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The Synergy between Educational Qualification Levels and Youth Employability: The Case of Kanyamazane, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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Abstract. Unemployment is a global issue that negatively affects people, especially the youth. Youth unemployment impacts the current and future economies of every nation. A lack of required prerequisites for work might impede an individual's chance of being employable. There are many contributing factors to the gradually increasing unemployment rate, including the flawed education system inherited from the apartheid system in South Africa, which limits the skills and knowledge required to function at work. The study focuses on the impact of educational qualifications on youth employability in Kanyamazane (a rural area in the Mbombela Municipality of Mpumalanga, South Africa). A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select the study participants among the Kanyamazane youth with N=106. The research instrument was self-developed with five Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The descriptive statistics used frequency, mean, standard deviation and percentage to describe the demographic information of participants and responses to research items. Spearman's Correlation was used to test the relationship between selected demographic and research item variables, and the result showed significant relationships ($p>0.05$) between most of the variables. Similarly, one-way analysis was done using One-way Analysis of variance to determine the impact of various educational qualification levels on the employability status of the participants. The result showed a statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) in the different levels of educational qualifications and employability status of the participants. Hence, it showed that educational level has a significant impact on the

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youths' employability, and the study recommended that youths should be given equal access to quality education.

Keywords: education; employability; qualification levels; unemployment; youths

1. Introduction

The rate of unemployment among youth is becoming a global crisis that requires urgent attention. Although the challenge is more critical in some regions than in others, globalisation has made regional crises more or less a global problem. Unemployed youth in a specific region can decide to emigrate to another region and, in the process, increase the rate. The current global youth unemployment rate is around 13%, and South Africa's unemployment rate recently reached a high level of 32.1% during the last quarter of 2023 (Cowling, 2024). This is not an isolated case; numerous studies have been conducted on the employability of young people and the factors that affect unemployment in different circumstances. The world unemployment rate is characterised by other factors such as the educational system, demographic makeup, economic crises, a severe recession with a relatively slow rate of recovery, and unemployment because of a shortage of open positions (Habiyaremye et al., 2022; Khuluvhe et al., 2022). There is a global trend of unemployment among the youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years based on similar reasons.

South Africa has a lengthy history of unemployment because of apartheid in the labour market, educational system, and racial disparities. The South African government still needs to find a solution to the problems of equitable employment opportunities and universal access to high-quality education. One of the causes of unemployment in South Africa could be traced to the economic background of parents when one or both parents have never worked or received a formal education and are unaware of the enrolment process of their wards at school or follow-up on their academic progress. Compared to parents who have formal education and jobs and are able to guide and advise their children accordingly when applying to school, the former children may need help to be employed more than the latter (Clark & Lepinteur, 2019).

Unemployment can be categorised into two types, namely, broad/expanded and narrow unemployment. The unemployed people in the broad unemployment category are those who have not actively sought employment during the past 30 days, and they are mostly referred to as discouraged job seekers. Among the many causes are people's inability to secure employment, failure to find a suitable position, lack of personal credentials and when the cost of seeking employment outweighs the possibility of finding one (Altman, 2003; Dinkelman & Pirouz, 2011). Strict/narrow unemployment is defined as those who have not given up looking for work and are desperately looking for an available opportunity. These two categories of unemployment are significantly varied from one another (Alenda-Demouttiez & Mügge, 2020; Venter & Levy, 2014; Verick, 2011). Also, people who are employed below their skills and qualifications are regarded as underemployed, which is another type of unemployment that has not been

extensively discussed in the literature (Beukes et al., 2017). All three forms of unemployment are classified as unemployment in this study.

The Mpumalanga province's overall expanded unemployment rate is currently 48.7 per cent. According to Statistics South Africa, the narrow unemployment rate in Mpumalanga climbed in the third quarter of 2017 from 13.3% to 27.8% and in 2024, it increased to 37.4% (Mokgobu, 2022). The largest rates of unemployment were among young people (15-24 years) and those (25-34 years), with 64.4% and 42.9%, respectively (StatsSA, 2021). Young people in the province of Mpumalanga may be unemployed for a variety of reasons, including a lack of access to quality education and a long commute to school. Prior to 2013, South Africa had no higher education institutions (universities) in the province of Mpumalanga. As a result, some young people found it challenging to leave the province for university education and were inhibited from having formal education.

Additionally, some students choose the wrong combination of subjects during their matriculation year due to a lack of proper counselling and guidance, which prevents them from being accepted into the higher education institution for a course of interest. These obstacles make it difficult for many young people to be gainfully employed after graduating from high school or earning a degree. Early work experiences often improve individual work skills and influence career pathways. Educational institutions (basic and higher) are under increasing pressure to incorporate employability skills development into all academic courses (Guo, 2023; Mokibelo et al., 2020). The study aims to explore the impact of educational qualifications on youth employability in Kanyamazane.

