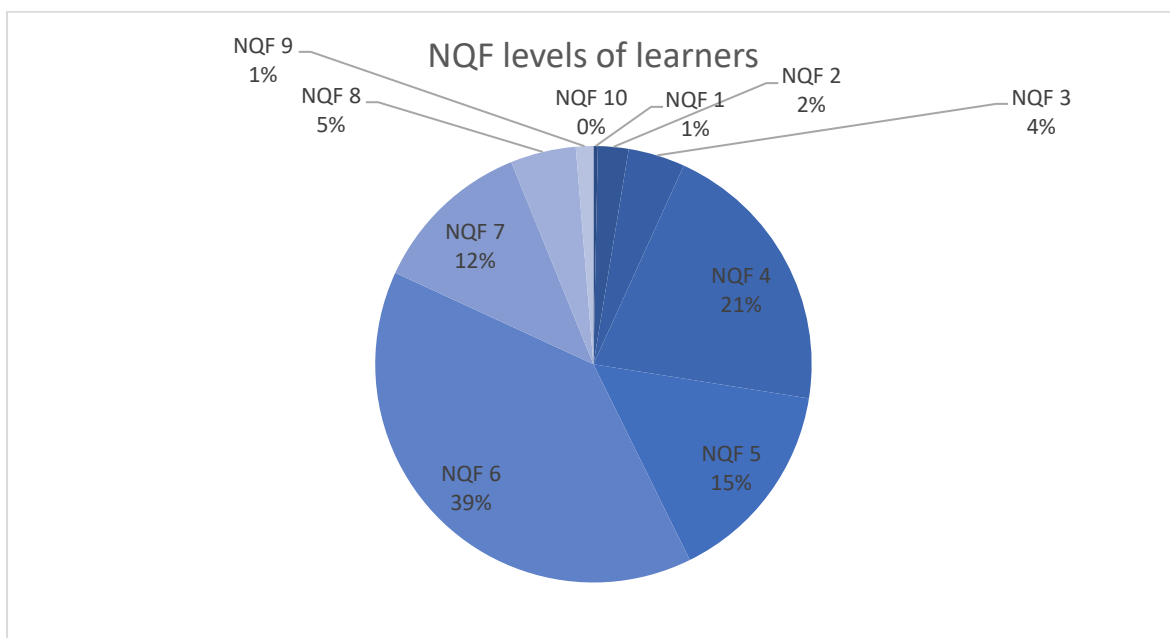


Figure 22: Levels of Learners

The high proportion of learners at NQF Level 6 (diplomas and advanced certificates) suggests that many participants already possess foundational higher education qualifications and are seeking further skills enhancement (DHET, 2023). This aligns with national policy objectives that prioritise vocational and professional development to bridge the gap between academic learning and employment readiness (Wildschut et al., 2023). However, the relatively low representation of NQF Level 8 and above (postgraduate qualifications) suggests that fewer learners pursue advanced qualifications, which could limit access to high-skilled job opportunities (OECD, 2024).

4.4.4 Programme Funders

In Figure 23, the funding distribution for CATHSSETA programmes, as depicted in the pie chart, highlights the overwhelming reliance on SETA funding, with 91% of learners supported by CATHSSETA. This dominance underscores the critical role of public sector funding in financing skills development and workforce training in South Africa (DHET, 2023). The limited contribution from employers (7%) and training providers/colleges (1%) suggests a weak co-financing model, where private-sector involvement in funding training initiatives remains minimal (OECD, 2024).

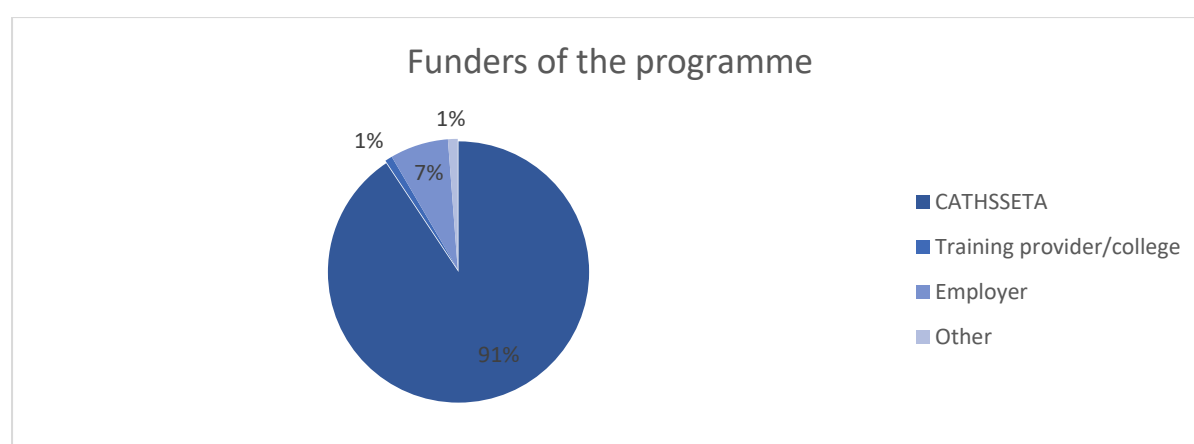


Figure 23: Funders of the Programme

4.4.5 Gender Representation in Skills Development Programmes

The gender distribution of participants in the CATHSSETA programmes, as reflected in the pie chart, highlights a significant female majority (69%) compared to males (31%) – Figure 24. This suggests a strong female representation in skills development initiatives, which aligns with broader efforts to promote gender inclusivity in education and workforce training (DHET, 2023).

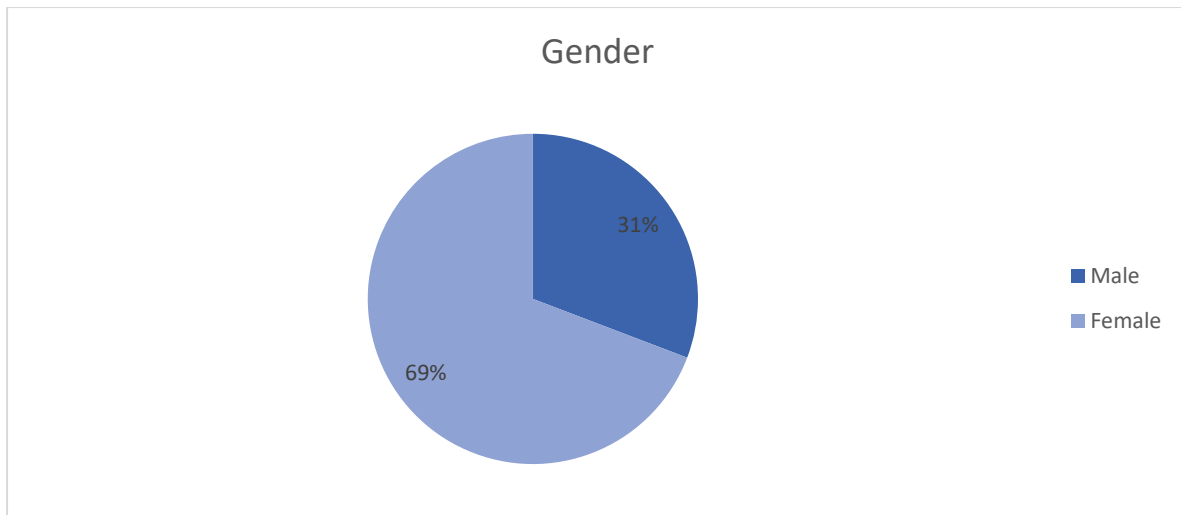


Figure 24: Gender Representation

The dominance of female participants in these programmes is a positive indication of gender equity in access to skills development. Various studies have shown that targeted interventions aimed at increasing women's participation in training and employment contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction (ILO, 2023). South Africa's National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030 emphasises the need for gender-responsive policies in technical and vocational education to ensure women's active engagement in traditionally male-dominated sectors (DHET, 2022).

4.4.6 Age Distribution in Skills Development Programmes

The age distribution of participants in CATHSSETA programmes, as reflected in Figure 25, indicates a strong youth representation, with 90% of participants being under 35 years old. This is in line with South Africa's skills development and employment policies, which prioritise youth empowerment to combat persistently high youth unemployment rates (Stats SA, 2024).

