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Expanded public works program on skills development at a selected construction company

By

Mmafyane Sharon Phalane

2/28/2025

Declaration

I, Mmafyane Sharon Phalane, student number 2188553, hereby declare that this research report, is my own original work. I confirm that:

- This research was conducted and written solely by me.
- All sources used in this report have been properly cited and acknowledged.
- This work has not been previously submitted for any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

I understand the principles of academic integrity and have adhered to them in the completion of this research.

Signature: 

Date: 2025/02/27

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in addressing skills deficits within South Africa's construction industry, focusing on a case study of a company that completed an EPWP-funded road construction project. Through qualitative analysis, including interviews and document reviews, the research assesses the quality and relevance of EPWP training, identifies challenges encountered, and gathers stakeholder perspectives. Findings indicate that while the EPWP facilitates the acquisition of valuable skills and contributes to the industry's skills pool, its impact is constrained by inconsistent mentorship, short-term project structures, and a primary focus on immediate labour demands. The study concludes that prioritizing quality over quantity in training, enhancing participant selection, and ensuring continuous skills development are essential for maximizing the EPWP's contribution to workforce development and economic advancement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The construction industry accounts for 8% of total registered employment and 2.5% of the nominal Gross domestic Product (GDP), with around 70% of jobs being semi-skilled, low-skilled, or unskilled (Mgqamqo and Hattingh, 2024). Dr. Anthony Costa highlights that South Africa's construction industry has a significant contribution to the Gross domestic Product (GDP), therefore it is vital to the country's development (dtic, 2023). Furthermore the construction industry plays a crucial role in job creation, impacting various sectors like manufacturing, mining, transport, real estate, and business services. Beyond its economic impact, the construction sector is essential for creating a favorable business environment, attracting investment, supporting SMEs, and fostering innovation Mgqamqo and Hattingh (2024).

South Africa 's construction industry is faced with significant skills deficit, which impacts project completion and quality (Lula, 2023; 3Smedia, 2021).Chris Campbell, CEO of Consulting Engineers South Africa, highlights that one of the other challenges faced by the construction industry is the shortage of skilled and experienced resources, a problem further intensified by emigration (Nadine, 2023). Mongane (2024) observes that the construction industry in the past several years has been experiencing a shortage of skilled workers, impacting its success and growth.

Aiyetan and Dillip (2018) emphasises the significance of government policies in addressing skilled labour shortages in the South African construction industry. Their key recommendations include supporting skill development programs, offering incentives for employers to invest in training, ensuring better health and safety standards, and tackling economic barriers to formal training and certification. These policies can foster a conducive environment for skill development and retention, ultimately enhancing the construction industry's effectiveness.

The South African Government has initiatives aimed at skills development, such as: Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Contractor Incubation Programme (CIP), Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG),Construction Industry Development Board, Integrated Energy Centres, National Urban Reconstruction and Housing Agency, People's Housing Partnership Trust, National Home Builders Registration Council, Rural Housing Loan Fund, Social Housing Foundation, National Housing Finance Corporation and Local Economic Development (South African Government,2024).

EPWP in particular, aims to address socio-economic challenges in South Africa. Its objectives include poverty alleviation, skills development, employment creation, social cohesion, and economic empowerment. The skills development objective: particularly in the infrastructure sector, is to provide work opportunities to unskilled individuals and developing their skills through labor-intensive methods and training (Expanded Public Works Programme, 2024).

According to Thabo Masombuka Chairperson of the Construction Education and Training Authority, without developing critical skills, the South African construction sector will struggle, as skilled and specialised labor is essential for economic growth and sustainability (Creamer Media, 2022).

1.1 Problem Statement

The South African construction industry to date faces critical shortage of skilled impacting project completion, quality, and overall industry growth. Despite government initiatives such as the EPWP aimed at addressing this challenge, there remains a mismatch between the existing workforce and the required skills.

This case study seeks to analyse the effectiveness of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in developing skills in a selected construction company that has completed a project funded by EPWP. The study will specifically assess the quality and relevance of the training in relation to the construction industry requirements, and to identify the challenges encountered throughout the project. Addressing these issues is essential for enhancing the industry's effectiveness and supporting South Africa's economic growth and development.

1.2 Research objectives

To assess the effectiveness of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in enhancing skills within a specific construction company that has completed a project funded by the program by investigating the following:

- The quality and relevance of the training provided by the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) policy in relation to the needs of the construction industry.
- Identify the challenges faced in relation to skills development during the project

1.3 Research question

How effective is EPWP in addressing skills deficit in the construction industry:

- What are the most frequently developed skills among participants in the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)?
- How do construction industry stakeholders perceive the relevance of the skills developed through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) to the demands of the construction industry?
- What were the main challenges faced during the project concerning skills development?

1.4 Rationale of the study

This study analyses how the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) impacts skills development in South Africa's construction industry. By addressing the skills deficit, the EPWP aims to enhance project quality and industry productivity. The findings can guide policymakers in optimizing the program to better meet industry needs.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

A single case study approach is employed, focusing exclusively on a construction company that has completed an Expanded Public Works Programme-funded project to allow for an in-depth exploration of the specific context and dynamics within that company.

1.6 Assumptions

This research assumes that data collected from the study will be accurate as well as expecting participant honesty in their responses. Additionally, it is assumed that the skills developed through EPWP are necessary for the construction industry

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The literature will explore the effectiveness of EPWP in addressing skills deficits within the construction industry. The empirical literature review examines existing research, while the theoretical framework centers on Human capital theory. Additionally, the conceptual framework outlines the study's structure, considering EPWP participation, skills development, and the potential mediating role of training quality.

2.2 Empirical literature review

Hampson & Sanchez (2014) describe the construction industry globally as vital for infrastructure development, supporting other sectors, and driving economic growth, especially in developing economies, they further asset that it has a substantial multiplier effect, generating additional economic activity and jobs across various sectors. The industry plays a critical role in the global economy, accounting for approximately 9% to the world's gross domestic product, additionally they assert that it is the largest industrial employer in numerous countries, representing around 7% of employment world-wide (Horat et al., 2013).

The National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 for South Africa, that was first launched August 2012, envisions a construction industry that not only contributes to economic growth but also addresses social challenges through job creation, skills development, and sustainable practices. Furthermore it emphasises on enhancing skills of the workforce in the construction industry and promotes the use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to mobilize resources and expertise from the private sector for public infrastructure projects. The NDP advocates for training programs that equip workers with the necessary skills to meet the demands of modern construction practices (National Planning Commission, 2012).

EPWP originated from the 2003 Growth and Development Summit (GDS) with a focus on creating more and better jobs. As a significant government initiative, it aligns with policy priorities such as decent work, education, health, and rural development. It spans four sectors: Infrastructure, Non-State, Environment & Culture, and Social—and emphasizes labor-intensive methods. Specific initiatives in the infrastructure sector include Vuk'uphile (training for construction), the National Youth Service (skills development for unemployed youth), large projects adhering to EPWP principles, and provincial roads aimed at improving rural access (EPWP, 2024).

EPWP in conjunction with the Vuk'uphile Contractor Learnership Programme, has significantly enhanced participants' skills. Through training and practical experience in public works projects, beneficiaries have gained valuable expertise. Notably, the EPWP emphasizes local economic development by employing community members and improving infrastructure. However, challenges persist, including project scarcity for emerging contractors and disparities in skill levels. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring lasting impact (Cuthbert, 2023).

Additionally, Poo's (2012) study highlights that EPWP participants acquire skills sufficient for self-sustenance even after program completion. Policymakers should focus on accredited skills development and tackle administrative inefficiencies to enhance the program's effectiveness. Sibanda (2021) further underscores the need to support entrepreneurship and prioritize long-term employability for beneficiaries.

