FoodBev SETA

Food & Beverages Manufacturing
Sector Education and Training Authority

Employability of Apprenticeship Programme Beneficiaries in the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector

(September 2023)

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ABSTRACT

The National Development Plan (NDP, 2012), for South Africa emphasised the importance to eradicate the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality and ensure that all citizens have a better working and living conditions by 2030. South Africa is known to be among the highest in the world with immense unemployment rate. The first quarter of 2023 recorded the unemployment rate at 32,9 %, which is mainly due to unskilled cohorts and the contracting Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is through the NDP that prominence of identifying the correct skills that will create jobs and entrepreneurs in South Africa. Thus, the democratic government embraced artisan training as a tool designed to address social and economic inequities and placed more emphasis to produce 30 000 qualified artisans a year to meet labour demands placed on artisan training and development in South Africa. Apprenticeships are the most appropriate training intervention for technical and vocational education and training students to obtain preliminary job knowledge and experience which enables them to become qualified artisans, increasing their employability in the labour market. It is noteworthy, that Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector is experiencing a shift towards automation and mass production, which is mainly dependent on qualified artisans to manage. In addition, the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector offers substantial economic value by contributing to the overall GDP of country, creating employment opportunities across a wide range of roles, promotes innovation, and contributes to the country's food safety, production and processing. The sector has been supported by Food & Beverages Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority's (FoodBev SETA) through skills development interventions which includes support of apparencies through disbursing grants for the development of artisans in the food and beverages industry.

However, there is limited literature available regarding the employability of apprentice's beneficiaries. This study examined the employability of FoodBev SETA-funded apprenticeship programme beneficiaries. The study was conducted using a quantitative research approach which emphasises data in the form of numbers. The approach was adopted because it was the most expedient data collection method given time constraints. The data collection method included surveys with employers/training institutions (28) that trained learners on the apprenticeship programme using FoodBev SETA-funded apprenticeship programme beneficiaries (completed) between the 2017/18 to 2021/22 financial years. The findings of this study revealed that participation in an effective apprenticeship programme increases the employability of beneficiaries. Sixty-four percent (64%) of the beneficiaries were employed

after the completion of the apprenticeship programme either on permanent or contract employment. The study also found that practical and industrial experience pre and post the trade test is a vital contributing factor in the employability of beneficiaries. Furthermore, the study revealed that FoodBev SETA-funded apprenticeship programme is still adequately delivering on its mandate of equipping beneficiaries with skills in the labour market. Thus, the apprenticeship programme is relevant to the labour market. Lastly, the findings of the study provide the SETA with information on the effectiveness of the apprentice programmes for obtaining employment.

Employability of Apprenticeship Programme Beneficiaries in the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector

1. INTRODUCTION

One of South Africa's biggest priorities is to develop qualified artisans to support and grow the economy. There was renewed emphasis placed on artisan training and development in South Africa after a period of economic stagnation during the late 1980's and early 1990's. The democratic government embraced artisan training as a tool designed to address social and economic inequities left over from the past (DHET, 2022). For South Africa to eradicate the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality and ensure that all citizens have better working and living conditions by 2030, the National Development Plan sets a target of producing over 30 000 qualified artisans a year to meet labour demands (South Africa National Planning Commission, 2012). According to the National Apprenticeship and Artisan Development Strategy 2030, the artisan programme has the potential to be a viable source of economic growth, job creation and business expansion in the country (DHET, 2022). The artisan workforce is an important aspect of the food and beverage manufacturing sector and is the key factor in driving the economic growth and development of a developing country.

In responds to the governmental priorities SETAs disburse funds for apprenticeship programmes for the development of artisans. An apprenticeship is a period of contracted workplace training that involves theoretical and practical skills that lead to a qualification in a listed trade (SETA's Workplace-Based Learning Programme Agreement Regulation, 2018). After completing the apprenticeship program, the candidate becomes eligible to undergo a trade summative assessment, and upon successful completion of the assessment, they attain the status of an artisan.

