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The Significance Attached to Education and Youth Development in Rural South Africa

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Abstract

Education plays a significant role in improving the socioeconomic conditions of individuals and communities. Given that the youth make up the largest proportion of the population in the rural areas, it is important to understand the social and economic dynamics that affect their ability to develop as individuals and members of society. To put it another way, the significance attached to education will play an important role in the development of young people in the rural areas. This can be attributed to the fact that these young people have to contend with the difficulties posed by resource mobilization when it comes to accessing education or, in some cases, the social and cultural constraints that they face. This chapter shows that the significance attached to the education of the youth in the rural areas of South Africa is a reflection of a myriad of challenges presented by cultural and social expectations and is compounded by the bottlenecks in educational resource mobilization.

Keywords: rural development, significance, skills, youth development

1. Introduction

At the outset, it is an undisputed fact that Africa may now be at a turning point in terms of economic growth and development [1]. This calls, naturally for an education system that will equip the citizens with the requisite skill to match the rapid economic growth. The education system is intended to prepare young people either to enter higher education institutions or to enter the world of work, using the skills that they have acquired. In striving for such achievements, these young people have to contend with a number of difficulties that may prevent them from taking advantage of such opportunities or claiming such basic rights in the social realm. The quality of the education that these young people receive will determine their

economic futures. The significance attached to education and youth development in South Africa can be looked at from the perspective of the historical development, contours, and consolidation of power relations between the rural and the urban, and within the rural areas as influencing the formal or substantive quality of life of people living there.

This is in keeping with the Highest Good of the education system of South Africa, which asserts that curriculum seeks to create a life-long learner who is confident, independent, literate, and numerate. This learner has to have compassion and have respect for the environment, but in the main, he or she must be able to live with others as a critical and active citizen [2]. This curriculum is underpinned by a well-structured student support system that puts the learner at the center. Teaching in the South African context should be to guide the student to full physical and mental maturity and help to develop critical thinking and be encouraged to practice the truth and have self-respect and respect for other people.

This can happen only if the learner is afforded the opportunity to self-accept. If he or she fails to do that, they are likely to have lack of confidence, which will lead to lack of independence. Ultimately, there will be no critical thought, which is what we desperately need today. This chapter considers the significance attached to education and youth development in the rural areas of South Africa with the aim of establishing how education influences development. Attention will be paid to the delivery and the economic outcomes of education in the rural areas of South Africa.

2. Relevance of the study

Schooling and the transition to higher education set the stage for economic development at the personal and the societal level. Policy-makers need to understand how the provision of education affects the access to education and the use people make of educational experiences later on. The creation of conditions enabling people to access such rights can be translated into formal and substantive equality through the enhancement of substantive freedoms through the redistribution of resources [3].

In the South African context, a study in this regard could contribute significantly to enhance the delivery of education in the rural areas in three ways, namely by encouraging the acquisition of authentic knowledge in its context of use rather than through decontextualized exercises, by emphasizing learning connected to coherent knowledge instead of knowledge that has been compartmentalized into distinct courses and subjects, and by promoting learning in collaboration rather than isolation [3].

An evaluation of the education system in South Africa reveals that prior inequalities constraining the rights to, within, and through education relate to the responsibilities that children in the rural areas are expected to bear, especially regarding labor and human production [4]. Therefore, policy-makers need to identify ways to deal with such issues in the community so that the full utility of educational experiences can be achieved at the individual and societal level. This is because, in the South African rural communities, children's roles in the

context of household labor often constrain their freedom to exercise their rights to, within, and through education [4]. The study reported on in this chapter could make a significant contribution in enlightening South Africans about how social and economic dynamics play a role in defining the significance attached to education and youth development in the country and help in policy formulation.

3. Ethical considerations of the study

In any kind of study, ethical considerations guide the way in which the research is conducted and the validity of the information that will be obtained from it. Researchers must, therefore, not only bring their own principled ethical sensitivity to bear on the study in question but also conform to the often stringent requirements of ethical codes that have been formulated by ethics committees [5]. In conducting the study reported on here, it was necessary to pay careful attention to avoid ethical violations so as not to compromise the quality of the research study.