2.3 Analytical Framework

This study aims to comprehensively assess the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) by focusing on three key areas. First, it will identify the most frequently developed skills among EPWP participants and analyze their relevance to the construction industry's demands, drawing on stakeholder perceptions. Second, the research will explore the perspectives of construction industry stakeholders regarding the applicability of these acquired skills, aiming to uncover any discrepancies or mismatches between the skills developed through the EPWP and the actual needs within the industry. Finally, the study will evaluate the overall effectiveness of the EPWP in addressing skills deficits, incorporating insights from both human capital development and stakeholder perceptions, while also identifying and analyzing the main challenges encountered during the program's implementation.

2.3.1 Theoretical framework

Becker's (1964) seminal work, "Human Capital," revolutionized economic thinking by introducing the concept of human capital as an investment. Human capital refers to the valuable skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by individuals or groups, which organizations or countries can leverage Oxford dictionary (Oxford, 2024). Becker emphasises that just as businesses invest in physical capital (e.g. machinery and equipment), individuals can invest in themselves by acquiring education, skills, and knowledge. Becker's human capital also emphasizes the strong link between education levels and higher earnings. Importantly, Becker's

work demonstrates that a nation’s economic growth is closely tied to its investment in human capital.

Becker's (1992) posits that human capital, acquired through education and skills development, directly enhances worker productivity, driving economic output. Furthermore, educated populations readily embrace technological advancements, fuelling innovation and accelerating economic progress. Skilled individuals are more inclined towards entrepreneurship, leading to new business creation and job growth, thereby diversifying and strengthening the economy. Nations with a skilled workforce attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), bringing in capital, new technologies, and improved management practices, further augmenting human capital. Additionally, education fosters social and economic mobility, reducing inequality and improving overall quality of life. In essence, Becker's work establishes that investing in human capital is indispensable for sustainable economic growth, resulting in heightened productivity, innovation, and overall societal well-being.

According to Lucas (1988), human capital is a key driver of economic growth. Human capital is the stock of knowledge, skills, and abilities that workers accumulate through education, training, and experience. Lucas (1988) argued that human capital accumulation can lead to sustained economic growth, even in the absence of exogenous technological progress. This is because human capital can generate positive externalities, such as the diffusion of knowledge and the development of new technologies.

Lucas (1988) also emphasized the importance of education for human capital accumulation. He argued that education can increase workers' productivity, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. In addition, education can help workers to adapt to new technologies and changing economic conditions.

Schultz (1961) defined human capital as skills and knowledge with economic value, highlighting its role in boosting productivity and earnings. This concept reshaped economic thought, spurring research and justifying public investment in education. The US, with its high education returns rates and skilled workforce, exemplifies the benefits of human capital investment, maintaining its economic edge. Schultz's work also implies that developing nations can spur growth and reduce inequality through similar investments

The article by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) provides empirical evidence supporting the theoretical arguments of Lucas (1988). The authors find that countries with higher levels of

human capital, as measured by educational attainment and cognitive skills, tend to have higher rates of economic growth. This suggests that investing in education and skills development can lead to significant economic benefits.

2.3.2 Conceptual framework

The theoretical foundation of this case study will draw from Gary Becker, Lucas and Schultz's theories on human capital theory and its application to the economy. Specifically, the research will investigate the Expanded Public Works Programme and its influence on skills development within the construction industry. The premise is that the EPWP functions as an investment in human capital, resulting in heightened productivity, better employment opportunities, and, ultimately, economic growth.

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) operates at the intersection of human capital investment and economic growth. First, EPWP participation represents an investment in human capital that is individuals who engage in the program acquire skills that enhance their productivity and employability. Second, skills development within the EPWP directly contributes to this investment, as participants acquire valuable competencies. Third, successful job placement of EPWP participants in the construction industry is a tangible outcome of their enhanced human capital. Finally, the ripple effect extends to economic growth: a skilled workforce within the construction industry leads to increased productivity and innovation, ultimately benefiting the broader economy.

2.4 Conclusion

This study will delve into the intersection of human capital theory, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), and skills development within the construction industry by focusing a selected construction company that has completed an EPWP funded project. It is anticipated that the findings might suggest that the EPWP serves as a strategic investment in human capital, equipping participants with relevant skills and enhancing their employability. As these skilled individuals find placement in the construction industry, the ripple effect extends to increased productivity, innovation, and overall economic growth.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research is aligned with post-positivist worldview defined by Creswell (2018), emphasising empirical observation and theory verification. By adopting a postpositivist lens, this research explored EPWP's impact on skills development in the construction industry by analysing a selected construction company that has completed an EPWP funded project systematically and objectively.

3.2 Research methodology

A qualitative case study was employed as it allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon (EPWP skills development) within its real-world context, enabling the researcher to uncover rich, descriptive data through direct interaction and document analysis (Creswell, 2018).

3.3 Data collection methods

This study employed two data collection methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted allowing an in in-depth engagement conversations with EPWP participants, construction industry stakeholders, and program administrator. The interviews offered flexibility while ensuring that essential topics were thoroughly explored. Second, through document analysis, the study delved into training materials to gain valuable context and insights that enriched the study (Creswell ,2018).

3.3.1 Population

The target population for this study consisted of three distinct stakeholder groups who possess direct and relevant knowledge regarding the EPWP's implementation, execution, and outcomes in the construction environment:

- **EPWP Participants:** Individuals who recently engaged in the EPWP at the selected company.
- **Construction Company Management:** HR Manager, Project Manager, and Supervisor responsible for recruiting, supervising EPWP participants.
- **EPWP Program Administrator:** A representative responsible for the design, curriculum, and administrative oversight of the EPWP.

3.3.2 Sample and sampling method

Purposive Sampling (Creswell,2018), a non-probability technique, was utilised to select participants who could provide the most relevant and insightful information based on their knowledge and experience. A total of [Insert your intended number, e.g., 12 to 15] participants were targeted across the three groups to achieve data saturation, with the final sample size determined by the point at which no new themes or information emerged during the analysis.

3.4 Research instrument

Two primary data collection instruments were used: semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Interviews were the main source of primary data, allowing for flexibility and depth. Three distinct, but thematically aligned, interview schedules were developed to cater to the specific roles and perspectives of each stakeholder group:

- **Schedule 1:** Focused on EPWP participants (Experiences, Perceived Skill Gain, Challenges).
- **Schedule 2:** Focused on Company Management (Relevance of Skills, EPWP Impact, Opportunities).
- **Schedule 3:** Focused on Program Administrators (Design, Implementation, Collaboration, Success Metrics).

All interviews were recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in the data analysis phase. The three interview schedules are presented in Appendix A.

3.4.2 Document Analysis

Secondary data was collected via the analysis of internal and external organisational documents related to the EPWP. These documents included company training records, EPWP program curricula, policy briefs, and performance reports. A systematic approach using the following **Document Analysis Coding Framework** was applied: | Category | Description | Source

- **Category 1: Skills Development** | Most frequently developed skills, training methods, curriculum alignment. | Company training logs, EPWP curriculum documents. |

3.5 Data analysis strategies

The data gathered from the interviews and documents was analysed using **Thematic Content Analysis** as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This systematic method involved six phases:

- **Familiarisation with the Data:** Reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and document notes to achieve deep immersion.
- **Producing the Report:** Relating the final themes back to the research questions and constructing the findings chapter.

3.6 Limitations

Despite rigorous measures, the study is subject to the following limitations:

- **Limited Generalisability:** As a **Single Instrumental Case Study**, the findings are specific to the selected construction company and its unique context regarding EPWP implementation. While the detailed analysis offers depth, the results cannot be statistically generalised to the entire construction industry or the broader EPWP.

- **Researcher Bias:** Although reflexivity was employed, all qualitative research is subject to potential subjective interpretation by the researcher, particularly in the thematic analysis phase.

