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CONTRIBUTION OF THE EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME TO EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE SKILLS TRANSFER AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY

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Supervised by Prof. P Pillay

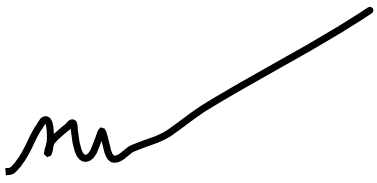
A research report submitted to the Faculty of Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in 50% requirement of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public Policy).

Abstract

This research aimed to explore the contribution of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development in the City of Ekurhuleni. This report followed a qualitative methodological approach and provided a rich detailed thematic analysis of the data gathered. The report found that public works programmes such as the EPWP and the Vuk'uphile Contractor Learnership Programme made an important contribution to upskilling participants through training and practical experience as well as local economic development through the employment of local labour and the provision of infrastructure within communities. However, it did find that challenges such as the limited number of projects allocated to emerging contractors, the program's structure which failed to account for participants varying skill levels, and the lack of locally skilled labour, as challenges that require the attention of policymakers.

Declaration

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public Policy) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



Mathew John Cuthbert
12/09/2023

Dedication

This report is dedicated to Mom and Dad who have continuously encouraged me to complete my studies, coached me through writer's block and held my hand when I have wanted to give up. I could not have done this without you by my side.

I love you

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank my partner, Demi-Jane Lyons, for her continued support, love, and understanding. Despite the several moves we have had to make to accommodate my career and the exciting but trying times associated with being new parents – we have finally got to this point. I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC – African National Congress

BRAC - Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

CETA - Construction and Education Training Authority

CIDB - Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB)

CoE – City of Ekurhuleni

DPLG - Department of Provincial and Local Government

DTI – Department of Trade and Industry

EPWP – Expanded Public Works Programme

FPL - Food Poverty Line

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

HCI - Human Capital Index

IDP - Integrated Development Plan

LBPL - Lower Bound Poverty Line

LED – Local Economic Development

LEDF – Local Economic Development Fund

LGTA - Local Government Transition Act of 1993

LGWP - Local Government White Paper

MEGS - Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme

MNGRGEGS - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee

MoU – Memorandum of understanding

MPC – Marginal propensity to consume

NEET – Not in employment, education or training

NGOs - Non-governmental organisations

NQF - National Qualifications Framework

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PWP Plus - Public Works Plus

PWPs – Public works programmes

QLFS – Quarterly Labour Force Survey

RDP – Reconstruction and Development Programme

SEDA - Small Enterprise Development Agency

SETA - Sector Education and Training Authorities

StatsSA – Statistics South Africa

TIMMS - Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

UBPL - Upper Bound Poverty Line

USA - United States of America

VCLP - Vuk'uphile Contractor Learnership Programme

YESP - Youth Employment Support Project

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research aimed to describe whether or not participants in the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) within the City of Ekurhuleni (CoE) perceive the programme as an effective mechanism of skills transfer. Moreover, the research sought to determine whether or not their graduation from the programme empowered them to obtain employment within an economic environment characterised by structural unemployment.

Noting the Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2022) Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) results for the 1st Quarter of 2022, per the standard definition of unemployment, 34.5% of South Africans found themselves without employment and 45.5% of South Africans as per the expanded definition of unemployment (which includes discouraged work seekers) (StatsSA, 2022). A further challenge noted by StatsSA (2022: 19) was that: "Compared to Q1: 2021, the percentage of young persons aged 15–34 years who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) increased by 2,7 percentage points from 43,6% to 46,3% (out of 20,7 million) in Q1: 2022". Moreover, an unemployment rate of 63.9% for those aged 15-24 years and 42.1% for those aged 25-34 compounds South Africa's perennial battle against high levels of unemployment (StatsSA, 2022; Bhorat et al., 2016).

As alluded to earlier, structural unemployment is one of the main economic constraints to development in South Africa. According to Mohr (2015: 402), "Structural unemployment is usually confined to certain industries, sectors or categories of workers. Structural unemployment occurs when there is a mismatch between worker qualifications or when jobs disappear because of structural changes in the economy". The notion that structural unemployment is an excellent source of South Africa's economic challenges, as suggested by Bhorat et al. (2016) cite a skills bias in the labour market, the destruction of jobs in specific primary sectors and a lack of labour-intensive job creation as contributing factors to this phenomenon. Where an efficient allocation of resources does not occur within a given economy and the market fails to create

the necessary employment, it is then necessary for the government to intervene (Holmes, 2007).

One of the means of government intervention, which is a particular focus of this research, is through public works programmes (PWPs) which provide work opportunities to the unemployed. (Subbarao, del Ninno, Andrews & Rodrigues-Alas, 2013). A "work opportunity" is an elementary occupation that includes unskilled or semi-skilled labour on a temporary or contractual basis (City of Tshwane, 2017). As noted by McCord (2013), there has been an increase in the profile of the role of PWPs in development circles which has led to the decision to expand upon existing scholarship.

This research report consists of six chapters: introduction, literature review, research methodology, presentation of the research results, discussion analysis of research, and conclusions and recommendations.

1.2. Background

According to Subburao et al. (2013:3), "…public works programs are social protection instruments used in diverse country circumstances in both low- and middle-income countries with the dual objectives of providing temporary employment and generating or maintaining some labour-intensive infrastructural projects and social services". In principle, PWPs have been around for many centuries, from the construction of roads in (what is now) Pakistan in the 12th century to the construction of canals and drain marshes in 18th Century England. However, the actual emergence of PWPs came about after India instituted a PWP in the 1970s, which aimed to alleviate poverty in rural parts of the state of Maharashtra – when a severe drought had struck, this led to what would be called the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS). Notably, MEGS proved to be an outstanding success in alleviating poverty and creating sustainable infrastructure (Subburao et al., 2013).

Following suit, many other countries worldwide have implemented PWPs to provide temporary work relief and poverty alleviation after periods of

macroeconomic instability, for example, Latvia and Argentina. However, within more developmental contexts (low to middle-income countries) such as Djibouti and South Africa, PWPs have been employed with a far broader scope. For instance, PWPs are supposed "to create a pathway out of poverty through programmatic linkages with employment and community services—an example of the so-called public works plus model" (Subburao et al., 2013: 4). With specific focus on South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki, launched the EPWP at the Growth and Development Summit in 2003 in response to rising levels of unemployment and poverty (South African Cities Network -SACN- 2017).

In South Africa, the EPWP is under the National Department of Public Works custodianship. It must ensure that all public and state-owned entities include EPWP in their planning and budgeting (SACN, 2017). According to the COE's Department of Economic Development (2016:174), EPWP is governed by the legislative and policy prescripts as listed in **Table 1**:

Table 1: Policy and Legislative Framework of the Ekurhuleni EPWP Policy
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa
Public Finance Management Act (Act No.1 of 1999)
Public Service Act (Act No. 147 of 1999)
Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act (Act No. 56 of 2003)
Division of Revenue Act (Act No. 5 of 2012)
Local Government Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000)
Basic Conditions of Employment Act (No. 75 of 1997)
Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998)
Cabinet Memo 2003 approving the implementation of the EPWP
Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) Institutional Arrangement Framework, (2012)
National Development Plan 2011
New Growth Path 2010

Table 1: (Department of Economic Development, 2016)

South Africa suffers from extremely high levels of unemployment. However, there are associated socio-economic challenges that one should consider in order to grasp the context of this research. These are issues related to poverty and inequality. StatsSA (2017) makes use of three different indicators of poverty, namely, the Food Poverty Line (FPL), the Lower Bound Poverty Line (LBPL) and the Upper Bound Poverty Line (UBPL).

The FPL is the amount of money in Rand value an individual requires to purchase the minimum amount of food and energy per recognised norms and standards. Both the LBPL and the UBPL make use of the FPL as a baseline; however, the LBPL accounts for the fact that an individual may have to forego the purchase of food items in place of non-food items, whereas the UBPL accounts for individuals who can purchase enough of both. As of September 2021, the FPL was R624 per person per month, the LBPL R890 and the UBPL R1 335 (Ngqakamba, 2021). As per the 2015 poverty headcounts, 25.2% of the South African population were FPL poor, 40% LBPL poor and 55.5% UBPL poor (StatsSA, 2017). Extreme poverty levels result in widespread malnutrition, developmental challenges amongst children and a high disease incidence among the population. Furthermore, social risks are associated with a high incidence of poverty, such as social unrest, increased crime levels and political instability (Bhorat et al., 2016).

The stark income and wealth inequality levels in South Africa are due to high levels of unemployment and poverty. As per the World Bank's "Overcoming Inequality and Poverty Report" (2018: XV) “, By any measure, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world". The internationally recognised measure of income inequality is the Gini coefficient, which posits 0 as perfect equality and one as perfect inequality (Mohr, 2015). As of 2015, South Africa registered a Gini coefficient of 0.63, in contrast to Sub-Saharan Africa's average of 0.42. Furthermore, studies show that the top percentile holds 70.9% of the country's wealth (World Bank, 2018).

The last contextual consideration in this section is the choice of location, namely, Ekurhuleni. Considering the high levels of unemployment experienced

in this metropolitan municipality (metro), with a standard unemployment rate of 30.9% and an expanded unemployment rate of 35.6%, the need for government intervention is apparent (StatsSA, 2018). Moreover, the City had a target of 20 659 work opportunities to create and only succeeded in creating 8412 work opportunities for the 2016/2017 financial year. Lastly, per the National Department of Public Works requirements, municipalities must provide training that not only assists workers in their day-to-day roles but capacitates them to 'graduate' from the programme. According to this measure, the City only provided a cumulative total of 2 training days compared to the City of eThekwini, which provided a cumulative total of 1 397 training days. The City is the worst-performing metro in terms of the provision of training for EPWP workers for the 2016/2017 financial year (SACN, 2017).

1.3 Research Problem

The EPWP in Ekurhuleni has not been effective in providing a skills transfer mechanism that contributes to local economic development. However, PWPs have played a historically significant role in alleviating poverty and providing temporary work relief – particularly in the developing world (Subburao, 2003).

The evolution and broadening of the PWP scope have led to skills transfer becoming an additional objective of PWPs. This model has come to be known as "PWP plus". South Africa is one of the few international proponents of this particular model, and therefore, it is of interest to the researcher to investigate this model further for possible implementation in Ekurhuleni (Subburao et al., 2013; Andrews & Kryeziu, 2013).

Skills transfer is the process in which an individual's behavioural and cognitive abilities can apply to different contexts from those in which they were acquired (Sebri et al., 2020).

This research aimed at building on the work conducted by McCord (2009: 176), who argues that "while PWPs offer a potential mechanism for the state to access the unemployed and incorporate them into skills training policies, the benefit of providing skills development through the medium or short-term

PWPs is not always clear". In addition, McCord (2009) raises an additional concern that EPWP workers in the infrastructure sector are least likely to obtain skills that improve their chances of employment or being self-employed. However, McCord's (2009) research did not include an assessment of the Vuk'uphile Contractor Learnership Programme (VCLP); this would have allowed her to explore whether or not longer-term interventions, such as the VCLP within the infrastructure sector, have a skills development benefit and improve a participant's possibility of finding employment.

Similar studies by Mukanyima (2012) and Kubayi (2015) focused on implementing the VCLP in Ekurhuleni and contractor development in the Eastern Cape, respectively. In contrast, this research emphasises whether or not the skills transfer element of a PWP plus is perceived to be effective by participants. Furthermore, it aims to describe participants' perceptions regarding whether or not PWP Plus programmes contribute to local economic development.

Local economic development constitutes a multidisciplinary approach to development which focuses on a specific geographic location, the provision of local goods and services and the participation and role of residents in using these goods and services in order to support commercial activity, reduce income inequality, and generate local economic growth (Tello, 2010).

The above creates a new angle from which to explore the role of PWPs as a skills transfer mechanism. Moreover, the poor performance of the CoE in terms of EPWP-related training (as noted in the previous section) created an opportunity to understand better the challenges that local government encounters in this space.

1.4 Research Purpose

This research aimed to analyse whether or not participants in the VCLP in the CoE perceived the programme as an effective mechanism of skills transfer and contributor towards local economic development. This research followed the assumption that participants in PWPs often exit these programmes without the requisite skills required for them to be commercially competitive. In this regard, the infrastructure projects that participants were assigned to work on do not contribute towards local economic development in the concerned communities in which they.

1.5 Research Questions

Noting concerns within the scholarship that PWP interventions were unlikely to be an effective mechanism of skills transfer, with particular reference to the infrastructure sector, this research sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development?

The first research question presents an opportunity to investigate the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes from the participants' perspective. Furthermore, it presents an opportunity for the researcher to analyse the participants' personal experiences, the differences they have observed in their lives, and how the programmes have impacted their personal skill development. In examining these aspects, it also allowed the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the importance and efficacy of programmes in improving both the participants' lives and skill sets.

2. What are the perceptions and experiences of participants concerning the attainment and understanding of skills through their participation in the VCLP and, by extension, a contractor learnership programme?

The second research question allows the researcher to examine the participants' perspectives and experiences regarding the concept of skills and their attainment of skills within the context of the VCLP and, by extension, the contractor learnership programme. By examining participants' perceptions of what constitutes a skill and identifying the specific skills they believe they have attained, the researcher has acquired valuable insights into their understanding and interpretation of skills development. Moreover, this research question enables an in-depth analysis of the participants' experiences and perspectives, thus clarifying the effectiveness and influence of the VCLP in developing skills from their perspectives.

3. What are the perceptions and inputs of participants in the VCLP concerning the specific project/s they were involved in and their contribution towards local economic development?

The third research question allowed the researcher to investigate the participants' understanding of local economic development and their perceptions of how the project/s they worked on contributed towards LED. Through analysing their perspectives and personal experiences, the researcher gained insights into how participants conceive local economic development and the particular manner in which they believe the project has had an impact. In addition, this research question provided an opportunity to examine the participants' perspectives on the relationship between their project/s and local economic development. Thus, it contributed towards a more in-depth understanding of a given project's role in fostering economic development within a specific locality.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Literature Search

The literature search used the following search engines, e-journal databases and other mediums; Google, Google Scholar, Wits University Library Catalogue, EBSCO Host, Sage Journals, JSTOR and Econstor.

The literature search made use of the following search terms; Public works programmes, skills transfer on public works programmes, public works, expanded public works programme, skills transfer, skills, public works plus, public works in South Africa, economic development EPWP in South Africa, Vuk'uphile Learnership Contractor Programme, poverty graduation, human capital theory, measuring human capital, history of local economic development in South Africa, how to measure economic development.

2.2 Introduction

The literature review explores public works programs, poverty graduation, skills development, and local economic development. It begins with an overview and then examines the evolution of public works programs, challenges and potential solutions, alternative models for poverty graduation, skills conceptualisation, transfer dynamics, and human capital development. Shifting from economic growth to local economic development is discussed, including key considerations for local economic development strategies. The section concludes by exploring the local economic development policy framework in South Africa, following a theoretical framework for analysis and synthesis.

The research looks at a variety of examples of where these programmes across the world and what results they have achieved. However, there is much debate as to whether or not this is effective and if alternative approaches, such as poverty graduation strategies, are not more appropriate.

There is much contestation surrounding what a skill is, how it is to be measured and whether it can occur via training from one person to another. Is a skill something that can be objectively measured, or is it subject to workplace power

dynamics and relationships? With human capital theory as a theoretical basis, this paper argues that skills can be measured and impact incomes, productivity, and a country's general economic performance. Moreover, it looks at how a lack of value derived from South Africa's human capital investment has impacted our economic outcomes.

This research seeks to understand the difference between economic growth and economic development concepts. Furthermore, it aims to understand how local economic development strategies came about, their historical development within South Africa, international best practices in implementing local economic development (LED) policies and how LED can be measured and evaluated. This section has a particular focus on the policy confusion that marked the development of LED policy in South Africa, in which the national government has flip-flopped between a poverty alleviation versus a market-orientated approach. It also highlights the concern that while municipalities are mandated to implement LED – these mandates often go underfunded.

Each section in this literature review is closely linked to the research problem and purpose posed in Chapter 1 and aims to assist the author in answering the research questions.

2.3.1 The Evolution of Public Works Programmes: From Temporary Relief to Poverty Graduation

The following section explores the evolution of public works programmes and their shift in focus from temporary relief to poverty graduation. According to Adongo and Deen-Swarray (2006:1), "(P) poverty alleviation is reducing the fluctuations of income levels between poor and non-poor scenarios". It differs from "poverty graduation", which involves assisting poor households to exit poverty indefinitely (Adongo & Deen-Swarray, 2006, p. 1). More specifically, poverty graduation refers to programmes that contain a specific set of sequenced interventions aimed at improving the livelihoods of poor households sustainably over a finite period (Ahmed et al., 2018).

The underlying theory of PWPs is the *Keynes multiplier effect* which dictates that largescale public investment in infrastructure has a positive impact on the aggregate demand for goods and services in the economy. Not only would citizens benefit from sustainable public infrastructure, but such programmes would provide temporary work relief to those unemployed; this spurs an increase in citizens' marginal propensity to consume (MPC) due to their increased income, thus reducing the intensity of downswings in the business cycle and helping to grow the economy (Keynes, 1936).

While PWPs have historically been considered appropriate for short-term economic and financial shocks, the recent literature suggests that PWPs provide an opportunity to meet developmental needs. (Lal et al., 2010). This is expanded upon by Subburao et al. (2013: 82), who argues that "(A)n increasing number of countries are implementing a "public works plus model", providing training or access to credit to improve participants' chances of obtaining permanent employment or of becoming self-employed once they exit the program".

PWPs have evolved in scope and duration; therefore, it is necessary to analyse more modern conceptions of the public works theory. The concept of PWP Plus is that scope of PWPs moves beyond the notion of temporary work relief and poverty alleviation towards poverty graduation (Lal et al., 2010; Subburao et al.; 2013; McCutchens & Taylor-Parkins, 2012; McCord, 2012; McCord, 2018; GIZ, 2018; Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018 and Alik-Lagrange, Buehren, Goldstein & Hoogeveen, 2020).

2.3.2 Public Works Plus Programs: Challenges, Approaches, and Potential Solutions:

This section discusses public works plus programs and the challenges, approaches and potential solutions associated with this model. Lal et al. (2010) argues that PWP Plus programmes are an effective way of preventing the depreciation of human capital and even improving it, whereas McCord (2009) argues that in order for there to be a meaningful transfer of skills – the duration

and intensity of training must be appropriate. There are several approaches to PWP Plus, such as financial inclusion, linked social protection programmes and training to increase participation in the labour market. The most relevant in South Africa's context is the last approach. The EPWP contains a vocational and microenterprise training element which aims and assumes to improve the quality of participants' labour, thus, allowing for their re-entry into the labour market (Subburao et al., 2013).

The VCLP is an example of the above as it aims to provide training in labour-intensive construction by granting National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 2 and 4 certifications for supervisors and contractors, respectively (SACN, 2017). According to McCutchens and Taylor-Parkins (2012:45), skills development programmes within labour-intensive construction require "...a planned series of related projects, directly and integrally linked to specific training programmes".