2. Literature Review

Bhola and Dhanawade (2017) define employability as the ability to navigate the labour market independently in order to reach one's potential through sustainable employment. Likewise, Clarke (2018) describes employability as an individual's capacity for jobs and success in their chosen field as a result of a combination of personal qualities, abilities, knowledge, and understanding. Employability is further described as a range of career qualities, including the drive, personality characteristics, and awareness of one's own and other people's goals, values, and interests, which can include having competencies such as knowledge and skills that are advantageous to an individual's success in the workplace.

Pool and Sewell (2007) explain employability, especially to new students and their parents, by using a model. Individual access to a developed career, work and life experience, knowledge, skills and understanding, generic skills, and emotional intelligence should be attained in order to be employable. Access to these elements will then assist individuals in developing self-confidence, self-efficiency, and self-esteem, consequently resulting in employability (Ismail, 2017; Pignault et al., 2023; Pool & Qualter, 2013; Potgieter, 2012). When students achieve all the elements of the model, they can be successfully employed in the labour market (Pool, 2020).

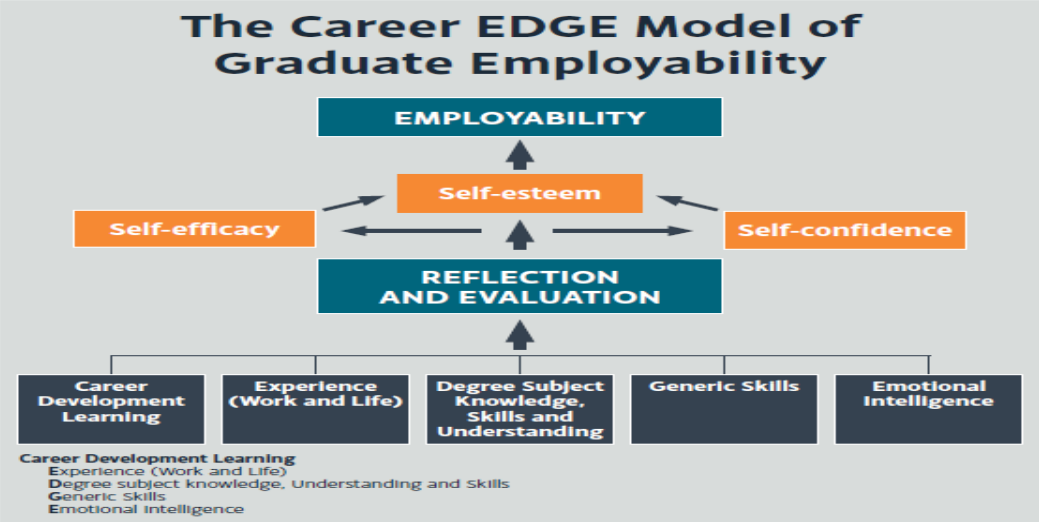

Figure 1: The Career EDGE Model of Employability (Pool & Sewell, 2007)

The employability profile is a tool for diagnosis that motivates students to think and take appropriate action on development and improvement. Work experience is advantageous because it helps people develop the general abilities that businesses need (Pool, 2020). When students are provided with education, practical experience, knowledge, and understanding of the labour market, their skills and emotional intelligence are eventually developed. Career development learning is about the preparedness of students by ensuring that the guidance needed for the labour market is provided. Jackson and Edgar (2019) and Bridgstock et al. (2019) stated educational institutions must integrate career development plans into the curriculum to prepare students for searching for employment process and actual employability. It is important to ensure that students clearly understand the labour market demands, resulting in a competitive advantage for the student's future employment. Undergraduates need information on how to begin searching for work, create a CV, and present themselves to employers. Career development learning is useful because it assists students in choosing a career, education, training, and managing their careers. It also helps school leavers develop self-awareness, awareness of opportunity and career management skills that significantly impact an individual's employability (Frankowska et al., 2015; Lauder & Mayhew, 2020; Pool, 2020).

Furthermore, work experience is mostly valued by employers because it is believed to enhance an individual's confidence in employability skills and shows the ability to apply the study to real-life situations and work. Organisations provide graduates with the opportunity to gain work experience through internships (Masego et al., 2024). It also allows organisations to pre-recruit and evaluate individuals without the pressure to employ students. Students may volunteer or work part-time to gain work experience and enhance employability skills (Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). Students who act in voluntary or paid work would have been exposed to professional communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills. Also, it assists potential employees in understanding their area of interest in a specific career path and making decisions about career choices (Masego et al., 2024; Pool, 2020).