The study relied extensively on data from previous studies as a means to verify or understand various elements. It was necessary to validate the information obtained from any secondary source by evaluating whether the research was conducted in an ethical manner or not. Even though some of the information was obtained from old sources, most of the research studies were conducted in an ethical manner that would guarantee the validity of the research information that was collected in the field.

It was, therefore, necessary to evaluate the way in which the study was conducted by examining the kinds of sources used and how the questions in the study were structured and put to the respective respondents. The interviewers were trained to pose objective questions in a way that would not interfere with the respondents' intended meaning. The secondary sources were also evaluated for possible bias to ensure that the information that was obtained from the previous studies constituted an objective reflection of what was obtained in the field.

Another ethical consideration related to the fact that some of the questions to be asked would involve having to delve into the personal lives of the respondents, to ascertain their income and educational levels specifically. Thus, the researcher had to ensure the confidentiality of all information supplied by the study participants. The researcher had to inform the respondents about the nature of the study and how it would be conducted, including the nature of the information that the respondents would be expected to provide. Respondents who subsequently provided informed consent participated in the study.

4. Method

Various approaches were adopted to gather relevant information for use in the study. Because the research study was related to education, the intention was to collect information from various learning institutions while at the same time involved a number of learners or students

who had completed their education and were either employed or unemployed. Emphasis was placed on obtaining their opinion about their educational experiences and how their educational experiences had helped them thus far in their lives.

In addition, records from learning institutions and the employment bureau were used to assess the level of education of people from various backgrounds and how it influenced the lives of the young people in one way or another. Statistics from previous research studies were used in support of information that was collected in the field. Information from the institutions of higher learning such as universities or technical institutions was used to collect secondary information, particularly regarding past employment trends.

Given that accessing information of this nature involved using several secondary sources, the originality of the information or data had to be ascertained before it could be used. The researcher received training in how to identify a piece of work that is not merely a replica of other work or one that simply applies well-established methods and proposes solutions to straightforward problems. Preferable are texts that apply new methods in tackling existing problems in new ways. Therefore, suitable sources had to demonstrate diversity in their approach to evaluate the significance attached to education among the youth in rural South Africa.

In addition to the use of various secondary sources for the study, interviews were conducted to gain insights into the perspectives of young South Africans. This was done because, in as much as quantitative research is crucial in the practice settings, especially with regard to policy issues, the qualitative approach as embodied in interviews also makes a significant contribution in the assessment of the efficacy of the policies that have been put in place.

It was felt that the interviews would be useful in exploring the lives and viewpoints of the young people and elicit in-depth responses to complex research questions. Moreover, when carrying out research studies on the youth, it is important to recognize the importance of communication. Hence, evaluation of the information about the individual biographies and organizational profiles of young people is important in ensuring that there is more information on the topic. The qualitative approach plays a significant role in the collection of data that contextualizes the feelings, meanings, and experiences of individuals as well as groups.

