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A critical analysis of the South African organising framework for occupations for skills planning in the chemical sector

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Abstract

The interface between the world of work and education has been the subject of much interest over the past decade in the light of high youth unemployment and low economic growth in South Africa. Many countries undertake skills planning in order to better identify the skills needed to bolster economic growth.

The rapid economic growth in Asian countries has been attributed to the state adopting a centrally-driven skills planning approach in order to realise a stable labour market. (Ashton, Green, Sung, & James, 2002).

In contrast, skills planning in SA is demand-led and undertaken by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). SETAs develop sector skills plans informed by data collected from employers indicating the skills needed and the education and training required. Reviews of sector skills plans highlight that the quality and relevance of the data collected from employers is a vital component for skills planning (Marock, Yeowart, & Singizi, 2012). Considering policy learnings from Asian countries and skills planning approaches and methodologies, the SA government is developing a central skills planning mechanism. Data collected from employers on their skills needs is vital for both demand-led skills planning and centrally-driven skills planning.

According to official documents, the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO) was introduced to collect better data from employers and to create a common language for skills planning. The use of the OFO entails the clustering of millions of jobs into occupations to enable dialogue on skills demand and supply. However very little research has been undertaken on the utilisation of the OFO for skills planning.

This study focuses on the use of the OFO by employers and officials responsible for skills planning in the chemical sector. The Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA) was identified as one of the SETAs that actively placed the concept of occupation and the use of the OFO as a central pillar in sector skills planning.

Using a mixed-methods research approach, data was collected from CHIETA and employers in the chemical sector. The qualitative data collected and analysed included source documents and interviews conducted with CHIETA officials and employers. The quantitative data was collected and analysed through a survey conducted with all employers in the chemical sector. The analysis of the data collected provides insights and understanding of the challenges and experiences of employers and CHIETA officials who utilise the OFO. The insights will be of particular interest to those involved in skills planning like policy makers, researchers, and employers.

Keywords: Occupational classification system, Organising Framework for Occupations, sector education and training authority, sectoral skills planning and Education and Training