Employers' first preference is educational qualification when judging applicants' employability. In most cases, applicants get employed because of their educational qualifications and other important aspects like skills, characteristics, and more (Frankowska et al., 2015; Lauder & Mayhew, 2020). Generic skills are the most preferred skills by employers in the labour market. They include the ability and willingness to learn, creativity, teamwork, ability to adapt and communication skills, which is usually referred to as the Critical Cross-Field Outcome (CCTO) (Kappo-Abidemi & Ogunyemi, 2023). Communication is the most common skill employers focus on during recruitment. Language barriers could impact employers' recruitment decisions. Generic skills are transferable to various contexts, such as school and work. Employability skills are generic and help the individual cope and perform better within the workplace. Generic skills play a significant role in supporting students' disciplinary knowledge within the context of work (Iqbal et al., 2023; Mansour & Dean, 2016; Murrar et al., 2022).

Emotional intelligence is also considered one of the required skills for employability by the model, which is the ability to manage emotions and handle situations. When students possess the ability to emphasise their feelings and those of other individuals and adequately manage their emotions, it is a sign that they are adequately prepared for the labour market (Brit, 2024; Chand et al., 2019). One of the attributes required for job descriptions and specifications is emotional intelligence. Organisations seek individuals who can control their emotions. Self-awareness is also an important element required of an individual in the workplace in order to enhance employability and increase the chance of success in the workplace. Educational institutions can guide students on how to present themselves to employers. Through one's emotional intelligence skills, one would be able to develop self-confidence as well as self-efficacy (Pool, 2020).

2.1 Youth employability and educational qualifications

Both developed and developing nations have high rates of youth unemployment. The global number of unemployed youths is consistently increasing (Atkins, 2013; Desai et al., 2024). Bojadjieva et al. (2022) stated that the youth are disproportionately impacted by economic volatility, as evidenced by the rising jobless rate. This can be because the demands of the labour market and the educational system are incompatible (Minguez, 2013). Yu (2012) also reckons that one of the problems employers must deal with is the discrepancy between demand and available talent. Building a solid foundation of high-quality education is the government's duty, and to ensure this benefits everyone from primary, secondary, further education and training (FET) and tertiary levels. Unfortunately, stakeholders or organisations prioritise the enhancement of graduate employability only, excluding other educational levels (Dewan & Sarkar, 2017; Okolie et al., 2019). The section focuses on the employability of youth with educational qualifications according to educational levels and unemployment status in South Africa.

2.1.1 Employability of young people with pre- and post-Matric educational qualifications

The Department of Basic Education (2022) indicated that in South Africa, between 2020 and 2021, half a million youths dropped out of school before reaching Matric due to the pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, school programmes were moved online, and some learners could not afford to buy data, while others became depressed due to challenges related to the pandemic. Many studies found an association between family poverty and children's outcomes resulting in school dropout (Dieltiens et al., 2012; Ferguson et al., 2007; Stanley & Olumuyiwa, 2023). However, many other factors lead to learners dropping out of school beyond poverty. Factors such as illness, disability, a family structure, children living with guardians or people who are not their biological parents, living in isolated communities, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, lack of effective teaching, and poor performance contribute to students' dropout (De Wet & Mkwananzi, 2014; Ngwakwe, 2014; Romero et al., 2018; Sibanda, 2004).

According to Desai et al. (2024), dropping out of school can place individuals in a disadvantaged position in terms of employability skills, income and chances of employment. Even if one can find work, it is still likely that their income will be limited to a lower salary. Many of the young people who have not finished their Matric represent the most at-risk, who find it difficult to enter the workforce and frequently find themselves jobless. Helping these populations demands going beyond grades and credentials and considering other crucial factors, including behaviour, attitude, and learning capacity (Cariaga, 2022; Li & Schoenfeld, 2019). The employability of students in elementary and secondary school can be greatly improved by including career-related activities in the curriculum, which would expose students to a wide range of learning opportunities and the world of work.

Developed nations consider the curriculum's emphasis on entrepreneurship and the development of 21st-century skills to make sure that students are appropriately prepared for a complicated future once they graduate from school or per adventure, they could not make it through school. To ensure that young people are prepared for the job market, those nations intentionally introduce training programs to students while they are still studying (Cariaga, 2022; Li & Schoenfeld, 2019). The government must make sure that educational objectives match up with national requirements and that students receive the training needed to compete in today's globalised and competitive world. Countries like Singapore have created an educational system that is well-structured and considers the abilities and career preferences of learners from an early age. The nation has a system in place that divides students into groups based on their varying levels of subject-matter proficiency. The system gets students ready for less rigorous academic courses in vocational education. The framework focuses on students in basic education through secondary education by enabling secondary students to select the stream they want to study and choose between courses in business, the arts, and technology (Brito & Cheng, 2015).