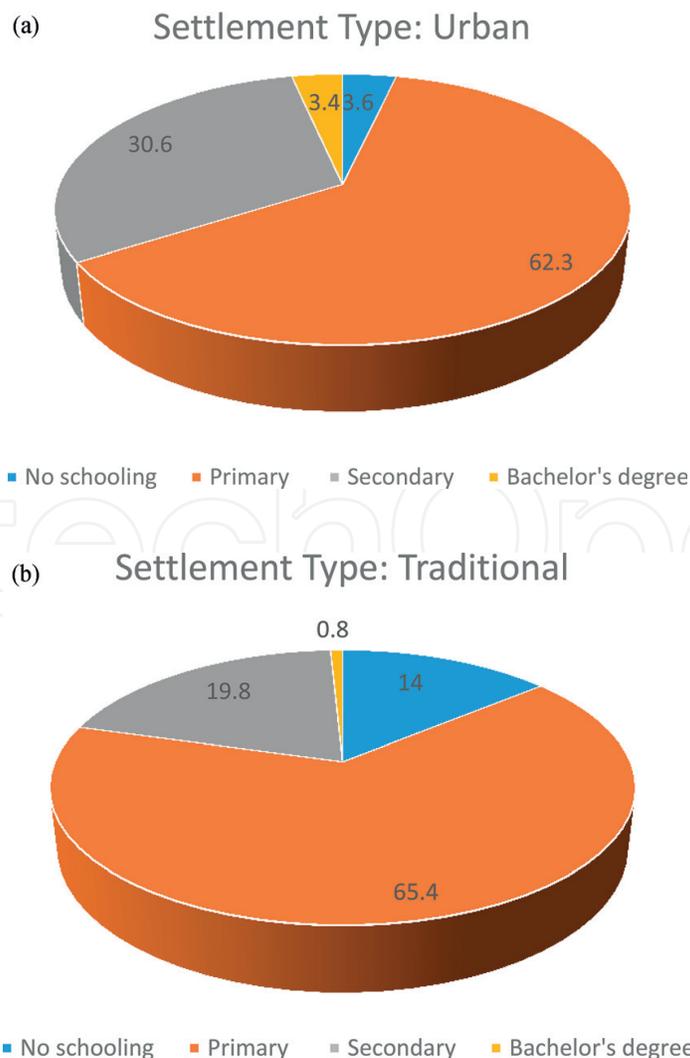
5. Results

5.1. General overview of education and socioeconomic issues in rural South Africa

A study conducted by Spaull in 2013 focused primarily on evaluating the relationship between schooling and the transition to higher education [6]. Spaull's study provided a general picture of the education and employment situation in South Africa that had the potential to contribute to an understanding of the specific factors that determine access to education opportunities. The study revealed six critical facts relating to school-to-work and school-to-tertiary institution transition in South Africa. The first is that poor quality schooling at the primary and secondary levels significantly impedes the ability of young people to take advantage of opportunities they encounter later [6]. In 2009, for instance, 446 schools obtained a pass rate of below 20% [7].

The worst affected provinces are Limpopo, KwaZulu Natal, and Eastern Cape. In Limpopo province, for instance, Excelsus Academy, Hlabirwa Commercial, Kabela Secondary, Kulani Learning Centre, Matokane High school, and Setotolwane Secondary all had 0% matric pass rate. This is just a sample of the 446 schools exhibiting this trend; there are many more within the same province showing similar patterns. In KwaZulu Natal, Lubelo Secondary, Zizamele JS, Msimbithi, Uphezeni Secondary, and Nqumizwe Secondary, all had matric pass rates of below 8% [7]. Again, this is a sample, which means that there are more schools showing the same trend in the actual sense. These statistics show that despite enrolment in learning institutions, the success rate is very low and as such, chances of enrolling in institutions of higher learning are equally inhibited.

Those residing in urban areas are more likely to attain higher education levels than their rural counterparts. Although this is to be expected, given the disparity in opportunities available to either party, there is a stagnation of low schooling over an extended duration of time [8]. The increased rural-urban migration has shown an increased number of those with a bachelor's degree since many in the cities are now exposed to learning environments and opportunities that they would have otherwise missed on. **Figure 1a–d** on settlement type below gives meaning to the story.