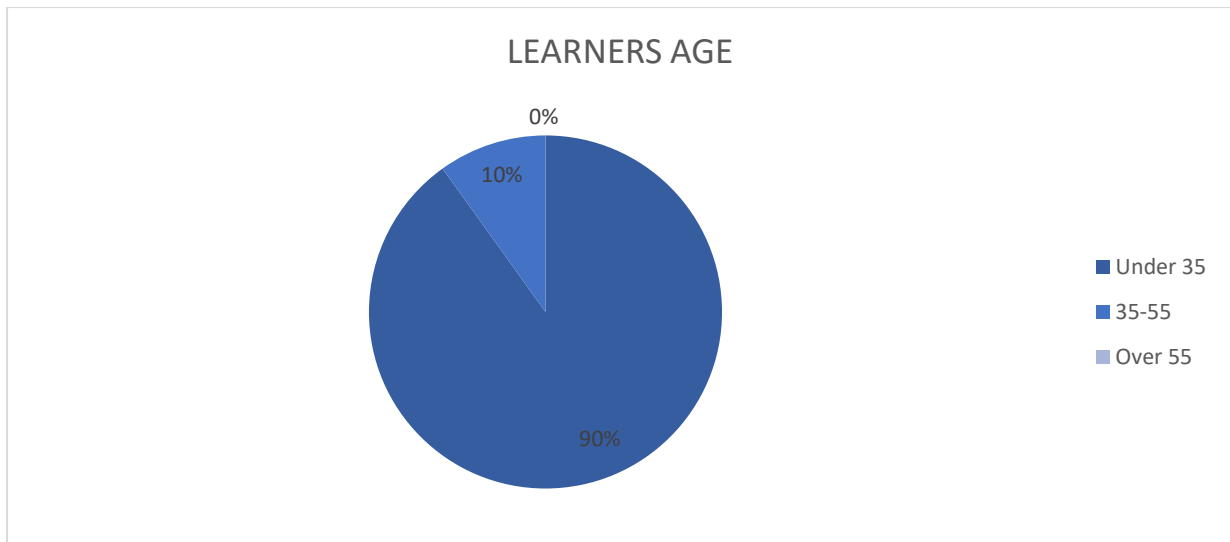


Figure 25: Age Distribution of Learners

The overwhelming presence of young participants suggests that skills development initiatives are largely targeting early-career individuals and first-time job seekers. Given that South Africa's youth unemployment rate remains alarmingly high at 41.5% (Stats SA, 2024), interventions such as learnerships, internships, and workplace-integrated learning (WIL) are crucial for equipping young people with industry-relevant skills (DHET, 2023).

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 underscores the need for youth-focused training to foster job readiness and entrepreneurship (National Planning Commission, 2022). However, despite high participation in these programmes, studies have shown that many young graduates struggle with labour market absorption due to structural employment constraints and weak linkages between training and industry needs (Wildschut et al., 2023).

4.4.7 Limited Participation of Older Age Groups

The low representation of individuals aged 35-55 (10%) and the near absence of participants over 55 years raise concerns about lifelong learning and continuous skills upgrading for mid-career and older workers. In an evolving labour market driven by digitalisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), older workers require upskilling to remain competitive (OECD, 2024).

Research highlights that adult learners often face barriers such as limited financial support, time constraints, and employer reluctance to invest in older employees' training (UNESCO, 2023). This underscores the need for greater inclusion of mid-career professionals in skills

development policies to support career transitions, workplace adaptability, and economic resilience.

4.4.8 Racial Representation in Skills Development Programmes

The racial distribution of participants in CATHSSETA programmes is highly skewed towards African learners, who make up 96.7% of the total cohort – Figure 26. This overwhelming majority reflects South Africa’s demographic composition, where Black South Africans constitute approximately 80.2% of the national population (Stats SA, 2024). It also aligns with government policies aimed at redressing historical inequalities in education and employment through targeted skills development initiatives (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2023).

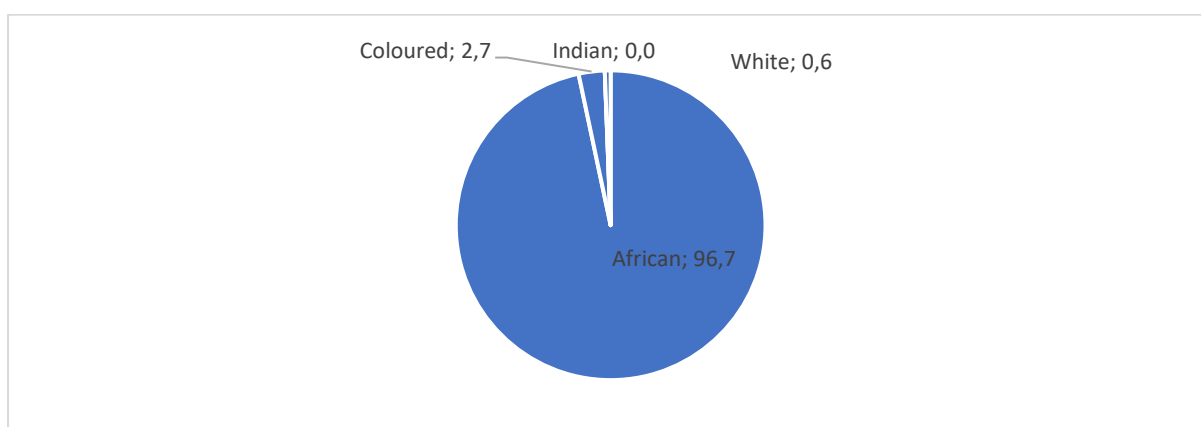


Figure 26: Racial Representation in Skills Development Programmes

4.4.9 High African Participation and Policy Priorities

The strong representation of African learners demonstrates the effectiveness of transformation policies such as the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030, which prioritises historically disadvantaged groups in education and workplace training opportunities (DHET, 2023). Given that African youth face the highest unemployment rates—with Black South Africans experiencing an unemployment rate of over 40% compared to other racial groups (Stats SA, 2024)—their strong presence in skills development programmes is a positive step towards labour market inclusion (Kruss et al., 2023).

4.4.10 Underrepresentation of Other Racial Groups

The participation of Coloured (2.7%), Indian (0.6%), and White (0%) learners remains disproportionately low, raising concerns about the broad inclusivity of skills development programmes across all historically marginalised groups. Coloured South Africans, for instance, continue to experience high dropout rates from secondary education and face unique socio-economic barriers to employment (Spaull & Jansen, 2023). Similarly, Indian and White learners often pursue higher education pathways rather than enrolling in skills programmes, which are traditionally viewed as alternative routes to employment (Wildschut et al., 2023).

4.4.11 Geographical Representation in Skills Development Programmes

The distribution of learners across provinces highlights significant disparities between programme participation and provincial population sizes. Gauteng, despite accounting for 24% of South Africa's total population, has a slightly lower share of programme participants at 23% as shown in Table 2. This could indicate greater access to alternative educational and employment opportunities within the province, reducing the reliance on structured learning programmes. Similarly, the Western Cape, with only 12% of the national population, accounts for 14% of programme participation, suggesting either a more proactive approach in skills development initiatives or higher programme availability within the province.

KwaZulu-Natal with its population proportion, contributing 20% of South Africa's population and has 24% of programme participation which is much higher than its proportional population. However, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo exhibit significant underrepresentation, with only 4% and 1% of programme participants, respectively, despite constituting 11% of the population each. This disparity raises concerns about accessibility and outreach, as these provinces typically experience higher youth unemployment and outmigration due to limited economic opportunities (Stats SA, 2024). The uneven distribution of learners suggests that while urban centres and economically developed regions have greater participation in skills development, rural and underdeveloped areas remain marginalised, perpetuating existing labour market inequalities (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

The Free State's disproportionately high participation rate of 13%, despite only accounting for 5% of the national population, raises questions about the province's targeted recruitment efforts or a possible lack of alternative employment pathways. Northern Cape, the least populated province, reflects a aligned participation rate of 2% against a 2% population share, indicating relatively better programme penetration compared to provinces like the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. This may be attributed to focused skills development efforts in response

to the province's mining and agricultural economic structures, which require specific vocational training (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

Table 2: Provincial Representation of Learners

Province	Total	Total Percentage of the learners funded in the 2023/24 financial year	Total South African Population percentage
Kwazulu-Natal	1074	24	20
Gauteng	1031	23	24
Eastern Cape	166	4	11
Western cape	675	15	12
Northern Cape	98	2	2
Mpumalanga	232	5	8
North-West	272	6	6
Free State	598	13	5
Limpopo	323	1	11
Total	4434	100	100

The findings reinforce the argument that access to skills development programmes remains uneven across provinces, disproportionately benefiting urban centres with stronger institutional support. This misalignment has policy implications, as it suggests that learners from underrepresented provinces may face barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited programme awareness, or fewer training providers (OECD, 2023). To achieve more equitable access, policymakers must strengthen outreach in historically disadvantaged regions, ensuring that skills development interventions cater to those most in need, particularly in rural and semi-urban contexts (ILO, 2023). Without deliberate efforts to bridge these gaps, skills training risks exacerbating rather than alleviating labour market inequalities, leaving marginalised populations with fewer opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

4.4.12 Distribution Across Metropolitan Areas

In Figure 27, the distribution of participants across different metropolitan areas indicates a significant concentration in unspecified locations, categorised as "Other" (64.2%). This suggests that a substantial number of learners are based in rural areas or non-metropolitan regions, aligning with findings that skills development initiatives often extend beyond major urban centres to address widespread unemployment and skills shortages in less economically developed areas (DHET, 2023; Stats SA, 2024).