The educational system from developed nations was accepted by South Africa and implemented in the local school population. The country's educational system gives students the option to choose a course, beginning in grade 10, that focuses on commerce, general studies (history), and sciences. South Africa devised policies and procedures to include the fourth industrial revolution, particularly with reference to the nation's technical educational curriculum to promote learning (Mtshali & Ramaligela, 2020). The introduction of 4IR to the education system seeks to replace task-based aspects in the workplace with human-centred ones (Alexander, 2022; Kayembe & Nel, 2019; Uleanya, 2023). The 4IR provides immediate intervention to the COVID-19 outbreak, and technology use is now more important than ever in workplaces, educational institutions, and other settings. However, there are fears that robots may replace workers in Africa on a large scale, leading to fewer employment prospects, which is one of the major reasons to include technology as part of learning right from basic education (Jegede, 2021; Moloi & Mhlanga, 2021).

According to Horn (2006), only 5-7% of grade 12 candidates could find employment in a formal sector. This justified the South African government's (2024) report that mentioned that the people with less than Matric qualifications formed the highest level of employment (38.6%) nationally based on substandard academic achievement and the quality of the education content learned at the high school level. There is a general belief that Matric credentials no longer hold much value in the job market (Monyooe et al., 2014; Moses, 2017). Meanwhile, De Clercq (2020) and Spaull (2013) indicated that these presumptions are incorrect; inequalities in the quality of education and significant income gaps among matriculants equally affect the quality of education offered at the basic education level. In most cases, access to quality education is determined by the parent's income. South Africa's educational quality seems to be worse than that of other countries with similar socioeconomic levels, based on inequalities in the distribution of resources and historical apartheid legacy. There is evidence that underprepared students from low-income backgrounds and less equipped schools have difficulty passing the nationally required matriculation exams and dealing with worse labour market challenges because of the inadequate quality of secondary education (Hofmeyr et al., 2013).

The government is expected to provide equal access to quality education regardless of individual background. The education system could offer teacher training programmes and establish a fundamental literacy and numeracy curriculum that is age appropriate (Rose & Alcott, 2015; Zickafoose et al., 2024). In order to ensure that the curriculum is age-appropriate and relevant to learners, monitoring programmes must also be put in place to ensure peer learning and self-development among the programme participants. These methods assist students in making an easy transition from education to a job (Brito & Cheng, 2015; Cariaga, 2022; Li & Schoenfeld, 2019). Yu (2012) explains that the youth employability skills deficit is a global issue. The global monitoring study acknowledged that the majority of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in developing nations have not even finished primary education and thus lack the necessary employment skills. Similarly, the lack of skills in industrialised nations

leads to higher unemployment rates. It is confirmed that young people without skills will permanently be locked in working poverty, even in affluent countries.

One of the largest global employment issues is the persistence of the broad skills gap. Governments seem to lack the resources necessary to close the gap between the demands of individuals, businesses and the educational system. The development and implementation of strategies to ensure that the educational system meets the market demand is the responsibility of the government. Young people gain the required education to meet the core skills needs of the market because higher education institutions are required to provide students with employable skills (Brito & Cheng, 2015). Tymon (2013) also emphasises that while a degree alone cannot ensure employment in the future, it does increase an individual's chance of employability (Botha, 2021).

Assumptions arise that universities must employ integrated learning and practical content of subjects that educational institutions may include to get students ready for a successful job and lifelong learning. These would assist students in gaining work experience and putting what they have learnt in their tertiary studies into practice. Collaboration between educational institutions and organisations is required to promote learning, improve the quality of the curriculum, and give teachers the training needed in monitoring techniques and other essential skills (Kappo-Abidemi & Ogunyemi, 2023). Brewer & Comyn (2015) and Brank (2016) further assert that several factors, including access to school, training opportunities, encouragement and support for ongoing learning, and acknowledgement of the necessary abilities, contribute to employability. Graduates must have the technical skills to carry out activities in order to get employment. Communication, problem-solving, motivation to learn, and teamwork are among the fundamental abilities. Knowledge and skills improve an employee's capacity to get, keep, and permit mobility at work. Graduates' ability to have comprehensive education, training, and higher-level skills, as well as the ability to embrace new technologies and access new markets, makes them more employable (Bernstein & Osman, 2012). Brito and Cheng (2015) emphasise the need for a high degree of education and training in the existing economic systems. People with more skills have better work opportunities than those with less education. As a result, universities must consider both the demands of sustainable development and the needs of the labour market. Universities are obligated to give students a foundational education, the skills needed in the workforce, and ongoing training to advance their knowledge and skills. Some colleges in Europe emphasise knowledge acquisition and application in real-world settings more than others by using practical learning.