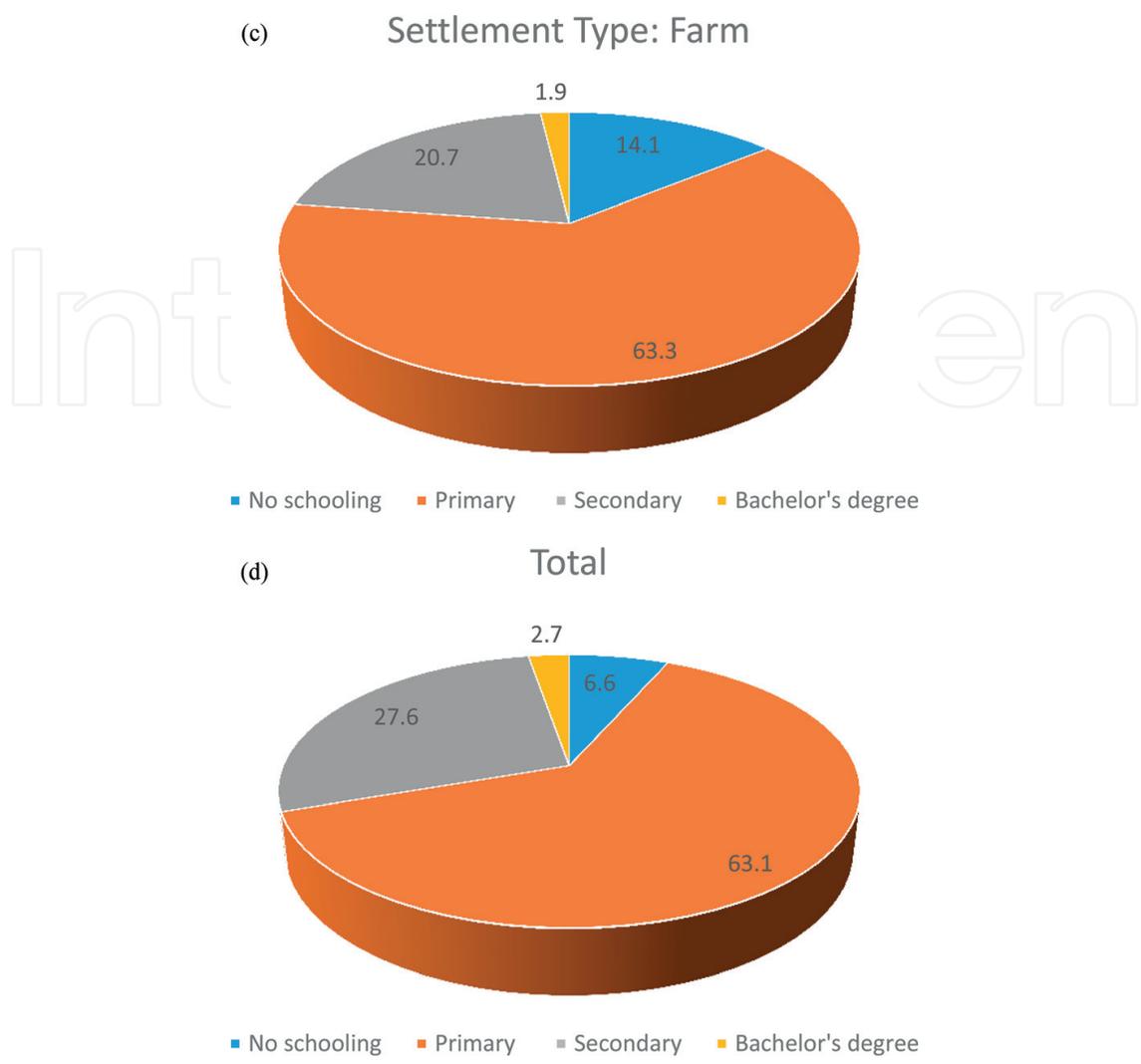


Figure 1. Those who have completed education level by settlement type. (a) Settlement type: urban, (b) settlement type: traditional, (c) settlement type: farm, and (d) total.

In total, 1,176,728 people in urban areas had completed bachelor’s degree, a figure that showed a significant gap from the 88,499 located in traditional/tribal areas and the 38,670 located in farm areas. The census further revealed that one of the main reasons for this disparity is the challenges attributed to socioeconomic development because of electrical connection, piped water, and proper sanitation. However, it is worth mentioning that despite the high number of those with bachelor’s degree in urban areas, the same census reveals that that figure is less compared to those with secondary school level as their highest education level. The figure is even less compared to those that have reached primary school level. In the urban context alone, 10,447,758 people have reached secondary school level. This is less than half the same number who has reached primary school level. The same trend can be observed in the traditional and farm settings.

Consequently, skill deficiencies will persist among those who are considered the products of the underperforming schools. The second is that South Africa has an abnormally high level of youth unemployment (50%), which is high within the realm of the lower average and global

and sub-Saharan youth unemployment rate, while the prevailing unemployment rate in the country is 25%. Third, the percentage of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years who are not employed or enrolled for education or training increased from 30% in 1995 to 45% in 2011, while those in employment decreased from 50 to 36% [6].