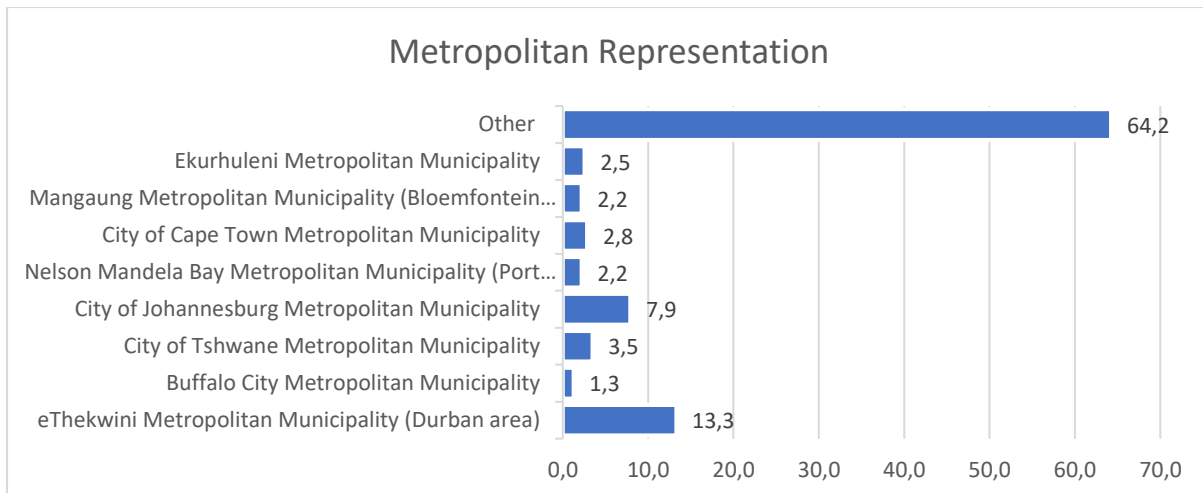


Figure 27: Metropolitan Representation in Skills Development Programmes

Among the major metropolitan areas, eThekweni (13.3%) and Johannesburg (7.9%) recorded the highest participation rates, reflecting the economic hubs where employment opportunities are concentrated. This finding aligns with research indicating that urban centres attract more learners due to greater access to education, infrastructure, and industry partnerships (Kruss et al., 2023). However, the relatively lower representation in Gauteng (Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni municipalities collectively under 15%) raises concerns about whether the province's high population density and economic activity are proportionally reflected in skills development enrolment.

The notable underrepresentation of Buffalo City (1.3%), Nelson Mandela Bay (2.2%), Mangaung (2.2%), and Cape Town (2.8%) suggests disparities in access to structured skills programmes across secondary cities. Studies show that skills development initiatives often fail to penetrate these areas effectively, limiting local economic integration and workforce readiness (Wildschut et al., 2023). This pattern reinforces the need for expanded rural and peri-urban training initiatives to prevent the outmigration of youth seeking employment opportunities in core urban areas (Stats SA, 2024).

4.4.13 School Type Representation

The distribution of participants based on school type reveals significant disparities in educational backgrounds, which have broader implications for access to skills development and employment opportunities – Figure 28. The majority of learners (67.6%) attended non-Former Model C public schools, which are often characterised by limited resources, larger class sizes, and lower overall academic performance compared to former Model C and private schools (Spaull, 2023). This finding aligns with national statistics, which indicate that the vast

majority of South African learners complete their schooling in under-resourced public institutions (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2023).

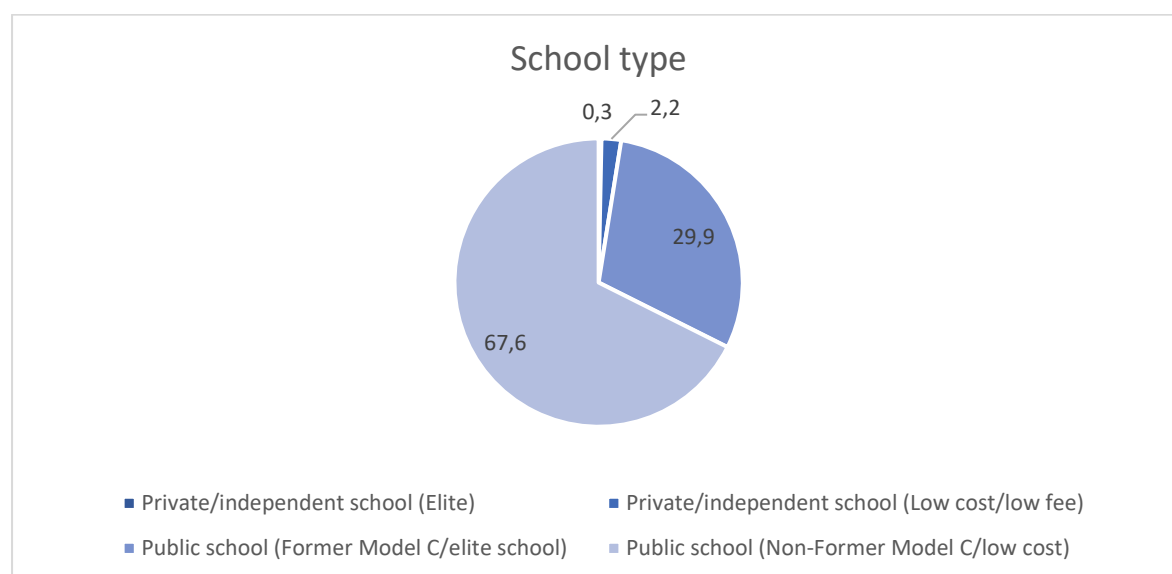


Figure 28: School Type Representation

Former Model C schools, which historically served a privileged demographic under apartheid but have since become more diverse, account for 29.9% of the participants. These schools typically offer higher-quality education, better infrastructure, and access to additional academic and extracurricular resources, which can improve learners' post-school outcomes (Van der Berg & Gustafsson, 2022). The relatively high representation of learners from these institutions suggests that those with stronger academic foundations are better positioned to access structured skills development programmes.

Private schools, both elite (0.3%) and low-cost (2.2%), are significantly underrepresented in the dataset. This finding is consistent with national trends, where private school enrolment remains limited to a small fraction of the population due to high tuition costs and limited affordability for most South Africans (DBE, 2023). The low participation of private school graduates in the skills development programmes suggests that these learners are more likely to transition directly into higher education or formal employment without needing additional skills interventions.

The data highlights the persistent inequalities in South Africa's education system, where the quality of schooling remains a determinant of future opportunities. Learners from under-resourced public schools face greater barriers to employment, often requiring additional training and support to bridge the skills gap. This finding reinforces the argument that educational background influences access to post-school opportunities, supporting the need

for targeted interventions to improve foundational learning and bridge systemic disparities (Spauli & Jansen, 2023).

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

5.1 Discussion on Demographic Profiles of Participants

The demographic profile of participants in the tracer study reflects key trends and structural inequalities in South Africa's labour market. The findings illustrate disparities in employment opportunities based on race, gender, and age, aligning with existing literature on workforce participation and skills development in the country.