PWP Plus programmes are most relevant where there is a lack of opportunity to obtain formal work as a result of structural market deficiencies, which reinforces earlier assertions in this paper regarding the structure of both South Africa and Ekurhuleni's labour market (Subburao et al., 2013; Bhorat et al., 2016; Stats SA, 2018). Moreover, this model of PWP has the built-in assumption that the skills developed are relevant to the prevailing labour market demand (Subburao et al., 2013). The skills capacitation process should include "…specific training for workers, worksite supervisory personnel, private sector contractors and those responsible for controlling quality, verifying compliance with specifications, and making payments" (Lal et al., 2010: 26). There is no use in providing training if it does not improve a worker's productivity, employability levels or compromises the quality of the public asset that it produces (Lal et al., 2010, p. 26).

Economists and public policy experts question whether PWPs add value to participants' well-being vis a vis cash transfers because they entail more administration, overhead costs and possibly less income for beneficiaries. Moreover, Gehrke and Hartwig (2018) question the notion that PWPs

contribute to economic growth in this respect. They concede that the skills and training component contained within PWP programmes may give them an advantage over ordinary cash transfers, such as social and basic income grants (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). However, implementing agents, such as the government, should not allow PWPs to be self-defeating because they end up targeting the incorrect market; this implies those with higher levels of education and income receiving work as opposed to those subjected to extreme levels of poverty (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018).

The existing evidence on PWPs indicates that skills training fails to improve a participant's employability or earnings once they have exited a programme. While on-the-job training may lead to improvements in one's level of knowledge, higher earnings are primarily contingent on the skills demanded by the economy at a given time. Two examples are the South African EPWP and Argentina's Jefes y Jefes programme, which provide various training modules such as industrial relations, social entrepreneurship, HIV/AIDS awareness, and vocational and life skills. Despite participants receiving this wide array of training, only a few can find employment after exiting a PWP programme (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). McCord, 2012 supports this argument; Odhiambo, Ashipala & Mubiana, 2015 Ismail (2018), argue that a significant proportion of participants in countries like South Africa and Namibia did not find employment after their training and graduation from a PWP programme.

Despite the lack of historical success in training on PWPs, a greater emphasis on the transfer of business and technical skills as well as job search assistance then, these challenges might be ameliorated (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). However, this would require sufficient contact time and an increase in market opportunities (McCord, 2018). In addition, The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (2018) argues that a PWP Plus programme which lasts for an extended time and provides a decent wage is able to generate an increase in an individual's accumulation of assets, upward mobility and savings.

An excellent example of the above is the PATI programme in El Salvador which emphasises business skills, technical skills and targeted employment support for electricians, mechanics and tailors. The programme has shown positive results regarding job readiness and participants wanting to start their businesses. These results can be due to its compulsory training programme, which consists of 80 hours over a period of 6 months – a significant increase compared to other programmes of a similar typology (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). In addition, McCord (2018: 63) proposes a deeper level of cooperation between the private and public sectors: "There is a need to increase linkages with the private sector, moving beyond the corporate social responsibility agenda, to develop mechanisms for absorbing greater amounts of EPWP labour in the market so that the scale of provision can be increased".

Despite the challenges that persist within the training components of PWP Plus programmes, there is still sufficient evidence to show that participants benefited from increased levels of productivity, income, and days worked (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2020). It is not as if participants in PWP programmes gave up formal employment to participate in the programme. Instead, they were recipients of casual wages and providers of subsistence labour. Therefore, with the skills base of participants assumed to be low, the programme's intervention would indicate an improvement in their material position, albeit marginally (McCord, 2012 in Ismail, 2018).

2.3.3 Approaches to Achieving Poverty Graduation: Evaluating PWP Plus Programmes and Alternative Models

The following section examines approaches to achieving poverty and evaluating PWP Plus programmes and alternative models. Questions about whether participants in PWP Plus programmes would experience a sustained decrease in poverty after exiting a programme (McCord, 2018). These questions stem from the limited employment opportunities (despite improved skill levels and on-the-job experience) and the need for essential service provision and social protection for participants post-graduation (McCord, 2018).

Gehrke and Hartwig (2018: 117) found that participants who participated in long-term programmes were more likely to "incur risk in own production and to shift savings to productive purposes". An example is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNGREGS) in India, where participants were more likely to take up risky entrepreneurial endeavours than non-participants. In support of this notion, Sierra Leone's Youth Employment Support Project (YESP) participants were four times more likely to set up new business ventures (Zimmerman, 2014; Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018).

Odhiambo et al. (2015) in Ismail (2018) argue that one of the critical objectives of PWPs "is to provide participants with income which they can invest in assets that can provide them with a sustainable means of earning a living". At a base level, findings from the Londo programme in the Central African Republic show that participants benefit from a diversification of income streams and an increase in the ownership of certain goods, such as furniture and household appliances (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2020). Furthermore, Alik-Lagrange et al. (2020; 4) state that: “The increase in asset ownership as a result of the program seems to lead to an improvement of the beneficiaries' household resilience, with increases in savings and a smaller likelihood of having contracted debt for schooling, health services or food, and increases in non-food expenditures".

However, upward mobility occurs predominantly in the case of men and less so for women, which indicates a possible gender bias. In addition, despite the improvements in asset accumulation – there is no noticeable improvement in food security. Therefore, asset accumulation on its own may not necessarily reduce poverty in a household. (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2020)
While the stated aim of PWP Plus programmes is to allow participants to graduate from poverty, several questions arise; for example, what does it mean to graduate from poverty? Does the composition and scope of these programmes allow for poverty graduation? Moreover, what would be a more appropriate approach to facilitate poverty graduation?

As previously stated in this report, poverty graduation refers to programmes that contain a specific set of sequenced interventions aimed at improving the livelihoods of poor households sustainably over a finite period. The intention behind these interventions is to ensure that these households do not recede into poverty and can sustain themselves upon the completion of their participation in such a programme. The interventions may include the provision of assets, consumption assistance, skills training and development, mentoring and inculcating a savings culture. These programmes are run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which first piloted these kinds of programmes in the early 2000s (Ahmed, Schofield and Self 2018).

Some issues necessitating such programmes are food insecurity, limited access to markets and productive assets, lack of social protection, discrimination and geographic isolation (Moqueet et al., 2019). In order to address these issues, the poverty graduation model relies on a 'Four Pillar' approach which includes social protection, livelihood promotion, financial inclusion and social empowerment. Social protection aims to secure basic income security through measures such as relief during times of crisis, consumption support and access to education and healthcare. Livelihoods promotion refers to interventions such as asset and cash transfer, formal employment opportunities, skills training and market access. Financial inclusion attempts to financially empower participants by improving access to savings, credit and insurance facilities. It also includes a financial literacy training element. Social empowerment is focused on affecting positive behavioural changes in families and facilitating community inclusion through life skills training and coaching (Moqueet et al., 2019).

According to Moqueet, Zaremba and Whisson (2019:11), "Together, the four pillars strengthen a family's resilience, enabling parents to provide for and protect their children by ensuring that they are adequately nourished, educated, and have a sense of hope and positivity for the future". However, for families to graduate, there should be strict adherence to the ten minimum

graduation standards. The minimum standards for graduating from poverty include (Moqueet et al., 2019:11):

- Integrating the four core pillars of poverty graduation;
- Assessing the local context in which the intervention is to take place prior to its implementation;
- Careful targeting of participants;
- Strict adherence to timelines;
- A well-defined poverty exit strategy that links participants to markets, services and community networks;
- Clearly defined and measurable poverty graduation criteria;
- Robust monitoring and evaluation and learning framework;
- A systematic coaching regime for households;
- Adequate graduation staff to ensure optimal contact time; and;
- An overarching commitment to gender equality

Several studies have shown that this approach has made a demonstrable impact in not only alleviating severe levels of poverty but has also improved employment security, enabling empowerment amongst women, increasing productivity, asset accumulation and the ability to withstand financial shocks (Moqueet et al., 2019).

Despite an intensive literature search, official documents relating to the VLCP are few and far between, aside from a series of contracts, memorandum of understanding (MOUs) and mentorship templates on both the official EPWP and the National Department of Public Works websites. However, this section will refer to one document of interest, entitled *"Management Plan for labour intensive construction learnerships", from* 2005.

According to the National Department of Public Works, the purpose of the VCLP is to capacitate learner contractors to deliver on labour-intensive construction projects that form part of the EPWP (National Department of Public Works, 2005). Furthermore, participants in the VCLP receive accredited

training that will allow them to be suitably qualified to tender for and deliver on 'labour-intensive projects.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the training consists of two components: contractor training at NQF level 4 and site supervisor training at NQF level 2 (SACN, 2017; National Department of Public Works, 2005). These qualifications are accredited by the Construction and Education Training Authority (CETA). Upon graduating from the learnership, "…the contractors should be registered enterprises able to tender for, build and maintain low-volume roads, stormwater drains, pipelines and sidewalks using labour-intensive methods" (National Department of (Public Works, 2005: 4).

This paper has drawn on the critical components in the *"Management Plan for labour-intensive construction learnerships"* document to determine successful participation in the VCLP (National Department of Public Works, 2005). These components have been adapted into Table **3** below:

Table 2: Key components of the VCLP
1. 15 learners should start the programme per intake to ensure cost-effectiveness
2. Public bodies should demonstrate that they are able to allocate R5 Million per annum per learner contractor to training projects
3. Scope of work should include low-volume roads, sidewalk and non-motorised transport infrastructure, stormwater drainage and trenches <1.5m
4. Contracts should be signed for 3 to 4 months on the first project, and 6-12 months on the second and third projects
5. Induction training should be conducted
6. Specific targeting of historically disadvantaged individuals (HDIs) preferably with experience in the construction industry
7. Construction Contractor learnership to last 24 months and Construction Supervisor 39 months
8. Payment of stipends by either Public or DPW directly

9. Access to credit facilities
10. Mentorship and construction services support

Table 2: (National Department of Public Works, 2005)

All of the key components listed in the table above are crucial in ensuring the success of a participant in the VLCP; however, they do not consider the impact of the programme, with specific reference to the impact of the VLCP programme in Ekurhuleni, Phases 1 and 2 comprised 20 learner contractors who received a share in R210 million worth of construction work. In 2016, under Phase 3 of the VCLP, the intake of contractors increased from 20 to 100 and R500 Million worth of construction projects were allocated amongst them. According to the former Executive Mayor of Ekurhuleni, Cllr Mzwandile Masina, "This approach enables us to leverage our budget spent to stimulate the transfer of skills and empower local communities in a manner that enhances their productive capabilities, to eventually become fully-fledged construction companies." (Sonqishe, 2016).

There appears to be consensus on what it means to graduate from poverty; however, approaches differ regarding how one achieves poverty alleviation or even eradication. The VLCP, as a sub-sector of the larger EPWP, possesses a far narrower scope than BRAC's poverty graduation model. While the VLCP focuses on a specific industry (construction) and related training programmes, BRAC proposes a broader, cross-cutting set of interventions. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to see how the BRAC approach could be adapted to complement the VCLP. In contrast, some may argue that the scope of the BRAC approach is too intensive and too onerous on an already strained South African fiscus. Therefore, the author cannot assert the more appropriate approach but has sought to provide insight into the various approaches upon which policymakers can rely to make an informed decision (McCord, 2018).

Government interventions such as those discussed in this section cannot address the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty, and inequality alone. Countries require economic growth in order for them to facilitate development, and there is due consideration of this throughout this report.

2.3.4 Conclusion

Public Works Plus (PWP Plus) programmes have evolved from temporary relief measures to initiatives aimed at poverty graduation. These programmes seek to provide participants with sustainable infrastructure, temporary employment, and skill development opportunities. While there are challenges in achieving poverty graduation, such as limited employment opportunities and lack of essential services post-graduation, evidence suggests that PWP Plus programmes can increase participants' productivity, income, and asset accumulation. Alternative models, such as the poverty graduation approach with its four pillars (social protection, livelihood promotion, financial inclusion, and social empowerment), have shown promising results in alleviating poverty and improving resilience among participating households.

2.4.1 Conceptualising and Measuring Skills: Theoretical Approaches and Ideological Perspectives

The following section examines the theoretical and ideological perspectives of conceptualising and measuring skills. Windapo (2016) states that skill is a competence level, qualification or expertise in a specific function. Perspectives of skills are divergent and dependent on one's ideological leanings (Allais, 2011, p. 634). However, as per Spenner (1990: 400):

> "Most writers concur on the necessity of distinguishing the skills that people bring to jobs (i.e., talents, abilities, capacities and so on) from the skills that jobs require (i.e., task demands, role requirements and what positions demand, permit and encourage)".

The first category of skills is something one possesses, whereas the second category refers to characteristics associated with social roles. Nonetheless, both are concerned with reward mechanisms, how technical requirements of a given task are defined by those in positions of power, and how the market matches individuals with jobs. However, there are varying conceptual understandings of what constitutes a skill and how to measure it (Spenner, 1990). There are two broad theoretical approaches to how jobs and one's

skills are conceptually understood: the Marxist (Idealist) and the Neo-classical (Neo-Weberian). The Marxist approach places skill as the point at which the mental and physical intersect to maximise the productivity of an individual (Spenner, 1990). By contrast, the Neo-classical approach locates the basis of skill as a consequence of technological advancement concerning the task (Bell, 1973; Kerr et al., 1964 in Spenner, 1990).

The two approaches also have different ways of measuring skills. The neoclassical approach relies on the mechanisms markets use, their efficiency, and their capital returns to determine what is indicative of and valuable as a skill (Spenner, 1990: 401). This approach views its measurement tools as the objective. In comparison, the Marxist approach to measuring skills concerns the perception of control, the accumulation and exploitation of capital and the contestation of work content and recruitment policy. This approach is socially constructed and significantly emphasises its subjective nature (Spenner, 1990, p. 401). The Marxist view receives support from sociologist Tilly (1988: 452-453) in Allais (2011: 634):

> As a historical concept, skill is a thundercloud: solid and bounded when seen from a distance, vaporous and full of shocks close up. The common-sense notion—that "skill" denotes a hierarchy of objective individual traits—will not stand up to historical scrutiny; skill is a social product, a negotiated identity".

Each of these theories differs according to the degree to which skills are defined by their level of social construction. Those on the extreme side of the Marxist spectrum posit that skills are defined subjectively. They argue that skills measure the interests of those higher up in the workplace hierarchy, such as managers and professional bodies. In contrast, the Neoclassical position argues that a negligible amount of social construction is involved in the skill definition process. Regarding the measurement of skill, the two theories differ strongly on what can be considered the actual underlying objective level of skill (Spenner, 1990, p. 401).

Neoclassicals argue that there is not much of a contrast between what is observed versus what goes unobserved. In contrast, Marxists would argue that the over or under-estimation of skill is defined by who controls the skill construction process (Spenner, 1990).

Academics have a consensus regarding how skills are labelled and measured to reflect one's ideological leanings (Spenner, 1990). Ideology is informed by the set of beliefs, principles and values that an individual ascribes to, particularly in a political or organisational setting (Cambridge et al., 2023). Therefore, the reader needs to understand that ideology informs an individual's perspective to have the necessary context when analysing why and how skills are labelled and measured in a particular way (Spenner, 1990).

There is further research which supports this notion. A study conducted by England & Dunn in Spenner (1988) reveals that those involved in job evaluations use different methods which produce varying judgements concerning what is considered a job skill. In addition, a case study of the Canadian workforce done by Myles in Spenner (1988) revealed that in some cases, experts overstated skill levels vis-à-vis the information provided by participants; however, both arrived at a similar interpretation of how the structure of the job was to be upgraded (Spenner, 1990).

2.4.2 Exploring the Dynamics of Skills Transfer and its Societal Implications

The following section explores the dynamics of skills transfer and its societal implications. Singh (2015 argues that skills transfer is often associated with a sense of professionalism acquired through formal education and training. However, he suggests that this definition fails to capture the real essence of the skills transfer process and that a more appropriate definition is "…an occupation that is acquired through less formal means and which facilitates employment and services that are recognised by local populations by virtue of their need for, support and patronage of these services" (Singh, 2015, p. 231).

Sebri et al. (2020) argue that skills transfer refers to the process in which an individual's behavioural and cognitive abilities can be applied to different contexts from which those in which they were acquired. They suggest that skills can transfer and that an example of this is how individuals can use the skills they acquire through sporting activities to apply in different areas of their lives, such as health, school and work. Therefore, allowing them to enhance their attributes and attain their goals (Sebri et al., 2020). However, the transfer of skills and knowledge depends on an individual possessing sufficient prerequisite knowledge in a particular field to develop said skill (OECD, 2019).

Abuzour, Lewis and Tully (2018) posit that skills and knowledge transfer occur within social contexts and that learners should have the requisite prior knowledge on a particular subject to transfer their skills. In addition, they will require the necessary support from their co-workers and should comply with the necessary prescripts to transfer their skills from the learning environment to their place of work. Critically, they will require positive reinforcement throughout this process and without it, they may not feel as if the transfer is valued and therefore be reluctant to apply what they have learned in new settings (Tegura et al., 2018). This process can be aided by teachers assisting students to apply and practice specific routine skills in various scenarios that test the student's abilities (Abuzour et al.).

Education and training are considered the panacea to fixing societal ills, and this stems from the extensive literature surrounding human capital theory and the assumed relationship between education and economic growth (Mariager-Anderson et al., 2016). According to Brine (2006) in Mariager-Anderson et al. (2016: 172):

> 'Low-skilled' workers (are) defined as those who have not completed a qualification beyond primary schooling or only completed a short vocational qualification insufficient to ensure their employability in a volatile labour market, constitute a risk – not only for the individual but also for society.

However, these scholars also point to the fact that studies have proven that 'low-skilled' workers participate in and are motivated to learn; however, this kind of learning is not deemed 'politically useful'. Thus, "…motivation turns into a 'governmentality', pathologising those groups in society who do not participate in lifelong learning (LLL) and, thereby, in the perpetual renewal of their human capital to meet the demands of the labour market" (Mariager-Anderson et al., 2016, p. 172).

Singh (2015) and Mariager-Anderson et al. (2016) argue that skills and the transfer thereof are primarily associated with formal education. In contrast, Sebri et al. (2020), Abuzour et al. (2018), and Tegura et al. (2018) refer to skills and the transfer thereof as distinct concepts. Therefore, it is essential to clarify the distinction between skills and education. Generally, education refers to the formal or structured process of obtaining knowledge, information, and abilities through educational experiences like going to school, a college, or a university. It is not advisable despite the tendency to use skills and education interchangeably; this is because skills are not necessarily obtained through formal education alone and may also develop through interaction with an individual's cultural, familial, peer or other settings, such as the workplace (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007).

It is essential to note the contrast between people's skills and their education level. The education premium has historically been calculated by contrasting the outcomes of highly educated and less educated individuals on the job market. This method's basis is that more advanced credentials or years spent in school equal high skill levels, regardless of whether educational attainment fosters skills or merely signals them. However, education and certifications only sometimes represent actual skills. Meanwhile, data indicates that having high skills has advantages for the economy. As a result, it is critical to consider both educational attainment and skill levels when analysing the return on investment in education (Araki, 2020).

2.4.3 The Importance of Human Capital Development: An overview of the evidence

This section provides an overview of human capital development and discusses its importance. According to Bruce-Lockhart (2019), human capital theory was defined in 1928 by Piguo, who stated that "(T)here is such a thing as investment in human capital as well as investment in material capital." However, it only became a part of the popular lexicon in the 1960s when economists Becker and Mincer "used it to describe the mixture of skills, knowledge, experience, habits and personality in each of us that can be put to productive use". Bohlander et al. (2001) in Fugar, Ashiboe-Mensah, and Adinyira (2013: 466) define *human capital theory* as the "knowledge, skills, and capabilities of individuals that have economic value to an organisation". In addition, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that "Pursuing formal education (early childhood, formal school system, adult training programmes) but also informal and on-the-job learning and work experience all represent an investment in human capital" (OECD, 2022).