The term artisan is derived from the Latin word "artire" which means to instruct through arts (Breier and Erasmus, 2009). In accordance with the Skills Development Act, of 1998 (Act No.97 of 1998) an artisan is defined as a candidate who has been certified as competent to perform a listed trade. Candidates who possess the necessary qualifications to engage in an artisanal trade where they use their knowledge, specialised tools and developed manual skills are known as artisans. Artisan development is a priority for all Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in South Africa. These candidates work in in technical fields doing work such as plumbing, electrical, welding, mechanical repair, fitting and turning, plastering, rigging, millwright, etc.

Currently, South Africa is not producing skilled artisans who can maintain the various manufacturing sectors at the target level set by the NDP, with the country only producing approximately 19 000 artisans a year (NSDP, 2019). According to the NSDP (2011), South Africa's pool of intermediate skills, especially artisanal skills, is too low to support national and sector development and growth. It is against this backdrop, that it has been established that artisanal training and development is a critical activity in the country (NSDP, 2019). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has identified trades that are in demand for the economy to reach the level envisaged in the NDP 2030 such as diesel mechanics, instrument technicians, auto electricians and millwrights. These trades are relevant to the food and beverages manufacturing sector. Consequently, transformation and the development of artisans are key priorities of the FoodBev SETA as per the Sector Skills Plan 2023/2024 (FoodBev SETA, 2022). In this way, the FoodBev SETA, like other SETAs, continues to be a key role player in realising the government's national skills priorities.

One of the major roles that SETAs**Error! Bookmark not defined.** play in the South African context is to provide education and training opportunities to develop the necessary skills to be able to work in the sector that they represent (Skills Development Act, 1998). SETAs provide funding towards education and training, including artisan training to improve employability in the economy and consequently reduce high unemployment rate, inequality, and poverty in the country. According to the FoodBev SETA Annual Report (2021/22) one hundred ninety-nine (199) beneficiaries completed apprenticeship programmes and were certified as Artisans, between 2020/21 and 2021/22 (FoodBev SETA, 2022). The SETAs continues to increase its apprenticeship uptake; however, it is unknown if current SETA funded artisan apprenticeship programmes which include Boilermaker, Electrician, Fitter & Turner, Instrumentation, Millwright, Diesel Mechanic and Refrigeration equip beneficiaries with the necessary skills required by the sector and the labour market in general. Therefore, it is important for the SETA to explore the transition of apprentices from training to the labour market or market absorption rate of artisans to find out if the apprenticeship programme provides a smooth transition to employment. This would provide the FoodBev SETA with information on the effectiveness of the apprentice programmes for obtaining employment.

Therefore, if trained artisans do not possess the skills needed by the labour market, arguably they are not employable. It is important for the FoodBev SETA to understand trends and factors that make artisan employable. Essentially FoodBev SETA is interested in determining the value and relevance of apprentice programmes in the labour market. Such information is significant for future planning and implementation by the sector.

1.1. Aim and objectives.

The study aimed to determine the employability of the FoodBev SETA-funded apprenticeship programme beneficiaries in the labour market.

The aim was achieved through the following objectives.:

I. To determine the employment rate of apprenticeship beneficiaries in the labour market.
II. To examine the employability of the apprenticeship beneficiaries in the labour market.
III. To determine the effectiveness of the FoodBev SETA apprenticeship programme
IV. To understand employer perceptions on the relevance of the apprenticeship programme.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions were pertinent to the study:

I. What is the employment rate of FoodBev SETA funded apprenticeship beneficiaries in the labour market?
II. What are labour market dynamics of apprenticeship programme beneficiaries?
III. How effective is the FoodBev SETA apprenticeship programme for beneficiaries in the labour market?
IV. What are the employers' perceptions regarding the FoodBev SETA funded apprenticeship programme in ensuring beneficiaries' employability?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. An overview of the state of employment in South Africa