5.1.1 Racial Distribution and Employment Patterns

The racial composition of the study participants indicates that Black South Africans make up the overwhelming majority (90,5%), followed by Coloured (8,4%), White (0,2%), and Indian (0.9%) participants. This distribution aligns with South Africa's broader demographic structure but also highlights persistent racial disparities in employment. Black and Coloured South Africans continue to face disproportionately high unemployment rates, limited access to skilled occupations, and greater vulnerability to precarious work (National Treasury, 2023).

Historical inequalities, as outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, have resulted in racial disparities in access to education and employment opportunities (Republic of South Africa, 2012). Although affirmative action and employment equity policies have sought to address these imbalances, empirical studies indicate that Black and Coloured South Africans remain overrepresented in lower-paying sectors with fewer opportunities for career progression (Seekings & Nattrass, 2022). The lower participation of White and Indian learners in the tracer study suggests that these groups are more likely to access alternative education and employment pathways, reinforcing existing labour market stratifications.

5.1.2 Gender Representation and Workforce Participation

The gender distribution of participants indicates a significant female majority, with 69% of respondents identifying as female and 31% as male. This finding suggests that women are more likely to participate in skills development programmes, possibly due to higher unemployment rates among women and greater barriers to entering formal employment.

Existing research highlights the gendered nature of unemployment in South Africa, where women face lower labour force participation rates, wage disparities, and a concentration in lower-paying, precarious employment (Rogan & Reynolds, 2019). Structural challenges such as gender discrimination, unequal access to leadership positions, and occupational segregation continue to hinder women's economic mobility (Casale & Posel, 2021). Women's greater reliance on skills development interventions may indicate a strategic effort to overcome

these barriers and improve their employability, yet research suggests that even after training, women remain more likely to be employed in part-time or temporary positions (Stats SA, 2024).

The findings underscore the importance of ensuring that skills development programmes are linked to sustainable employment pathways for women, particularly in high-growth industries where female participation remains low. Expanding women's access to technical fields, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and managerial roles can contribute to closing the gender employment gap.

5.1.3 Age Distribution and Youth Employment Challenges

The study's findings highlight a significant youth representation, with 89% of participants being under the age of 35, 10% between 35 and 55, and only 1% aged over 55. This dominance of young participants reflects broader labour market trends, where youth unemployment remains a major crisis in South Africa. According to Stats SA (2024), the country's youth unemployment rate stood at 41.5% in Q4 of 2024, one of the highest globally.

South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 has prioritised youth employment as a key policy focus, with skills development initiatives such as learnerships, internships, and workplace-integrated learning (WIL) playing a critical role in equipping young people with industry-relevant competencies (National Planning Commission, 2022). However, despite high participation in these programmes, many young graduates still struggle with labour market absorption due to structural constraints such as skills mismatches, lack of work experience, and weak professional networks (Kruss et al., 2014).

The study's findings also reflect the limited participation of older individuals in training programmes. The 10% representation of those aged 35-55 and the near absence (1%) of those over 55 suggest that mid-career and older workers engage less in structured training, likely due to employment commitments or a lack of incentives for career transitions. Given the increasing demand for digital skills and the disruptions caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), lifelong learning initiatives must be expanded to ensure that older workers remain competitive in an evolving labour market (OECD, 2024).

5.1.4 Policy and Structural Considerations

The demographic findings of the tracer study highlight significant structural challenges in South Africa's skills development and employment landscape. The persistent racial disparities indicate the need for stronger employment equity policies and private-sector commitments to inclusive hiring. The gender imbalances in economic participation reinforce the importance of

expanding career opportunities for women beyond traditionally feminised sectors such as hospitality and retail.

Furthermore, the dominance of young participants in skills programmes emphasises the urgency of addressing youth unemployment through targeted interventions. However, the limited participation of older individuals suggests that current skills development policies may not adequately cater to lifelong learning needs. Expanding mid-career reskilling and promoting industry partnerships for skills transfer could contribute to a more sustainable workforce.

5.2 Discussion on Objective 1: Pathways of Learners who have Completed the Learning Programmes Intervention

The findings from Objective 1 explores the employment pathways of learners who completed CATHSSETA learning programmes, assessing their transition into the labour market. It examines employment status, job types, and further education pursuits, highlighting challenges in job absorption and skills alignment. Employer contributions to benefits such as UIF, pensions, and medical aid are also analysed to evaluate job quality and stability.

5.2.1 Employment Pathways

The employment outcomes of learners who participated in the CATHSSETA skills development programmes highlight persistent challenges in transitioning from training to the labour market. The study found that 86% of participants remained unemployed after programme completion, demonstrating significant difficulties in securing employment despite skills acquisition. This finding aligns with South Africa's broader labour market crisis, where youth unemployment remains critically high, recorded at 41.5% in Q4 of 2024 (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2024). The structural barriers contributing to this challenge include slow economic growth, limited job creation, and a mismatch between skills training and industry demands (National Treasury, 2023).

The low employment absorption rate (8%) of programme graduates underscores the challenges faced by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in ensuring that skills development initiatives effectively link to employment opportunities. Research suggests that one of the key shortcomings of SETA-led programmes is the lack of strong industry linkages and employer commitments, leading to skills interventions that fail to secure meaningful labour market integration (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Employers remain hesitant to absorb new entrants due to concerns over training costs, economic uncertainty, and limited incentives to hire inexperienced workers (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2023).

A small proportion (6%) of participants opted for full-time studies after completing their initial training. While further education is critical for career advancement, this trend raises questions about whether the initial skills training provided adequately prepared participants for the job market or if it merely exposed existing gaps in employability (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021). This aligns with literature suggesting that skills training should be demand-driven and responsive to evolving industry needs to ensure that learners can immediately transition into employment rather than requiring additional education for job readiness (National Planning Commission, 2023).

The findings reinforce the argument that skills development initiatives must be better integrated with industry needs. Strategies such as enhanced workplace exposure during training, stronger employer partnerships, and targeted interventions aligned with high-demand occupations are critical for improving employment outcomes (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

5.2.2 Employment Type

The nature of employment secured by programme graduates further illustrates the structural challenges within the South African labour market. The study found that 58.5% of employed learners were in full-time positions, reflecting a positive outcome for those who transitioned into stable employment. However, a substantial proportion (24%) of participants were employed on fixed-term contracts, raising concerns about job security and long-term career progression. Fixed-term employment is often associated with precarious work conditions, limited benefits, and uncertainty about future job prospects, particularly in economies with high structural unemployment (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2023).

The prevalence of casual or seasonal employment (10%) suggests that many learners struggle to secure stable work. South Africa's labour market is characterised by high levels of informal and non-standard employment, driven by rigid labour regulations and slow economic expansion (National Treasury, 2023). While casual employment offers short-term income opportunities, it lacks pathways for career advancement and sustainable livelihoods, reinforcing cycles of underemployment (Bhorat et al., 2021).

Part-time employment (7%) was the least common work arrangement among programme participants. While part-time jobs provide flexibility, they are often involuntary in high-unemployment economies, where workers accept reduced hours due to a lack of full-time opportunities. This reflects broader labour market constraints where demand for skilled and permanent jobs significantly exceeds supply (Stats SA, 2024).

The findings underscore the need for skills development programmes to integrate job placement support and employer engagement strategies that enhance long-term employment

outcomes. Strengthening work-integrated learning models, increasing industry collaboration, and improving pathways to permanent employment must be prioritised to ensure sustainable labour market integration (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

5.2.3 Employer Pension Fund Contributions

A significant finding from the study is that only 17% of learners reported receiving employer pension fund contributions, while 83% did not benefit from such provisions. This disparity highlights the precarious nature of employment among programme participants and reflects broader trends in South Africa's labour market, where a significant portion of the workforce operates in non-standard or informal employment without adequate social protection (ILO, 2023).

Pension fund contributions are critical for financial security and retirement planning. The absence of employer contributions places a financial burden on employees, increasing their economic vulnerability in later years. In South Africa, where high unemployment and underemployment persist, many workers prioritise short-term income over long-term savings, exacerbating financial insecurity in retirement (National Treasury, 2023).

The findings align with research on the growing informalisation of employment, particularly among young workers and those in low-skilled occupations. Without structured employer benefits, such as pension contributions, workers face long-term financial instability, contributing to intergenerational poverty cycles (Stats SA, 2024). The high proportion of learners without pension contributions also raises concerns about labour market inequalities, as workers in lower-income and entry-level positions are less likely to access employer-sponsored retirement savings compared to those in formal, permanent employment (World Bank, 2023).