Fugar et al. (2013:466) capture all of the above elements mentioned concerning human capital theory in the following workable definition: human capital theory refers to "…the knowledge, skills, competencies, experience and attributes that individuals have which contribute to the achievement of organisational goals and enhance individual value in the market place".

The development of human capital relies on activities which improve the value of an individual, and it achieves this through the attainment of knowledge and participation in training, thus improving their capabilities in executing activities or tasks of economic value. The knowledge they acquire and the skills they develop from their participation in training increase income and productivity. Becker (1962, 1964) in Fugar et al. (2013) differentiate between two categories of human capital: specific and general. The expertise acquired through firm/context-specific education and training falls within the first category. In

contrast, the latter refers to general skills, such as reading and writing, obtained through education and training (Fugar et al., 2013).

Human capital is the "physical means" of production. For example, a firm can invest in an individual's education, training and medical treatment as it would in factories or machinery. Its rate of return would be directly proportional to the amount of human capital one owns. "Thus, human capital is a means of production, into which additional investment yields additional output" (Fugar et al. 2013: 467).

A broad set of benefits is associated with human capital development; this is neatly summarised by Fugar et al. (2013), drawing on the work of several subject experts. Human capital development contributes to effective and high performance, enhances competitive advantage, and prepares workers for promotion and succession opportunities. Cultivates a culture of continuous learning which allows individuals to cope with competitive and uncertain environments. Allows employees to upskill themselves in the context of workplace automation and continuous technological change. Promotes organisational loyalty as it satisfies the personal growth needs of workers and thus results in the retention of highly skilled workers. Lastly, it develops problem-solving abilities which are helpful in complex work environments (Beardwell and Holden, 1997 in Loosemore et al., 2003; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2003; Grobler et al., 2002/2003; Martocchio and Baldwin, 1997 in Fisher et al., 2003; Candy & Miller, 2000; Elsdon & Iyer, 1999, in Fisher et al., 2003; Fisher et al., 2003; Sisson and Storey, 2000 in Loosemore, et al., 2003).

Significant evidence suggests that human capital development improves firm-level productivity too. For example, Hanson et al.'s (2003) review in Fugar (2013: 469), which sought to "identify the impact of investment on human capital development at the firm level in European countries", found that investment in training resulted in significant benefits for employers such as increases in productivity, profitability and market performance.

Tamkin 2005 et al.'s literature review of United Kingdom-based firms found that the benefits of human capital development outweighed the costs of wages paid, that successful firms were more likely to employ more educated individuals, and that these individuals were more productive than those who lacked similar levels of education. While most studies associated positive business benefits with higher levels of training, the evidence suggests that this depends on the kind of training provided and how it relates to a business's intended outcomes. However, the study concluded consistent training resulted in more substantial returns (Hansson et al., 2003; Tamkin et al.,2004; Bassi & McMurrer, 2006 Fugar et al., 2013).

Moreover, a study conducted by Hanson (2005) which analysed approximately 6000 companies across 26 countries, found that training opportunities did not necessarily have a significant impact on staff turnover. However, it did impact a company's profitability – particularly the intensity of the training provided. Therefore, the benefits derived from investing heavily in training were more significant than any costs associated with staff turnover (Hanson 2005 in Bassi & McMurre, 2006 in Fugar et al. 2013).

In addition, several studies conducted in the United States of America (USA) found that "…the best human capital practices are directly related to a firm's present and future performance, high financial performance, employee retention, customer satisfaction, and productivity". Instead of the evidence in this section, human capital development significantly impacts productivity, financial and operational performance (Low and Kalafut, 2002; Pfau & Kay, 2002; Buckingham Coffman, 1999 in Fugar et al., 2013).

In 2018, the World Bank launched the Human Capital Index (HCI); its stated aim is to quantify the role that education and health play in the productivity of future workers. The HCI measures how much human capital a child can obtain by turning 18, considering the potential education and health risks associated with the country in which he/she was born. It ranges between 0 and 1, with a complete score of 1 referring to a child who could expect to reach full health, devoid of stunting and having reached the potential age of 60 and, having met

his/her full educational potential, which is 14 years of quality schooling completed by the time, they turn 18 (World Bank, 2022). Therefore, it can be said that:

"A country's score is its distance to the "frontier" of complete education and full health. If it scores 0.70 on the Human Capital Index, this indicates that the future earnings potential of children born today will be 70% of what they could have been with complete education and full health (World Bank, 2022).

The HCI is also helpful in determining the likely future income of individuals and countries. For example, a score of 0.50 means that it is likely that a future worker may only accumulate half of what he potentially could have, was the country to have obtained both complete education and full health (World Bank, 2022). Quantitatively, the HCI shows how crucial phases in the journey from infant to adult in a particular year impact the productivity of future workers. It uses three components to do so, namely, survival, school and health (World Bank, 2022). Survival reflects the sad reality that many children do not make it to the age where they can start accumulating human capital through formal education. This component is measured using the mortality rate of those five and under (World Bank, 2022).

This index's school component looks at the quantity and quality of education received. Quantity refers to the years of formal education a child is expected to complete by turning 18, mindful of the average enrolment ratio. The maximum number of years is 14 if a child is assumed to have started preschool at 4. In order to measure the quality of education, the World Bank uses international student achievement testing programs that follow a similar methodology to the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). As per TIMMS, the maximum score is 625, and the lowest is 300 (World Bank, 2022).

Unlike the survival and schooling components of the HCI, there is no universally agreed-upon measurement of health. Therefore, the World Bank has opted to use two proxies instead: adult survival rates and healthy growth

among children under the age of 5. Adult survival rates are measured as the proportion of 15-year-olds who reach 60; this considers the likely non-fatal health issues that a child may experience in the future *ceteris paribus*. Healthy growth in children aged five or less is measured using stunting rates. This measure helps determine what children will most likely experience during their first few years. It is well-documented that health issues encountered during this crucial development phase have severe consequences in later years if not attended to (World Bank, 2022).

How does South Africa perform on the HCI? The latest report issued by the World Bank in 2020 gives South Africa a score of 0.43 out of 1. Therefore, the average South African child is only 43% as productive as he/she could have possibly been if he/she had the opportunity to obtain a complete education and full health. While this on average higher than its Sub-Saharan neighbours – it is lower than that of its Upper middle-income peers. South Africa's HCI value has remained constant over the ten preceding years (World Bank, 2020). **Table 3** illustrates how South Africa performs across the three components (inclusive of the sub-components) on the HCI:

Table 3: South Africa's Performance on the Human Capital Index 2020	
Component of HCI	**South Africa's performance**
Probability of Survival to Age 5	97 out of 100 children born in South Africa survive to age 5
Expected Years of School	In South Africa, a child who starts school at age 4 can expect to complete 10.2 years of school by her 18th birthday
Harmonized Test Scores	Students in South Africa score 343 on a scale where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum attainment
Learning-adjusted Years of School	Factoring in what children actually

	learn, expected years of school is only 5.6 years
Adult Survival Rate	Across South Africa, 69 percent of 15-year olds will survive until age 60. This statistic is a proxy for the range of health risks that a child born today would experience as an adult under current conditions
Healthy Growth (Not Stunted Rate)	73 out of 100 children are not stunted. 27 out of 100 children are stunted, and so are at risk of cognitive and physical limitations that can last a lifetime

Table 3: World Bank, 2022)

One can conclude from **Table 3** that South Africa has not maximised its potential to invest in human capital development, resulting in its stagnated performance on the HCI, despite mobilising a comparatively large proportion of its fiscal resources to improve the provision of education, healthcare and social assistance. South Africa's government revenue as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 29% as of 2018, 8.4% higher than the average for its regional peers but 1.6% lower than that of its income group peers. Health expenditure accounts for 4.4% of GDP as of 2017, 2% higher than its regional peers and 0.4% higher than its income group peers. Education expenditure accounts for 6.2% of GDP as of 2018, 2.2% higher than its regional peers and 1.5% higher than its income group peers. Social assistance expenditure as a percentage of GDP is 3.4% as of 2016; this is 2.9% higher than its regional and income group peers (World Bank, 2022).

The above HCI data, in combination with the high levels of NEETs (39%) and youth unemployment (52,8%), as mentioned in the introductory section, further bolsters the assertion that despite mobilising and utilising significant fiscal resources, South Africa fails to get value for the money it spends (Trading Economics, 2018; Bhorat et al., 2016).

While the literature suggests broad agreement on what a skill is, as this section has developed, there have been serious disagreements about how one labels and measures skills and whether or not the concept of "skills transfer" is acceptable and can be objectively measured. However, through the theoretical lens of human capital theory, supported by a significant body of evidence in this section, there is much to suggest that formal education and skills impact incomes, social mobility and general economic performance.

2.4.4 Conclusion

The concept of skill and its measurement is multifaceted, influenced by ideological perspectives, and can vary depending on theoretical approaches. Marxist and Neo-classical views differ in defining and measuring skills, with the former emphasising social construction and its subjective nature, while the latter relies on market mechanisms and objectivity. Skills transfer differs from education, as it involves the application of behavioural and cognitive abilities acquired from diverse contexts. Human capital development is essential for individual and organisational growth, with evidence supporting its positive impact on productivity and performance. Understanding the complexity of skill measurement and human capital development is crucial for informed decision-making and policy implementation.

2.5.1 Shifting Perspectives: From Economic Growth to Local Economic Development

This section looks at the shift in perspective from economic growth to LED. Governments and policymakers historically focused on policies which generated economic growth and were less concerned with the broader notion of economic development (Litwinski, 2017). *Economic growth* is an increase in the total goods and services produced in an economy (Mohr, 2015). However, as inequality, poverty, and social agency became more apparent to government and policymakers, this necessitated adopting a more developmental approach, resulting in a focus change from economic growth to economic development (Sen, 1999). Economic development is a concerted effort to enhance a particular geographic area's economy, e.g., a nation-state or a municipality (Perry, 1999)

However, there is contestation surrounding how LED should be defined (Litwinski, 2017; Akudugu and Laube, 2013: 4). Barthik (2003) argues that local economic development is the ability of the local economy to generate wealth for its residents. Rogerson (2009) argues that LED provides an opportunity for decisions of economic consequence to be devolved to local actors, which moves away from the centralisation of economic planning. Swinburn, Goga and Murphy (2006) argue that LED allows municipalities and private and non-governmental stakeholders to collaborate to strengthen the local economy. In addition, these stakeholders should focus on improving competitiveness, prioritising sustainability, job creation and pursuing economic inclusion.

While the definitions above touch on various important conceptual issues related to LED, it is appropriate that a more comprehensive definition is applied to this report. Tello (2010) defines LED as a multidisciplinary approach towards development which focuses on a specific geographic location, the provisions of local goods and services and the participation and role of residents in using these goods and services in order to support commercial activity, reduce income inequality and generate local economic growth.

According to Rogerson (2014), LED has developed as an innovative, geographically-based approach to local and regional development planning. LED allows for a more focused approach to development which captures the nuances of local economic conditions, which increases a locality's level of responsiveness. Furthermore, this approach allows for specific conditions to be created that are geared towards the developmental objectives of a given area. LED allows for developing public-private partnerships (PPPs), leading to improved cooperation between the respective sectors and producing mutually beneficial results (Rogerson, 2009).

2.5.2 Key Considerations for Developing a LED Strategy: Understanding Local Economic Conditions and Policy Areas

The following section details the key considerations for developing a local economic development strategy taking into account local economic conditions and key policy areas. According to Rodriguez-Pose (2008), LED's purpose is to mobilise local economic resources to leverage infrastructure development, grow SMEs and improve their skills base, attract investment, enhance geographic competitiveness and improve local institutions. This approach to policymaking intends to address the gaps left by the traditional top-down developmental policy approaches. Before developing an LED strategy, the implementing authority needs to have an in-depth understanding of the local economic conditions and where new development and growth opportunities lay (Rodrigues-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). However, this is a relatively data-heavy exercise and requires one to understand "…the economic structure, basic information about the size of the economy, the sectoral make-up and the number and type of firms within the territory" (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009, p. 62).

There also needs to be a clear assessment of the land quality and availability, access to utility services and transport infrastructure endowments. Furthermore, the quality and size of the labour force need to be accounted for, mainly when one of the strategy's main objectives is to increase the number of

employment opportunities. Lastly, a frank assessment of the positive or negative role that existing formal and informal institutions play in promoting the local economy is a helpful tool (Rodrigues-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). Once all necessary data has been obtained and analysed, the local authority can devise its LED strategy. This strategy should consider the short to medium-term goals and be clear in what it wants to achieve within its territory, and this allows the implementing authority to maintain policy coherence throughout (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

While LED strategies are generally unique in their local sense, they still broadly conform to four common types of policies (**See Figure 1**) according to Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra (2009: 64-65):

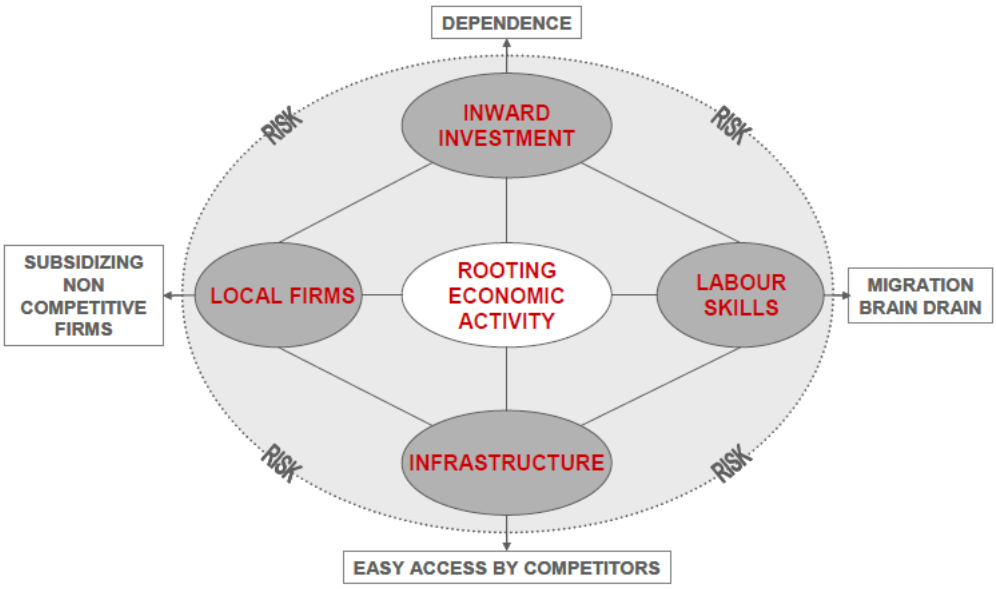
"1. Local firms: policies that aim to improve the competitiveness of local firms;

2. Inward Investment: policies aimed at attracting new inward investment;

3. Labour skills: programmes and projects aimed at developing local human capital and skill-pool in the local economy and;

4. Infrastructure: activities that aim to upgrade the local infrastructure."

Figure 1 The bases and risk of LED strategies (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009, pp. 64-65)



While an intervention need not incorporate all four of the above policy areas, it is unlikely to be successful if it only focuses on one and neglects the remaining three (Figure 1). By way of example, infrastructure development may not lead to economic development and increased employment levels if local firms are uncompetitive and human capital is insufficient. However, assume that local human capital is insufficient and firms in the territory are not competitive outside their locality. In that case, any infrastructure development may lead outside competition to gain easy access to the local market – to the detriment of local businesses (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

Another example is where the local authority focuses on securing external investments, but the results do not meet initial expectations. Where local firms are uncompetitive and skilled labour is in short supply, such a policy may result in either failure or a situation where the only type of employment which is created is of a low-skilled and low-paid nature. Therefore, leading to increasing reliance on economic actors outside the locality's borders. Conversely, if the locality possesses highly competitive firms and the residents have the necessary skills, an external investment drive may result in better quality employment and more opportunities for local businesses to take advantage of (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

A locality may have a highly skilled workforce, but the appropriate jobs to absorb these workers may be absent, and this could result in either brain drain or migration. Similarly, a policy intervention that focuses on increasing the competitiveness of local firms may end up subsidising uncompetitive firms where a conducive economic environment does not exist. Lastly, where local capabilities may not exist or are insufficient, this does not necessarily imply that a particular intervention cannot be used. However, the local authority needs to ensure that it balances "these development axes with efforts to boost the remaining factors to a level that will allow the local economy to take full advantage of any development policy" (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009, p. 65).

2.5.3 The Development of the Local Economic Development (LED) Policy Framework in South Africa

This section traces the development of the local economic development policy framework in South Africa. LED only started gaining a foothold in South African policymaking circles after the advent of democracy in 1994. Before that, South Africa's economic and spatial planning policies aimed to benefit and preserve the minority while the majority were sent to the periphery in homelands and townships. Coupled with a highly centralised state that pursued protectionist economic policies, there needed to be more room for autonomy or LED. However, post-1994 has led to LED becoming a priority of the government despite much disagreement as to what kind of economic policies the country should pursue (Patterson, 2008).

The disagreements on which economic policy route to follow stem from the tension between those who think it should focus on poverty alleviation and those seeking to enhance competitive advantage through international cooperation and trade (Patterson, 2008). Patterson (2008) suggests that the first approach is internally focused and relies on mobilising local resources. In contrast, the second approach is externally focused, emphasising foreign direct investment and export promotion. Nationally, LED is guided by the policy framework, as shown in **Table 4** (Patterson 2008: 4). This section will look at how these various policies have developed the country's approach towards LED to where it is today.

Table 4: Policy framework which guides LED in South Africa
The Constitution (1996)
White Paper on Local Government (1998)
Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000)
A policy paper on Integrated Development Planning (2000)
LED Guidelines to Institutional Arrangements (2000)
Draft LED Policy (2002)
Policy Guidelines for implementing LED in South Africa (2005)
National Framework for Local Economic Development (LED) in South Africa (2006-2011)

The foundation of the LED policy framework is within the South African Constitution. Specifically, Sections 152 (c) and 153(a) which state that:

"…local government must "promote social and economic development" and it must "structure and manage its administration, and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community" (Patterson, 2008: 6).

LED also found expression in the African National Congress's (ANC) "Reconstruction and Development Programme" (RDP) and the Urban and Rural Development Frameworks in which the party committed to supporting local community development projects. However, unlike housing and infrastructure, there were other policy focuses of the governing party at the time (Patterson, 2008).

In 1998 the release of the Local Government White Paper (LGWP) sought to highlight specific challenges faced by municipalities. It granted them the mandate to address them, i.e., service delivery backlogs, apartheid spatial planning and uneven settlement patterns. It was made operational through the Local Government Transition Act of 1993 (LGTA), which introduced the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process that promoted economic and infrastructure development, spatial planning and funding mechanism regulation. The successor to the LGTA of 1993, the Municipal Systems Act of 2000, then made it compulsory for all municipalities to prepare annual and five-year IDPs linked to their development objectives and operationalised through specific programmes and projects (Patterson, 2008).

The LGWP of 1998 also needed clarification as to what role municipalities are to play in LED. While it explicitly stated that it was committed to "developmental local government", which aimed to address the socio-economic needs of its residents, in the same breath, it says that it is not the direct responsibility of local government to create jobs but rather to create a conducive economic environment, this brings into question the functions, mandate and powers of a municipality in terms of LED. In the same document, it placed an additional requirement on local governments to ensure that it provides for the basic needs of people experiencing poverty; this created an added layer of confusion until the government released LED Guidelines to Institutional Arrangements in 2000 (Patterson, 2008).