- **Reliance on Self-Reported Data:** The primary data source relies on participant interviews, which are inherently based on self-perceptions and experiences. This introduces the potential for **social desirability bias**, where participants may offer responses they believe are expected or socially acceptable rather than their genuine views.

3.7 Trustworthiness

The study adhered to Guba's criteria for trustworthiness (Lincon & Guba,1985):

- **Credibility:** Achieved through **Triangulation** (using multiple data sources: participants, management, administrators, and documents) and **Member Checking** (confirming key findings with participants).
- **Transferability:** Achieved through providing a **Thick Description** of the research context (the selected company), participant characteristics, and the EPWP environment, allowing future researchers to judge the applicability of the findings.
- **Confirmability:** Addressed by demonstrating that the interpretation of the findings is clearly traceable to the original data, ensuring neutrality and objectivity.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The research adhered to strict ethical protocols, including:

- **Informed Consent:** All participants received a comprehensive information sheet outlining the study's purpose, their role, and data usage. Written consent was obtained prior to any interview.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Participants were assured that their identities would not be disclosed, and pseudonyms (e.g., Participant A, Manager B) were used in the reporting of results. The name of the construction company was kept anonymous.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- **Gatekeeper Permission:** Formal permission was secured from the relevant academic institution and the management of the selected construction company before commencing data collection.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussions

4.1 Research findings

This section delves into the findings of skills development within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in the context of a road construction project. To understand the program's impact, the types of skills acquired by participants, how these skills are perceived by industry stakeholders, the challenges faced during the project where examined and recommendations for improvement. The complete, detailed tables of evidence, including specific quotes and documented facts for each theme, are presented in Appendix C.

The following will be addressed:

Firstly, to understand the impact of the EPWP project, the study will begin by examining the specific skills acquired by participants. Due to limited responses, this analysis focuses on interviews with three key participants: a cleaner, a civil engineering student, and a subcontractor, each representing diverse engagement levels and career trajectories within the construction industry. This involves a detailed analysis of company training documents, coupled with insights gathered from participant experiences, to assess the perceived relevance of these skills to their individual career progression.

Secondly, an exploration of the perspectives of construction industry stakeholders regarding the quality and relevance of the skills developed through the EPWP is conducted. The Stakeholders were contracts director, HR manager and quantity surveyor. This analysis examines stakeholder perceptions on the program's effectiveness, its integration within the broader industry landscape, and their recommendations for enhancing skills development initiatives.

Finally, an examination of the challenges encountered during the project implementation is conducted, with a focus on the obstacles that hindered effective skills development. This analysis will draw upon the experiences of participants, stakeholders, and EPWP administrators to provide a comprehensive understanding of the project's limitations and areas for improvement.

4.1.1 What are the most frequently developed skills among participants in the EPWP?

This section delves into the practical outcomes of the EPWP-funded road construction project, examining the specific skills training provided and its impact on participants. Through an

analysis of company documents, participant interviews, and subcontractor progression, the study highlights the tangible skills acquired, the diverse motivations driving participation, and the varying perceptions of skills relevance, ultimately illustrating the multifaceted effects of the EPWP on individual and business development within the South African construction industry.

The company documents detail that the local labours went through the following skills training:

- Road workers class, which entailed the following standards:
  - Installation of culverts
  - Precast Concrete Kerbs and channels
  - Pavement Installation
  - Gabions Installation
  - Steel Fixing
- Construction Roadwork's: Short Skills Programme. Entailing the following standars:
  - Render Basic First Aid
  - Apply Health and safety to a work area
  - Manage HIV/AIDS in the work place
  - Plan to manage one's time
  - Maintain and adapt oral communication
  - Implement Roadside Safety Procedures (Flagmen covered)
  - Apply productivity on a construction site
- Sub- contractors:

Upgraded from Grade 1 to Grade 2 according to the Construction Industry Development Board

- Response from three participants

Participant backgrounds and motivations for joining the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)/ road construction project varied considerably. A civil engineering student, who completed the theoretical part of National Diploma in Civil Engineering at a TVET college, had prior volunteering experience on construction projects, seeking further practical training to fulfil diploma requirements. A cleaner had a background in domestic work and was

motivated by the search for employment. A subcontractor, previously operating at Grade 1, sought business opportunities through the EPWP/ construction project.

These diverse motivations shaped the participants' engagement with the program. The civil engineering student acquired practical skills relevant to site management, including project management, laboratory technician skills, leadership, supervision, and material classification in road construction. The cleaner sought and obtained employment as a Precast Concrete Kerbs and channel labourer, directly facilitated by the skills gained in the program. The subcontractor reported an upgrade from Grade 1 to Grade 2, indicating business growth and development.

The relevance of the acquired skills was perceived differently by the participants. The civil engineering student emphasized the importance of these skills for site management and understanding project scope, this translated to the student obtaining a job placement as a site manager recently. The cleaner highlighted the direct link between the acquired skills and securing employment in the construction industry. The subcontractor's progression to a higher grade indicates the relevance of the skills in business advancement. These varied perspectives underscore the diverse impacts of the EPWP on participants' professional development and career trajectories.

4.1.2 How do construction industry stakeholders perceive the relevance of the skills developed through the EPWP to the demands of the construction industry?

This section examines stakeholder perceptions regarding the quality and impact of skills development within the EPWP construction sector, revealing a consensus on the program's potential hindered by systemic limitations. Interviews with a quantity surveyor, contracts director, and HR manager highlight concerns regarding inconsistent mentorship, a primary focus on immediate labor demands over long-term growth, and the restrictive nature of short-term project structures. Furthermore, stakeholders express concerns about the lack of follow-up support post-project, leading to skill deterioration and unemployment. To address these challenges, stakeholders advocate for significant improvements in training curricula, mentorship programs, and career progression pathways, emphasizing the need for comprehensive training initiatives and a shift towards viewing skills development as a distinct project within the EPWP framework. Recommendations include raising competency thresholds, implementing robust follow-up mechanisms, revising participant selection processes to allow for employer-led recruitment, and decoupling the EPWP from individual project timelines to ensure continuity of training and employment.

- Stakeholder perceptions regarding the quality of skills development within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in the construction sector reveal a complex interplay of potential benefits and systemic limitations.

A “quantity surveyor on site” acknowledges that the program has a capacity for effective skills enhancement, contingent upon dedicated mentorship, however a significant challenge lies in the inconsistent provision of such support. Furthermore reluctance among certain individuals to mentor participants, coupled with time constraints faced by professional staff, hinders the realization of the program's full potential.

Prevailing critique centres on the EPWP's operational focus by the contracts director. Although stakeholders recognize that, under optimal management, the program could facilitate comprehensive training across diverse construction disciplines, the current emphasis appears to be primarily on fulfilling immediate labour demands rather than fostering long-term participant growth. This approach undermines the program's potential to cultivate a skilled workforce.

The inherent limitations of the EPWP's project-based, short-term structure “explains the HR Manager” are identified as a significant constraint on skills development. Furthermore the “HR Manager said” the training provided does benefits the industry by addressing immediate skills gaps, the limited duration of placements restricts the depth and continuity of learning, ultimately hindering the long-term professional development of individual participants. Consequently, the perceived quality of skills development within the EPWP falls short of expectations, primarily due to these structural and operational challenges.

- Stakeholder perceptions regarding the impact of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) on skills development reveal significant concerns about the program's long-term effectiveness.

A primary critique centres on the project-based, short-term nature of EPWP engagements. While acknowledging that knowledge is imparted during the project lifecycle, stakeholders express concern about the lack of follow-up and support upon project completion.

This discontinuity creates a critical gap, as participants often face unemployment after project termination, leading to the deterioration of acquired skills. The core issue, therefore, lies not in the acquisition of skills during the project, but rather in the program's inability to ensure sustained employability afterward said the quantity surveyor.