5.2.4 Employer UIF Contributions

The study found that only 31% of learners reported that their employers contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), while 62% indicated that their employers do not make these contributions, and 7% were uncertain. This suggests a significant gap in compliance with South Africa's labour laws, particularly regarding social security provisions for workers.

UIF contributions provide financial relief for unemployed workers, but high levels of non-compliance limit the effectiveness of this safety net. The lack of UIF coverage among participants suggests that many are employed in informal or contract-based roles that do not offer standard employee benefits (Bhorat et al., 2022). Research indicates that many workers, particularly in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), are unaware of UIF deductions and

entitlements, highlighting the need for increased awareness and enforcement of compliance regulations (ILO, 2023).

5.2.5 Employer Medical Aid Contributions

Only 8% of learners reported receiving employer contributions towards medical aid, while 92% did not. This finding raises concerns about financial security and access to healthcare. Employer-sponsored medical aid is essential for reducing financial barriers to healthcare and improving worker well-being (ILO, 2023).

The low rate of employer-provided medical aid contributions reflects broader labour market trends where lower-skilled and entry-level workers are excluded from employer-supported healthcare. This trend exacerbates economic inequality, as lower-income earners rely more on overburdened public healthcare services (Stats SA, 2024). Research suggests that the lack of employer medical aid contributions contributes to poorer health outcomes and reduced workplace productivity (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2023).

5.2.6 Reasons for Not Finding a Job

The overwhelming majority (90%) of respondents cited a lack of job opportunities as the primary reason for their unemployment, reflecting the structural nature of South Africa's job crisis. The economy has struggled to generate sufficient employment, with a persistently high unemployment rate exceeding 30% (Stats SA, 2024).

A small proportion of respondents (4%) indicated an unwillingness to relocate for work, suggesting that geographical mobility constraints further exacerbate unemployment. Labour mobility is often hindered by financial limitations and family obligations, reinforcing spatial inequalities in employment access (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

5.2.7 Time Taken to Find a Job After Completing Studies

The study found that 51% of graduates secured employment immediately after completing their studies, while 29% found jobs within three months. This suggests that a significant proportion of graduates benefited from work-integrated learning (WIL) and vocational training, which facilitated a smooth transition into the labour market. Research highlights that WIL, including structured internships and learnerships, enhances employability by providing practical experience and industry-specific skills, making graduates more attractive to employers (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The immediate absorption of more than half of the graduates reinforces the importance of demand-driven skills development that aligns with industry requirements (OECD, 2023).

Despite this positive outcome, 15% of graduates took between three and six months to find employment, which may reflect challenges in job matching. Labour market frictions such as delays in recruitment, limited access to employment networks, and extended job search periods contribute to prolonged unemployment spells (Bhorat et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of graduates found work within a relatively short timeframe suggests that their qualifications aligned with labour market demands, particularly in sectors experiencing skills shortages.

A small but notable proportion (4%) took between six months and a year to secure employment, while 1% remained unemployed for over a year. Extended joblessness among graduates is a critical concern, as prolonged unemployment can lead to skills depreciation, decreased motivation, and reduced employability (Turok & Visagie, 2021). Research shows that young graduates who fail to secure employment within a year are more likely to struggle in the long term, as employers may perceive them as lacking relevant experience or workplace readiness (ILO, 2023).

The findings suggest that while WIL and vocational training can improve employability, structural challenges persist in ensuring rapid labour market absorption. Addressing these issues requires improved employer engagement, stronger career placement support, and policies that incentivise firms to hire and retain new graduates.

5.2.8 Reasons for Further Studies

The study found that 31% of respondents pursued further studies primarily to improve their chances of finding a job. This finding aligns with global trends where competitive job markets push individuals to obtain additional qualifications as a way to differentiate themselves (OECD, 2023). In high-unemployment economies such as South Africa, further education often serves as a coping mechanism, with individuals seeking to improve their credentials in an oversaturated labour market (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

Achieving a higher qualification (19%) and increasing knowledge and understanding of the industry (19%) were also significant motivators for further studies. This highlights a recognition that specialised knowledge and academic credentials play an important role in career advancement. Research indicates that advanced qualifications are associated with higher earnings and greater job security, particularly in knowledge-intensive industries (ILO, 2023). However, the extent to which further education leads to employment depends on whether qualifications align with industry demands. Skills mismatches between education and job market requirements can result in overqualification, where individuals possess skills exceeding the needs of available jobs, leading to underemployment (Bhorat et al., 2022).

Smaller proportions of respondents cited career expansion (8%), obtaining a better job (8%), or increasing promotion opportunities (4%) as reasons for further studies. These findings suggest that many participants view further education as a means of upward mobility, though workplace promotion mechanisms may remain limited. Research highlights that lifelong learning and continuous professional development are key drivers of career adaptability, particularly in fast-changing industries affected by digital transformation (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The findings emphasise the importance of aligning educational qualifications with labour market demands. Strengthening work-based learning, employer partnerships, and career counselling interventions will be critical to ensuring that further studies translate into tangible employment benefits.

5.2.9 Current Study Courses

The study revealed a diverse range of study courses pursued by learners, with hospitality (16%) being the most popular, followed by business administration (8%) and supply chain management (8%). This trend aligns with global labour market shifts, where service-oriented industries, particularly hospitality and business administration, continue to experience strong demand for skilled professionals (OECD, 2023). The prominence of hospitality studies reflects the sector's significant role in South Africa's economy, particularly in tourism-driven employment (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021).

The selection of business administration and supply chain management suggests that learners recognise the importance of managerial and logistical skills for securing stable employment. As industries evolve with digital transformation and globalisation, strong business and logistical competencies have become critical for navigating complex business environments (World Economic Forum, 2023).

However, relatively lower enrolment in ICT and marketing (4% each) raises concerns about whether students are aligning their education with emerging industry needs. Research suggests that digital skills and data literacy are among the most sought-after competencies in contemporary labour markets, yet South Africa continues to experience a digital skills gap that limits employment opportunities for young graduates (Bhorat et al., 2022).

The presence of ecology, zoology, and conservation-related courses highlights an awareness of sustainability and environmental concerns among learners. This is a positive trend, given the growing global emphasis on green economies and sustainable development (ILO, 2023). However, employment absorption rates in these fields are often lower, as opportunities tend

to be concentrated in government agencies, research institutions, and non-governmental organisations, which may lack the capacity to absorb all graduates (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

The findings underscore the importance of career counselling interventions to ensure that students select courses with strong employment prospects. Higher education institutions and industry stakeholders must work together to equip graduates with both technical and soft skills necessary for the evolving labour market.

5.2.10 Employment Status

The study confirmed that 86% of respondents remained unemployed, with only 8% securing employment and 6% engaging in full-time studies. These findings align with South Africa's broader labour market crisis, where youth unemployment remains a significant challenge (Stats SA, 2024). Despite participation in skills development programmes, many graduates struggle to transition into employment, raising concerns about the effectiveness of these initiatives in securing sustainable work (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

The low employment absorption rate suggests a mismatch between programme graduates' skills and industry requirements. Research shows that training initiatives, while improving qualifications, do not always translate into job opportunities if the skills acquired do not align with labour market demands (Bhorat et al., 2022). The rise of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has further complicated employment prospects, requiring a shift towards digital and technical competencies, yet many vocational training programmes continue to focus on traditional skill sets with limited adaptability to modern industry needs (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The proportion of graduates pursuing further studies (6%) indicates that some learners are opting to strengthen their qualifications, possibly in response to limited employment opportunities. This is consistent with research showing that individuals in high-unemployment contexts often pursue additional education to improve their employability (OECD, 2023). However, further studies alone do not guarantee employment unless coupled with industry-driven curricula and practical work experience (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

5.2.11 Distribution of Learners Across Types of Organisations

The distribution of learners across different organisations shows that 44% were employed in private enterprises, 37% in public entities, 12% in non-profit organisations, and only 7% in government roles. These trends align with global labour market patterns, where private sector employment dominates due to its dynamic nature and ability to drive job creation (ILO, 2023). The presence of learners in public entities suggests that government-related organisations

remain vital workforce absorbers, particularly in regulated industries requiring state oversight (National Treasury, 2023).

The low percentage of learners employed in government structures raises concerns about public sector employment pathways. Government job availability is constrained by budgetary limitations, slow recruitment processes, and rigid hiring policies (Burger, 2021). Expanding internship and learnership opportunities within government institutions could improve skills transfer and job placement for graduates (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions that support structured graduate employment programmes and workplace learning initiatives, particularly within the private sector. Strengthened labour regulations and incentives for businesses to provide decent work conditions would enhance long-term career development (ILO, 2023).