With the introduction of the LED Guidelines to Institutional Arrangements and the Draft LED Policy in 2000, the focus of LED shifted towards those previously disadvantaged in many of the secondary towns and regions across the

country. These documents were framed so LED initiatives would be pro-poor, localised and meant to stimulate job creation. In combination with the new LED policy direction, the then Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) launched the LED Fund (LEDF) as a sign of the government's commitment to poverty alleviation. The LEDF allocated up to R1,5 million to municipalities to initiate projects that aid job creation and poverty alleviation in the agricultural, human resource and tourism fields (Patterson, 2008).

However, this initiative ultimately failed as it was not sustainable, and only a few obscure projects remained. Those in charge of administering the fund needed to be better equipped to lead projects of this nature, and many prohibitive conditions needed to be met before funding could be accessed. There needed to be better-considered business plans submitted to DPLG, and in many instances, these submissions were not accompanied by feasibility studies. Lastly, funding recipients needed to be consulted, thus leading to a lack of ownership of the projects and, overall, a policy failure on the part of the DPLG (Patterson, 2008).

In 2006, the government changed its approach to LED policy again, which resulted in the introduction of the DPLG's LED Framework. This approach was a departure from the previous model, which relied on funding from the central government. Instead, it argues that local governments should provide a conducive economic environment for creating jobs instead of having to create jobs themselves directly. Instead, municipalities were to create this conducive environment by investing in infrastructure development and providing quality essential services. Furthermore, municipalities were to seek out and then manage relationships between stakeholders who could assist them in unlocking economic potential within their environment, i.e., Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the DTI's Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) for skills development (Patterson, 2008).

Four focus areas for municipalities are set out in the LED Framework—first, good governance, provision of quality service delivery, and establishing both market and public confidence. It was second, using spatial development

planning to exploit a given municipality's competitiveness and comparative advantage. Third, business infrastructure development and enterprise support. Fourth, community investment programmes that were sustainable in the long term (Patterson, 2008). This focus was more thoughtful as it sought to combine the general economic approaches of poverty alleviation versus enhancing competitive advantage (which had caused much contestation in policy circles). As argued by Patterson (2008:9), both approaches were "…seen as important in developing a globally competitive economy that promotes competitive advantage as well as still providing pro-poor responses to the emerging second economy".

As detailed in this section, there has been a slow and challenging progression towards the government's LED approach. However, many challenges persist and are a significant debate in policymaking circles. To a large extent, LED has not been ingrained into the practice of municipalities, and the lack of funding allocated to it, as well as the lack of impact of LED, is evidence of this. While there exists a diversity of funding sources on a national level, municipalities are unable to commit the kind of resources required in order to run their LED programme without intervention from the national government. (Patterson, 2008).

As noted by Patterson (2008:9): "(T)here are pro-poor statements in the policies of many municipalities, but this is often not translated into significant LED budgets, nor the actions of other municipal departments". This lack of coherence and focus means that minimal impact is achieved. Moreover, there is an inability to link nationally funded projects such as housing and infrastructure with LED projects and outcomes and once again brings into question what the core functions and powers of municipalities are and should be (Patterson, 2008)

According to Barthik (2002), the simplest way to evaluate the outcomes of LED is the impacts that local policy has on the number of new business start-ups or expansions, job growth and productivity growth. However, these policies' broader public benefits should also be measured because they often rely on

public subsidies. Therefore, there should be an increase in both local government revenue and employment benefits arising from these interventions. First, as increased levels of business activity occur within a municipality, this should result in a situation where tax revenues generated exceed that of the prescribed expenditure increases incurred due to the policy's implementation. Second, employment benefits arise when new local jobs wages exceed the reservation wage - the minimum wage that a worker requires to participate in the labour market (Bartik, 2002).

While using a series of metrics to evaluate the impact of LED in a given municipality is helpful in informing national and provincial policy, they often need to be simpler and more affordable for a local government to implement. Instead, it is suggested that municipalities conduct regular surveys with businesses that benefit from LED policies to establish whether or not they are having the intended impact. Bartik (2003 41-42) states, "These surveys should ask specific questions about how the program affected the business's location, expansion, investment, employment, and operations". These surveys should be conducted independently from the municipality (Bartik, 2003).

There is evidence to support the view that these surveys provide quality feedback. For example, in the case of business extension programmes and policies, respondents have little incentive to say that the process was successful when they did not derive any benefit from it. Regarding financial incentives, some may argue that they enjoy receiving cash transfers from the municipality; however, in the same breath, they will inform say that the intended objective of the policy was not achieved (Bartik, 2003).

The data gathered from the survey process can then be included in a cheaper, less complicated local model that can determine "…the multiplier, employment, and fiscal effects of the program" (Bartik, 2003: 42). This will aid a municipality in approximating what the effects of their policies are and whether or not they are having a positive or negative impact on their broader LED objectives. In addition, it will help them to either maintain the focus of or improve on the

original design of their policies. It should also be kept in mind that "Increasing local business activity is not an end in itself.
Instead, it is a means to achieving public benefits through the labour market and fiscal benefits" (Bartik, 2003, p. 42).

Nel et al. (2005), in a policy note entitled "Measures of Local Economic Development" by the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (2013), state that in South Africa, most municipalities rely on StatsSA data which measure employment creation, economic growth and poverty levels - with a limited amount of this data being self-generated by metropolitan municipalities.
Other LED measurement alternatives include the World Bank's scorecard, which measures bankability, competitiveness, good governance and management and liveability; this may be a useful analytical tool for further study by a future researcher (Nel 2005 in Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute, 2013) – **Figure 2**.

Outputs	
Liveability	**Effective governance and management**
Basic Public services available	People centered and participatory
Functioning and effective infrastructure	Active and accessible networks of community led service providers
Environmental standards	Effective, responsive, co-ordinated and accountable management and delivery by local government
Adequate housing	Autonomy of local government
Secure and safe environment	Strategic direction, redistribution and oversight by national government
Availability of amenities and cultural and sporting activities and infrastructure	Co-ordination across government and with the private sector and NGOs
	Learning from successes and failures
Competitiveness	**Bankability**
Holistic and disaggregated understanding of local economy and livelihood strategies (SWOT analyses)	Effectiveness of financial management
Active private sector institutions and linkages	Creditworthiness of local authority
Adaptive management capacity and entrepreneurial expertise	Stability of intergovernmental fiscal flows
Sound business environment which fosters investment and entrepreneurial activity and development	Attraction of local and non-local private investment
Access to integrated and open markets	
Encouragement of creativity and innovation	
Access to modern technology	
Sustainable transport system	
Access and availability to credit for firms	
Human resources including skills	

Figure 2 World Bank LED Scorecard (Nel, 2005)

The broader mandate of the South African government of economic development instead of just economic growth creates policy confusion, which has often meant switching between a poverty alleviation approach and a market-orientated approach. It also raises pertinent questions about the mandate of local governments with respect to LED and the fact that this mandate lacks funding. As argued by Rodrigues-Pose and Tijmstra (2009), it is necessary to ensure that the four core LED policy areas are balanced so as to prevent the emergence of a negative externality within a municipality. South Africa's LED policymakers would do well to heed this call. From a measurement perspective, South African metropolitan municipalities are able to mirror international best practices. However, the same cannot be said for secondary towns and rural areas.

2.5.4 Conclusion

LED has shifted from a narrow focus on economic growth to a broader approach encompassing poverty alleviation and social development. Local economic development strategies require a deep understanding of local economic conditions, including the labour force, infrastructure, and available resources. In South Africa, local economic development policies have evolved, emphasising pro-poor initiatives, job creation, and infrastructure development. However, challenges still need to be addressed, such as better coherence between national and local funding and clearly defining municipalities' roles in local economic development implementation.

2.6 Conclusions from the Literature Review

Public Works Plus programmes have transformed from temporary relief measures to comprehensive initiatives for poverty graduation (Subbarao, 2003). These programs offer sustainable infrastructure, temporary employment, and skill development opportunities (Lal et al., 2010 & Subburao et al., 2013). Despite challenges like limited employment options and post-graduation service deficiencies, evidence shows that PWP Plus programmes enhance participants' productivity, income, and asset accumulation (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2020). Alternative models, including the poverty graduation

approach with its four pillars, exhibit promising outcomes in ensuring that participants do not recede into poverty by enhancing resilience (Adongo & Deen-Swarray, 2006 & Ahmed et al., 2018).

The measurement of skills is complex, influenced by ideological perspectives and varying theoretical approaches. Marxist and Neo-classical viewpoints differ in defining and measuring skills, emphasising different aspects (Spenner, 1990). Skills transfer, distinct from education, applies acquired abilities across diverse contexts (Sebri et al., 2020). Human capital development is crucial for individual and organisational growth, with evidence supporting its positive impact on productivity and performance (Fugar et al., 2013).

Local economic development strategies shift the focus from economic growth to broader objectives, including poverty alleviation and social development (Litwinski, 2017 & Sen, 1999). Successful local economic development strategies require a deep understanding of local economic conditions, including the labour force, infrastructure, and resources (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). In South Africa, local economic development policies have varied between the market-orientated and pro-poor approaches, leading to much policy confusion. These challenges persist, such as the need for better coherence between national and local funding and clear definitions of municipalities' roles in local economy development implementation (Patterson, 2008).

Overall, this literature review explores the evolution and potential of PWP Plus programmes, the complexities of skill measurement and human capital development, and the significance of local economic development strategies for local economic growth and social development. These findings provide insights for policymakers and practitioners in designing effective poverty alleviation programs and promoting sustainable economic development at a local level. The gap that this study aims to fill is to explore whether or not participants in public works plus programmes, with a specific focus on small contractor development, acquire the requisite skills in order to graduate from poverty. Moreover, it aims to explore whether or not the projects they

participate in as a component of this programme contribute towards local economic development in the areas in which they are located.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

Significant research has been conducted into the development and evolution of public works programmes in terms of their initial conceptualisation as state interventions that provided work relief to the unemployed and alleviated poverty amongst the poor to their role as skills transfer mechanisms (Subburao, 2003). The intention behind this is to allow participants to improve and acquire new skills, thus, increasing the likelihood of them acquiring stable employment and accessing credit once they have completed the programme (Subburao et al., 2013). However, several studies that have been conducted to evaluate whether or not participants were able to find employment upon exiting a public works programme indicated that a large proportion was unsuccessful in doing so (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018; McCord, 2012 & Odhiambo et al. 2015).

Gehrke and Hartwig (2018) argue that there should be a more deliberate focus on transferring business and technical skills and cite the PATI programme in El Salvador as an example. However, McCord (2009) states that it is unclear whether or not there is a benefit in providing skills development and transfer to participants in public works programmes. In addition, she states that participants in the infrastructure sector of these programmes are less likely to obtain skills which allow them to obtain employment once they have exited; this presents an opportunity for further research in the context of the VCLP (McCord, 2009).

This research is an opportunity to describe how participants perceive the intended outcomes and roles of the VCLP and the impact it has had on their lives and skillset. In addition, it describes whether or not participants can apply their behavioural and cognitive abilities, which they developed in the programme within a different context, as the literature on skills transfer suggests (Sebri et al., 2020). Furthermore, it describes whether or not

participants have experienced any development of their human capital through the attainment of new knowledge and their participation in training, thus improving both their incomes and productivity, as argued by Fugar et al., 2013.

The report is an opportunity to describe participants' perceptions of the projects they worked on and their contributions towards local economic development in the context of infrastructure development (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). This perspective aligns with the work of Tello (2010), who argues that local economic development is concerned with the provision of local goods and services, participation and role of local communities in consuming these goods and services, to support enterprise, reduce inequality and generating growth within a specific locality.

According to Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra (2009), the objectives of local economic development are to mobilise local economic resources to promote infrastructure development, develop SMEs and strengthen their skill sets, draw in investment, increase regional competitiveness, and boost local institutions. There are four types of policies which can be implemented in order to achieve these objectives. Firstly, policies that make local businesses more competitive. Secondly, policies intended to draw in further inbound investment. Thirdly, initiatives focused on enhancing the local economy's local human capital and skill base, and lastly, interventions aimed at enhancing the local infrastructure (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). This research aimed to evaluate whether or not the VCLP contributes towards attaining local economic development objectives as per Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra (2009). Moreover, it aimed to describe which combination of local economic development policies policymakers could employ to attain these objectives (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

The study conducted by Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra (2009) did not include an evaluation of public works programmes as a policy instrument intended to achieve the objective of local economic development. Therefore, it was of interest to the researcher to ascertain whether or not the VCLP could be a policy instrument that leads to attaining these objectives. Lal et al. (2010)

argued that local economic development objectives, which include creating jobs, promoting economic growth, sector interventions, and enterprise development, were aligned with public works programmes. Furthermore, investing in skills development and capacity building, building physical infrastructure, empowering the private sector to create jobs and enacting targeted labour market policies were critical ways these programmes could function as a policy instrument contributing towards local economic development (Lal et al., 2010).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1.1. Research Paradigm

The research was conducted using a qualitative research methodology. According to Wagner, Kawulich & Gamer (2012: 8), qualitative research is most appropriate "… for exploring, describing, identifying or explaining social phenomena". Furthermore, this research paradigm enables the researcher to grasp a more detailed understanding and comprehension of a specific issue at a particular time in a designated context (Merriam, 2002). Thus, considering the social nature of the research problem, it is appropriate that this approach be chosen.

A literature review has revealed that the EPWP programme has not been effective in transferring skills to its participants despite the potential of PWP Plus programmes to improve human capital. Furthermore, there exists a gap in the existing knowledge of the contribution of PWP Plus programmes towards local economic development. Therefore, this study described participants' perceptions of the VCLP concerning the above concepts. This intention is reinforced by Wagner et al. (2012: 8), who states that "descriptive research paints a detailed picture of the social situation or relationship. It addresses 'how' and 'who' questions.

3.1.2 Research Approach

The most commonly used research approaches are positivist, interpretative, transformative or postcolonial. Each approach possesses its philosophical underpinnings, perception of reality, values, and what is to be considered the truth. The research approach to this study was interpretative because it sought to describe and gain insight into human nature. Furthermore, it is considered truth dependent on the context in which the subject finds itself. It is advantageous because it aims to describe how participants feel about a particular issue (Wagner et al., 2012).

This approach benefitted the study as it allowed the researcher to reconstruct latent meaning, which created a deeper understanding of information that was

not initially apparent. In addition, it created a better understanding of the subjective meanings participants ascribed to specific concepts and experiences (Rosenthal, 2018). However, it should be noted that this approach was largely subjective and, therefore, cannot be considered generalisable (Wagner et al., 2012; Rosenthal, 2018).

3.1.3 Research Design

Case study research design is a branch of the interpretive research approach. According to Lather (1992) and Robottom & Hart (1993) in Baxter & Jack (2008: 545), by sharing their "…stories, the participants can describe their views of reality, and this enables the researcher to understand the participants' actions better". Firstly, case studies are considered to appropriate as a research design when the researcher wants to understand 'why' and 'how' social phenomena occur when there is no power to coerce or influence the participants when there is a particular interest in context. There is a lack of clarity between the incidence of a particular phenomenon and the context. Furthermore, using a descriptive case study was applicable to describing a particular intervention within its context (Yin, 2003 in Baxter and Jack, 2008). Considering the clearly defined geographical location and the presence of the intervention being studied (on a theoretical basis), a descriptive case study was further justified (Merriam, 2002).

3.2 Data Collection Strategy

3.2.1 Primary Data

Case studies empowered the researcher to use multiple data sources, which allowed for the creation of rich, descriptive and detailed analysis of the subject matter. Researchers can use interviews, documentary analysis, and direct and participant observation – all contributing to the quality of the end product. In addition, without the possibility of conflating a qualitative study with a mixed-methods study, case studies have the unique advantage of being amenable to integrating quantitative data, strengthening the researcher's argument (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Even with the multiple data sources available to the case study design, the primary data source chosen for this research is in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews involve conducting intensive individual interviews with a few respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). This approach benefited this study as it attempts to describe individuals' perceptions within a defined context. It is argued that in-depth interviews allow the researcher to comprehensively understand his/her matter of concern and provide a rich data set from which to analyse one's findings. Additionally, this method allowed for more accessible data collection than other methods because participants felt more relaxed in this setting. However, it should be noted that this data collection method was prone to bias, was time intensive, required proper training and was largely subjective and, therefore, not generalisable (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

3.2.2 Population and Unit of Analysis

The VCLP was initiated in 2005 as a structured programme of the EPWP which focused on small contractor development. The VCLP aimed to involve participants in providing labour-intensive local government infrastructure projects such as low-volume roads, sidewalks, stormwater drains, electrical lines, material hauling and water and sewer reticulation (National Department of Public Works, 2006).

When this study was conducted, there were 3 phases or intakes of the VCLP within the CoE. Phase 1 of the VCLP consisted of 20 learner contractors and 20 learner supervisors, with a total project value allocated to them worth R210 million over three years. Phase 2 of the VCLP replicated the approach taken in Phase 1. Phase 3 increased the intake of learner contractors and supervisors to 100, with a total project value allocated to them worth R500 million over three years (Sonqishe, 2016).

According to the National Department of Public Works' targets (2006), at least 85% of the participants should be historically disadvantaged, 50% should be women or people with disabilities, and 50% should be youth (under 35).

Additionally, contractor applicants must have had at least Grade 10, supervisor applicants must have at least Grade 12, and each application must consist of one contractor and a maximum of three supervisors. Furthermore, applicants must have been employed by the contracting public body or company for the period of the learnership. They must indicate their willingness to participate in the learnership on a full-time basis, thus, preventing them from engaging in any work opportunities outside of the learnership. It is also important to note that the VCLP did not explicitly target unemployed or unskilled individuals (National Department of Public Works, 2006).

Participants in this programme were recruited through a formal selection process publicly advertised through the media in the relevant municipality. The selection process consisted of interested parties submitting their application to the relevant office, completing written assessments and being interviewed if they met the required test score threshold of 24 out of a possible 34 points. Applicants did not have to possess any prior experience in the construction field, higher qualifications than the specified minimum, experience in running a contracting business or access to and ownership of capital or assets. However, these characteristics were looked upon favourably by the selection committee during the selection process (National Department of Public Works, 2006).

3.2.3 Sampling Strategy and Criteria

Qualitative research sampling is more flexible than quantitative research, as the combination of methods and techniques will most likely change depending on the context in which the study is being conducted. Qualitative research is characterised by its in-depth design, and sample sizes are comparatively smaller than quantitative studies (Wagner et al., 2012). Elliot & Timulak (2005) argue that whether the sample size is 8 or 100, qualitative research often aims to sample broadly enough and interview intensively enough to capture all the significant elements and variations of the researched phenomenon.

In line with Wits School of Governance's recommendations, this study interviewed 15 participants.

The method of selecting these respondents was based on both purposive and convenience sampling. The advantage of using purposive sampling is that the researcher can draw on both past research and experience to select participants. Moreover, this technique allowed for a sample generally representative of and relevant to the study. However, when the participants could not partake in this study, convenience sampling was used to supplement the existing purposive sampling (Wagner et al., 2012). The profile of the 15 participants was selected based on the following three criteria:

1. The participant must have graduated from Phases 1, 2 or 3 of the VCLP.
2. The participant must have been a resident or working in the CoE at the time of their participation in the programme.
3. Particular attention was placed on sourcing participants who have graduated from general workers to become small contractors. However, this did prove challenging considering the relatively small pool from which to sample.