Based on these statistics, it becomes apparent that unemployment continues to cripple economic activities in the region. Fourth, over time, there has been an increase in unemployment levels, and this has made the situation even worse. In the same vein, it was discovered that the nature of youth unemployment has undergone a change, in that the number of young people who have never been employed and those who have been seeking employment for more than a year has increased. In 2009, the South African working-age population was 32.4 million, a figure that has since increased to 36 million by 2015. Of the 36 million, 63.7% constituted of whites who are actively employed compared to 40.6% blacks Africans in the same category. In the same year, majority of postsecondary qualification holders (77%), who had the capability of working, were actively employed [9]. This shows that higher educational qualifications increase chances of meaningful employment. The study population included those who have completed secondary and postsecondary education levels. The results affirmed the same thing that higher education levels increase chances of employment. The following figure also shows a similar trend. Between 2008 and 2015, the rate of employment was highest among those without secondary school qualification as compared to those with such levels of qualifications [10], as seen in **Figure 2** below. The rate of unemployment, in this case, refers to the portion of the population that is trying secure jobs. The same tabulation also suggests that secondary schooling is not enough guarantee to secure a job, as was the case in the past.

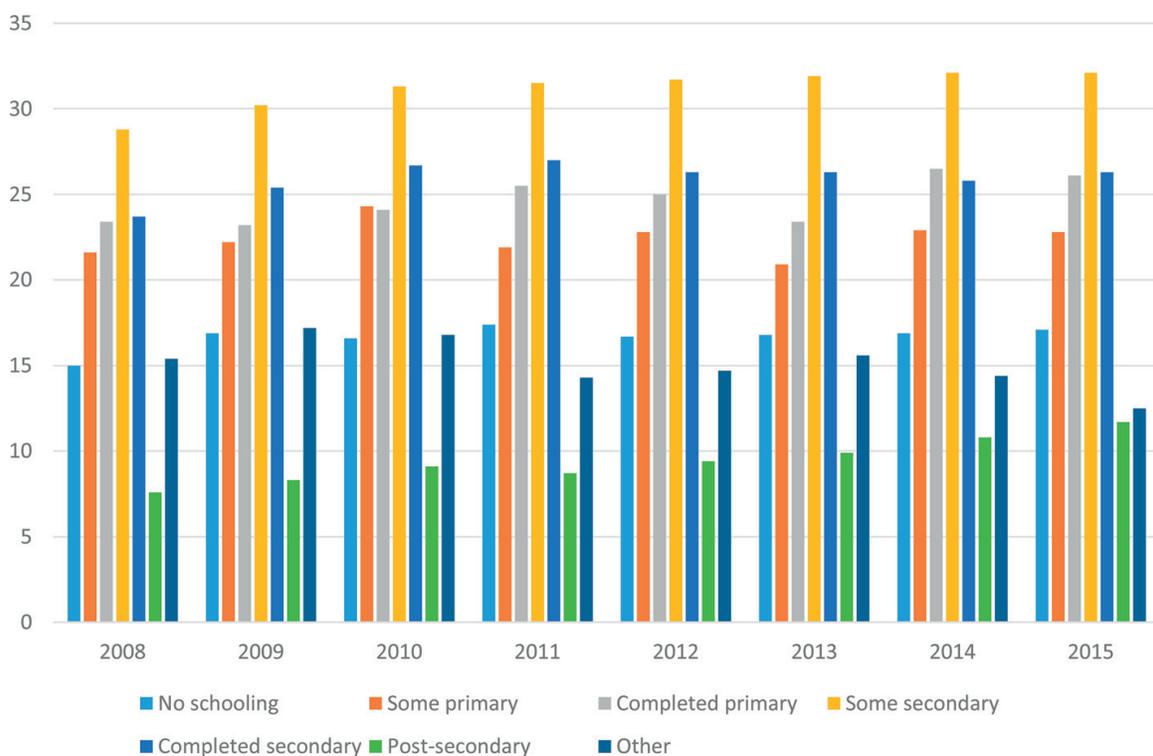


Figure 2. Rate of unemployment subject to education level between 2008 and 2015.

Fifth, the young people believed that passing the national senior certificate (NSC) exam neither guaranteed employment nor increased one's chances of becoming employed.

They believed that passing the NSC exam helped set the stage for tertiary education as a way of improving future employment prospects and that there was, therefore, no need to go out of their way to take advantage of the skills that they had acquired from such opportunities. Finally, in as much as the employment rate of those aged between 18 and 24 years who have tertiary qualifications is much lower than that for young people with NSC or less, it is nevertheless high in relation to South Africa's overall employment rate [6].