Research has revealed that by 2050, Africa will be home to 25% of the world's workforce (Kaziboni and Roberts, 2022). However, there is no guarantee that those workers, especially the growing share of young people among them will be employed, let alone in decent jobs (Kaziboni and Roberts, 2022). Despite decades of sustained policy initiatives to increase job readiness and create employment opportunities for the growing number of young job seekers, unemployment remains the most prevalent pandemic in African economies (Habiyaremye, Habanabakize and Nwosu, 2022a). South Africa has one of the world's highest unemployment rates. Research shows that South Africa continues to face deepening levels of unemployment,

with the unemployment rate in the second quarter 2023, sitting at 32.6% (Stats SA, 2023) The actual number of unemployed people in the second quarter of 2023 was 7.921 million people (Stats SA, 2023). In countries such as Egypt and Finland, research has revealed that young people, particularly graduate, are languishing in unemployment due to poor academic performance and lack of skills required in the labour market (Ead, Fahmy and Elbadry, 2023; Yulia and Yuzhuo, 2015). This argument is supported by literature which has shown that unemployment in the country is accompanied by persistent concerns about the quality and availability of skills (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2022). However, recent calls for more critical approaches to understanding employability have led to views moving beyond the skills-based approach (Rowe and Zegwaard, 2017).

The existing literature suggests that South African scholars have headed this call. In South Africa, which is the focus of this study, the unemployment situation is not only attributed to the quality and availability of skills. It has been revealed that the employability of those who went through the PSET system is hampered by the lack of labour market information, lack of job search skills, absence of professional networks, high cost of job search, geographical location, low socio-economic status uncertainty in the economy, and lack of competencies required by employers (Botha and Botha, 2022). When coming to artisans, it is argued that their employability is affected by the state of the global economic climate, regional and local political instabilities and market volatilities (DHET, 2022). While above studies highlight what often leads to the unemployment situation of graduates, the literature is silent on the employability of artisans in the food and beverages manufacturing sector and the perspectives of employers regarding the employability of artisans.

2.2. Defining Employability

It is important to understand what employability means for various scholars as conceptions of employability have broadened in recent years. Most conceptions of employability view it as the ability of an individual to obtain and maintain a job they desire (Bisschoff and Massyn, 2022; Gilbert, Turner and Haass; 2022). According to Mokhtar *et al* (2022), employability is a collection of accomplishments, abilities, and personality traits that make it easier to find employment. For others, employability is a collection of knowledge, abilities, skills, behaviours, and characteristics that increase the chances of landing a job (Mainga, Daniel and Alamil, 2022). Others like Ishak et al., (2021) have presented employability as a graduate's ability to start working as a competent professional employee. It is on this basis that scholars have argued that given the constant changes in the workplace, the present and upcoming generations of workers should receive adequate and effective training since their knowledge, skills, and positive outlook are crucial for adjusting to the demands of the contemporary world

(Mokhtar *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, literature has indicated how employability comprises knowledge, skills, behaviours and attributes that enable graduates to get jobs, stay in jobs, thrive at their jobs and progress in their chosen career (Wang et al., 2022). To summarise, there is a consistency in the definition of employability as most scholars adopt the skills-based approach in their conceptualisation. Thus, the definitions of employability suggest employability hinges on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes everyone possesses, the way he/she uses those assets and presents them to employers.

2.3. Artisan development in South Africa: Debates and Definitions

It is crucial to understand the meaning of an apprenticeship and artisan and the road taken to become one in South Africa. An apprenticeship is defined as a period of workplace training that leads to a qualification in a listed trade (SETA's Workplace-Based Learning Programme Agreement Regulation, 2018). It is a work-based route for students who are interested in working in a practical, technical field so they can become certified artisans that obtained trade through the work-based approach. According to DHET (2012) an artisan is a person that has been certified as competent to perform a listed trade as per the DHET Government Gazette 35625. SETAs play an orchestral role in assisting employers with artisan training (Mzabalazo Advisory Services, 2022). Mainly this is done through grants, with employers and training providers working together to deliver practical training and provide work experience to apprentices (Mzabalazo Advisory Services, 2022).