3.3 Data Analysis Approach

The data analysis approach chosen for this study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a data analysis method for identifying, interpreting, and reporting data-related patterns. Your data set is minimally organised and richly detailed. However, it frequently goes beyond this and interprets different aspects of the research topic. Thematic analysis can follow an essentialist or realist approach that documents participants' experiences, meanings, and reality, or it can be a constructionist approach that looks at how events, realities, meanings, experiences, and other things are influenced by various social discourses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis entails several decisions that must be made clearly, even if they are frequently not explicit. These questions include (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

1. Defining themes: Determine the criteria for identifying themes in the data.
2. Specifying the level and type of analysis: Decide on the depth and approach for conducting the thematic analysis.
3. Choosing deductive or inductive theme identification: Decide whether to derive themes from the data or use pre-existing coding frameworks.
4. Determining the level of theme detail: Decide on the specificity or abstraction of the identified themes.
5. Adopting a realist or constructionist lens: Choose the philosophical perspective guiding the analysis.
6. Aligning qualitative research questions: Ensure that the research questions align with the objectives of the thematic analysis.

Addressing these decisions explicitly in research reporting enhances transparency and reproducibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research aimed to capture meaningful patterns concerning the research questions. It did so by looking at the prevalence of specific themes within the data as well as the relevance of these themes to the research questions. In terms of the level and type of analysis that was conducted, this research provided a detailed thematic description of the complete data set in order to determine the critical themes, and this was particularly useful instead of the fact that the perceptions of VCLP participants were largely under-researched (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The report employed the inductive method of theme identification which involved the identification of themes directly from the data set without using pre-existent coding or theoretical frameworks, and this allowed for themes to emerge organically from the data and to provide new insights into the topic of this research. Furthermore, themes were identified at a semantic rather than a latent level, implying that the research focused on explicit meanings of the data provided by participants and did not interrogate the assumptions underlying the data. Therefore, the patterns in the data were organised and summarised within the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The thematic analysis conducted in this study was done through the realist lens as it aimed to identify a direct relationship between the experience, meaning and language used to theorise the meanings and motivations derived from the data set. This lens was considered complementary to the employed semantic theme identification approach. Lastly, it was important for this research to understand the relationship between the overarching research question - the contribution of the expanded public works programme to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development – concerning the sub-research questions, as stated in section 1.5 of this report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis conducted in this study followed the six-step process as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is:

1. Data familiarisation: Following the conclusion of the interviews, a thorough examination of the data was conducted through numerous readings of the interview transcripts, cross-correlation with the interview notes, and reverting to the interview recordings as necessary for clarity. otter.AI was used to transcribe the data. In-depth listening to recordings was used to repair AI artificial intelligence and faults.
2. Code generation: The transcripts were coded manually by printing out the transcripts, underlining distinct codes into colour codes, and then recording these codes into an Excel sheet for theme generation across interviews. These codes were generated to cluster ideas generated or that describe the ideas described by research participants.
3. Theme generation: The codes were combined into single themes after being categorised into common concepts when the recurrence or similarity of concepts was evident.
4. Theme review: Based on a second reading of the data, the themes were examined concerning the research question to determine their applicability and if the codes' grouping into themes was appropriate or whether themes needed to be divided.
5. Theme definition: In this step, eight themes related to the primary research question were defined; all of these themes were pertinent to the study and then assigned as pertinent to the research sub-questions.

6. Write-Up: Section 4.3 of this research report contains the write-up of the data analysis.

3.4. Reliability and Validity

Qualitative researchers must ensure that their work is credible and trustworthy. While it is almost impossible to remove all bias or subjectivity, the researcher should remain cognisant of their inherent dispositions, attitudes and do their best to avoid compromising the quality of their study. These risks can be mitigated through unobtrusive measures, multiple collection methods, participant validation and triangulation (Wagner et al., 2012).

Unobtrusive measures refer to the researcher's discretion in not disturbing the setting or natural environment in which the study occurs. Multiple collection methods prevent the conflation of findings when interpreting data and offer a method to verify your understanding of the data. Participant validation implies verifying that you have captured your participant's perspectives in a way that genuinely reflects their social reality. Lastly, triangulation in qualitative research is better framed as a "crystallisation". The notion is that one's work is genuinely authentic and that those who read your work subsequently "will be able to see the same emerging pattern" (Wagner et al., 2012, p. 138).

3.5 Limitations

Considering the demarcated location, research design and methods of sampling (which are qualitative), this study cannot be generalisable or demographically representative.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants needed to grant their informed consent through a consent form (with all relevant details of who the researcher is and what his supervisor's details are) that was supplied to them. Participants participated voluntarily and were allowed to continue the study if they wished. Lastly, all data remains strictly confidential; findings were provided to participants, and their names were coded to ensure confidentiality (Wagner et al., 2012).

The researcher's former employment as a municipal councillor in the CoE excluded him from conducting research related to this study within the Daveyton area (where he was previously allocated to serve), and this aimed to prevent any perceived abuse of power due to the perceived social or institutional power associated with being an elected public representative. The decision was taken in consultation with Mr Murray Cairns, the course convenor for the research proposal development course, and Prof. Pundy Pillay, the research supervisor and was approved by the Wits School of Governance's ethical clearance committee.

This study was conducted in the researcher's capacity as a student and as a matter of academic endeavour. There were no existing relationships between the researcher and participants before or after the study was conducted. Furthermore, no mention was made of the researcher's occupation or social or institutional position at any stage throughout the interviews held with participants, nor was there any attempt to coerce or influence any participant in service to a political end. The researcher is satisfied that all of the necessary ethical considerations were taken into account and that his behaviour and actions throughout this study were beyond reproach and in line with the Wits School of Governance's code of ethics.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed in the study, which utilised a qualitative approach to explore and describe social phenomena related to the EPWP programme. The interpretative nature of the research approach facilitated a detailed understanding of human nature and the reconstruction of latent meaning. By adopting a case study design and conducting in-depth interviews, the study aimed to analyse the VCLP within a specific context comprehensively. Although the findings may not be generalisable or demographically representative, the study adhered to ethical considerations. The chosen methodology provided a robust framework for examining participants' perceptions and addressing the research objectives.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants on the VCLP in line with the research questions as stated in Chapter 1, as well as the research instrument used, which is in Appendix A. A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted against a target of 15 with participants in VCLP Phase 3.

4.2 Description of Research Sample

As stated in Chapter 3, the nature of this research was that of a descriptive case study in which 15 participants participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. They were asked six individual questions and were allowed to provide any additional information they thought relevant to the study.

The participants were selected by their participation in and experience with the VCLP as learner contractors. Their inclusion in the study was because this research sought to examine and describe the perceptions and experiences of participants regarding the impact of contractor learnership programmes on their lives and skills development. Furthermore, it investigated how participants perceived the attainment and understanding of skills through their involvement in the VCLP and similar contractor learnership initiatives. Lastly, the research aimed to explore participants' perspectives and inputs concerning the specific project/s they were engaged in within the VCLP context and how these contributions influenced local economic development.

The respondents listed in **Table 6** below have been classed into one group, as obtaining a research sample from Phases 1 and 2 of the VCLP was impossible. The respondents are listed in the chronological order in which they were interviewed in the tabulated sequence order. In order to adhere to ethical clearance requirements and best practices, the data was anonymised, and other information irrelevant to the research was not reported.

Table 6: Description of Research Sample				
Interview number	**Respondent Code**	**Grouping**	**Gender**	**Role**
1	A1	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
2	A2	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
3	A3	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
4	A4	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
5	A5	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
6	A6	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
7	A7	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
8	A8	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
9	A9	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
10	A10	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
11	A11	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
12	A12	VCLP Phase 3	Male	Learner Contractor
13	A13	VCLP Phase 3	Male	Learner Contractor
14	A14	VCLP Phase 3	Female	Learner Contractor
15	A15	VCLP Phase 3	Male	Learner Contractor

Table 6: Interview participants – relevant data reported

4.3 Presentation of Results

This section displays the study's findings as developed using the research questions and instrument in Annexure A. The results are organised by the primary research question first, followed by the research sub-questions.

The research questions explored participants' perceptions of the VCLP regarding EPWP's contribution to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development. More specifically, it aimed to explore the perceived outcomes and roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on participants' lives and skill development. It investigated their experiences and understanding of skills acquired through participation in the VCLP and other learnership initiatives. Additionally, the study examined participants' perceptions of their contributions to specific VCLP projects and their impact on local economic development.

Specific themes that emerged from the interviews applied to particular constituent research questions, whereas the overall research question could only be answered through a holistic analysis of all research questions included in the research instrument, as provided in Annexure A. These themes were derived from the thematic analysis coding process, which the researcher undertook and refined as the write-up of results was underway. At the beginning of the coding process, the researcher identified 89 codes, and this was reduced to 48 codes, in the end to avoid duplication and maintain the internal coherence of the themes. Please refer to **Appendix B** for additional details (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research identified nine key themes explained and presented in this chapter. The themes were categorised and assigned to the relevant research questions. The key themes are summarised in **Table 7** below:

Table 7: Description of themes identified			
Area of Research	**Theme 1**	**Theme 2**	**Theme 3**
The perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development	Perceived role of the EPWP and the VCLP	Perceived outcome of participation in VCLP	Challenges associated with the VCLP
The perceptions and experiences of participants concerning the attainment and understanding of skills through their participation in the VCLP and by extension a contractor learnership programme	How skills are perceived and understood	Perceptions surrounding the attainment of skills through participation in VCLP	Challenges associated with the training component of the VCLP
The perceptions and inputs of participants in the VCLP in	Perceptions of local economic development	Perceived contribution of project/s towards	Challenges associated with contributing towards LED

relation to the specific project/s they were involved in and their contribution towards local economic development		local economic development	

4.3.1 Theme 1 - Perceived Role of the EPWP and the VCLP

4.3.1.1 – Category - Skills

Seven of the fifteen respondents felt that the central role of both the EPWP and VCLP was developing the skills of and empowering the unemployed, as demonstrated below:

Respondent A4 stated that the main role of the EPWP programme was to give participants skills that they could use to participate in the labour market or to run a business:

> *A4: I" think the main role is to give skills to the public so that everyone can apply for work. You must be able to, let's say, for example, a simple example. Let's say someone wants to learn how to do, let's say, construction work. What I mean is to give them skills in the manner of how to run the business in the business. In the office, and also give them skills to manage the site. For example, on the site, there's a project manager, and there's a safety officer. They are foremen, so the person must be able to understand more into details".*

Respondent A4 expanded upon her view that these programmes should aim to upskill manual labourers so that the CoE could reduce its reliance on external consultants:

> A4: *"They must also get that Skill that especially that person that's actually laying the concrete slab, must be able to have a knowledge of how to run a business, how to do a draft a bill of quantities instead of only putting concrete on the floor. Yeah, yeah, I'm coming from that if I'm, if I am a builder, and I only know the Skill of doing bricks to build a*

house. For example, I must have a skill or knowledge to be able how to do safety work. If my safety officer collapse and get sick, I must be able to have knowledge of how to deal with stuff. Yeah, I mean, so that's perfect. We don't end up using so much money by looking for consultants".

Respondent A9 spoke to the idea of empowering the unemployed through programmes such as the EPWP:

A9: "*Its role should not be to empower the ones that are employed and who are existing business people but to equip the unemployed with skills".*

Respondent A10 highlighted the importance of the programme in upskilling the community in order to empower them:

A10: "To give the community a chance to work to get to leave them with the skill but the opportunity that when you finish the project in your community, you can you can be able to properly run your own resources or to be exposed to things that were not exposed to before".

Respondent A11 stated that the primary role of the programme was to transfer skills to individuals in the construction industry to allow them to access employment:

A11: *"I think it's for, like, you know, skills in the community and specifically for the construction industry. The whole reason for this skill transfer would be there to try and alleviate job shortages.*

Respondent A12 felt that the programme should facilitate skills development in order to address poverty:

A12: "*What it should be is to transfer skills in order to alleviate poverty".*

Respondent A13 suggested that the main role of the EPWP should be to upskill participants in order to enable them to obtain employment after exiting the programme:

A13: *"It should be the people on the program there must receive a certain level of training, and that will enable them to to be employable after that program because what I've realised is most of the guys who enter such programs, they enter them as a contract worker right and then the program is finished. Those guys are not employable because they don't have a certain skill that they've obtained through the program".*

Respondent A15 shared a similar view to A13 on the role of the programme:

A15*: "To try to create jobs and offer people skills. Those are the two things that I've seen in this man. If you think about something else, I've never seen that I've never experienced that. Those are the two things that I've seen. Yeah".*

4.3.1.2 Category – Jobs

Two respondents stated that the main role of the programme was to create jobs.

Respondent A5 explained that in the context of working on a construction site, there should be more jobs created for manual labour and less reliance on machines:

A5: "It's *to make sure that in a construction site, if possible, we create jobs that can be done manually by people. Okay, not using the machines. all right".*

Respondent A8 also thought that the primary role of the programme was to create jobs and argued that general workers should be employed for periods longer than three months:

A8: *"The main role of EPWP, Yes, should be to create employment and alleviate poverty and creating the employment. It should be shouldn't be short-term employment. Yeah, it should be a long-term appointment. Sometimes, you find that the project is only for three months; how do you escape poverty if people are only working for three months".*

4.3.1.3 Category – Women Empowerment

Another two respondents stated that the role of the EPWP and, in particular, the VCLP was to empower women:

> A2: *"Public Works was supposed to empower young women. of construction, to build and educate them in construction and even projects or pay me to learn in the construction industry".*

This notion was expanded upon by respondent A14:

> A14: *You know, because it's pretty hard to break into the industry as a female entrepreneurs, especially in the construction industry. So you know, most times, we find ourselves tendering for these contracts that we are not always guaranteed to get. So the program the way it was, it was formed, was that we would get what you call practical lessons with being awarded contracts.*

4.3.1.4 Category - Transition from small to medium-sized businesses

Two other respondents understood the role of the programme in enabling them to grow their existing businesses.

Respondent A3 spoke about how she envisioned their business transitioning from a small to a medium-sized one:

> A3: *"As our businesses are already set up, the main role is supposed to assist emerging contractors and others in moving from a small business to a medium-sized one. That's the main role that they're supposed to do".*

Respondent A6 spoke about her expectations that her business would be self-sustaining after exiting the programme:

> A6: *"Many emerging contractors or entrepreneurs thought that government would assist them, teach them how to do the business and then set them up so that they are able to self-sustain their businesses after the program".*

4.3.1.5 Category - Miscellaneous

The two remaining respondents provided different perceptions of the main role of the programme:

> A1: "*The role of EPWP is local economic development".*
>
> And;
>
> A7: *"For me, I feel like it was to empower the youth that is disadvantaged youth especially when we have just started our businesses".*

4.3.2 Theme 2 – Perceived Outcome of Participation in the VCLP

4.3.2.2 Category - Negative Experiences

Six respondents indicated that the programme had not positively impacted their lives. In some instances, they incurred business and personal losses from participating in the programme.

Respondent A1 felt that the programme had not made a material difference to her life and highlighted a lack of projects assigned to her as the central concern she had with the programme:

> A1: *"The programme really does not work. I think what failed was that the work was too little, and out of the projects I had, I was busy for a week, two weeks maximum. My business took a huge knock".*

Respondent A2 also felt that it made no difference to her life, and instead, she incurred serious personal loss as a result of their participation in the programme:

> A2: "*According to me, it didn't make any difference aside from the few things that I have learned in that six-month period in class was not worth it. They wasted my career for nothing. I quit my job. Now I'm hoping that I don't lose my house. I lost my car. I even lost my job because we had to attend our programme. We had to resign from our jobs and attend that program full-time".*

Respondent A3 was concerned by the lack of support by the Department of Public Works in supporting her through the programme:

"First of all, you struggle with equipment, with tools, funding, everything. Our lives were worse than before. Remember we quit whatever we were doing before the programme and concentrated only on this, and as a result, we ended up with nothing".

Respondent A6 stated that despite learning from the projects she was involved in – she incurred personal loss due to her participation in the programme.

A6: "*Yes, I did learn a lot from the projects, but financially and to be able to sustain myself and be able to bid and get other contracts, no. I found myself to be completely under because we had to leave work to go into the program, and indeed, life is worse than it was before".*

Respondent A8 felt that the programme did not improve her life. Furthermore, she held to the belief that they would be employed permanently upon exiting the programme, but that was not the case:

A8: *"No, it didn't. It didn't. It didn't. And was that, as I say to you, it didn't make a difference to my life because I was promised that, you know, after a certain time, you know, I'm gonna be employed permanently, but that thing never happened".*

Respondent A8 further highlighted the plight of some of her fellow participants on the programme:

A8: I don't know how many people you have called. If people are honest with you. They'll tell you that this thing didn't work. Some of the people we were just told you to say there's money in government, people, they were working, they left their jobs. They went into this thing. They lost their houses; they lost their cars. Because of this, Vuk'uphile. It didn't do anything for us. Instead, it was just an exploitation".

Respondent A9 said that their business was severely affected by her participation in the programme:

A9: "*So in between, like, you lost the contracts that you had before with the other clients because you had to focus on attending the class, doing the practical work, so my business was really affected.*

Five respondents did not report increased CIDB gradings despite participating in the VCLP".

Respondent A1 explained that her grading did not even improve by one point:

> A1: *"My company's grading didn't even go up from one to two while I was in the program to be honest".*

Respondent A5 indicated that she had not had an opportunity to work on projects that would enable her to improve her grading:

> A5: *"So most of the companies, they were still remaining on CIDB grading level one, level two, we were not given the projects that were related to taking you to the upper level, upgrading you to any other space".*

Respondent A7 stated that the programme administrators told her that participants would exit the programme with a CIDB grading of five. However, that did not materialise:

> A7: *"They came with a great story, and we were told we would come out with grade five by the time we came out. It wasn't as much as expected".*

Respondent A8 shared a similar view to respondent A8:

> A8: "*When we started, they said my CIDB grading would improve through Vuk'uphile, and I thought maybe going through Vuk'uphile, I'm gonna come out with a different grading, but it didn't happen"*
>
> .

Respondent A13 indicated that by the time he had exited the programme, he remained on CIDB grade 1, and it was only through work he did in the private sector that his grading improved.

A13: "I went in with with with grade one and also ended with grade one because of the number of projects that were promised - we never got them. So currently, I'm grade three, but that is through private sector projects I have been involved in and has nothing to do with Vuk'uphile. So the vision that was sold to us through Vuk'uphile, we didn't achieve that, you know?"