5.2. Education and development in the rural areas of South Africa

A study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, Nelson Mandela Foundation, and Education Policy Consortium (2005) aimed to explore and improve the complex relationship that exists between poverty and education in the context of rural South Africa. The research was carried out in KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, and Limpopo. The selection of these provinces was because they include former homelands within their boundaries and they routinely appear among the provinces that exhibit the highest levels of poverty and unemployment and the lowest levels of educational attainment [4]. Moreover, over half of the school learners in South Africa attend school in these three provinces, with the learning population in the remaining six provinces being much smaller. The levels of adult illiteracy and youth unemployment are also highest in these three provinces. The traditional authorities play a crucial role, as seen in their strong presence in these areas.

From the research that was conducted, it was apparent that poverty conditioned the children's ability to access education in the rural areas of South Africa. That is, the conditions under which the young people were able to access educational opportunities in order to advance their personal and societal development were largely dependent on the conditions under which the government can provide education. In this regard, the uneven spread of schools, particularly the missionary schools, constituted a significant obstacle for those in the rural areas [4].

The uneven distribution of schools throughout the country was reinforced by the unequal provision of education in the apartheid era, and the fact that in some instances, families in these areas needed their children's labor, so elected not to send the children to school [4]. This shaped the students' participation in decisions about education. The fact that traditional values in these rural areas continued to define the way they lived their lives implies that some of the communities rejected either schooling or Christianity or both in some instances [4]. Such divisions are still evident in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

The inclusion of educational experiences in development agendas for young people was also evident in the way they viewed the value of educational experiences. Most people living in the rural areas will use their educational experiences in the way that society expects them to. For instance, in Tshamavhudzi, society's notions concerning the predetermined roles of men and women define Limpopo, the main purpose of education in the rural areas. More specifically,

schools and education are viewed as important for employment, making a good marriage and being a responsible citizen [4].

Consequently, the purposes of education will be viewed differently by girls and boys within the context of marriage. For the young women, there tends to be a strong emphasis on marriage and childcare [4]. The fact that access to education and educational experiences has been defined within the realm of gendered norms has led to the formation of certain social attitudes toward education and educated people.

For example, women believe that if they are too highly educated, they may not get married, and men may fear educated women on the grounds that they may not submit to their husbands once they are married [4]. Societal expectations of this kind significantly influence people's decision whether or not to be educated or whether or not to further their education for their own development. From another perspective, the traditional and modern forms of education play complementary roles.

In all three provinces, it was noted that the majority of parents encouraged education relating to sexuality and the transition to adulthood as supplied by initiation schools [4]. What this reveals is that the decision to acquire an education is guided by the societal attitudes of the community members in these rural areas toward education. If they believe that education will not pave the way for a better position in society, they prefer to forego such opportunities.

5.3. The quality of education and youth development in the rural areas

In terms of helping the rural South African population fit in with the contemporary education framework, the quality of the education that young people in the rural areas receive plays a significant role in defining how they choose to position themselves in their communities. This is what a study conducted during the post-apartheid era aimed at evaluating. The study indicated that with regard to the provision of educational opportunities, the education that young people in the rural areas receive must be defined by their culture and their experiences as members of a particular community; otherwise, they will end up fighting the very system that has been designed to improve their socioeconomic status.

The rural areas in South Africa have undergone structural and systemic changes in the transition to democracy. In the process, the most critical and interrelated problems have been the fact that only a small percentage of the rural population is employed, and that the education available to the majority of the rural population is of poor quality [9]. Such bottlenecks negatively affect the socioeconomic status of people from the rural areas because the post-apartheid era in South Africa ushered in political freedom and legal justice, but did very little for economic freedom and social justice [11]. This system has persisted and to a significant extent defines current rural society.

In the quest to overcome the problems that arose because of the influence of the apartheid era, rural-based universities were established in South Africa. The underlying philosophy was that the potential of the rural-based universities in the country would play a significant role in

sustainable development, especially among the communities within their vicinity [9]. Despite the presence of universities in these rural areas, poverty and unemployment remain rife there. It is an indication of the failure of the education system that regardless of the policies that have been formulated to redefine, restructure, and transform higher education, socioeconomic issues such as unemployment and poverty persist in these areas [11]. Therefore, the provision of education opportunities has not been structured to take cognizance of the cultural issues in the rural parts of South Africa, and this increases the chances that socioeconomic problems will persist.