Evidently, from the literature, artisan development is central to South Africa's economic development, but the question central to this research is whether people who completed apprenticeship programmes to become artisans or have qualified as artisans are fully participative in the labour market or are gainful employment or not.

2.4. Artisan employability

There has been very little research done on the employability of apprenticeship programme beneficiaries or artisans in the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector despite the issue becoming a policy issue in South Africa. According to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the manufacturing sector is the global economy's second-largest employer of artisans (DTI, 2019b). However, the absolute number of artisans employed has decreased over the years. Evidence suggests that the absolute number of employed artisans in manufacturing has decreased from 44 000 in 2002 to 41 231 in 2016, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of -0.4% (DTI, 2019a). It was further revealed that above one-third of artisans in the

manufacturing sector hold a matric qualification with just over 6% qualified (DTI, 2019a). It is further indicated that majority of the qualified artisans are elderly and would soon be in retirement (DTI, 2019a). The combination of the shrinking number of qualified artisans and subsequent losses to retirement are the main reasons for the decrease. The year 2016 saw the most jobless artisans sign up for the Employment Services of South Africa (ESSA) database over the 10 years (6 992) (Mzabalazo Advisory Services, 2022). These cited statistics suggest that employment patterns shift concurrently with the economy's recovery.

2.5. Employers' Perspectives on Employability

Despite the increasing demand for artisans in the labour market, employers still seem to have difficulty in filling several vacancies due to that the majority of artisans are not employable and lack skills (Munir, 2021). Employers are increasingly choosing to leave unfilled positions rather than hiring recently qualified artisans (Asefer and Abidin, 2021). Artisan employability has been linked to a lack of competency and quality that does not meet employers' expectations (Munir, 2021). The employability and unemployability of artisans have to do with how employers understand employability. For example, for employers, employability refers to work readiness, that is, the possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and commercial understanding that will enable graduates to make effective contributions to organizational objectives immediately after beginning employment (Asefer and Abidin, 2021; Mesuwini and Mapeto Bomani, 2021; Siwela and van der Bank, 2021). Employers expect artisans to possess the hard skills required for their respective occupations.

Employers further refer to employability skills as critical skills necessary for acquiring, maintaining, and performing well in a particular job (Mesuwini and Mapeto Bomani, 2021). These skills include, but are not limited to, managing resources, communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork, solving complex problems and acquiring and maintaining a job (Mesuwini and Mapeto Bomani, 2021). From the reviewed literature the most desirable skills and traits from the employer's perspective are communication, teamwork and collaboration, problem solving, computer literacy and technical skill, hardworking and willingness to take on extra work, achievement orientation, adaptability, time management, leadership, personality and academic results and knowledge (Hoque *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the 21st century artisans, need the necessary skills, knowledge and values to fulfil the hugely demanding roles of the modern workplace (Munir, 2021). Employers prefer candidates who do not have to train in soft or hard skills (Asefer and Abidin, 2021).

2.6. SETA Studies on Artisan Employability

The review of literature indicates that most SETAs have traced and tracked apprenticeship beneficiaries. Reference to two SETAs has been noted below to support and enhance findings from literature. According to the 2020 artisan pathways evaluation study conducted by the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MERSETA), majority of apprentices got employed after their training period (MERSETA, 2020). The study further revealed that those who did not find employment reported that there were simply no employment opportunities, some cited delays in issuing their certificate as the main cause of unemployment and others reported that there were retrenchments or that employers were looking for post trade test experience, which they lacked (MERSETA, 2020). According to MERSETA (2020), most beneficiaries were appointed into positions they had trained in.