4.3.2.2 Category – Positive Experiences

Two respondents reported an increase in their CIDB grading upon exiting the programme. However, only respondent A11 attributed this occurrence to her participation in the programme:

> A11*: "I only had Grade 1 when I started but exited with Grade 3".*

Respondent A12 exited the programme with an increase in his CIDB grading but attributed this to work that he did outside of the programme:

> A12: *I was grade one. Yes. And I did leave with the grade two, but it wasn't really attached to them or to the Vuk'uphile programme; it was something else that I got involved in. Okay,*

Respondent A14 felt that she had gained meaningful experience which enabled her to seek jobs in the construction industry:

> A14: "*So, you know, we were learning, we also gained experience as well, you know, hands-on experience with managing projects in the construction industry, which meant that at the end of the program, you know, then we were fully fledged contractors, and now we're able to go out there and seek jobs within the industry".*

Respondent A3 mentioned how the funds she generated from the projects she worked on enabled her to accumulate an asset:

> *A3: "I was able to take the money from the project that I was given, and then we managed to buy two properties. It managed to help us to subdivide the properties and to pay the transfer duties and the deposit".*

Respondent A4 felt that the programme had created new opportunities for her:
A4:

> *'It really did. It actually assisted me a lot and opened many doors for myself, and also gave me confidence that look as a young woman, black woman, I'm able to go and get jobs and private sector and in government now.*

Respondent A15 explained that the programme did not improve his life as expected but that he used his business acumen to benefit from it financially.

> A15: "*It didn't help me personally, but financially, it helped me because I am a very business-minded person and used the money to acquire another business in the manufacturing industry and was able to expand that business".*

4.3.3 Theme 3 – Challenges associated with the VCLP

The respondents in this study cited several challenges associated with the VCLP, which impacted their participation.

Six of the respondents felt that there needed to be more projects assigned to them for the duration of the programme.

Respondent A1 complained that there were too many contractors in VCLP phase three:

> A1: "*I think what failed was that we were too many contractors, and the work was far too little. I had only two projects allocated to me, and they kept me busy for a maximum of two weeks".*

Respondent A2 said that she was promised that she would be allocated projects to the value of R5 million but that it never materialised:

> A2: "*What about the projects that they promised to give us? It was supposed to amount to R5 million, but for me, my projects were far less".*

Respondent A4 suggested that the CoE should have enough projects for all contractors:

> *A4: "The only thing we should change about the programme is to make sure that when they give away projects, they must make sure they have enough projects for all contractors".*

Respondent A6 said that she had only one project allocated to her despite being promised that she would have three projects allocated to her:

> A6: *"We were just told after three years that the programme is finished, and therefore, we are finished. Some of us only got one project; we didn't even get the second project, and the city just said okay, three years is done, you guys are done".*

Respondent A7 stated that she was promised an allocation of three projects but only ended up being allocated two:

> A7: "*The fact that some of us were promised the same contract, saying that we would get three projects and that we would have a certain amount of money by the time we finished the project, and all of that, but that didn't happen. Like for me, I only got two projects".*

Respondent 12 indicated that he had only been allocated one project:

> A12: *"We only got do like one project, which is the one I spoke off. So, in terms of benefitting skills or financially or business growth, I didn't benefit at all from all this".*

There was a strong feeling among participants that VCLP Phase 1 and 2 had been more successful because of the reduced intake size.

Respondent A1 said that she was aware of the previous cohorts being successful on account of their reduced intake size:

> A1: *"They were about five or seven contractors for the duration of the four or five years. They were very successful.*

Respondent A6 suggested that the size of the intake should be smaller during the next phase of VCLP:

> A6: *"Maybe next time when there is Vuk'uphile, they mustn't take a bigger number, whereby they lose control of the contractors."*

Respondent A9 said that she felt disadvantaged in comparison to the previous two cohorts:

> A9: *"According to my knowledge, compared to the other groups, Vuk'uphile 1 and 2, it didn't do us any good. We were disadvantaged because of the size of the group".*

Respondent A11 also shared his concerns about the size of the intake relative to VCLP 1 and 2:

> A11: *"There were two cohorts before us, and I think that they had 20-25 companies, and with us, we had like 100 companies. I think that by increasing the number of companies that they chose, they were not able to fulfil their promises to us. We were all promised a third project, and none of the companies got a third project. If they wanted to increase the size of the cohort, they could have increased it to maybe 50, but 100 didn't work".*

Another concern raised by participants was the perception that one's political affiliation determined the kinds of projects they got.

Respondent A8 said that she felt her project was not aligned with her expertise because she did not have the right relationships within the CoE:

> A8: *"With Vuk'uphile, it depends on who you know, who you talk to in order to get a construction job. So, because I didn't have any friends, I didn't know anybody, that's why they gave me a landscaping project."*

Respondent A9 share a similar view to Respondent 8:

> A9: *"That's why I'm done. Like if you don't know the way politically or if you don't actually take affiliates on your project of a certain political group, then you won't get better projects. Unlike the ANC groups who tend to get projects."*

Respondent A15 acknowledged the role that politics played during the program:

A15: "There was a lot of things we were promised on the project, but it all depended on whom you know and what your relationship with them was".

Respondent A7 thought that participants in the programme were subject to differential treatment:

A7: *"Also, it felt like when they were giving out projects ,there was favouritism. There were some people that had nice projects; they left there with nice grading and had the opportunity to work on higher-grade projects than what we did. I didn't even get the third project".*

Some of the other concerns raised by participants were; being prevented from tendering for other projects, the limited scope for profit on projects and late payments.

A1 argued that by her participation in the programme, she was not able to tender for projects within the municipality outside of the VCLP programme:

A1*: "So it was five years, and I feel personally for my company. It was five years wasted. Because it kept me back. I couldn't tender on other stuff in the city".*

Respondent A6 was disappointed by the limited scope for profit on the projects they were assigned:

A6: "When you get a contract for R2 million, you can use it all on the project and not make anything. People that we get this money and we walk away with it, but I have learnt that you can actually appear to have made it in life and only to find out that you didn't make it at all".

Respondent A7 was concerned about the late payment for work completed:

A7: *"The payments, the payments will get to you like late, and you still have people to pay, and that was not all right",*

4.3.4 Theme 4 - How skills are perceived and understood

4.3.4.1 Category - Interpretation of skills

The respondents interpreted skills in different ways. Five of the respondents interpreted skills as practical as opposed to theoretical.

According to Respondent A3, a skill is something that requires practical training:

> A3: *"It is something that somebody will train in you and show you how to practically do it".*

Respondent A6 thought that skills were the ability to do something and provided the following example as illustrated below:

> A6: *"I think a skill is the ability to do something. For example, say you are digging a trench; it is the ability to dig the trench as quickly as you can. So, you should have the knowledge to keep the line of that trench as straight as possible, and you should have the ability to keep on digging until you get complete the job. It's about the ability to be able to do something and get it right".*

Respondent A9 share provided a similar example to Respondent A6:

> A9: "*Is to say that John knows before he does his bricklaying, that you mix your cement with one or two quantities of cement with the river sand, then after like teaching him and teaching him how to do the pre-planning, giving him the proper measurements, the proper mix tasks and how to lay the bricks properly. Then after seeing that he can do it on his own".*

Respondent A12 described skills as the knowledge and know-how to do a specific task on-site and provided the example below:

> A12: *"Well, a skill is basically the know-how and knowledge to do a specific task. Like in terms of, for example, progress reports and that sort of thing on the job on site for you to be able to create that , put that in place and give it to your engineers, I mean, that skills, in terms of running a project in terms of skills for labourers and so forth. I mean,*

you come onto site, you're not sure of how to articulate it the report, and by the time you leave, you have to know how and the knowledge to do that".

Respondent A13 described skills as something that one learns from experience in a practical setting:

A13: *"My idea of the Skill is like on the on the space that I am as an electrical contractor, I'm electrician myself. So for me, I would say Skill is, for instance, there are people in my organisation whom I've employed who know nothing about electrical right but after a year, those people are equipped with the knowledge that they have a basic understanding of them to be able to access the market".*

Three of the other respondents stated that skills were practical and theoretical. Respondent A2 noted that despite her not receiving the kind of practical training she would have hoped for, she learnt skills theoretically and practically:

A2: *"We learnt a few things during the six months' worth of classes, but there is nothing that I learnt from a practical point of view".*

Respondent A7 said that she had learnt through practical work on the projects as well as the classroom sessions:

A7: *"I think that we learned through the practical work that we did on the projects during the programme, and we learnt through the classes as well".*

Respondent 8 explained how skills were both practical and theoretical but, to her, more practical:

A8: *"Skill to me. It's both theoretical and practical, but it's more practical. You really just go there to get an understanding of how to do things. And practically, it will now you do it and get corrected because that's where you get the experience as well. If you do something practical. Yeah. I can go people there's so many people that have gotten degrees, you know, that have done the civil engineering degree, whatever. But*

when they go on-site, they can't do the work. You've done the practical, you know very well. You've got the theory and the practical together this thing that you are going to produce good results".

Three of the respondents interpreted skills as transferred from one person to another.

A5: "*A skill is an information that you can acquire from someone that you don't know. That is the transferring of Skill from one person to the other. Like most of the contractors, they didn't have knowledge of costing and all that. So those are the skills that they were supposed to transfer to us";*

A10: "*Okay, this Skill is taking normal labour from someone, for example, someone in normal labour, and then let's say there's planning they the labourer will know how to get back up have to probably teach them safety, you know, explain to them different things that they need to to check while doing that. So that next time they, they they have the opportunity probably to do so, there will be a difference in information".* And;

A4: "A skill is something you can use for yourself to maintain yourself. A skill is given".

The remaining three respondents interpreted skills differently, such as skills allowing you to make a living, skills knowledge of a particular job, and skills developed through repetition.

Respondent A11 noted that a skill is something that you can use to make a living and improve your community:

A11: "I think it's something that you acknowledge that you have that can, that you can use to better the community with and obviously, something that you can also use to, to earn to make a living, you know, something that the community need, the community that you live in, it

means that thing and that knowledge that you have, and that you are able to make a living out of it as well"

.

Respondent A14 stated that skills are knowledge of a particular job:

A14: "It is knowing how to do a job".

Respondent A15 said that skills develop through repetition:

A15: "Skills are something that you need to do it. It needs to develop as a habit basically. If you do it more frequently, then you will have that skill".

4.3.5 Theme 5 - Perceptions surrounding the attainment of skills through participation in VCLP

4.3.5.1 Category - Perceived no improvement in skillset

Six of the fifteen participants experienced no perceived improvement in their skillset due to their participation in the programme.

Respondent A1 was of the view that she did not obtain any new skills from her participation in the programme and would have liked to have built a new building from the beginning:

A1: *"I would have liked to build a building from scratch. Okay, I would have liked to have done even an RDP home. I would have wanted to do something from scratch in order to equip myself with those skills so I can move forward".*

Respondent A5 indicated that she had not acquired any new skills and that she was already technically equipped before joining the programme:

A5: *"No, I didn't because I was actually equipped with the technicality before I could join Vuk'uphile. So, what happened when I joined the programme was, I expected more but got less". I was actually more skilled than what they were providing".*

Respondent A8 said that she had not acquired any skill and complained about the focus on theoretical as opposed to practical knowledge:

> A8: *"Skill? I didn't. I didn't acquire any skills. There was no practical. We just went for classes for three months. We were given three months, and then three months went for the classes for three months. And then after that, we went to work, yeah, so I think that's not important. That's not enough. Just the theory and the theory for three months. What is it that you can do with that?*

Respondent A10, similarly to Respondent A8, indicated that she already possessed the skills she was supposed to learn from the VCLP:

> A10: *"I had already had the necessary technical skills before Vuk'uphile. Okay, based on the way it was presented to us. We were supposed to all benefit in terms of whether you're a beginner, whether you're in the middle, whether you're at a certain point because there was there wasn't there was supposed to check the loopholes or what do you do to get to the next level? I don't think enough was done with individuals to check how to increase each company to the next level".*

Respondent 13 explained that he did not acquire any new skills as he was a graduate of a private incubator programme:

> A13: "*No, I didn't acquire any skills or program because myself I am a graduate from a private incubation. Right. So now, entering the program, I thought I was gonna get a similar experience because I am someone who understands what an incubation program should be structured like, and it was not the same. It was a waste of government funds".*

Respondent 15 explained that he already had civil engineering as well as a project management qualification and experience in the private sector, so he did not feel as if he had acquired any skills from the programme:

> A15: *"Before I joined the programme, I already had a civil engineering qualification and a project management qualification, I had also worked*

with professional consulting companies, so I don't think that I acquired any skill".

Five of the respondents indicated that they had not received the NQF level 4 qualification that they were promised at the start of the programme:

A3: *"We didn't receive any of the qualifications that was expected".*

Respondent A5 stated that no one could prove that they were a part of the programme if they did not get a certificate:

A5*: "But when you look at it in a broader space, we were supposed to fill in a logbook, sort of. At the end of the day, like today, no one can show you a certificate to say this is the graduation certificate that I received from EPWP."*

Similarly, Respondent A7 was concerned that there was no paper trail to show that she had complied with all of the requirements of the programme:

A7: *"But we did everything required, we submitted files, we were attending classes, but those certificates were not given to us. So those things that, like, did all of that work? But there is no paper trail to show that"*.

Respondent A8 thought she should follow up with the CoE to see if they still had her certificate:

A8: *"I never got my certificate. I suppose it's a matter of me going to the CoE to see if they still have it because I have completed the course".*

Respondent A12 was disappointed that he had only one project to show for participating in the VCLP.

A12: *"Yes, we never got anything. No certificates. It had to be on record that we were a part of the programme. I have nothing to show except that one project. My supervisor also received nothing. He was also supposed to get a certificate, and when I followed up, we just got doors".*

Respondent A15 said that the CoE did not fulfil its promise:

> A15: “*They didn't fulfill their promise to us. Number one, we were promised that after the programme, we were supposed to get certificates".*

4.3.5.2 Category - Perceived an improvement in skillset

Seven respondents felt they had acquired new skills from the programme, albeit limited in some instances.

Respondent A2 felt that she learnt more from a theoretical than a practical perspective:

> A2: *"Maybe I've learned some theory but very little on the practical side of things".*

Respondent A3 indicated that she had acquired better knowledge of how to run her business:

> A3: "*The only skill I acquired was to know how to run my business; that is the only thing I have accumulated".*

Respondent A4 explained that she had acquired many new skills as a result of her participation in the programme:

> A4: *"Right now, I am able to understand how to use a bill of quantities and be able to compile one myself. Before the programme, I did not understand much about construction, and now I feel more comfortable. Now I know what to do and what not to do. This is because they taught us the ins and outs of construction, roadworks and stormwater drains. They also gave us the opportunity to implement what we learnt by giving us projects. When I first started, I only knew the basics, but now I know how to run my company, how to draw up a bill of quantities, how to take care of my work and how to resolve disputes".*

Respondent A6 indicated that she learnt about running a business and managing her finances and workers:

A6: *"I have learnt a lot about running a business as well as understanding how money works. Yes, definitely. I have acquired skills. It is the understanding of running the project, multitasking having more than one thing to do on-site and running everything competently. The Skill of managing the workers so that they are productive at least 80% of the time on site. The Skill of handling the finances of handling the expenditure, the money that is spent on the site and just maintaining everything".*

Respondent A7 said that she had encountered many things in the programme which she had not had exposure to before:

A7: "*There were many things I hadn't done before, like accounting, health and safety, managing a construction site, as well as managing my own business. After I completed my first project, I felt that I can be anything that I want to be now. The first project allowed me to learn from the bottom".*

Respondent A11 felt that she acquired skills in both the classroom as well as in the practical component of the training:

A11: *"It does make a difference. Because before, I had no idea about how the construction industry worked, so being in the program, firstly, starting with classes that we attended and then going through to the practical training parts of it opened my eyes in terms of you know, the construction industry as a whole".*

Respondent 12 did not experience the same level of skill acquisition but learned a meaningful lesson:

A12: *"It taught me how to better manage my business in terms of when you acquire a contract, not to just rest on your laurels, you know. Okay, this is it. Things are going to be fine. Yeah, I suppose that's the only that's not really a good lesson, but it's a it's a lesson I learned from this program. Basically, not to put your faith in, in anything until it's done and dusted. And, then you've completed what you need to do, and they've done what they needed to do".*

4.3.5.2 Category - What skills enable

Two respondents in the study spoke to the idea that people with skills were less likely to be unemployed. While limited in frequency amongst respondents, this is a crucial issue to highlight as it spoke to the expected benefit of possessing skills.

Respondent A4 explained that when people have skills, they are more likely to see a decrease in unemployment.

> A4: *"If you teach people to have skills, then we will be able to decrease the percentage of unemployed".*

Respondent A13 shared a similar view regarding the lack of access people have to tertiary institutions:

> A13: "People are unemployable because they haven't undergone any form of training. This is why we need programmes like Vuk'uphile to upskill these people".

4.3.6 Theme 6 - Challenges associated with the training component of the VCLP

4.3.6.1 Category - Structure of the Programme

Two respondents in this study perceived a couple of challenges with the structure of the training component of the VCLP. These include the need for different groups according to skill levels and the lack of specialisation in particular infrastructure projects.

Respondent A10 held the view that there was a need for different groups within the VCLP according to the participants' skills levels, i.e., beginner, intermediate and advanced:

> A10: "*What was missing on Vuk'uphile was the way in which it was structured. I don't believe that it achieved what it needed to achieve. Like I said to you, we were a hundred contractors at different levels. Some were beginners, and others were more advanced. They should*

have divided us into groups according to our experience and skills so that they could have empowered us according to our needs."

Respondent A7 felt that they should have allocated the contractors to projects that were in line with their specialisation:

A7: "Before they appointed the contractors, they should have checked with us to find out how we wanted to grow our businesses. If I had said that I wanted to renovate buildings, then they should have allowed me to focus on that. But now some people would get parks when their main focus was construction or civil engineering".

4.3.6.2 Category - Mentors

Three of the respondents cited perceived challenges with the mentorship component of the programme. Amongst these respondents, there was a feeling that the mentors were ill-equipped to assist the contractors.

Respondent A5 held the view that her mentor was unable to transfer skills to her:

A5: *"The mentors that were there were not adequately equipped to transfer skills to people like myself. Yeah, I was already technically clued up in civil engineering. So those mentors did not actually give us what they were supposed to".*

Respondent A7 felt that there were too many emerging contractors assigned to too few mentors:

A7: *"The mentors, I think they didn't even do any justice to us. As a mentor, you need to take the person and teach them the roles and so on, but I understand that one mentor will have like ten contractors they are dealing with, so you won't get as much experience and knowledge that you need from a mentor if that same person is dealing with like ten people and then the projects they are in".*

Respondent A7 suggested that mentorship groups should be smaller and more focused on the contractor's expertise:

A7: *"Like if three of us want to focus on renovations, we should get someone who has dealt with renovations before, that person can be like a proper mentor for those contractors. If I want to focus on plumbing, give me someone who is an expert in plumbing so that he can mentor me how to run a plumbing business and how to manage my finances. A mentor is supposed to do that, if I'm not mistaken".*

Respondent A12 complained that there was not enough a focus on mentorship:

A12: *"I do think that there should have been more focus on the mentorship. Most of them didn't really know what they were doing. They didn't care much".*

Respondent A1 raised an additional concern regarding the role of the mentors in signing their business transactions:

A1: *"And you have a mentor who had to sign off on our funds. So, what I would usually do is use my funds for a project. Then I would have to go to my mentor to explain what I did and provide them proof that I used a R5 out of my personal capacity in order to do this and that on the project, and then they have to sign for that money and then only does the money come to you. However, there were other contractors who didn't have to do that and could get their money".*

4.3.7 Theme 7 - Perceptions of local economic development

4.3.7.1 Category - Interpretations of LED

Seven of the fifteen respondents interpreted LED as empowering your local community.

Respondent A1 said that LED is developing the community that you live in daily:

A1: *"Local economic development is developing the community that live in on a daily basis. For example, if I know that the closest shop to me is*

18km away and I know that I can sell bread from my house, then that is empowering my community with something".