Furthermore, a contact director's assessment suggests that the EPWP has not demonstrably impacted skills development, citing the extensive training required as a key challenge. This perspective underscores the potential disconnect between the skills imparted through the EPWP and the actual skills required for sustained employment within the broader labour market.

Despite these concerns, the HR manager argue that, even with its short-term focus, the EPWP contributes, albeit minimally, to the industry's overall skills pool. The argument posits that the skills acquired by participants, however brief, remain within the industry, thus offering some level of benefit in addressing immediate skills needs. This perspective, while acknowledging the limitations of the EPWP's short-term structure, highlights its potential to contribute incrementally to industry capacity. However, it does not address the fundamental issue of long-term skills development and participant employability.

- Integration of the Expanded Public Works programme into the broader landscape of South Africa’s construction industry:

The Stakeholders highlight the need for significant improvements in skills development and career progression. A recurring concern is the insufficient level of qualifications attained by EPWP participants, which often proves inadequate for successful entry into the competitive job market. Stakeholders emphasize the necessity of upgrading the training curriculum to equip participants with more marketable skills.

Furthermore, the establishment of structured mentorship programs is deemed crucial. Such programs should provide guidance on further educational opportunities and strategies for enhancing employability. This mentorship component is seen as essential for bridging the gap between EPWP participation and sustainable career paths.

A key recommendation emerging from stakeholder feedback is the prioritization of comprehensive training initiatives. Beyond simply imparting skills, stakeholders advocate for creating opportunities to employ individuals who demonstrate potential. Facilitating the transition from contract to contract, ideally with government support, is considered vital for continued skills development. The current system, where contractors move on and leave behind newly skilled individuals without employment, is viewed as detrimental to long-term skills retention and development within communities. This underscores the need for a more integrated approach that ensures continuity of employment and skills enhancement.

Finally, stakeholders advocate for framing skills development as a distinct project within the EPWP framework. This suggests a need for dedicated resources, focused strategies, and clear performance indicators specifically targeting skills acquisition and long-term career development. By treating skills development as a core project objective, the EPWP can potentially move beyond short-term job creation and contribute more effectively to building a sustainable and skilled workforce within the South African construction industry.

- Stakeholders recommendations

Stakeholder recommendations for enhancing the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) emphasize improvements in participant selection, training, follow-up, and program structure. A key recommendation pertains to raising the minimum competency threshold for critical subjects like mathematics and sciences, suggesting a target pass mark of at least 50%. This reflects a perceived need for stronger foundational skills among participants entering the construction industry.

Furthermore, stakeholders advocate for a more robust follow-up mechanism. EPWP administrators should conduct thorough assessments of project impact on participants' skills development. This would provide valuable data for program evaluation and improvement.

A significant concern revolves around the current participant selection process. Stakeholders suggest a shift away from simply assigning unskilled individuals to construction employers. Instead, they propose allowing employers to conduct their own recruitment processes, enabling them to select participants with existing skills or a demonstrated aptitude for development. This would address the issue of participants who view EPWP primarily as a temporary job opportunity rather than a pathway to a career in construction. Enabling employers to select individuals with pre-existing skills would allow for more effective and targeted skills enhancement.

Finally, stakeholders strongly recommend decoupling the EPWP from the constraints of individual project timelines. They propose a system where participants can be seamlessly transferred from one project to another, ensuring continuity of training and employment until they achieve full qualification. This recommendation, coupled with the suggestion to expand the program's objectives beyond mere poverty alleviation, signals a desire to transform the EPWP into a more effective vehicle for long-term skills development and workforce development within the South African construction industry.

4.1.3 What were the main challenges faced during the project concerning skills development?

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) through the lens of diverse stakeholder perspectives, encompassing participant experiences, stakeholder insights, and the EPWP administrator's observations. The analysis begins by juxtaposing the largely positive individual experiences of participants—a civil engineering student, a cleaner, and a subcontractor—with the systemic challenges identified by construction industry stakeholders. These challenges range from recruitment difficulties due to high unemployment and political influence, to concerns about the program's disproportionate focus on poverty alleviation over skills development, and instances of labor exploitation. The EPWP administrator's response further illuminates the operational hurdles, highlighting the contractor's management of the training process as a critical factor affecting the program's efficacy. By examining these varied viewpoints, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the EPWP's impact on skills development and employment within the South African construction sector.

- Response from participants

Participant experiences within the program present a range of perspectives. The student in civil engineering reported no challenges, expressing satisfaction with the significant learning opportunities provided within the construction industry. Similarly, the cleaner reported a positive experience, highlighting the smooth operation of the program and the consistent, timely payment received. The subcontractor, however, noted a challenge related to timely payment, although ultimately confirming that payment was received.

- Response from Stakeholders

Stakeholders revealed several key challenges encountered during the implementation of the project, particularly concerning recruitment, program focus, and labor practices. A recurring issue is the high rate of unemployment in project areas, leading to a large number of unqualified applicants. This challenge is further compounded by political influence, where connected individuals were prioritised over more qualified candidates. Stakeholders emphasise the importance of foundational skills, particularly in mathematics, for success in construction. However, many applicants fall short of this requirement, and the low matriculation pass mark is perceived as contributing to a lack of receptiveness to technical training. Furthermore, some

participants demonstrate a lack of interest and engagement, hindering the effectiveness of skills development initiatives.

A perceived imbalance in the EPWP's three core pillars – job creation, skills development, and poverty alleviation – is also a significant concern. Stakeholders argue that the program's focus is disproportionately skewed towards poverty alleviation, often at the expense of meaningful skills development. While acknowledging that some skills are acquired and retained within the industry, the overall emphasis on poverty alleviation is seen as limiting the program's potential to cultivate a truly skilled workforce.

Finally, the issue of labour exploitation by SMMEs is raised. Stakeholders report instances of underpayment and abuse of labour. The practice of communities dictating which individuals should be employed on projects further restricts employers' ability to select qualified personnel, hindering the development of necessary skills and potentially compromising project quality. This practice also reinforces the challenge of matching available workers with the specific skills required for the project.

- Response from EPWP Administrator

The administrator's response indicates that skill development itself is not the primary challenge. Funding for training is consistently available. Instead, the core issues lie with the contractor's management of the training process.

The onus falls on the main contractor to identify necessary skill development areas. This suggests a potential gap in the contractor's ability to accurately assess training needs, which could lead to ineffective or misdirected training initiatives “notes the administrator”.

While funding for skills development is available, the contractor's management of the training process, specifically in skills needs assessment, payment of service providers, and budget allocation, presents significant challenges that hinder the effectiveness of skill development initiatives. The administrator's response underscores the need for improved contractor oversight and a more strategic approach to training management.

4.2 Discussions of findings

This section delves into the critical analysis of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)'s role in skills development, examining its impact through the lens of human capital theory and broader economic growth models. By exploring participant experiences,

stakeholder perspectives, and aligning them with established academic frameworks, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EPWP's effectiveness. The discussion will focus on the direct impact of the EPWP on participant skills development, analyse the importance of educational quality within the program, and present stakeholder recommendations for enhancing its efficacy. This analysis will draw upon key theoretical contributions from scholars like Schultz, Becker, Lucas, and Hanushek & Woessmann, to contextualize the findings and provide a robust evaluation of the EPWP's contribution to human capital and economic development in South Africa.

4.2.1 The role of EPWP in skills development

The diverse backgrounds and motivations of EPWP participants significantly influenced their engagement and perceived benefits from the program. The civil engineering student, driven by the need for practical experience, acquired and valued technical skills relevant to site management, which directly facilitated their career progression. The cleaner, seeking employment successfully transitioned into a construction laborer role, highlighting the program's potential for career change. The subcontractor's pursuit of business growth was realized through an upgraded CIDB grade, demonstrating the program's impact on enterprise development.

These findings underscore the varied impacts of the EPWP, aligning with human capital theory, which posits that investments in skills and knowledge can lead to enhanced productivity and economic opportunities (Schultz, 1961).