2.1.2 Factors impacting employability

Education is a tool for developing skills needed for ever-changing modern work environments and changing technologies (Bolton et al., 2020). These changes require new skills, enabling young people to adapt and cope well in the labour market (Ndebele & Ndlovu, 2019). Therefore, young people with higher educational qualifications easily apply such skills within the workplace than

young individuals with a lower level of education (Bojadjieva et al., 2022). Ishola et al. (2018) denote that education is an asset and basis for young individuals to develop and reach their potential. Acquisition of higher education is important as the certificates or degrees obtained can enhance the chances of finding higher compensating occupations. Quality education can enhance an easy transition of students from school to work (Bolton et al.,2020).

Notwithstanding, research has shown no significant association between skills developed in a tertiary institution and an increased probability of employment (Vasanthakumari, 2019). Ishola et al. (2018) believe that educational qualifications alone do not guarantee employability; work experience also plays a role in employability. When an individual has many years of experience within a specific work field, it impacts their employability, ability to maintain, allow mobility or find another job. Bojadjieva et al. (2022) explain that due to work experience, most educated adults remain employed compared to educated youth.

Furthermore, in the case of demographics and education, the unemployment rates of educated adults remain low compared to those of educated youth (Bojadjieva et al., 2022). These prove that unemployment affects people differently and is experienced differently (Ishola et al., 2018). Demographic variables, such as age, are some of the most significant statistical variables that impact employability. Bojadjieva et al. (2022) reckon that youth between the ages of 15 and 25 are the most affected by unemployment. Most of the youth find themselves trapped in lower-compensating jobs. Young people with lower education are affected mainly by recessions. Most individuals do not recover fully from the effects of unemployment. Ndebele and Ndlovu (2019) add that the number of unemployed young individuals aged 15 to 25 is three times higher than that of adults. Similarly, gender is perceived as another predictor of employability. Studies show that males tend to learn and display competency skills faster and more quickly than females. Even the Statistic South Africa report reveals that globally and in South Africa, the labour market is more favourable to men than to women (Dominic & Fulgence, 2019; StatsSA, 2021; International Labour Organization, 2023). The OECD research showed that employment at all levels of education for women is far below that of men. The comparison showed employed individuals with lower secondary education, 69% men and 49% women, and those employed with tertiary education, 88% men and 79% women (OECD, 2012). According to Bojadjieva et al. (2020), OECD (2012), Murire et al. (2024) and Adekanmbi and Ukpere (2023), the impact of different educational levels on youth employability showed no effects of primary and secondary (pre-matriculation) levels on youth employability. However, academic qualifications have a significant impact on the employability of individuals, showing that 83% of graduates, 74% of upper secondary and below, and 56% of those without upper secondary are employed. This has proven a positive relationship between graduates' employability skills and the graduates' perceived employability.

Although academic qualifications have been shown to improve the employability of individuals, the study will explore the types of employment the study participants are engaged in relation to the quality of education they had as well

as their current employment status. Education has always been seen as a significant determinant of individuals' workplace performance. For numerous years, university graduates possessing bachelor's or master's degrees have been in significant demand in the employment market (Stoffberg et al., 2023). A collection of titles, diplomas, and/or certificates issued in a nation that have comparable qualities in terms of degree, length of associated educational pathway, and level of labour market entry is known as an educational qualification type (Welber, 2024). Hence, the study explores the impact of the various educational qualifications on youth employability at various employment levels.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a correlation quantitative research design. Quantitative research design is a systematic and empirical technique used to collect statistical data regarding a particular phenomenon (Daniel, 2016). A closed-ended, self-developed research instrument with five Likert-Scale questionnaires ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly agree (5) was used for data collection from the Kanyamazane youth, an urban-rural township located in Mbombela. The study's participants consisted of youth between the ages of 18 and 40 who had obtained pre-Matric, post-Matric, and tertiary education, either employed, self-employed, or unemployed. The study participants were selected from a group of youths from churches, hair-dressing salons, carwashes and internet cafés in Kanyamazane communities. The self-developed instrument consisted of 27 items; reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha, and the result was **0.620**, which was moderately reliable (Bujang et al., 2018; Taber, 2017; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Face validity was used to measure the extent to which the instrument appears to measure what it is supposed to measure (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The instrument was administered to over 250 participants, but only 106 useful ones were retrieved. The participants were selected by using convenience and purposive non-probability sampling techniques to select study participants based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The purposive sampling technique ensures that participants are within the age range classified as youth in South Africa. The data was cleaned, coded, and captured using SPSS version 29. The participants' identities were kept anonymous, and they were informed of their rights before the commencement of data collection. Informed consent letters were attached to the research instrument so that all the participants could be informed of their rights.