Respondent A4 explained that LED is about assisting people within the local area by supporting their businesses:

A4*: "Local economic development is all about assisting people who stay within the local area through supporting their businesses. A simple example of this is if you're staying in, let's say, Alberton, then you must support the businesses in Alberton, support the Alberton shops and support shops that are actually owned by people who stay there. Then it actually improves the economy whereby people are actually able to have an income, businesses are booming because you are supporting them instead of going to support a business in Bedfordview".*

A4 further stated that:

A4: "*Neighbours should support each other; this means that instead of going to a shop and buying, go buy at your neighbour. Another thing, support local brands, brands that people actually make; instead of going to buy Chinese brands, you should buy from a local South African brand".*

Respondent A6 argued that LED should be about the development of the community by hiring locals and allowing for money to circulate within that community:

A6: *"It should be about the development of the community because you get into the community and must hire people from that community to get that money circulating within the community through the projects that are made for that specific community. If I am allocated a project in Katlehong, then I must use the hardware stores in that area and employ labour from that area".*

LED was about empowering the local area through hiring contractors from the community, according to Respondent A7:

A7*: "LED is to empower the local area. If it was me, then you hire contractors from the area in which the project is located. The labourers in that area need to work on that project. However, you do find some projects in Ekurhuleni where someone from Pretoria is getting that project, and they are coming with workers from Pretoria. That is not local economic development to me".*

Respondent A8 said that LED was about developing local communities. However, she said that it should not refer to a specific suburb or township:

A8*: "Local economic development is about developing the local communities. However, for me, that doesn't mean that it should only be because I live in Kempton Park, that I should only work in Kempton Park. Yes, eventually Kempton Park will be developed, but over time, the jobs in Kempton Park are going to finish in Kempton Park; where else am I going to work?".*

Respondent A9 stated that LED was about eradicating unemployment in your local area:

A9: *"It is about trying to eradicate unemployment in your local area. If there is a project in my ward, then we will start empowering the local people in that community before going to other people outside the community".*

Respondent A10 spoke about how upskilling people in her community would allow people to support their extended families:

A10: *"You know, we take people who don't have skills in our community, we upskill them and find them employment. You will most probably find that he is supporting a family of 10. I feel that's what it means to develop the local economy".*

Respondent A15 spoke about how it is essential for a local community's goods and services can empower one another if they are of high quality:

A15: "Look, local economic development is about empowering each other in our communities, but we need to make sure that when we do things, they are quality so that everyone can benefit".

Three of the remaining respondents interpreted LED as skills development.

Respondent A3 spoke about how LED is the provision of skills given government to empower people:

A3: "Local economic development is supposed to be Ekurhuleni assisting the local people to give them skills that will help them be able to survive".

Respondent A13 expanded upon this;

A13: *"My understanding is that local economic develop should be a structured programme which takes local people who have not had access to education or skills and trains them to use their hands in order for them to be able to be employable".*

Respondent A14 mentioned addressing skill shortages in communities where they lack:

A14: *"It's about the communities where a lack of skills is mostly found, where they lack employment and how to assist them".*

The remaining two respondents interpreted LED as when the government builds and grows youth and development confined to a specific geographic area.

Respondent A2 stated that LED is when governments build and grow the youth:

A2: *"Local economic development, I think, is supposed to be for governments to build and grow young people in business. They need to focus on giving them a vocation and improving their socio-economic circumstances from where they were and enable them to bring change to the economy and bring change to the country".*

Respondent A5 stated that LED is about making sure that the economy within a specific geographic area develops:

> *A5: "I will say it's just to make sure that the economy within a certain area is being developed in those areas or aspects that need attention. It's like making sure that the companies within Ekurhuleni get to grow and they get to develop skills, like was supposed to happen with Vuk'uphile".*

4.3.8 Theme 8 - Perceived contribution of project/s towards local economic development

4.3.8.1 Category – Made a Contribution towards LED

Nine of the fifteen respondents indicated that the projects they worked on contributed towards economic development by employing local labour.

Respondent A4 explained that instead of using people from outside of the community, she employed local people to work on the projects she was assigned:

> A4: *"Basically, what we did was instead of bringing people from outside, we would actually take local labourers from the place in which the project was located. The only time we would consider using someone from outside was if we couldn't find a skilled person".*

Respondent A5 stated that from a labour perspective, the communities she worked in benefitted from LED:

> A5: *"So definitely, the projects benefitted the local community from a labour perspective, and we also involved local subcontractors in our projects. We would collaborate with local skilled and general workers on projects".*

Respondent A6 said that while she did not benefit from any of her projects financially, the community did:

A6: "*I walked away with nothing financially, but when it comes to the community, there are people we would hire from the community who know nothing, and we would upskill them and get them working".*

Respondent A7 said that they uplifted those who did not have businesses by hiring local labour with a specific focus on women and people with disabilities:

A7: "*We uplifted those who didn't have businesses by hiring people who were from the areas that we were working in. We also focused on the hiring of women and people with disabilities as this was required by the municipality".*

Respondent A9 said that they employed local people and have the skills:

A9: *"It was good because it employed a lot of the guys in the area, and most of them got a skill".*

Respondent A10 said she had given some local drug addicts a chance to work on her projects in Edenvale:

A10: *"We worked in Edenvale, and most of the community who wanted to work on the projects were from the squatter camp, and we were informed that they were recovering drug addicts. So, we thought that we would give them an opportunity to improve their lives. They grabbed these opportunities and wanted to change their lives".*

Respondent A12 stated that they employed and upskilled local labour, which stimulated the local economy:

A12: "*We employed workers over a period of about two to three months. We paid them over minimum wage, they got their skills, and I think that it did stimulate the economy around their immediate area".*

Respondent A14 indicated that they employed local people and gave them skills:

A14*: "Well, you know, we employed workers from the community where our projects we taught them some basic skills".*

Respondent A15 stated that he employed local labourers and paid them adequate wages:

> A15: “*One of the ways in which I contributed to local economic development was the workers; I made sure that I paid them adequate wages, but not a lot of money".*

Two respondents felt that the communities where their projects were located benefited from newly established infrastructure.

Respondent A7 explained how they had renovated a Customer Care Centre (CCC) alongside other projects which benefitted the community:

> A7: *"I renovated a CCC in Brakpan, and then I did a project at Wattville Hostel, and we were renovating the hostels, and then I put in gutters in Wychwood".*

Respondent A12 said that the community benefitted from a theatre they had built in Germiston:

> A12: *"I would say it did because we built a theatre for shows for the public and school children, and now, they are able to charge a fee for people to be able to watch shows. I would say that has sort of stimulated their economy there".*

Two of the remaining respondents felt that buying local goods and services contributed towards LED:

A4: *"We would buy our materials from around the local malls as well as the hardware stores in the area."*

Respondent A7 felt that she had contributed a lot to the local area by purchasing from local suppliers:

> *A7: "We used suppliers from the area, it contributed a lot".*

Respondent A2 felt that the residents of Ekurhuleni benefitted because of the projects she worked on in the area:

A2: *"Yes, it did because the projects were in Ekurhuleni and people benefitted".*

4.3.8.2 Category – Made No Contribution towards LED

Two respondents felt that the programme or the project they worked on did not contribute towards LED.

Respondent A8 felt that the project she worked on did not contribute at all to LED:

A8: "The programme didn't work, and I don't think that it contributed to local economic development at all".

Respondent A13 explained that he only managed to hire more people once he had exited the programme:

A13: *"No, it didn't contribute at all because the number of staff I had only increased after I exited the programme. The vision they sold us was that we were going to get a project where we were able to employ local labour, but that didn't happen. They gave me a project to install CCTV cameras, and the work was not enough to even cater for all my staff, let alone to get external people involved in the project".*

Respondent A3 was concerned by the short-term nature of the VCLP's contribution towards LED:

A3: "Say they give us a project; it will only benefit the community for a period of six months which is not enough".

4.3.8 Theme 9 - Challenges associated with contributing towards LED

4.3.1.8 Category – Challenges

Respondents raised a few challenges in this study, such as the local labour lacking specific skills, payment of local labour to comply with regulations maliciously, political pressure to appoint local labour and participants using business funds for personal use.

Respondent A1 says the thing that made this programme challenging for her was that she had to appoint local labour:

> A1: *"The thing that irritated me most was that we had to use local labour. Now it gets difficult because you require specific skills in order to work on these projects".*

She explained that there was political pressure from the local councillor to appoint labourers from the area:

> A1: "And then you sit with a councillor that is forcing you to give the community work".

A1 said that in one case, she paid one of the labourers just so that he could fill in the logbook:

> A1: "To be honest with you, I pay the one out of my pocket monthly, just to have a day so they can just see what it's all about and I can just fill in a sheet to be honest with you".

Participant A13 indicated that some participants used business funds for personal use:

> A13: *"Some of the guys that in the programme with me and even the guys on Phase 2 were living live, and we couldn't understand. They need to know that business money is not your personal money that you spend on yourself. When the programme was finished, most of them were looking for employment, and they lost the assets they acquired through the programme".*

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to present and analyse the results using the Braun and Clark (2006) thematic data analysis method described in Chapter 3. The relevant demographic data related to the fifteen respondents were presented. Nine themes were developed from eighteen categories, and the relevant data was presented accordingly. Per the research questions and literature review offered in Chapters 1 and 2 of this research project, Chapter 5 will assess these research findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analysed the research results in Chapter 4 of this research report, in line with the literature review in Chapter 2, to answer the research questions in Chapter 1. The research data set contained themes and categories that served as the foundation for the analysis in this chapter. The identified themes within the research results are discussed and presented with the relevant research questions in this chapter.

The research problem identified in this study was that the EPWP in the CoE had not effectively provided a skills transfer mechanism for LED. However, PWPs have historically played a significant role in alleviating poverty and providing temporary work relief, particularly in developing countries (Subburao, 2003). The "PWP plus" model, which South Africa is one of the few international proponents of, has become an alternative approach towards helping people exit poverty (Subburao et al., 2013; Andrews & Kryeziu, 2013). This research aims to build on McCord's work, which argues that while PWPs offer a potential mechanism for the state to access unemployed individuals, the benefits of skills development through medium or short-term PWPs are only sometimes clear (McCord, 2009).

The study examined how participants perceived the VCLP concerning the EPWP's contribution to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development. The findings revealed diverse opinions on the EPWP and VCLP's role and impact, including skills development, job creation, women's empowerment, and company transition. Participants emphasised issues with VCLP outcomes, project allocation, skill development, training components, and contributions to LED. While some saw positive effects on their skill sets and local communities, others were concerned about restricted prospects and short-term projects. Addressing concerns regarding training, mentorship, and political influence concerns can improve programme efficacy and assist long-term LED. Overall, participants' perceptions provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the VCLP and its role in skill development.

5.2 Discussion

This study consisted of fifteen research participants, who were selected on account of their participation as emerging contractors on the VCLP within the CoE.

The main research question that this study aimed to answer was:

1. What are the perceptions of participants on the VCLP in terms of the contribution that EPWP makes to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development?

Alongside the following sub-research questions:

1. What are the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development?

2. What are the perceptions and experiences of participants concerning the attainment and understanding of skills through their participation in the VCLP and, by extension, a contractor learnership programme?

3. What are the perceptions and inputs of participants in the VCLP in relation to the specific project/s they were involved in and their contribution towards local economic development?

The discussion in the following section was based on the above research questions.

5.2.1 Research Question 1: What are the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development?

Three themes from Chapter 4 were deemed relevant to research question 1. They are the perceived role of the EPWP and VCLP (Theme 1), the perceived

outcome of participation in VCLP (Theme 2), and the challenges associated with the VCLP (Theme 3). They appear below.

5.2.1.1 Theme 1:

The perceived role of the EPWP and the VCLP

Theme 1, "Perceived role of the EPWP and the VCLP", was explored among fifteen respondents in skills development, job creation, women empowerment, transitioning from small to medium-sized businesses, and other perspectives. Seven respondents highlighted that the EPWP and VCLP's central role was to provide skills and empower the unemployed to enter the labour market or start their businesses. The perceptions of these participants align with the modern conception of PWPs as skill transfer mechanisms (Subburao, 2003). Furthermore, they speak to participants acquiring new skills through a PWP to access stable employment once they have exited (Subburao, 2003). Two respondents emphasised job creation as the primary purpose of the programs. This perception suggests that these participants see the primary role of the VCLP as a state intervention which provides work relief to the unemployed (Subburao, 2003).

Another two respondents saw the programs as avenues for empowering women in the construction industry. Additionally, two respondents viewed the programs as opportunities for transitioning their existing businesses from small to medium-sized ones. These findings shed new light on the role of the PWPs, which were not present in the literature review. Two other respondents provided miscellaneous perceptions, one emphasising LED and the other focusing on empowering disadvantaged youth. The participant who perceived the role of the EPWP as LED is consistent with Lal et al. (2010), who suggest that the objectives of LED are aligned with that of PWPs.

5.2.1.2 Theme 2: Perceived outcome of participation in VCLP

Theme 2, "Perceived Outcome of Participation in the VCLP," yielded diverse experiences among the respondents. Six participants expressed negative sentiments, reporting that the programme had not positively impacted their

lives. Some faced business and personal losses due to insufficient work opportunities and a lack of support from the Department of Public Works. This finding is partly supported by various studies, which suggest that participants in PWPs were mostly unsuccessful after exiting a PWP (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018; McCord, 2012 & Odhiambo et al., 2015). Furthermore, it reemphasises the lack of answers as to whether PWP Plus programme participants experience sustained decreases in poverty upon exiting a programme (McCord, 2018).

Five respondents did not observe an increase in their CIDB gradings despite participation in the VCLP. In contrast, two respondents reported positive experiences. One attributed an increase in CIDB grading to the programme, while another acknowledged gaining valuable experience managing construction projects, leading to new job opportunities. These findings were not anticipated in the literature review. They provided an exciting insight into how participants on the VCLP ascribe a positive outcome to an increase in their CIDB grading.

Another respondent used funds from the programme to acquire assets and expand their business. This finding is consistent with the work of Alik-Lagrange et al. (2020), who states that evidence suggests that PWP Plus programmes enhance asset accumulation and income.

5.2.1.3 Theme 3: Challenges associated with the VCLP

Theme 3, "Challenges Associated with the VCLP," highlights several issues faced by participants in the programme. Six respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the limited number of projects assigned to them during the programme, causing financial strain and inadequate business growth. Comparisons were made with previous cohorts, suggesting that earlier phases with smaller intakes were more successful than their intake. Another concern raised by participants was the perception of political influence on project allocation, with some feeling disadvantaged based on their affiliations. This issue created feelings of favouritism and differential treatment.

Moreover, participants faced challenges such as limited profit margins on projects, late payments, and restrictions on tendering for other projects within the municipality. All of the findings raised in this theme emerged during this study and were not identified as a part of the extensive literature review which was undertaken. However, they provide valuable insights into what participants perceive as challenges and how they experience them.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: What are the perceptions and experiences of participants concerning the attainment and understanding of skills through their participation in the VCLP and, by extension, a contractor learnership programme?

Three themes from Chapter 4 were deemed relevant to research question 2. They are: how skills are perceived and understood (Theme 4), perceptions surrounding the attainment of skills in the VCLP (Theme 5), and challenges associated with the training component of VCLP Theme 6). They are presented below.

5.2.2.1 Theme 4: How skills are perceived and understood

Theme 4, "How Skills Are Perceived and Understood," reveals diverse interpretations of skills among the respondents. Five participants view skills as practical abilities acquired through training and hands-on experience, emphasising the capability to perform specific tasks efficiently. Three respondents consider skills encompassing theoretical knowledge and practical application, indicating the importance of effectively understanding and executing tasks. Both of the above findings illustrate that the perceptions of these participants reflect the notions of "skills that people bring to jobs", such as abilities, capacities and talents, as well as "skills that jobs require", such as role requirements, task demands and what positions demand as described by Spenner (1990: 400).

Another three participants highlighted skills as knowledge transferred from one person to another, emphasising the role of mentorship and learning from experienced individuals. This finding is consistent with Abuzour, Lewis and

Tully (2018), who posit that skills and knowledge transfer occur within social contexts. Additionally, skills are essential for making a living, improving communities, and enabling self-sustainability. These findings were not accounted for in the section on skills in the literature review. However, they do correlate with one of the critical objectives of PWPs which is to provide participants with a sustainable way of earning a living (Odhiambo et al. (2015) Ismail (2018). Some respondents also associate skills with repetitive practice and the development of habits.

5.2.2.2 Theme 5: Perceptions surrounding the attainment of skills through participation in the VCLP

Theme 5, "Perceptions Surrounding the Attainment of Skills through Participation in VCLP," showcases participants' diverse views on improving their skill sets as a result of the program. Seven participants acknowledged improved skill sets, though in some cases, it was more theoretical than practical. This finding describes how participants perceived the development of their human capital through acquiring new skills and their participation in training (Fugar et al., 2013). They cited enhanced knowledge in business management, project planning, construction techniques, and financial management, and this suggests that participants perceived a transfer of skills to have occurred as they were now able to apply the skills they acquired on the programme in different contexts (Sabri et al., 2020). A few respondents highlighted that the program exposed them to various aspects of the construction industry which they had not encountered before, and this clarifies the benefits associated with providing skills development and transfers to participants in PWPs (McCord, 2009).

Six respondents expressed a perceived lack of improvement in their skill sets. This finding sheds light on McCord's (2009) suggestion that participants in the infrastructure sector are less likely to obtain skills that allow them to find employment upon exiting a PWP. Some felt that the program did not provide them with new practical skills; this speaks to the need for a more conscious effort to transfer technical skills to participants (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). Others were disappointed they did not receive the promised NQF level 4

qualification. This finding confirms that participants in these programmes perceive skills as a qualification, as conceptualised by Windapo (2016). Five respondents who perceived a lack of improvement in their skill sets stated that they already had the necessary qualifications or experience in the training they were exposed to on the programme. This finding suggests that these participants should have been correctly targeted because of their higher levels of education (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018).

In a broader context, two participants recognised the importance of having skills in reducing unemployment rates. They believed that possessing skills makes individuals more employable and decreases the overall unemployment percentage. This perception is consistent with the assumption that the microenterprise and vocational training provided on the VCLP will improve the quality of participants' labour, allowing re-entry into the labour market, as Subburao (2013) suggested. The contrasting perceptions regarding skill improvement shed light on the program's effectiveness and impact on participants' professional development. While some respondents benefited from the VCLP by gaining new skills and knowledge, others wanted more practical training and certification issues.

5.2.2.3 Theme 6: Challenges associated with the training component of the VCLP

Theme 6, "Challenges Associated with the Training Component of the VCLP Participants", identified several challenges associated with the training component of the VCLP. Two major concerns were highlighted. Firstly, some participants felt that the program's structure needed to have personalised attention to participants' varying skill levels. They suggested the need for different groups based on experience to receive more targeted training. This finding illustrates that specific training per varying skill levels was not considered a part of the skills capacitation process (Lal et al., 2010).

Secondly, the mentorship aspect faced criticism, with respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the mentors' capabilities and insufficient one-on-one support. They believed mentors should possess expertise in specific areas and

provide more focused guidance. Additionally, issues arose with mentors overseeing financial transactions, leading to delays in accessing project funds. This finding implies that one of the essential components required for effective participation in the VCLP, mentorship, as described in the "Management plan for labour-intensive construction learnerships" document, was not perceived to be met by these participants (National Department of Public Works 2005).