The findings from the pathways of learners highlight significant challenges in the transition from skills development programmes to sustainable employment. High unemployment rates among graduates indicate a need for stronger industry linkages, demand-driven training, and improved work-integrated learning models. Structural issues such as job scarcity, skills mismatches, and non-compliance with labour protections exacerbate precarious employment conditions. Addressing these challenges requires policy reforms, enhanced employer engagement, and strengthened pathways to stable employment to ensure that skills development initiatives translate into long-term economic opportunities.

5.3 Discussion on Objective 2: Relevance of the Learning Programmes Interventions Among Beneficiaries

The findings from Objective 2 discusses the relevance of CATHSSETA learning explores participants' perceptions of programme usefulness, skills application in employment, and alignment with job market demands. Employer perspectives on learner proficiency and programme satisfaction are also analysed to assess overall effectiveness.

5.3.1 Learning Programme Beneficial

The findings reveal that 51% of respondents rated the learning programme as "very useful," while 38% found it "somewhat useful." This indicates that the programme was largely successful in providing participants with relevant skills and knowledge, aligning with literature that highlights the role of structured skills development in enhancing employability (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The high satisfaction levels suggest that the programme incorporated key elements of effective vocational training, such as practical components, industry alignment,

and competency-based learning, all of which are critical in bridging the skills gap (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021).

However, a small proportion of respondents (2%) rated the programme as "not very useful," while 1% found it "not at all useful." These responses highlight potential gaps in training quality, employer linkages, or sectoral relevance. Research indicates that skills development programmes often fail to meet learner expectations due to inadequate workplace exposure, poor curriculum alignment with labour market needs, or limited post-training support (ILO, 2023).

Additionally, 9% of respondents were neutral about the programme's usefulness, suggesting some uncertainty or varied experiences. This could be attributed to differences in programme delivery across sectors or institutions. Powell and McGrath (2019) argue that vocational training effectiveness depends on several factors, including access to quality trainers, availability of learning resources, and practical application opportunities. While the overall findings affirm the programme's positive impact, they also highlight areas for further enhancement, particularly in improving job placement and industry collaboration to maximise the programme's effectiveness in real-world employment settings.

5.3.2 Learners' Use of Studies

The study indicates that 70% of respondents are utilising their studies in their current employment or career pursuits, reflecting the programme's effectiveness in facilitating relevant labour market transitions (McGrath & Powell, 2022). This aligns with research on vocational education, which highlights the importance of curriculum relevance, industry partnerships, and work-based learning experiences in shaping positive employment outcomes (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021). The high rate of learners applying their studies suggests that the programme successfully equipped them with industry-aligned competencies.

However, 30.2% of respondents reported that they are not using their acquired skills, raising concerns about potential skills mismatches, limited job opportunities, or a lack of workplace integration. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) warns that skills underutilisation can lead to job dissatisfaction, lower wages, and long-term economic inefficiencies. Powell and McGrath (2019) similarly argue that graduates often struggle to transition into relevant employment due to gaps in workplace readiness, limited employer recognition of vocational qualifications, and insufficient career guidance.

To address these issues, stronger employer engagement, structured career support mechanisms, and continuous curriculum updates are necessary to ensure alignment with

evolving industry demands. This will help bridge the gap between training and employment, improving the ability of all graduates to effectively utilise their qualifications in the workplace.

5.3.3 Course Alignment with Employment Needs

The findings indicate a mixed perception regarding the relevance of courses to employment needs. While 29% of learners believe their courses align "to a very great extent" with job market demands, 25% see no alignment at all, 25% report partial alignment, and 21% note minimal alignment. This suggests that while some training programmes effectively respond to industry needs, a significant portion of learners experience a disconnect between their education and available job opportunities.

The literature on vocational training emphasises the necessity of curriculum relevance in bridging the education-employment gap (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Effective training programmes equip learners with both industry-specific competencies and transferable skills that enhance employability (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021). However, the relatively low proportion of learners reporting strong alignment raises concerns about whether training curricula are sufficiently responsive to evolving economic and technological needs.

Skills mismatches between education and labour market demands are a known contributor to underemployment and prolonged job searches (Powell & McGrath, 2019). The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023) stresses the importance of continuous collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to ensure that curricula remain relevant. Countries with strong vocational education and training systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, have demonstrated that structured apprenticeship models and employer-driven curriculum development significantly improve graduate employability (OECD, 2023). Strengthening these linkages in South Africa will be critical in addressing current skills misalignment issues.

5.3.4 Employer Perception of Job Proficiency

The findings indicate that 43% of employers believe that all learners exhibit job proficiency upon completing their training, while 25% consider most learners proficient. However, 21% of employers report that only some learners meet job performance expectations, and 11% express concerns about overall proficiency. These findings suggest that while a majority of

learners demonstrate competence, a notable proportion may not be fully prepared for workplace demands.

Employer perceptions of job proficiency are crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of skills development initiatives (ILO, 2023). Ideally, training programmes should equip learners with both technical and soft skills that align with labour market expectations. However, the disparity in employer assessments suggests gaps in work-readiness training, hands-on learning experiences, or industry collaboration. Research shows that work-integrated learning models significantly enhance graduate employability and workplace adaptability by embedding real-world application into vocational training (McGrath & Powell, 2022).

Skills mismatches remain a persistent issue in developing economies, where vocational education often struggles to align with employer expectations (OECD, 2023). South Africa's National Skills Development Strategy underscores the importance of employer engagement in programme design to enhance workplace readiness (DHET, 2022). Countries with robust vocational education systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, incorporate structured apprenticeships and ongoing industry participation in curriculum development, which strengthens employment outcomes (Powell & McGrath, 2019).

The findings indicate a need to expand work-integrated learning opportunities, enhance employer involvement in programme design, and ensure that learners acquire industry-relevant competencies. Without these improvements, some graduates may continue to face difficulties in meeting employer expectations, potentially leading to underemployment and job turnover.

5.3.5 Employer Satisfaction with the Programme

The findings indicate that 50% of employers are very satisfied with the programme, while 25% are satisfied, suggesting that three-quarters of employers view the initiative positively. However, 13% remain neutral, and another 13% express dissatisfaction, indicating room for improvement in meeting employer expectations. Employer satisfaction is a crucial indicator of a programme's effectiveness, as it reflects the extent to which training interventions align with workplace needs and contribute to productivity (OECD, 2023).

High satisfaction levels suggest that the programme successfully equips learners with relevant skills, enhancing their employability and workplace readiness. Research highlights that employer engagement in programme design significantly increases satisfaction by ensuring that training content is industry-relevant (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Countries such as Germany and Switzerland, which implement structured apprenticeship models, have

demonstrated that close collaboration between employers and training institutions fosters high satisfaction levels and better job placement outcomes (Powell & McGrath, 2019).

However, the presence of dissatisfied employers highlights potential challenges such as skills mismatches, insufficient practical training, or inadequate support mechanisms. Studies indicate that employer dissatisfaction often stems from graduates' lack of problem-solving abilities, soft skills, and adaptability—competencies that are increasingly important in modern workplaces (World Economic Forum, 2023). Strengthening work-readiness training, incorporating industry-led competency assessments, and expanding mentorship opportunities can help ensure that graduates meet employer expectations more effectively.

The findings demonstrate that the learning programme was largely successful in equipping participants with relevant skills, as indicated by high levels of perceived usefulness and employer satisfaction. However, persistent challenges, including skills mismatches, limited job-market absorption, and variable employer assessments of proficiency, highlight the need for further improvements. Strengthening work-integrated learning, enhancing employer participation in programme design, and continuously updating curricula to match industry needs will be critical in maximising the programme's long-term impact on employability and economic participation.

5.4 Discussion on Objective 3: Perception of the Learning Programmes Interventions Among Beneficiaries

The findings from Objective 3 provide valuable insights into how beneficiaries perceive the learning programme interventions in terms of their usefulness, career impact, and overall value. The discussion contextualises these perceptions within the broader literature on skills development, employability, and workforce integration.