4. Result and Discussion

A descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, educational qualification level, educational qualification field, and current employment status of the study participants is explored to identify the distinguishing features of the participants. The result is discussed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Parameters	Classifications (n=106)	Frequency and Percentage %
Gender	Male	56 (52.8%)
	Female	50(47.2%)
Age	18-23	38(35.8%)
	24-29	34(32.1%)
	30-35	18(17.0%)
	36-40	16(15.1%)
Educational Qualification Level	Pre-Matric	5(4.7%)
	Matric	44(41.5%)
	FET	4 (3.8%)
	Diploma	20(18.9%)
	Degree/Postgraduate	33(31.1%)
Current Employment Status	Unemployed	51(48.1%)
	Employed	38(35.8%)
	Self-Employed	17(16.0%)

The analysis in Table 1 showed that there were more male 56(52.8%) than female 50(47.2%) participants. The research has a third option for gender, which is the other option for any of the participants who are neither male nor female. However, none of the participants chose the option. The majority of the participants are between the age of 18-24 years 38(35.8%), followed by the participants between 24-29 years 34 (32.1%), 30-35 years of age 18 (17.0%) and 36-40 years are the least 16(15.1%). The educational qualification level of the participants was also explored, and the majority of the participants have a Diploma/Degree qualification 45(42.5%), followed by the participants with Matric qualifications who were 44(41.5%); 8 (7.5%) of the participants have a postgraduate qualification and 4(3.8%) completed a qualification from FET. The current employment status of the participants showed that most of the participants, 51(48.1%), were unemployed, 38 (35.8%) were employed, and 17(16.0%) were employed. The descriptive result in Table 2 shows the information such as number, mean, standard deviation, standard error, lower and upper bound, and minimum and maximum in each group.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Participants' Educational Qualification Levels

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Employability Status	Pre-Matric	5	11.40	5.177	2.315	4.97	17.83	5	17
	Matric	442	13.30	3.461	.522	12.24	14.35	6	21
	FET	4	14.25	4.113	2.056	7.71	20.79	9	19
	Diploma	20	17.35	3.760	.841	15.59	19.11	11	25
	Degree/Post-graduate	33	17.64	3.595	.626	16.36	18.91	9	25

Table 2 further showed the difference between groups and within groups' sums of squares, degrees of freedom and the significant difference between the employability status and educational qualification levels of the participants. The self-developed research instrument consisted of 27 research items, which were grouped into three subcategories. The first sub-category consisted of ten research items (questions 1- 10) to examine the quality of education of the participants. Sub-category two consisted of five research items (questions 11-15) linked to employability status, and the third category examined types of employment, with twelve research items (questions 16 -27) linked to the category. Table 3 provides the participants' responses to the research items as well as the mean and standard deviation for each of the research items.

Table 3: Participants' Response to the Research Items

	Research Items	Mean	SD	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
1	The learning at school prepared me for the workplace.	3.32	1.490	21(19.8%)	11(10.4%)	16(15.1%)	27(25.5%)	30(28.3%)
2	I have been employed based on the academic qualification/discipline I acquired.	2.82	1.536	28(26.4%)	27(25.5%)	11(10.4%)	16(15.1%)	24(22.6%)
3	Going to school is worth it.	4.08	1.185	6(5.7%)	5(5.7%)	16(15.1%)	24(22.6%)	54(50.9%)

	Research Items	Mean	SD	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
4	I understand the goal of going to school.	4.11	1.107	5(4.7%)	4(3.8%)	17(16.0%)	28(26.4%)	52(49.1%)
5	I believe that education is key to success.	3.63	1.333	10(9.4%)	13(12.3%)	21(19.8%)	24(22.6%)	38(35.8%)
6	The educational qualification fields determine employability.	3.28	1.378	17(16.0%)	10(9.4%)	33(31.1%)	18(17.0%)	28(26.4%)
7	The educational systems used in South Africa are sound.	3.04	1.366	20(18.9%)	14(13.2%)	33(31.1%)	22(20.8%)	17(16.0%)
8	I have all the education and skills I need to be competitive in my current job.	3.37	1.410	14(13.2%)	16(15.1%)	21(19.8%)	30(28.3%)	25(23.5%)
9	The education/training I received in the past helped me get a job.	2.80	1.417	23(21.7%)	32(30.2%)	11(10.4%)	23(21.7%)	17(16.0%)
10	My educational level resulted in my current employment status.	2.96	1.393	19(17.9%)	28(26.4%)	16(15.1%)	24(22.6%)	19(17.9%)
11	The school programmes were designed in relation to the labour market demand.	3.04	1.249	15(14.2%)	20(18.9%)	32(30.2%)	24(22.6%)	15(14.2%)
12	My current educational qualification makes it easy for me to get a job.	2.87	1.339	21(19.8%)	24(22.6%)	24(22.6%)	22(20.8%)	15(14.2%)