The findings brought forward crucial insights on the skills development facet of the EPWP within the construction industry, which can be looked at through the lens of human capital theory. The findings highlighted that the EPWP does play a crucial role in skills development, with a variety of technical and practical skills being developed. These skills ranged from technical abilities, such as installation of culverts and concrete work to more practical skills like first aid and health and safety awareness. The acquisition of these skills can be seen as an investment in human capital, which has the potential to lead to increased productivity and economic growth as indicated by Becker (1964).

This aligns with the broader macroeconomic perspective articulated by Lucas (1988), who, in his seminal work 'On the mechanics of economic development,' emphasized the critical role of human capital accumulation in driving sustained economic growth. Lucas's model underscores

that investments in skills and knowledge not only enhance individual productivity but also generate positive externalities, fostering innovation and technological progress at a societal level. Therefore, the EPWP's potential to contribute to South Africa's economic development is significant, provided that the skills development initiatives are effectively designed and implemented.

4.2.2 Educational Quality as a Determinant of EPWP Skills Development and Economic Growth

Hanushek and Woessmann (2020) highlight the intricate relationship between education and economic growth, emphasizing that while education is pivotal for economic advancement, the quality of education holds greater significance than its quantity. They argue that the conventional approach of measuring educational impact solely through years of schooling overlooks the vast differences in educational quality across nations. This oversight can lead to a skewed understanding of education's true impact on economic growth. By integrating measures of cognitive skills, which reflect the actual knowledge acquired by students, the authors provide a more accurate depiction of education's role in fostering economic development.

Their research indicates a strong correlation between a country's knowledge capital—defined as the aggregate cognitive skills of its population—and its economic growth. Specifically, improvements in the quality of education, as evidenced by enhanced performance in international student achievement tests, are associated with substantial economic benefits. This suggests that investing in educational quality can lead to significant economic returns. Moreover, the authors discuss the importance of institutional frameworks in maximizing the economic benefits of education, noting that countries with robust institutions and open economies tend to leverage their knowledge capital more effectively.

However, these insights into the importance of educational quality are particularly salient when considering programs like the EPWP. While such initiatives aim to develop human capital, stakeholders have raised concerns about the quality and long-term relevance of the skills imparted. The short-term nature of EPWP projects, coupled with a lack of consistent mentorship, presents a significant challenge. This indicates that even when programs contribute to human capital development, their impact may be limited by structural and operational deficiencies. Furthermore, the issue of unqualified applicants and the program's disproportionate focus on poverty alleviation over skills development underscores the need to

prioritize the 'quality' aspect of training, as emphasized by Hanushek and Woessmann, to ensure the EPWP's effectiveness in enhancing skills and driving economic growth.

4.2.3 Recommendations for Enhancing Human Capital Development in the EPWP by stakeholders

Stakeholder recommendations for the EPWP emphasize a shift towards quality skills development: improving participant selection by allowing employer-led recruitment, enhancing training with higher competency thresholds and mentorship, implementing robust follow-up assessments, restructuring the program for continuous training beyond individual projects, and establishing skills development as a distinct project within the EPWP. These changes aim to move beyond mere job creation, transforming the EPWP into a sustainable workforce development initiative.

In order to maximize the programs impact on human capital development, stakeholders have suggested that there is need for improvements in participant selection, training and follow-up mechanisms. These include raising the minimum competency threshold for critical subjects, implementing robust follow-up assessments and decoupling the EPWP from the constraints of individual project timelines. These recommendations are in line with Becker's (1992) assertion that investment in human capital is essential for sustainable economic growth. By addressing the identified challenges, the EPWP can enhance productivity, foster innovation and improve overall well-being of its participants, thereby contributing to the broader economic goals of the country.

4.3 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this section reveals that while the EPWP demonstrably contributes to skills development and offers valuable opportunities for participants, its full potential is constrained by structural and operational challenges. The diverse motivations and outcomes experienced by participants underscore the program's capacity to facilitate individual growth and economic mobility, aligning with foundational human capital theories.

However, the critical importance of educational quality, as emphasized by Hanushek and Woessmann, highlights the necessity for a more strategic and rigorous approach to training and participant selection. Stakeholder recommendations, focused on enhancing selection processes, training curricula, and follow-up mechanisms, provide a clear pathway for transforming the EPWP into a more effective vehicle for long-term skills development and economic

empowerment. By prioritizing quality over quantity and aligning program objectives with established economic growth models, the EPWP can significantly enhance its contribution to South Africa's workforce development and overall economic advancement. Further research should focus on the implementation of these recommendations and the long-term impact of the EPWP on participant career trajectories and national economic indicators.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study, which investigated the effectiveness of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) within the South African construction industry, focusing on a case study of an EPWP-funded road construction project. The research revealed that while participants acquired valuable technical and practical skills, systemic challenges, including inconsistent mentorship and short-term project structures, hindered the program's long-term impact. Drawing on human capital theory and economic growth models, the chapter concludes that prioritizing quality over quantity in training and aligning program objectives with industry needs are essential for enhancing the EPWP's contribution to workforce development.

To this end, specific recommendations are proposed, including improving participant selection through employer-led pre-screening and partnerships with TVET colleges, prioritizing skills development as a distinct project within the EPWP framework, and promoting long-term employability through skills portability, government-supported skills databases, and incentivized continuous employment. These recommendations, grounded in concepts of shared value, corporate social responsibility, and career development, aim to transform the EPWP into a more effective vehicle for sustainable skills development and economic empowerment within the South African construction sector.

5.1 Summary of findings

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in developing skills within the South African construction industry, focusing on a case study of a company that completed an EPWP-funded road construction project. The research aimed to evaluate the quality and relevance of EPWP training, identify the main challenges encountered, and gather stakeholder perspectives on the program's impact.

Key findings revealed that EPWP participants acquired a range of technical and practical skills, including roadwork, first aid, and health and safety. Stakeholders acknowledged the program's potential for skills enhancement but highlighted limitations such as inconsistent mentorship, short-term project structures, and a primary focus on immediate labor demands over long-term skills development. There was a consensus on the need for improved participant selection, enhanced training curricula, and stronger follow-up mechanisms to ensure sustained employability and career progression.

5.2 Conclusion

The EPWP, as a large scale public works programme, plays a crucial role in skills development within the construction sector, offering valuable opportunities for participants and contributing to the industry's overall skills pool, which can lead to employment. This is consistent with Becker's (1964) human capital theory, which posits that investments in skills and knowledge can lead to enhanced productivity and economic opportunities.

However, the programme's effectiveness is hindered by structural and operational challenges. The quality of education and training provided is pivotal, and there is a need for a more strategic approach to participant selection, training, and follow-up. By prioritizing quality over quantity, as emphasized by Hanushek and Woessmann (2020), and aligning programme objectives with established economic growth models, such as those proposed by Lucas (1988), the EPWP can significantly enhance its contribution to South Africa's workforce development and economic advancement.

5.3 Contribution of the study to existing literature

This research advances beyond traditional macro-level evaluations to offer detailed, micro-level evidence of the structural and operational limitations that reduce the long-term effectiveness of Public Works Programmes (PWPs) in South Africa. The analysis makes three significant contributions: a necessary theoretical refinement of Human Capital Theory (HCT) when applied to short-cycle employment schemes, empirical validation of the widespread dual-mandate policy trade-off, and the development of structural interventions for sustainable workforce development grounded in strategic management frameworks.

5.3.1 Theoretical Contribution: Refining the Application of Human Capital Theory in Temporary Employment Programs

In examining the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) through the lens of Human Capital Theory (HCT), this study reveals critical limitations in applying traditional HCT to short-term public employment initiatives. While EPWP is intended to enhance productivity through skill development, its brief, project-based structure, characterized by inconsistent training and limited mentorship, undermines the accumulation of durable human capital. The research introduces the concept of "Perishable Human Capital" to describe how skills acquired under such conditions rapidly deteriorate post-employment, failing to translate into sustained employability. Furthermore, the study validates the Quality-of-Knowledge paradigm by

demonstrating that the absence of accreditation and transferable competencies diminishes the economic value of training, shifting EPWP's role from fostering long-term productivity to serving as a temporary poverty alleviation mechanism.