5.4.1 Programme Usefulness and Alignment with Employment Needs

The findings indicate that a majority of beneficiaries found the programme useful, with many ratings it positively in terms of knowledge acquisition and skills enhancement. This aligns with global research suggesting that structured skills development programmes, particularly those that incorporate both theoretical and practical components, significantly contribute to workforce readiness (McGrath & Powell, 2022). The perceived usefulness of the programme reflects the relevance of its curriculum, suggesting that at least some of the training provided meets labour market demands. However, the presence of learners who did not find the programme useful raises concerns about potential skills mismatches, inadequate industry alignment, or insufficient exposure to practical work environments (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2021).

The varying levels of perceived usefulness reinforce the argument that training interventions must be continuously adapted to match shifting economic and technological demands. Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) stresses that demand-driven skills development—where training content is informed by real-time labour market needs—yields the highest employment success rates. The findings suggest that while the programme has value, a more robust employer engagement strategy could ensure greater alignment between training and job placement.

5.4.2 Willingness to Recommend the Programme and Programme Credibility

A key finding is that a significant proportion of beneficiaries would recommend the programme to others, suggesting general satisfaction with the training experience. High recommendation rates indicate that learners perceive the programme as credible and beneficial, a factor that is critical in strengthening the reputation of skills development initiatives (ILO, 2023). The positive word-of-mouth endorsement could also enhance future enrolment, reinforcing the role of the programme in workforce development.

However, the reluctance of some respondents to recommend the programme raises concerns about post-training outcomes. In particular, dissatisfaction may stem from a lack of job placement opportunities, inadequate employer engagement, or challenges in securing employment within their field of training. Research by Powell and McGrath (2019) highlights that even well-structured vocational programmes risk losing credibility if they do not translate into tangible career opportunities. To address this, training providers and policymakers must enhance career guidance services, facilitate stronger workplace linkages, and improve employer incentives for hiring programme graduates.

5.4.3 Perceived Career Pathway Impact and Job Market Integration

The findings reveal mixed perceptions regarding whether the programme provided a clear career trajectory. While some learners view their training as a stepping stone to employment or further education, others struggle to connect their skills development experience with concrete career opportunities. The presence of learners who do not see a clear career pathway suggests potential gaps in programme structure, career support services, or alignment with employer expectations (Turok & Visagie, 2021).

Research underscores the importance of integrating structured career pathways within training programmes, particularly in economies with high unemployment and slow job market absorption (National Treasury, 2023). The dual-training model used in countries such as Germany and Switzerland, where vocational education is closely linked to employer needs,

provides a best-practice example of how work-integrated learning can enhance career progression (OECD, 2023). South Africa's skills development framework could benefit from a similar model, where employers play an active role in shaping training content and facilitating employment transitions.

Despite the generally positive feedback, the findings highlight that a notable proportion of beneficiaries feel the programme did not provide them with meaningful career direction. This aligns with broader concerns about the effectiveness of skills development interventions in addressing South Africa's employment crisis (Bhorat et al., 2022). Structural challenges such as slow economic growth, weak labour market demand, and limited job creation opportunities further complicate the transition from training to employment (Stats SA, 2024).

Additionally, the presence of respondents who remain unemployed despite completing the programme raises questions about post-training support. Studies show that skills development programmes are most effective when they include structured mentorship, career coaching, and employer connections (ILO, 2023). Enhancing these elements could improve employment rates and ensure that graduates are equipped to navigate job market challenges.

The findings suggest that while the learning programme interventions are generally perceived as useful, there are notable gaps in their ability to secure long-term employment and career advancement. Strengthening employer partnerships, ensuring curriculum relevance, and improving post-training support mechanisms are essential to increasing programme effectiveness. By addressing these factors, training initiatives can better align with labour market needs, improve employability outcomes, and enhance overall workforce development in South Africa.

5.5 Discussion on Objective 4: Programmes Challenges and Successes

The findings under Objective 4 highlight both positive trends and persistent challenges in CATHSSETA's skills development programmes. The discussion integrates the literature review to critically examine trends in enrolments, certification, programme representation, funding, demographic inclusion, and geographical disparities in participation. These findings underscore the need for a more structured and responsive approach to skills development in South Africa.

5.5.1 Increasing Enrolments and the Impact of Policy Interventions

The sharp rise in programme enrolments from 2023 to 2024 suggests a growing recognition of the importance of skills development in addressing unemployment (DHET, 2022). The

increased participation aligns with government policy priorities to expand training opportunities and integrate more young people into the labour market (Stats SA, 2024). However, the limited participation between 2020 and 2022 reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted education, training, and employment pathways (Casale & Posel, 2021). Economic uncertainty and reduced employer participation during the pandemic likely contributed to these lower numbers, reinforcing the need for long-term resilience strategies in skills development (OECD, 2024).

While the post-pandemic recovery in training participation is promising, the sustainability of this growth remains a concern. Increased enrolments alone do not guarantee employment outcomes, as research suggests that the success of skills programmes depends on their alignment with labour market needs and employer engagement (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Without structured transition pathways from training to employment, high participation rates may not translate into meaningful job creation.

5.5.2 Certification Gaps and Their Implications for Employability

The finding that only 38% of participants received certification upon programme completion raises significant concerns about the effectiveness of skills development initiatives (Kruss et al., 2014). Certification plays a crucial role in enhancing employability, as formal recognition of skills is often a prerequisite for job opportunities (OECD, 2024). The absence of certification for 62% of learners suggests administrative inefficiencies, incomplete programme requirements, or a lack of standardised assessment processes.

Research highlights that incomplete certification can undermine the perceived value of training and create barriers to employment (Rogan & Reynolds, 2019). Employers rely on recognised qualifications to assess competency, and without formal certification, many learners may struggle to validate their skills in the job market (DHET, 2023). Addressing certification challenges requires streamlining assessment processes, ensuring timely issuance of credentials, and strengthening quality assurance mechanisms.

5.5.3 Programme Representation and the Role of Work-Integrated Learning

The distribution of learners across various programme types reveals a strong emphasis on learnerships (33%) and internships (33%), which aligns with national policies promoting structured workplace-based training (DHET, 2023). The prominence of these programmes suggests that experiential learning is central to the skills development strategy, reinforcing the argument that work-integrated learning (WIL) improves employability (Kruss et al., 2014).

However, the lower participation in bursaries (8%) and skills programmes (5%) indicates that alternative training pathways may be underutilised. Skills programmes, in particular, are designed to provide targeted upskilling in critical sectors, yet their limited representation suggests potential funding constraints or limited industry partnerships (OECD, 2024). Expanding short-term skills training could address immediate labour market demands while offering flexible learning opportunities for a broader range of participants.

5.5.4 Educational Background and the Dominance of NQF Level 6 Learners

The strong representation of NQF Level 6 learners (39%) highlights a significant presence of individuals with post-secondary education seeking additional skills (DHET, 2023). This aligns with national policy objectives that prioritise vocational training to bridge the gap between higher education and employment (Wildschut et al., 2023). However, the relatively low participation of learners at NQF Level 8 and above suggests that fewer individuals pursue advanced qualifications, which may limit access to high-skilled job opportunities (OECD, 2024).

The prevalence of NQF Level 4 learners (21%) and NQF Level 5 learners (15.2%) indicates that many participants are engaging with skills development at an intermediate level. While this provides a foundation for workforce entry, the effectiveness of training depends on industry relevance and practical application (McGrath & Powell, 2022). Strengthening pathways from mid-level qualifications to higher-level specialisations could enhance career progression and reduce underemployment.

5.5.5 Funding Disparities and Weak Employer Contributions

The overwhelming reliance on SETA funding (91%) raises concerns about the sustainability of CATHSSETA's skills programmes (DHET, 2023). Employer contributions remain minimal at just 7%, suggesting weak private-sector investment in workforce development. International best practices indicate that strong employer participation in training initiatives enhances programme relevance, increases job placement rates, and fosters skills transfer (OECD, 2024).

The limited financial involvement of training providers (1%) further reinforces the need for a diversified funding model. In countries with successful vocational training systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, employer co-financing plays a critical role in sustaining high-quality skills development (ILO, 2023). Encouraging greater private-sector investment through tax incentives, cost-sharing agreements, and apprenticeship funding models could enhance training quality and ensure long-term sustainability.

5.5.6 Gender Disparities and Female-Dominated Participation

The high female participation rate (69%) suggests strong gender inclusivity in CATHSSETA's programmes (DHET, 2023). This aligns with efforts to promote women's participation in skills development and employment (ILO, 2023). Research indicates that increasing women's access to training contributes to economic empowerment and social mobility (Wildschut et al., 2023).