Furthermore, in 2020, the Chemical Industries Education & Training Authority (CHIETA) (2020) conducted a tracer study for apprentices who completed their training in 2017–2018 and 2018–2019. The study consisted of telephonic interviews with 325 respondents and 53% of the sample obtained employment (CHIETA, 2020). Most of those who found employment (78%) did so in under six months of completion (78.0%). All respondents who found employment reported that they were working in the field they trained for. However, majority (83%) of those employed were on contract employment. In short, only about half of the respondents of the study were employed and most of them were on contract employment (CHIETA, 2020). This brings to light issues associated with the lack of permanence in a job. For example, workers are never settled, fearing early termination of contracts. Lack of job security can easily translate into a lack of commitment on the job. Workers on contract are often denied training/upskilling opportunities while at the same time, employers have higher expectations of them.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Method

The study used a quantitative research approach to address the objectives (Dawadi and Giri, 2021). The quantitative research approach entails collecting numeric data on the topic or subject with the aim of testing a hypothesis. However, for this study, no hypothesis was tested. The study found some strengths in using a quantitative approach as it allowed for the quick

collection of data from a large sample. The method of approach used surveys that had open-ended questions to allow participants to express their views. Although the quantitative approach is objective, the inclusion of open question allowed the research team to understand the dynamics behind some of the answers. The technique describes a vivid picture of the subject often characterised by generalisations of the population under study (Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri, 2021).

3.2. Study Population

The population of the study comprised employers (28) and beneficiaries (188) who have completed the apprenticeship, totalling 216. The population of the study was sourced from the FoodBev SETA Information Management System (SIMS) which is an internal database. The study targeted employers/training institutions (28) that trained learners on an apprenticeship programme using FoodBev SETA-approved grants between 2017/18 to 2021/22 financial years. Thus, ensuring the population has knowledge on the subject area. Furthermore, the employer population was expanded to include more employers as there are employers who employ artisans but might not train apprentices. The study also targeted FoodBev SETA-funded beneficiaries who completed apprenticeship programme (188) between the 2017/18 and 2021/22 financial years. The sample size of 127 was determined using a Confidence Interval of 95% and a Margin of Error of 5%. The aim was to include all 216 participants to increase the response rate. However, only 78 beneficiaries and 40 employers participated in the study.

3.3. Data Collection Method

The study used two online surveys created using Survey Monkey platform to collect data from employers and beneficiaries. Two different surveys were drafted for each population. This study used surveys as a primary research method because of their cost-effectiveness and usefulness in collecting data from a large population in a short time. The two online surveys were developed based on the reviewed literature and the objectives of the study and included Likert Scale and open-ended questions. Likert Scale questions obtained predetermined and generalised opinions or views pertaining to the subject matter. The open questions allowed participants to express their views and opinions on the questions posed. The surveys were sent to all participants of the study using an email link, ensuring that all participants have an equal chance of participation. Secondly, telephonic surveys were administered to beneficiaries that did not have email addresses. This exercise helped to improve the response rate. The timelines for data collection were between mid-November 2022 and end of January 2023.

3.4. Data analysis

All data obtained from beneficiaries and employers was imported from Survey Monkey and was analysed using Microsoft Excel version 2305. The results of the analysis are presented through univariate and bivariate statistics. Univariate analysis in research involves simple frequency counts, e.g., number of participants, employment rates, age bracket frequencies, etc. The bivariate analysis presents information from two variables, e.g., age group by gender. The output from the analysis is presented in both narrative and graphical formats.