	Research Items	Mean	SD	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
13	I am aware of any programme created to improve my future employability.	3.44	1.204	8(7.5%)	15(14.2%)	29(27.4%)	30(28.3%)	24(22.6%)
14	My current employment status is the result of my educational qualification/s.	2.87	1.415	24(22.6%)	23(21.7%)	20(18.9%)	21(19.8%)	18(17.0%)
15	I would not accept a job offering an amount less than the market-related minimum wage.	3.14	1.527	25(23.6%)	14(13.2%)	15(14.2%)	25(23.6%)	27(25.5%)
16	I was employed temporarily.	2.04	1.330	55(51.9%)	22(20.8%)	5(4.7%)	18(17.0%)	6(5.7%)
17	I am considering moving to find work.	3.89	4.849	18(17.0%)	11(10.4%)	19(17.9%0	21(19.8%)	37(34.9%)
18	I am currently unemployed, but I have a job to which I can return.	1.70	1.140	66(62.3%)	23(21.7%)	6(5.7%)	5(4.7%)	6(5.7%)
19	I have a health condition that makes me unemployable.	1.55	1.131	78(73.6%)	15(14.2%)	3(2.8%)	3(2.8%)	7(6.6%)
20	I have a business, and I am busy looking for formal employment.	1.70	1.114	67(63.2%)	19(17.9%)	9(8.5%)	7(6.6%)	4(3.8%)
21	I just resigned from my current job to seek other positions.	1.42	.861	77(72.6%)	21(19.8%)	2(1.9%)	4(3.8%)	2(1.9%)

	Research Items	Mean	SD	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
22	I am currently busy studying, that is why I am not working.	2.61	1.765	54(50.9%)	3(2.8%)	6(5.7%)	16(15.1%)	27(25.5%)
23	I have a business or job that is seasonal.	1.65	1.122	71(67.0%)	17(16.0%)	6(5.7%)	8(7.5%)	4(3.8%)
24	I lost my job as a result of COVID-19.	1.45	1.122	82(77.4%)	12(11.3%)	7(6.6%)	2(1.9%)	3(2.2%)
25	My skills have become obsolete, and I was replaced by technology.	1.59	1.040	73(68.9%)	15(14.2%)	8(7.5%)	8(7.5%)	2(1.9%
26	I am not interested in any formal employment.	2.32	1.363	43(40.6%)	19(17.9%)	21(19.8%)	13(12.3%)	10(9.4%)
27	My social grant is enough to take care of my basic needs.	1.33	.828	85(80.2%)	12(11.3%)	3(2.8%)	3(2.8%)	2(1.9%)
N=106								

**SD= Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree and SA=Strongly Agree*

The table showed a mean value ranging from 1.33 to 4.11 and a standard deviation value of 0,828 to 4.849. These values showed a wide variation in participants' responses to the research items. Furthermore, tests of normality were conducted to determine the suitable statistical approach to achieve the study objective. The tests of normality were conducted for demographic information of participants and the research items group (Quality of education, employability status and types of employment), as shown in tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Tests of Normality for Study Participants' Demographic Information

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Gender	.355	106	<.001	.635	106	<.001
Age	.222	106	<.001	.833	106	<.001
Educational Qualification Level	.275	106	<.001	.869	106	<.001
Current Employment Status	.279	106	<.001	.715	106	<.001

The Sig. value of all the demographic variables is less than 0.05, which is an indication that the data violates the assumption of normality. Similar tests were conducted for research variables, and the output is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Tests of Normality for Study Research Variables

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			**Shapiro-Wilk**		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Types of Employment	.122	105	<.001	.848	105	<.001
Employability Status	.070	106	.200	.984	106	.247
Quality of Education	.091	105	.032	.973	105	.033

The Sig. value of types of employment and quality of education is close to 0.05. Hence, the assumption of normality is violated; however, the employability of Sig. The value is greater than 0.05, which indicates a normality assumption. Based on normality tests, the study then adopted the non-parametric data analysis approach using Spearman Correlation to test the relationship between demographic characteristics and variables of employability, which were types of employment, employability and educational qualification field.