However, the lower male participation (31%) raises questions about potential barriers preventing young men from engaging in skills development initiatives. Studies suggest that societal expectations, limited awareness, and job market perceptions may influence gender participation trends (OECD, 2024). Ensuring balanced representation across all demographics is essential for inclusive workforce development.

5.5.7 Age Distribution and the Focus on Youth Employment

The dominance of young learners under 35 (90%) reflects the prioritisation of youth employment in South Africa's skills development policies (Stats SA, 2024). Given that youth unemployment remains a critical challenge, targeted interventions such as learnerships and internships are essential for equipping young people with industry-relevant skills (DHET, 2023).

However, the low participation of individuals aged 35–55 (10%) and the near absence of participants over 55 raise concerns about lifelong learning opportunities (OECD, 2024). In an evolving labour market shaped by digitalisation and automation, continuous upskilling is necessary for career adaptability (UNESCO, 2023). Expanding training opportunities for mid-career and older workers could enhance workforce resilience and economic productivity.

5.5.8 Racial and Geographical Disparities in Programme Participation

The overwhelming representation of African learners (90.5%) reflects national demographic trends and targeted transformation policies (Stats SA, 2024). Government initiatives prioritise historically disadvantaged groups, aiming to address persistent labour market inequalities (DHET, 2023). However, the underrepresentation of Coloured (8.4%), Indian (0.9%), and White learners (0.2%) suggests potential gaps in outreach and accessibility.

The uneven distribution of learners across provinces highlights disparities in programme access. While urban centres such as KwaZulu Natal (24%), Gauteng (24%) and Western Cape (14%) exhibit strong participation, provinces with high unemployment rates, such as the Eastern Cape (4%) and Limpopo (1%), remain underrepresented (Stats SA, 2024). Research suggests that rural areas often face structural barriers to skills development, including

inadequate training facilities and limited employer networks (Turok & Visagie, 2021). Expanding outreach efforts in historically marginalised regions is critical to ensuring equitable access to skills training.

The findings highlight both successes and challenges in CATHSSETA's skills development initiatives. While increasing enrolments, strong female representation, and youth participation indicate positive progress, critical gaps remain in certification, employer funding, and geographic accessibility. Addressing these issues requires a more integrated approach that strengthens industry partnerships, enhances certification processes, promotes private-sector investment, and expands outreach to underrepresented populations. By adopting a demand-driven model that aligns skills training with labour market needs, South Africa can improve workforce readiness and drive sustainable economic growth.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are structured in alignment with the findings from Chapter 4, addressing the four key objectives of the study. These recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness, inclusivity, and outcome of CATHSSETA's learning programmes.

Objective 1: Determine the Pathways of Learners who have Completed the Learning Programmes Intervention

Findings indicate that a significant proportion of graduates remain unemployed, suggesting barriers to transitioning from training to employment. To address this, stronger employer partnerships should be established to create direct employment pipelines for learners. Employer commitments to hire a percentage of programme graduates should be formalised through incentive schemes, tax breaks, or wage subsidies.

Entrepreneurship training should be expanded to equip learners with business development skills, enabling them to create self-employment opportunities. Business incubation support and access to start-up funding should be provided to learners who wish to establish their own ventures.

To improve graduate employability, the integration of workplace-based learning into all programmes should be prioritised. This includes strengthening internships, apprenticeships, and job placement services. CATHSSETA should work closely with industry partners to ensure that training outcomes align with employer expectations.

Concerns around employment quality, particularly the prevalence of temporary and contract work, suggest a need for greater advocacy for decent work conditions. Employers should be incentivised to transition learners into full-time roles, and labour market regulations should be strengthened to ensure job security and social protection for new employees.

Objective 2: Relevance of the Learning Programmes Interventions Among Beneficiaries

While most learners found the programmes beneficial, some reported a lack of direct alignment with job opportunities. To address this, curriculum design should be continuously revised in collaboration with industry experts to ensure relevance to evolving labour market demands. Sector-specific advisory panels should be established to guide training content development and update course materials in response to emerging industry needs.

A significant portion of graduates reported not applying their acquired skills in their jobs, indicating a skills mismatch. Structured career counselling services should be introduced to guide learners in selecting training programmes that align with high-demand careers. Short refresher courses and bridging programmes should also be offered to address any gaps between training and employment needs.

Employers expressed mixed perceptions regarding job proficiency among graduates, highlighting the need for enhanced work-readiness training. Soft skills development, digital literacy, and critical thinking components should be embedded into all programmes to improve overall workplace adaptability.

Objective 3: Perception of the Learning Programmes Interventions Among Beneficiaries

Findings reveal that while most learners viewed the training positively, some experienced administrative and logistical challenges. CATHSSETA should implement a robust feedback mechanism that allows learners to report concerns in real time, ensuring continuous improvement in service delivery.

Employer satisfaction with the programme was generally high, but some raised concerns about skills mismatches. More structured engagement between CATHSSETA and employers is needed to refine training content and enhance programme effectiveness. Work-integrated learning should be strengthened, with employers playing a more active role in shaping course delivery.

Objective 4: Programmes Challenges and Successes

The study revealed an increasing trend in enrolments, particularly in recent years. To sustain this growth, adequate funding and resources must be allocated to maintain quality training delivery. Expansion of digital learning platforms and hybrid training models could enhance accessibility and accommodate more learners.

Certification challenges were identified as a key barrier to employability, with a large proportion of learners not receiving formal recognition of their training. Administrative inefficiencies in issuing certificates must be addressed, and digital certification systems should be implemented to streamline the process. Employers should be made aware of alternative competency verification systems to ensure that learners without certificates are not unfairly disadvantaged.

Funding for the programme remains heavily dependent on CATHSSETA, with limited private-sector contributions. A co-financing model should be developed to increase employer

investment in training initiatives. Incentives should be introduced to encourage businesses to fund workplace training and employment transition programmes.

Geographical disparities in programme access highlight the need for more inclusive outreach strategies. Underrepresented provinces, such as the Eastern Cape and Limpopo, require targeted interventions to improve skills development access. Mobile training units and digital learning platforms should be introduced to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas.

Provincial participation rates suggest that learners in economically developed regions benefit more from skills development programmes, while those in rural and underdeveloped areas remain marginalised. More effort should be directed toward equalising opportunities by introducing region-specific training models tailored to local economic conditions.

The analysis of school type representation indicates that learners from non-Former Model C schools dominate programme enrolments, highlighting the importance of providing additional academic and skills support to disadvantaged learners. Strengthening foundational learning and providing remedial education where necessary would ensure that all learners benefit equally from the training.

To enhance the impact of CATHSSETA's learning programmes, a multifaceted approach is needed that strengthens industry engagement, improves training relevance, and promotes sustainable employment outcomes. These recommendations, if effectively implemented, will contribute to reducing unemployment, addressing skills mismatches, and fostering a more inclusive and responsive skills development ecosystem in South Africa.

6.2 Conclusion

The findings of the Track and Tracer study provide a comprehensive assessment of the outcome, relevance, and challenges associated with CATHSSETA's learning programmes. The study reveals significant progress in enrolments, with a surge in participation in recent years, reflecting the growing demand for skills development. However, despite increased access to training opportunities, critical barriers to employment remain, with 45% of programme participants still unemployed post-training.

The study highlights key structural weaknesses, including limited employer engagement, low certification rates (only 38% of learners received certification), and a mismatch between skills development and labour market demands. Geographic and demographic disparities also persist, with urban areas receiving greater access to structured training than rural areas.

Gender imbalances in participation were noted, with a female majority (69%), yet many women continue to face barriers to career advancement. Additionally, employer contributions to social benefits such as pensions, medical aid, and UIF remain alarmingly low, reflecting precarious employment conditions for many graduates.

Despite these challenges, the study affirms that CATHSSETA's interventions play a crucial role in improving employability, with 50% of participants securing jobs immediately or within three months post-training. The programmes have also provided a stepping stone for further studies, with 6% of graduates pursuing additional qualifications. Employer satisfaction remains high, with 75% of respondents indicating positive perceptions of the training. However, concerns about job proficiency and workplace readiness persist, necessitating stronger alignment between training content and industry needs.

Overall, while CATHSSETA's skills development programmes contribute positively to workforce preparedness, sustained improvements in employer collaboration, certification processes, and post-training support mechanisms are necessary to enhance long-term employment outcomes and ensure equitable access to opportunities.

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