3.5. Study Limitations

Limitations are part of any research study and should always be acknowledged. Although the beneficiary population was sourced from SIMS, the number of beneficiaries who omitted their email addresses was significantly high at 64%. It is noted that many people do not have email addresses, however, if an organization is going to train an apprentice, having a personal email should form part of the requirement. This would limit the ways to track and trace beneficiaries and make the process easy. Secondly, some beneficiaries who stated their employer's email address and not their own, and that posed significant risks to data quality and response rate. To mitigate against the first limitation, beneficiaries were called to request their participation in the survey and secondly, a short message service (SMS) was sent to beneficiaries to request their participation in the study. Moreover, employers were asked to distribute the survey to beneficiaries. This strategy increased the response rate.

4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This section summarises and presents the results of the study in connection with the research objectives and questions. It starts with the demographics of the participants (both beneficiaries and employers), employment status of beneficiaries and employer perceptions of the apprenticeship programme. The section lastly discusses the employability of apprenticeship programme beneficiaries and the effectiveness of the apprenticeship programme in the food and beverages manufacturing sector from employers' perspective.

4.1. Profile of Apprenticeship Beneficiaries and Employers

The study targeted a total of 216 participants for the study, however, 118 participants responded to the survey. Forty (40) were employers and 78 were beneficiaries. Employer representation was higher with most participants occupying the positions of Human Resource Manager, Human Resource, Learning and Development Specialist and Skills Development

Facilitator (SDF) in their respective organisations. The profiles of beneficiaries and employer is represented below.

4.1.1. Profile of Apprenticeship Beneficiaries

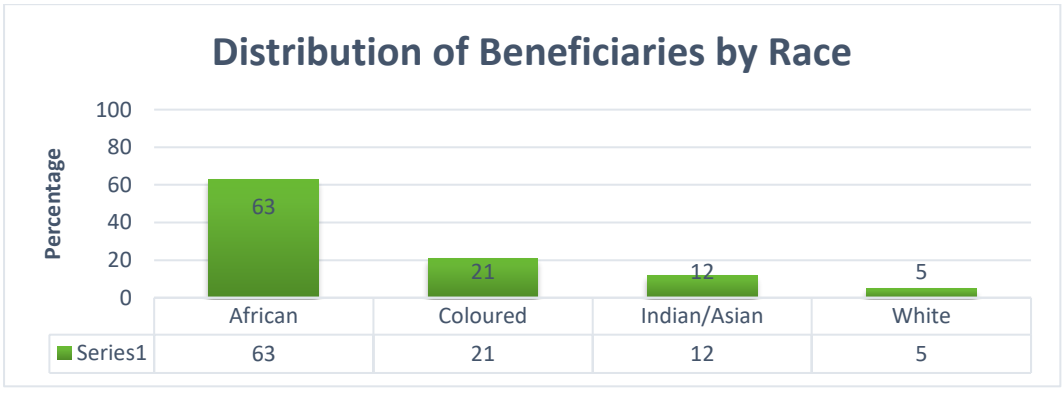
Distribution Apprenticeship Beneficiaries by Age and Gender

Figure 1: Age and Gender Profile of Apprenticeship Beneficiaries

Figure 1 presents the age and gender profiles of apprenticeship beneficiaries who participated in this research study. The results show that about 26% of the participants were female and 74% male, with most of them being of the 20-29 years age (69%) range, followed by the 30-39 years (27%) age group.

Distribution of Beneficiaries by Race

Figure 2: Racial Profile of Apprenticeship Beneficiaries



The distribution of respondents by race shows that most of the participants were Africans at 63% and Whites were less represented at 5%.

Trades Completed by Beneficiaries

Figure 3: Types of trades completed by beneficiaries.