The table below presents a structured synthesis of empirical findings from the EPWP case study, aligning them with foundational premises of Human Capital Theory (HCT) and highlighting key theoretical refinements.

Table 5.3.1: Theoretical Contribution: Mapping Empirical Findings to Human Capital Theory Refinements

Empirical Finding (EPWP Case Study	**Relevant Human Capital Theory Premise**	**Scholarly Contribution/Refinement**
Short project duration limits skill depth, leading to post-project skill deterioration.	HCT emphasises skill accumulation as sustained, long-term productive investment (Becker, Lucas).	The study reveals that project duration is a binding constraint on HCT effectiveness, leading to the concept of Perishable Human Capital in PWP contexts.
Inconsistent mentorship and lack of accredited/transferable skills.	HCT links education/skills to enhanced productivity (Schultz, 1961). Quality of knowledge determines growth (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).	The study demonstrates the necessity of prioritizing **quality** (accreditation, transferability, mentorship) over mere quantitative training inputs, validating the quality-of-education paradigm in public works.
Operational bias prioritizes immediate income transfer (stipends) over long-term skill acquisition.	EPWP dual mandate aims for poverty relief and skills development.	Confirms the implementation failure of the policy trade-off (Bossuyt & Van Der Ree, 2015), showing a bias towards immediate consumption smoothing over productive HCT investment.

5.3.2 Operationalising the Dual Mandate Trade-Off in the EPWP Construction Sector

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) faces a core policy dilemma common to many public works programmes: balancing short-term poverty alleviation with long-term skills development. While both goals are theoretically aligned, this study provides empirical evidence showing how, in practice, the dual mandate creates operational tensions—particularly within construction projects.

Skewed Implementation Toward Poverty Alleviation

Although funding for training exists, the responsibility for skills development is delegated to main contractors, whose priorities lie in meeting project deadlines and minimizing costs. This results in a strategic drift where contractors focus on easily measurable outputs—such as job creation and stipend distribution—while neglecting the more complex and costly task of meaningful skills transfer. The system thus reinforces low expectations for human capital development, rewarding short-term compliance over long-term investment.

Selection Bias Undermining Skills Absorption

The study also highlights how flawed recruitment practices hinder the programme's ability to build sustainable skills. High unemployment rates and political interference lead to the selection of participants with limited aptitude, especially in foundational areas like mathematics. This mismatch between training resources and participant capability compromises the programme's economic development goals. As a result, training budgets are often spent on individuals unlikely to benefit fully, validating concerns about the EPWP's long-term effectiveness.

5.3.3 Policy Structural Interventions for Sustainable Workforce Development

The study translates micro-level challenges such as inconsistent mentorship, short project durations, and biased recruitment into targeted structural policy interventions grounded in strategic management theory. It proposes a more rigorous, employer-led selection process in partnership with TVET colleges, aligned with the Shared Value framework, to reduce skill mismatches and enhance both project efficiency and long-term human capital outcomes. To address the systemic bias toward short-term poverty relief, it recommends framing skills development as a distinct, fully resourced project stream with dedicated KPIs and professional mentorship, ensuring it receives equal priority. Finally, to combat post-project skill decay and

unemployment, the study advocates for systemic continuity through government-supported contract transitions, a centralized skills database, and training pathways decoupled from individual project timelines thus transforming the EPWP into a sustainable career development platform.

To address persistent implementation challenges within human capital training (HCT) initiatives, Table 5.3.1 presents a structured policy contribution that integrates operational recommendations with established theoretical anchors.

Table 5.3.1: Policy Contribution: Bridging the Implementation Gap through Theory-Anchored Design

Identified Operational Constraint	**Policy Recommendation**	**Theoretical Anchor for Intervention**	**Implementation Impact**
Inefficient participant selection/low foundational aptitude.	Implement employer-led pre-screening sessions and partnerships with TVET colleges.[1]	Shared Value (Porter & Kramer, 2011).	Increases HCT absorption rate; aligns industry needs with social upliftment; reduces misdirected training costs.
Skills development mandate is secondary to job creation goals	Reclassify skills training as a distinct, dedicated project stream with separate budgets and KPIs.	Corporate Social Responsibility (Carroll, 1979)	Mitigates the dual mandate trade-off; ensures dedicated, professional mentorship; raises output quality.
Post-project skill deterioration and sustained unemployment.	Establish continuous employment transition frameworks (e.g., government-supported skills database, continuous contract transfer)	Career Development (Arthur et al., 2005).	Counters HCT perishability; provides the institutional scaffolding for market entry; fosters long-term career pathways.

5.4 Recommendations

This section outlines key recommendations derived from the study's findings, focusing on practical strategies to enhance the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) within South Africa's construction industry. The recommendations address critical areas such as participant selection, skills development prioritization, and the promotion of long-term employability. Each recommendation is supported by relevant theoretical frameworks and practical implementation strategies, aiming to transform the EPWP into a more effective instrument for sustainable workforce development and economic empowerment.

5.4.1 Improve Participant Selection

Implement a more rigorous selection process, potentially allowing employers to conduct their own recruitment to ensure participants have the foundational skills and aptitude for development. This can be linked to the concept of 'shared value' (Porter & Kramer, 2011), where businesses create economic value in a way that also creates value for society by ensuring that individuals with the right skills and aptitude are selected for the program, which can lead to better outcomes for both the participants and the industry. Additionally, from an organizational design perspective for EPWP, this can be related to the idea of 'talent management' (Collings & Mellahi, 2009), which emphasises the importance of attracting, developing, and retaining talented individuals.

Practical Strategies for Enhanced Participant Selection

To make the recommendation of improved participant selection practical for a construction project within the South African landscape, several key strategies can be implemented. Firstly, construction companies bidding for EPWP projects should be empowered to conduct employer-led pre-screening sessions, which would include practical skills assessments, aptitude tests, and interviews. This approach allows for a direct evaluation of candidates' abilities, motivation, and work ethic, ensuring a better fit for the project's requirements. Secondly, forging partnerships with local TVET colleges can provide access to standardized pre-screening tools and basic skills training for shortlisted candidates, enhancing their readiness for the project. Community liaison and targeted recruitment are also crucial, involving engagement with local leaders and organizations to identify individuals with a genuine interest in construction and a desire to up-skill.

By developing clear and transparent selection criteria and implementing pilot programs with feedback loops, the selection process can be refined for optimal effectiveness. Ultimately, integrating EPWP projects with talent pipelines within construction companies ensures that individuals with high aptitude and a strong work ethic are offered further training and potential full-time employment. This approach aligns with the concept of shared value, benefiting both the company and the community by creating a more skilled workforce. It also underscores the importance of talent management, positioning EPWP as a valuable source for developing future skilled workers in the South African construction industry, while addressing unemployment and skills shortages.

5.4.2 Prioritize Skills Development

Frame skills development as a distinct project within the EPWP framework, with dedicated resources and clear performance indicators. This relates to the concept of 'corporate social responsibility' (Carroll, 1979), which emphasizes the need for businesses to act in a way that benefits society, not just shareholders by ensuring that the program is designed to maximize its impact on skills development. Additionally, from an economic development perspective, this can be related to the concept of 'inclusive growth' (World Bank, 2008), which emphasizes the importance of economic growth that benefits all segments of society, including the poor and marginalized.