5.2.3 Research Question 3: Are the perceptions and inputs of participants in the VCLP in relation to the specific project/s they were involved in and their contribution towards local economic development?

Three themes from Chapter 4 were deemed relevant to research question 2. They are perceptions of local economic development (Theme 7), perceived contribution project/s towards local economic development (Theme 8), and challenges associated with contributing towards LED (Theme 9). They are presented below.

5.2.3.1 Theme 7: Perceptions of local economic development

Theme 7, "Perceptions of Local Economic Development (LED) The participants' views on LED" were diverse, with various interpretations emerging from their responses. Seven respondents perceived LED as empowering the local community through various means, and this involved supporting local businesses, hiring community members for projects, and promoting local brands to boost the local economy. For some, LED was about eradicating unemployment and upskilling individuals in the community to improve their socio-economic circumstances. The perceptions of these participations are consistent with the conceptualisation of LED as the supply of local products and services, as well as the involvement and role of local people in consuming these goods and services to promote entrepreneurship, decrease inequality, and produce growth within a given location (Tello, 2010).

Three participants associated LED with skills development, emphasising the role of governments in providing training and education to uplift those who lacked access to skills and employment opportunities. Additionally,

respondents identified addressing skill shortages in communities as a crucial aspect of LED. This finding is consistent with the literature concerning LED policies which aim to enhance local human capital and expand the local skills base within a local economic setting (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).
Two other respondents saw LED as a governmental effort to build and grow the youth in business, enhancing the economy within a specific geographic area. They emphasised the importance of fostering local companies' growth and developing skills aligned with the area's needs. These perceptions are consistent with the objectives of LED policies, such as developing SMEs and strengthening their skill sets, increasing local competitiveness and drawing in investment (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

5.3.3.2 Theme 8: Perceived contribution of project/s towards local economic development

Theme 8, "Perceived Contribution of Projects towards Local Economic Development (LED)," explored participants' perceptions of how their projects contributed to LED. Nine out of fifteen respondents believed that the projects positively contributed to LED by employing local labour and providing opportunities for skills development. They emphasised the importance of empowering the local community through job opportunities and upskilling initiatives. This finding is consistent with LED policies which aim to develop the local economy's human capital and expand the skills base (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). Furthermore, this finding confirms that PWPs can operate as policy instruments contributing to LED through capacity building, skills development and targeted labour market policies (Lal et al., 2010). However, this element of the programme was more concerned with alleviating the poverty experienced by the local labour force as opposed to assisting them to graduate from poverty (Adongo & Deen-Swarray, 2006).

Some respondents also highlighted their efforts to support local suppliers and businesses, further enhancing the impact of the projects on the local economy. This finding is consistent with local people's role in consuming local goods and services in contributing towards as suggested by Tello (2010). Two respondents indicated that they had contributed towards LED by providing

local infrastructure. This perception is consistent with the literature on LED policies enhancing local infrastructure. Furthermore, this finding relates to the work of Lal et al. (2010), who suggest that PWPs can function as policy instrument which contributes to LED through the building's physical infrastructure. However, there was no instrument in this study to measure the quality of the infrastructure supplied to local communities (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

In addition, two participants expressed scepticism about the program's contribution to LED, citing concerns about the short-term nature of projects and the limited impact on local economic growth. This research clarifies the perceived lack of advantages from short-term interventions for local labourers. (McCord, 2009).

5.3.3.3 Theme 9: Challenges associated with contributing towards LED

Theme 9, "Challenges Associated with Contributing towards Local Economic Development (LED)," unveiled various obstacles faced by participants in their efforts to contribute to LED through the VCLP. The challenges encompassed issues related to the availability of specific skills among local labour, compliance with regulations leading to payments made with reluctance, political pressure from local authorities to appoint local labour, and the misuse of business funds for personal purposes. Respondents highlighted the difficulty of finding skilled labour within the local community, which hindered the smooth execution of projects. This finding relates to the concern expressed in the literature review of LED policy failures due to a skilled labour shortage and where the only type of employment that can be created in an area is low-paid and low-skilled (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009).

Some participants expressed frustration due to political pressure to employ local labour, leading to compromises in hiring decisions. Additionally, there were instances where participants felt compelled to pay labourers solely to fill out the required documentation. Furthermore, the misuse of business funds for personal expenses was identified as a problem that negatively impacted

the program's overall success and sustainability. These findings were not reflected in the literature review and are outside this research report's scope and require further research.

5.3 Main research question: What are the perceptions of participants on the VCLP in terms of the contribution that EPWP makes to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development?

This research study explored the perceptions of participants in the VCLP, examining its contribution to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development within the broader context of the EPWP. The VCLP is vital in empowering the unemployed and developing skills in the construction industry. Understanding participants' perspectives on the programme's outcomes and expected roles is crucial for evaluating its effectiveness and impact on skill enhancement and local economic growth. This study explores three key research questions, each focusing on distinct themes that emerged from the participant's responses in Chapter 4.

Research Question 1 aimed to explore the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development. Three prominent themes emerged from Chapter 4: the perceived role of the EPWP and VCLP, the perceived outcomes of participation in the VCLP, and the challenges associated with the programme.

Theme 1, "Perceived role of the EPWP and the VCLP," offered insights into respondents' perspectives on skills development, job creation, women's empowerment, and transitioning from small to medium-sized businesses. Participants recognised the primary role of both the EPWP and VCLP as providing skills and empowering the unemployed to enter the labour market or start their businesses, and this aligns with contemporary notions of Public Works Programmes (PWPs) as mechanisms for skill transfer and opportunities for stable employment (Subburao, 2003). Moreover, respondents shed light on additional roles, such as empowering women in the construction industry and

supporting the growth of existing businesses (Lal et al., 2010 in Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009), not previously explored in the literature review.

Theme 2, "Perceived Outcome of Participation in the VCLP," presented diverse experiences among respondents. While some participants reported no positive impact on their lives and encountered personal and financial losses (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018; McCord, 2012; Odhiambo et al., 2015), others highlighted positive outcomes, such as an increase in their Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) gradings and the ability to expand their businesses (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2020). These findings offered valuable insights into how participants perceived and ascribed positive outcomes or challenges based on their unique experiences.

Theme 3, "Challenges Associated with the VCLP," shed light on the issues faced by participants in the programme. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with project allocation, limited profit margins, late payments, and restrictions on tendering for other municipal projects (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). These challenges offer a more comprehensive understanding of the programme's effectiveness and the obstacles participants encounter.

Research Question 2 explored participants' perceptions and experiences concerning the attainment and understanding of skills through their involvement in the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes. Three distinct themes emerged: how skills are perceived and understood, perceptions surrounding the attainment of skills in the VCLP, and challenges associated with the training component of the VCLP.

Theme 4, "How Skills Are Perceived and Understood," revealed diverse interpretations of skills among the respondents. Some participants viewed skills as practical abilities acquired through training and hands-on experience, while others considered them to encompass theoretical knowledge and practical application (Spenner, 1990). Moreover, participants associated skills with knowledge transfer through mentorship and their role in making a living and improving communities (Abuzour et al., 2018; Odhiambo et al., 2015;

Ismail, 2018). These findings comprehensively explained participants' perceptions and definitions of skills.

Some participants expressed frustration due to political pressure to employ local labour, leading to compromises in hiring decisions. Additionally, there were instances where participants felt compelled to pay labourers solely to fill out the required documentation. Furthermore, the misuse of business funds for personal expenses was identified as a problem that negatively impacted the program's overall success and sustainability. These findings were not reflected in the literature review and are outside this research report's scope and require further research.

Theme 5, "Perceptions Surrounding the Attainment of Skills through Participation in the VCLP," showcased diverse views on skill improvement. While some participants acknowledged improved skill sets, others perceived a lack of progress (Subburao, 2013; Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). Some respondents already possessed the necessary qualifications and experience in the training they received, suggesting the need for targeted training and mentorship (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018). These findings emphasised the importance of addressing participants' unique needs for effective skills development.

Theme 6, "Challenges Associated with the Training Component of the VCLP," identified challenges related to the programme's structure and mentorship. Participants expressed the need for more targeted training based on varying skill levels and raised concerns about mentors' capabilities and insufficient one-on-one support (National Department of Public Works, 2005). These findings underscored the significance of tailored training and mentorship for participants' skill enhancement.

Research Question 3 explored participants' perceptions and inputs regarding the specific projects they were involved in and their contribution towards local economic development (LED). Three pertinent themes emerged: perceptions

of LED, the perceived contribution of projects towards LED, and challenges associated with contributing to LED.

Theme 7, "Perceptions of Local Economic Development," revealed diverse LED interpretations among respondents. Some perceived LED as empowering the local community by supporting local businesses and upskilling individuals, while others associated it with addressing community skill shortages (Tello, 2010; Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). These findings provided valuable insights into participants' understanding of LED and its potential benefits.

Theme 8, "Perceived Contribution of Projects towards Local Economic Development," highlighted how participants perceived projects positively contributing to LED through employing local labour and providing opportunities for skills development (Lal et al., 2010 in Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). Some respondents also emphasised their efforts to support local suppliers and businesses (Tello, 2010). However, others expressed scepticism about the programme's impact on LED due to short-term projects and limited local economic growth (McCord, 2009). These findings illustrated participants' perspectives on project contributions to LED.

Theme 9, "Challenges Associated with Contributing to Local Economic Development," identified obstacles faced by participants in promoting LED through the VCLP. Challenges included finding skilled local labour, political pressure to employ local labour, and the misuse of business funds (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). These findings offer insights into participants' difficulties in promoting LED through their involvement in the VCLP.

This study comprehensively understood participants' perceptions and experiences in the Vocational and Construction Learnership Programme (VCLP). The findings shed light on the programme's role in providing skills and empowering participants and the challenges participants face in achieving their intended outcomes. The diverse views on skill improvement underscore the importance of tailored training and mentorship to effectively address participants' unique needs. Moreover, participants' perceptions of local

economic development provide insights into how projects contribute to LED and the challenges they encounter in this process.

The VCLP demonstrates the potential for promoting effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) framework. However, addressing the identified challenges is essential for the programme's long-term success and sustainability. Policymakers and programme administrators should consider the participants' perspectives and inputs to refine and enhance the VCLP's outcomes and impact on participants' lives and local communities.

Further research is necessary to investigate specific issues and policy implications to optimise the programme's effectiveness and contribute to the broader objectives of skills development and LED. By continuously evaluating and refining the VCLP based on participant feedback and experiences, policymakers can work towards creating a more inclusive and impactful programme that empowers individuals, promotes sustainable, local economic development, and assists communities to graduate from poverty.

5.4 Conclusion

The primary objective of this chapter was to present the findings of the in-depth interview data and the literature review concerning the main research question and the three research sub-questions. Because the primary research component was inductive, themes were identified from the literature review, tabulated and grouped, and then cross-referenced to see if they were also found in the primary dataset and to which research question they applied. The relevant information was discussed in the context of the study questions and validated against the literature. The themes that developed and considered applicable to the subject addressed the many research questions.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Final Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the perceptions of participants on the VCLP in terms of the contribution that EPWP makes to effective and sustainable skills transfer and local economic development. Based on a qualitative analysis, the VCLP contributed to skills transfer and local economic development. However, multiple challenges arose that need to be addressed by policymakers and the programme's administrators to refine and enhance the programme.

The research problem was identified as the EPWP in Ekurhuleni, which has not been effective in providing a skills transfer mechanism that contributes to local economic development. Building on the work of McCord (2009) and others, it aimed to explore whether or not longer-term PWP interventions, such as the VCLP within the infrastructure sector, benefit skills development and improve a participant's possibility of finding employment.

The research purpose of this study was to describe whether or not participants in the VCLP perceive the programme as an effective mechanism of skills transfer and local economic development, and this resulted in the development of the following research questions :

1. What are the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development?

2. What are the perceptions and experiences of participants concerning the attainment and understanding of skills through their participation in the VCLP and, by extension, a contractor learnership programme?

3. What are the perceptions and inputs of participants in the VCLP in relation to the specific project/s they were involved in and their contribution towards local economic development?

The research employed a qualitative approach to explore and describe the social phenomena of the EPWP programme. This choice of methodology was well-suited to understand participants' perceptions and gain insights into the topic. Thematic analysis was utilised as the data analysis approach to identify, interpret, and report patterns related to the data, providing a rich and detailed analysis of the subject matter. Adopting a case study design and conducting in-depth interviews enabled a comprehensive analysis of the VCLP within its specific context. Although the findings are not generalisable, the chosen methodology offered a robust framework for addressing the research objectives and capturing the rich perspectives of the participants. Overall, this chapter reflects the meticulous approach taken to understand VCLP participants' perceptions and provides a solid foundation for subsequent analyses and discussions in the research report.

There were several exciting findings that the literature review and research instrument did not explicitly cover, which warrant further investigation. Firstly, the finding revealed that five respondents did not observe an increase in their CIDB gradings. Participants were not expected to ascribe an increase in their rating to an improvement in their skillset. However, upon reflection, it is clear to see how participants would link their personal skill development journey to progressing up the grading scale.

An exciting insight that was not accounted for was the comparison between the various phases of the VCLP and how participants on VCLP Phase 3 perceived VCLP Phases 1 and 2 to have been more successful because of their smaller intakes. Understanding and evaluating the successes and failures of each of the phases present an excellent future research opportunity.

One grave concern that came to light in the findings was the perception of political influence and its role in allocating projects. While these findings need to be appropriately reported to and investigated by the relevant authorities, the effects of such behaviour by political actors may limit residents' access to opportunities in a material way.

Another finding that warrants further investigation by the CoE administration are the restrictions on tendering for other work within the VCLP and how these could be revised to provide additional opportunities for learner contractors to tender for work within the municipality pitched at the appropriate CIDB grading level.

The issue of mentorship and the role that mentors play in the participants' experience in the VCLP is an important one that needs to be better understood and evaluated. The aim of this endeavour should be to better equip participants with the necessary skills required to be successful learner contractors. However, this requires competent and relevant mentors to be identified in order to make this a valuable element of the programme.

In terms of addressing the research problem identified in this report, the finding that participants perceived an improvement in their skill sets, as well as the development of their human capital through participation in training as well as the acquisition of new skills, confirms the theory of human capital development as set out by (Fugar et al., 2013). Furthermore, the skills they obtained and were then able to apply in different contexts confirm the skills transfer theory of Sebri et al. (2020). Most importantly, this finding addresses the knowledge gap identified by McCord (2009), which noted the need for more clarity regarding the benefits of providing PWP participants with skills development opportunities.

In terms of the central role of the VCLP, the findings in this research support the theory posited by Subburao (2003), which states the provision of skills for the unemployed, with the view of re-entry into either the labour market or as a means of starting a new business, align with the conception of PWPs as skills transfer mechanisms. However, the finding that the VCLP had not positively impacted participants and that several of them had incurred a personal business loss as a result of their participation partially confirmed the theories which suggested that PWP participants were mostly unsuccessful upon exiting a programme (Gehrke & Hartwig, 2018; McCord, 2012 & Odhiambo et al. 2015).

The view held by participants that skills were acquired through both practical experience and training, as well as those who thought it was a combination of these factors alongside theoretical knowledge, supports the theory of skills suggested by Spenner (1990).

The perception by participants that LED relates to addressing unemployment and the upskilling of people in the community is consistent with the definition of LED as supplied by Tello (2010). Furthermore, the finding that most respondents perceived the projects they worked on to have contributed to LED by virtue of the upskilling and employment of local labour is supported by the literature on LED policies, which aim to develop the local economy's skills base and human capital (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2009). Furthermore, this finding is supported by the theory that PWPs function as policy instruments contributing to LED through enhancing capacity, skills and target labour market policies (Lal et al., 2010).

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions offered in this report, policymakers and administrators should consider the following recommendations:

- Ensure the correct targeting of participants in terms of their existing skill levels as well as their socio-economic status, as some of the participants were unstimulated by the programme's training component as they had a greater level of understanding. Furthermore, some participants had well-functioning businesses before entering the programme and were not necessarily candidates for poverty graduation.

- While there is a need for substantive change concerning the course material presented, in the sense that there needs to be a more intensive practical element, the CoE can start by giving each graduate their certificate of completion.

- The programme should be tailored so that the course material, mentors and projects allocated to participants align with their specialisation of choice.

- There should be a more equitable distribution of the projects amongst participants, as it was reported that there were vast discrepancies between the number of projects that participants received.

- Creating an aftercare programme for graduates should be established to assist them in obtaining further opportunities within the state and private sectors.

- The CoE should conduct a socio-economic impact study of the programme in order to be able to quantify the impact of the programme and should make the findings of this study public.

- The programme's administrators should look at how they can create a path of progression for EPWP general workers in the VCLP programme.

6.3 Suggestions for further research

To better understand the implication of these results and build on the work presented in this report, It is suggested that further research could be conducted as follows:

- The role of political actors in determining the success of public works programmes

- How can tender regulations be amended to enhance competition and foster inclusivity?

- The role of mentorship in determining the success of learner contractors

- A quantitative study on the incomes and rate of labour market absorption experienced by programme participants post-graduation

- Further research into poverty graduation strategies and the fiscal implications for middle-income economies such as South Africa

Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Questionnaire (In-depth interview)

Theme	Concepts	Questions
Public Works Programme Plus	Perceptions of the expansion of the scope of PWP's i.e. The inclusion of a graduation strategy.	1. What do you think the main role of EPWP should be? 2. Do you believe your participation in Vuk'uphile Contractor Learnership Programme made a material difference to your life and if so how?
Skills Transfer	What is perceived as a skill and what effect should that have on an individual's welfare.	1. What do you think constitutes a skill? 2. Do you think that you have acquired any skills from participating in the Vuk'uphile Contractor Learnership Programme and if so what skills have you acquired?
Local Economic Development	Whether or not LED interventions are perceived to be relevant to the local context.	1. What is your understanding of local economic development?

		2. Do you think the project you are working on has contributed to local economic development and if so, how?

Appendix B – Research Analysis Codes

Overall Research Question:

Contribution of the Expanded Public Works Programme to Effective and Sustainable Skills Transfer and Local Economic Development: A Case Study

Research Question 1 What are the perceived outcomes and expected roles of the VCLP and contractor learnership programmes on individual participants' lives and skill development?			
Codes	**Frequency**	**Categories**	**Theme**
Role of EPWP is skills development by empowering the unemployed	7	Skills	Perceived role of the EPWP and the VCLP
Role of EPWP is to create jobs	2	Jobs	
Role of VCLP is to help contractor's transition from small to medium sized businesses	2	Transition from small to medium sized businesses	
Role of EPWP was women empowerment	2	Women empowerment	
Role of EPWP is LED	1	Miscellaneous	
Role of the EPWP is to empower the youth and disadvantaged	1		
Suffered business or personal loss as a result of VCLP	5	Negative experiences	Perceived outcome of

Company's grading did not improve	4		participation in the VCLP
Government failed to assist contractors	1		
Company's grading improved	2	Positive experiences	
Gained experience	1		
VCLP led to asset accumulation	1		
VCLP created new opportunities	1		
Too few projects assigned to contractors	6	Challenges	Challenges associated with the VCLP
Intake of contractors too large	4		
Political affiliation determined the projects project's participants received	3		

Differential treatment of contractors	1		
Limited scope for profit on projects	1		
Prevented from tendering for other work due to VCLP	1		
Late payments for projects completed	1		

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