6. Discussion

Based on the research that has been conducted so far, it is clear that the rural areas of South Africa are characterized by underdevelopment at both the individual and societal level. This is because the decision to send children to school is heavily influenced by the economic, social, and cultural context of the community members. Ultimately, the level of education in the rural areas of South Africa greatly influences the development of both community members and society as a whole. This section will analyze the significance attached to education and youth development in the rural areas of South Africa from an economic, social, and cultural perspective.

6.1. Economic perspective

The UN 2013 Economic report on Africa hits is critical of the status of economic growth and puts the blame squarely on the current disproportionate growth pattern caused by lack of education and skills [1]. According to the UN 2010 Economic report, this explains why “the continent continues to suffer from high unemployment, particularly for youth and female populations, with too few opportunities to absorb new labor market entrants” [12]. Being educated sets the stage for a person to be informed about the opportunities that he or she can take advantage of in the future. Therefore, the quality of education that a person receives will significantly determine how he or she makes use of the skills acquired through studying. Good quality education teaches the student to understand the environment better and come up with ways to overcome various societal problems. In the rural areas of South Africa, young people and the elderly make up the majority of the population. Most of the employable men and women are not well educated, so they have to find ways to sustain themselves in the rural domain because they lack the skills necessary for a position in the corporate world. Consequently, the rural population constitutes a source of cheap labor for use in the economy. This is a confirmation of the structural adjustments and social engineering that have always defined South African history. The creation of the Bantustans by the nationalist government was pursued from the 1950s as a means of creating the rural areas where the population density allowed for the supply of labor to the urban or the mining areas [4].

This explains the persistence of subsistence farming in the rural areas of South Africa, in which just under half of South Africa’s children are located [4]. The persistent lack of skills because of

limited opportunities for the young people limits their potential to apply their educational skills. Cumulatively, the persistent lack of quality education creates a culture of neglect, which affects the delivery of education for the youth in these areas, this, in turn, sustains the higher poverty levels in the rural areas.

6.2. Social perspective

In the rural areas, the decision to pursue an education is significantly determined by the social expectations of family members. In some communities, education is perceived as a threat to the stability of the social fabric in the sense that women will be more empowered and will not be “biddable” in their marriages. Women perceive the attainment of education as being a critical factor in helping them reinforce their stability in the community. In other words, education is supposed to help them become better people in the context of childcare and as domestic workers. With such an approach toward learning, young people will strive to advance their skills purely to fit into the social context of their society. This sets the stage for formal inequality in education, depending on the level of access to and participation in the decision-making processes in education. In addition to that, the decision to pursue further education can also be understood within the context of direct and indirect costs to the families, which further compound problems such as repeating a year, the dropout rate and unemployment [4]. The persistent lack of quality education provision in these areas creates an attitude that does not promote participation in matters that are pertinent to human development and growth, and this is what sustains the continuous underdevelopment in the region.

Those in the rural areas do not get the opportunity to be actively involved in development issues that directly affect their lives in one way or another. Thus, it is important to note that the social environment can provide an enabling situation that defines the way education and eventually development are achieved and sustained. It means that the inequalities that constrain the rights to, within, and through education relate to the responsibilities that the children in the rural areas bear, especially in the areas of labor and human production [4].

6.3. Cultural perspective

The culture of rural communities incorporates gendered expectations of the roles of men and women in the context of education. This has led to a situation in which children’s roles in household labor in the rural economies limit their freedom to exercise their rights to, within, and through education [4]. Because of this cultural expectation, people in the rural areas are accustomed to living a life in which activities that are not integrated into their culture are perceived as potential threats. Therefore, they either refrain from such activities or limit their participation in them to the minimum.