To effectively prioritize skills development within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), a strategic framework encompassing several key elements is essential. Firstly, skills development must be established as a distinct project within the EPWP framework. This involves allocating dedicated resources, establishing clear performance indicators, and ensuring a separate budget allocation. By doing so, skills development is not overshadowed by other objectives such as job creation or poverty alleviation. The program should feature a well-defined curriculum, qualified trainers, and adequate training facilities to provide quality skills training.

Secondly, the EPWP should actively seek partnerships with local businesses, industries, and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) to align skills training with industry needs. This ensures that the skills being developed are relevant and in demand, thereby increasing the employability of EPWP participants. Collaborative efforts can take the form of joint curriculum development, industry placements, and skills forecasting initiatives.

Thirdly, the program should incorporate mentorship programs, internships, and apprenticeships to provide practical, on-the-job training and support to participants. This will help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, enhancing participants' confidence and competence. Mentorship programs can pair experienced professionals with EPWP participants, providing guidance and support throughout their training.

Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be implemented to track the progress and impact of skills development initiatives. This includes assessing the quality of training, the relevance of skills acquired, and the employment outcomes of participants. Feedback from participants, trainers, and employers should be actively sought and used to improve the program. Impact evaluations can measure the long-term effects of the program on participants' employability and income levels.

Furthermore, the EPWP should promote a culture of lifelong learning by providing opportunities for continuous skills development and up-skilling. This could include offering advanced training programs, recognizing prior learning, and facilitating access to further education and training opportunities. By fostering a culture of lifelong learning, the EPWP can empower individuals to adapt to changing labour market demands and pursue fulfilling careers.

5.4.3 Promote Long-term Employability:

Create opportunities for continued employment and skills enhancement beyond individual projects, potentially through government-supported contract transitions. This aligns with the idea of 'creating shared value' (Porter & Kramer, 2011), where businesses create economic value in a way that also creates value for society by ensuring that participants have the necessary skills and experience to succeed in the labor market. Additionally, from an organizational design perspective, this can be related to the concept of 'career development' (Arthur et al., 2005), which emphasizes the importance of organizations providing opportunities for employees to grow and develop their careers.

Strategies for Enhancing Long-Term Employability in Short-Term Construction Projects

To effectively promote long-term employability within the context of short-term construction projects in South Africa, several interconnected strategies can be implemented. Firstly, ensuring skills portability and certification is paramount. By providing industry-recognized certifications upon completion of training modules, workers are equipped with transferable qualifications that enhance their employability across various projects. Secondly, the

establishment of a government-supported skills database can serve as a centralized repository of EPWP participants' skills and work history, facilitating recruitment by construction companies and incentivizing the hiring of EPWP graduates. Thirdly, implementing phased training programs that align with the specific skill requirements of upcoming projects ensures that workers are continuously up-skilling and remain relevant to industry demands. Additionally, mentorship and job placement programs, coupled with entrepreneurship support, can provide participants with guidance, support, and resources to pursue further employment or start their own businesses. Finally, incentivizing continuous employment through tax breaks or preferential bidding rights encourages construction companies to invest in the long-term development of their workforce, fostering a culture of sustained employability.

5.4.4 Suggestion for future research:

Research Gap Statement	**Rationale and supporting**
A longitudinal study is necessary to track the career trajectories and sustained employment rates of EPWP participants in the construction sector for at least three to five years after they exit the program.	The study finds that the project-based structure and inconsistent mentorship undermine the depth and relevance of skills training. Existing literature indicates that the training often fails to provide all the necessary skills for formal employment, resulting in unmarketable or non-accredited skills (Gumede & Mazenda, 2020). The quality of training in the current model has historically been questioned as barely enough to produce skilled beneficiaries (Public Works Infrastructure,2005). The median contract duration is extremely short—averaging **76 days**—which inherently limits the ability of beneficiaries to secure meaningful or permanent work after leaving the programme (DPWI/PMG, 2025).Therefore, a key gap is to test alternative models, such as dedicated mentorship or partnerships with SETAs that emphasize creating transferable, marketable skills rather than merely meeting immediate project labour needs.

An investigation into policy and funding models is necessary to ascertain the optimal equilibrium between the EPWP's dual mandates of immediate poverty alleviation through stipends and long-term skills development aimed at enhancing employability.	This research, akin to broader policy critiques, observed that the implementation of the EPWP is frequently biased towards immediate income transfer, thereby prioritizing poverty alleviation at the expense of its skills development mandate. Policy analysts have noted that although Public Works Programmes (PWPs) are primarily designed for poverty alleviation, the simultaneous pursuit of multiple objectives often results in a theoretical "trade-off" in their design and execution (Bossuyt & Van Der Ree, 2015). Future research must explore specific policy adjustments, funding mechanisms, and compliance incentives that can compel implementation to equally emphasise skills development alongside the provision of temporary employment opportunities, thus addressing this fundamental operational conflict.
Research is necessary to design and empirically evaluate the effectiveness of a formal, dedicated post-project mentorship framework, independent of project timelines, aimed at enhancing skill transferability and formal placement rates.	The study revealed that the project-based structure and inconsistent mentorship undermine the depth and relevance of skills training. Existing literature indicates that the training often fails to impart all necessary skills for formal employment, resulting in unmarketable or non-accredited skills (South African Cities Network, 2021). The quality of training under the current model has historically been questioned as only marginally sufficient to produce skilled beneficiaries (Public Works Infrastructure, 2005). Furthermore, while participants express intentions to start businesses, they often lack the specific entrepreneurial skills relevant to successfully establishing an own business venture (Kobedi, 2022). Consequently, a significant gap exists in testing alternative models,

	such as dedicated mentorship or partnerships with SETAs that prioritize the development of transferable, marketable skills over merely fulfilling immediate project labor demands.

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Appendix:

Annexure A: Research Instrument

Semi structured interviews:

Introduction

- Thank you for participating in this interview.
- Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.
- Your responses will be kept confidential.

Section 1: EPWP participant's perspective

Background and Participation:

- Can you tell me about your background and experience before joining the EPWP?
- What motivated you to participate in the EPWP?
- What were your expectations of the program?

Skills Development:

- What specific skills did you learn or improve during your time in the EPWP?
- How relevant were these skills to your career goals or the construction industry?
- Were there any challenges or obstacles you faced in acquiring these skills?

Job Placement:

- Did you find a job in the construction industry after participating in the program?
- What were the challenges or barriers you faced in the job search process?
- How has your job experience been since leaving the EPWP?

Program Effectiveness:

- Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the EPWP in developing your skills and preparing you for employment?

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the program from your perspective?

Section 2: Stakeholder Perspectives

Skills Gap:

- What are the most critical skills shortages facing the construction industry in South Africa?
- How do you perceive the quality and relevance of the skills developed through the EPWP?

EPWP Impact:

- Has the EPWP had a positive impact on the availability of skilled workers in the construction industry?
- What are the challenges and opportunities in utilizing EPWP graduates in your company?

Future Directions:

- What recommendations would you have for improving the EPWP to better meet the needs of the construction industry?
- How can the EPWP be further integrated into the broader skills development landscape in South Africa?

Section 3: EPWP Program Administrators

Program Design and Implementation:

- Can you describe the design and implementation of the EPWP, including the curriculum, training methods, and job placement services?
- What are the key challenges and opportunities in delivering the program effectively?
- How do you measure the success of the EPWP in terms of skills development and job placement?

Participant Feedback:

- What feedback have you received from EPWP participants regarding the program's effectiveness?
- Are there any areas where the program could be improved?

Industry Collaboration:

- How does the EPWP collaborate with the construction industry to ensure that participants acquire relevant skills and have opportunities for employment?
- What are the challenges and opportunities in fostering stronger partnerships with industry stakeholders?

Document analysis coding Framework:

Category 1: Skills Development, Skills Acquired (Company Documentation):

- Most frequently developed skills

Annexure B: Semi-Structured Interview Schedules

This appendix contains the three distinct semi-structured interview schedules designed for each stakeholder group: EPWP Participants, Construction Company Management, and EPWP Program Administrator.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1: EPWP PARTICIPANTS

Research Focus: To understand the direct experiences of participants, perceived skills acquisition, and employment barriers.