Table 6: Spearman Correlation Analysis of the Relationship Between Demographic Information and Study Variables

		Gender	Age	EQL	CES	QoE	ES	TOE
Gender	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.016	-.165	-.036	-.084	.013	.077
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.	.869	.092	.791	.397	.897	.437
	N	106	106	106	106	105	106	106
Age	Correlation Coefficient	-.016	1.000	.313**	.619**	.378**	.283**	-.421**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.869		.001	.880	<.001	.003	<.001
	N	106	106	106		105	106	105
Educational Qualification Level	Correlation Coefficient	-.165	.313**	1.000	.276**	.505**	.506**	.292**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.092	.001		.004	<.001	<.001	.002
	N	106	106	106	106	105	106	105
Current Employment Status	Correlation Coefficient	-.036	.619**	.276**	1.000	.341**	.262**	-339**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.716	<.001	.004		<.001	.007	<.001

		Gender	Age	EQL	CES	QoE	ES	TOE
	N	106	106	106	106	105	106	105
Quality of Education	Correlation Coefficient	.084	.378*	.505**	.341**	1.000	.674**	-.261**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.397	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	.008
	N	105	105	105	105	105	106	105
Employability Status	Correlation Coefficient	.013	.283**	.506**	.674**	.674**	1.000	-.179
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.897	.003	<.001	<.001	<.001		.068
	N	106	106	106	105	105	106	104
Types of Employment	Correlation Coefficient	.077	-.421**	-.292**	-.261**	-.261**	-.179	1.000
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.437	<.001	.002	.008	.008	.068	
	N	105	105	105	104	104	105	105

The Spearman Correlation result showed a significant relationship between age, educational qualification level, current employment status, quality of education, employability status and the types of employment of the study participants. However, the result showed no significant relationship between age and current employment status, as well as employability status and types of employment. Further analysis was done using One-way Analysis of Variance to determine the effects of educational qualification levels on the employability status of the study participants (youth).

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (One-Way) of the Relationship between Educational Qualifications and Youth Employability

		Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig**
Employability Status	Between Groups	521.082	4	130.270	9.708	<.001
	Within Groups	1355.295	101	13.419		
	Total	1876.377	105			

The result showed a statistically significant difference (P< 0.001) in participants' responses to employability status based on the educational qualification level. According to Teichler (2015), the relationship between education and employment is not only determined by the functions of education to prepare learning for work and life challenges, but it does separate people based on merit, resource and social recognition. Although the levels and types of education are closely related to professional positions and job requirements, individuals are also expected to be trained on how to cope with challenges and changes in the workplace. According to the International Labour Office (2011), there is a significant disparity in the employability status of people with less educational qualifications and those with higher educational qualification levels. However, Bojadjieva et al. (2022) opined that the employability of less educated people can be increased based on workplace education and training. Therefore, the employability of young people should increase regardless of their educational qualification levels, as they have access to better employment in the job market and receive quality education and training.

The study findings align with Ishola et al. (2018) and Bojadjieva et al. (2022), who reckon that obtaining higher education is vital because the educational qualification earned can increase the likelihood of finding higher-paying jobs. Adequate education and training improve youth employability, consequently providing individuals with opportunities to access better positions in the labour market. Similarly, Boyadjiva and Ilieva-Tricchokova's (2015) findings showed that higher education institutions and qualifications strongly influence employability. Acosta-Ballesteros et al. (2014) state that educational attainment and area of specialisation are significant factors in determining the precariousness of the first

job and the difficulty in finding a new one. Furthermore, higher education levels shorten the time it takes to find a job and enhance the likelihood that an unemployed individual will find new employment with a comparable wage (Zimmer, 2016).

The study found that some obtained educational qualifications but are unemployed. This may result from the poor South African education systems, which impact the employability of the youth. According to Mouton et al. (2012), South Africa is plagued by underperforming educators and a lack of support from parents and the community, resulting in poor student discipline, all of which contribute to poor student performance, increased absenteeism, and a high dropout rate. The school administration's inexperience will undoubtedly impact teachers' performance. There will inevitably be crises where the system supervisors lack the necessary skills to administer the system. Bhola and Dhanawade (2013) add that educational institutions lack a clear strategy to teach employability skills required by the labour market.

5. Conclusion

Employment has been an ongoing issue for the youth residing in Kanyamazane urban township. However, the study findings indicate that educational qualifications play a significant role in enhancing youth employability. Also, the educational qualifications level of youth increases their chances of finding employment. It was found that there is a mismatch between the demand or scarce skills and available skills. The study suggests that students should consider that educational qualifications and educational qualifications field and level go together before selecting a course/discipline. Moreover, the study suggests that the government should develop and improve the South African education system to ensure quality school learning. These would help reduce South Africa's unemployment rate, specifically for the youth in Kanyamazane in the Mpumalanga Province. The study further recommends that educational institutions should consider practical learning, career counselling and guidance that would assist students in selecting careers/fields that are currently in demand and skills that are scarce. Also, to ensure that students are taught employability skills, knowledge regarding the prospects of the labour market and how to market themselves in the labour market. Vocational learning that addresses the national skills gap should also be made accessible and attractive to youth as opposed to the increased emphasis on conventional university education. The study was conducted among the Kanyamazane youth only, the result cannot be generalized to the entire Mpumalanga youth. A future study could draw samples from all Mpumalanga youth in order to determine the quality and level of education and how it impacts the employability of the youth within the province

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