This creates a culture in which there is very little involvement of the community members in government-sponsored initiatives, and this reinforces neglect by the government. The persistent neglect by the government is what makes education and schooling in the rural areas appear to be a denial of freedoms and opportunities to live a long, creative and healthy life,

acquire knowledge and have wisdom, and live in dignity and with self-respect [4]. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that the freedoms that some stalwarts have laid their lives for are realized. If these freedoms are not guaranteed, it will be a dereliction of the primary duty, and it constitutes neglect. Vision 2030 of the National Development Plan states that poverty shall be eradicated, and inequality reduced, by the year 2030 [13]. This vision is only a pipedream, especially for rural youth because of the following:

- Learners are not adequately equipped with the requisite 3Rs (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) to have proper skills to cope.
- Learners drop out before they could reach matric; yet the South African Bill of Rights states that basic education is free.
- Schools from rural areas continue to be abandoned. Good and competent teachers are poached out of the rural teaching setup by urban schools. Most of the time, these teachers would have been teaching at adult education and training (AET) centers, where they do not get the same benefits accruing to teachers in urban areas.

Against this background, it is apparent that the provision of educational opportunities in the rural areas must factor in the element of how cultural affiliations affect access to and participation in bread and butter issues about their personal growth. This is the only way of making education meaningful for the people in the rural areas.

7. Recommendations

Solving the problems relating to education in the rural areas of South Africa can make a significant contribution toward encouraging youth development within rural communities and the entire country. However, the education system has to be designed in such a way that it integrates the social, cultural, and economic issues that those in the rural parts of South Africa face. It is the only way of ensuring an appreciation of the significance of education and youth development in South Africa.

One of the ways of promoting youth development in South Africa is through the encouragement of reforms in education and training. According to Fox, such reforms help in improving the productivity of the labor pool and narrow the wide gap that exists between the skills that the labor market demands and those that workers can supply [14]. Most important, it can also increase the signaling ability of education, which in turn will advance the search and matching efficiency of the labor market [14]. Reforms in education will promote policies that are aimed at ensuring equal access to opportunities for the communities living in the rural areas. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the young people in the rural areas rely heavily on agricultural produce as a source of livelihood.

These young people would rather miss educational opportunities but take care of their means of livelihood, even if this were to jeopardize their future. Reforms in education should be geared toward ensuring that the young people have better opportunities to hone their skills

for use in the job market. This can be made possible only by ensuring that primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions offer quality education. Arming the youth with the educational skills required for the job market sets the stage for them to improve their socioeconomic well-being.

Another possible strategy to promote youth development in rural South Africa would be to ensure that the education system is designed in such a way that education equips young people in the rural areas to deal with the various societal challenges that they face. For instance, most of the rural communities in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal have a gendered perception of the role of education in the lives of young people. Most parents believe that education is supposed to prepare their children to fit into the social fabric of that society. In consequence, the young people pay little attention to life beyond what they are used to. They define themselves by the experiences and the limitations of those who have gone before them.

This kind of attitude does not encourage competition, nor does it promote creativity, because the young people have been conditioned to use their educational experiences to fit within the predefined realms of their communities. In other words, the significance attached to education and youth development in the rural areas of South Africa has been determined by the expectations of rural society, most of which relate to the gendered roles of men and women. Educational experiences should be designed in such a way that the youth can better understand their environment and come up with creative ways of overcoming the challenges that they experience.

8. Conclusion

The education of the youth in rural South Africa is an important aspect of the socioeconomic development of the region and the people who live there. It can be explained by the fact that education affects the social, economic, and cultural expectations of the community members in various ways. At present, the youth in the rural areas of South Africa have to deal with the cultural expectations of the community members as well as their families. This affects their ability to access educational opportunities and other matters that promote taking part in decisions about education. Moreover, it also defines the context in which they choose to apply the knowledge that they have acquired through learning. As a result, the youth will continue to define their successes in life in the context of what their societies have defined for them. They are unlikely to develop themselves beyond what they are used to in their communities.

Being educated implies being informed about the various activities that take place within the community or developing a more informed approach to engage with the contentious issues that a community is dealing with. This research suggests the importance of acknowledging that promoting youth development in the rural parts of South Africa should be based on a holistic approach ensuring that education promotes cultural, social, and economic prosperity at the individual and community levels. Adult education and youth development are synonymous with literacy because here we are dealing with adult learners who dropped out of school for different reasons; but who are striving to be part of the society through learning and

improving their developmental needs. Literacy is, therefore, important in adult education and youth development.

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