Biographical and Contextual Details

Detail	Response
Participant ID	EPWP-P01
Gender	Female
Age	44
Highest Educational Level	Matric
EPWP Role/Title	Labour
Total Duration in EPWP	1 year
Previous Work Experience	None

Detail	Response
Participant ID	EPWP-P02
Gender	Male
Age	24
Highest Educational Level	N6 Civil Engineering
EPWP Role/Title	Student
Total Duration in EPWP	2 years 5 months

Previous Work Experience	None

Detail	Response
Participant ID	EPWP-P03
Company ‘s Business	Supplier/Sub-Contractor
Company Age	At the time of employment it was 1 year
CIBD Grade	Grade 1
EPWP Role/Title	Sub-Contractor
Total Duration in EPWP	1 year
Previous Work Experience	None

Main Interview Questions

Thematic Area	Questions
1. Program Entry & Expectations	How did you first become involved with the EPWP, and what were your initial expectations regarding skills development?
2. Skills Acquired	What specific skills (technical and soft skills) have you learned or improved while participating in the EPWP?
3. Quality and Relevance	How relevant are the skills you have gained to real-world jobs and projects within the construction industry? Do you feel the training was adequate?
4. Employment Barriers	What challenges or difficulties have you faced in using your EPWP skills to secure long-term, stable employment after your programme period?
5. Overall Impact	How has the EPWP participation changed your personal career prospects or economic situation?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2: CONSTRUCTION COMPANY MANAGEMENT

Research Focus: To determine the company's perspective on the relevance, integration, and impact of EPWP skills on project execution and workforce quality.

Detail	**Response**
Participant ID	EPWP-M01
Current Job Title	Quantity Surveyor
Department	Surveying Department
Years in Current Role	10 years +
Involvement with EPWP	Supervisor

Detail	**Response**
Participant ID	EPWP-M02
Current Job Title	HR Manager
Department	Human Resources
Years in Current Role	10 years +
Involvement with EPWP	Recruitment

Detail	**Response**
Participant ID	EPWP-M03
Current Job Title	Contracts Director

Department	Contract Management and Tendering
Years in Current Role	20 years +
Involvement with EPWP	Project Planning

Main Interview Questions

Thematic Area	**Question**
1. Skills Relevance	How do you perceive the quality and relevance of the skills developed through the EPWP participants compared to your company's operational needs?
2. EPWP Impact	Has the EPWP had a noticeable impact on the availability of entry-level skilled workers in your company or on project efficiency?
3. Utilization and Integration	What are the main challenges and opportunities in utilizing EPWP graduates in your company's long-term workforce or during specific projects?
4. Retention & Progression	What systems or pathways does the company have in place (if any) to retain or promote skilled EPWP participants after their programme concludes?
5. Recommendations	What recommendations would you offer to EPWP administrators to improve the programme's training to better align with the construction industry's requirements?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 3: EPWP PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

Research Focus: To gather insights on the strategic design, implementation challenges, monitoring, and industry collaboration efforts of the EPWP.

Detail	**Response**
Participant ID (Pseudonym)	EPWP-A01
Current Job Title/Role	EPWP Projects Manager
Administering Organisation/Department	Department of Public Works
Years involved with EPWP	5 years +
Level of decision-making authority (Strategic/Operational)	Operations

Main Interview Questions

Thematic Area	**Question**
1. Program Design	Can you describe the design and implementation of the skills component of the EPWP, including curriculum development, training methods, and job placement services?
2. Measuring Success	How do you measure the success of the EPWP specifically in terms of skills transfer and long-term job placement, beyond just the temporary employment numbers?
3. Challenges in Delivery	What are the key operational challenges and constraints you face in delivering the EPWP effectively and ensuring consistent quality of training?
4. Industry Collaboration	How does the EPWP effectively collaborate with the construction industry to ensure participants acquire relevant, demand-driven skills and have opportunities for employment?
5. Future Improvement	What are the strategic future directions or planned improvements for the EPWP to enhance its impact on addressing the skills gap in sectors like construction?

Annexure C: Thematic Analysis Real Evidence

Theme 1: Most Frequently Developed Skills and Their Direct Impact

This theme outlines the specific technical and soft skills acquired by participants, as documented by the company and reported by the participants themselves.

Category	**Evidence (Documented Findings)**	**Source**
Documented Technical Skills	Company Files	Road workers class training included standards for: Installation of culverts, Precast Concrete Kerbs and channels, Pavement Installation, Gabions Installation, and Steel Fixing.
Documented Soft Skills	Company Files	Construction Roadwork's: Short Skills Programme training included: Render Basic First Aid, Apply Health and safety to a work area, Manage HIV/AIDS in the work place, Plan to manage one's time, Maintain and adapt oral communication, Implement Roadside Safety Procedures (Flagmen covered), and Apply productivity on a construction site.
Skills Relevance for Professional Advancement	The civil engineering student acquired practical skills relevant to site management, including project management, laboratory technician skills, leadership, supervision, and material classification in road construction.	Participant Interview (P02)

Direct Employment Outcome	This translated to the student obtaining a job placement as a site manager recently.	Participant Interview (P02)
Direct Employment Outcome (Unskilled Labour)	The cleaner sought and obtained employment as a Precast Concrete Kerbs and channel labourer, directly facilitated by the skills gained in the program. The cleaner highlighted the direct link between the acquired skills and securing employment in the construction industry.	Participant Interview (P01)
Business Advancement Outcome	The subcontractor reported an upgrade from Grade 1 to Grade 2, indicating the relevance of the skills in business advancement.	Participant Interview (P03)

Theme 2: Stakeholder Perceptions and Systemic Challenges

This theme captures the perceptions of construction industry stakeholders regarding the program's quality, relevance, and the operational limitations that hinder its long-term effectiveness.

Sub-Theme	Evidence (Attributed Quotes)	Source
Inconsistent Mentorship and Quality	• A "quantity surveyor on site" acknowledges that the program has a capacity for effective skills enhancement, contingent upon dedicated mentorship[16]. However, a significant challenge lies in the inconsistent provision of such support. • Reluctance among certain individuals to mentor participants, coupled with time constraints faced by professional staff, hinders the realization of the program's full potential.	Quantity Surveyor (M01)
Short-Term/Project-Based Structure	The current emphasis appears to be primarily on fulfilling immediate labour demands rather than fostering long-term participant growth.	Contracts Director (M03)
	The inherent limitations of the EPWP's project-based, short-term structure "explains the HR Manager" as a significant constraint on skills development[23].	HR Manager (M02)
Dual Mandate Trade-Off	The operational bias prioritizes immediate income transfer (stipends) over long-term skill acquisition, showing a bias towards immediate consumption smoothing over productive Human Capital Theory (HCT) investment.	HR Manager (M02)
Post-Project Skill Deterioration	This discontinuity creates a critical gap, as participants often face unemployment after project termination, leading to the deterioration of acquired skills.	Quantity Surveyor (M01)

	The core issue... lies not in the acquisition of skills during the project, but rather in the program's inability to ensure sustained employability afterward said the quantity surveyor[30].	Quantity Surveyor (M01)
Limited Perceived Impact	A contact director's assessment suggests that the EPWP has not demonstrably impacted skills development, citing the extensive training required as a key challenge.	Contracts Director (M03)
Counter-Argument on Contribution	The HR manager argue that, even with its short-term focus, the EPWP contributes, albeit minimally, to the industry's overall skills pool.	HR Manager (M01)
EPWP Administrator Perspective on Challenges	The administrator's response indicates that skill development itself is not the primary challenge. Funding for training is consistently available. Instead, the core issues lie with the contractor's management of the training process.	EPWP Administrator (A01)