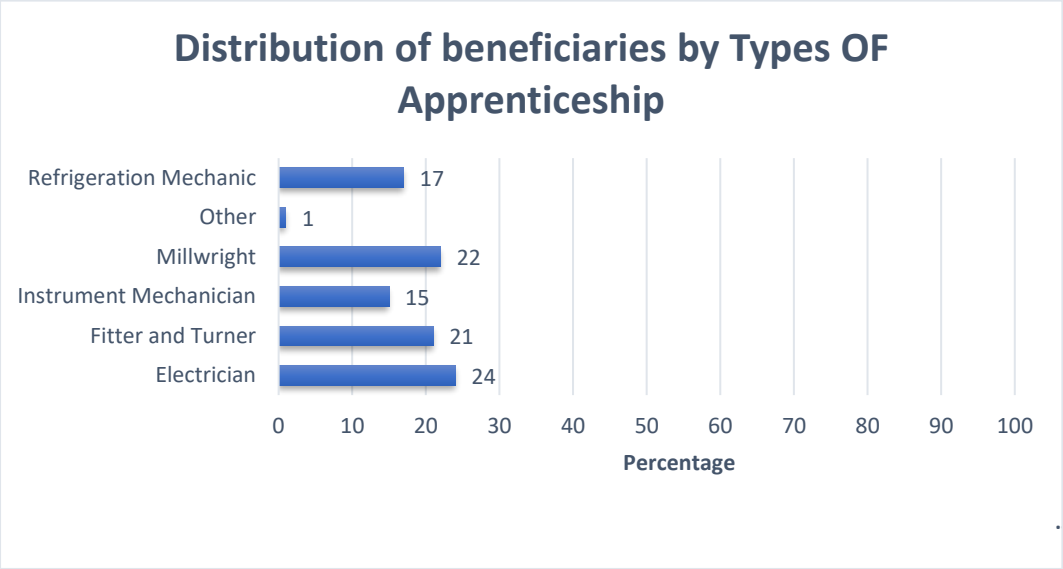


Figure 3 represents the types of apprenticeships completed by FoodBev SETA beneficiaries. Electrician has the highest number of Apprentices at 24%, followed by millwright (22%) and fitter and turner (21%). The lowest indicated apprenticeship was refrigeration mechanic (21%).

4.2. Trade Certificate Status

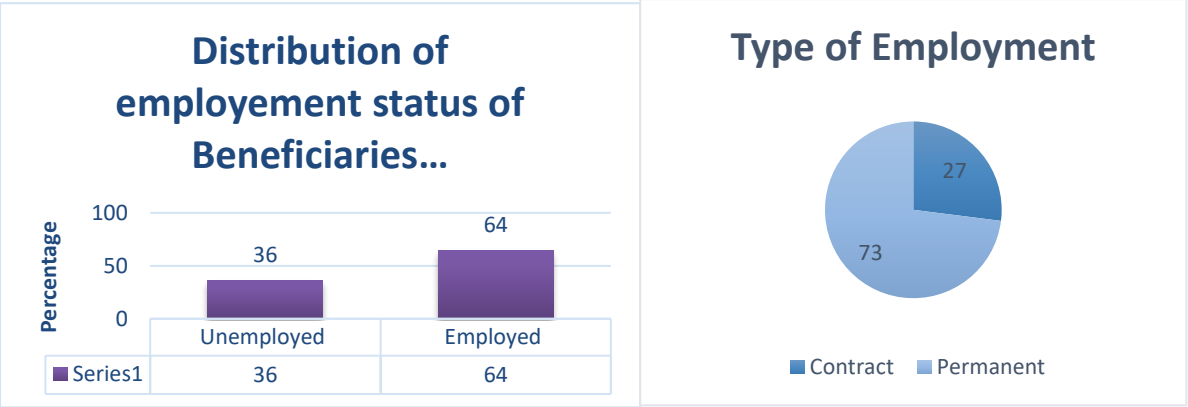
Beneficiaries were also asked about the years in which they obtained their trade certificate. It was noted that most of the beneficiaries received trade certificate in 2021 (22%) followed by 2019 and 2020 with 15%. Three percent (3%) had not received their trade certificate, although they had completed their respective programmes at the time of the study.

4.3. Employment Profile of Beneficiaries

One indicator to determine whether the apprenticeship programme meets the demands of the sector is the employment of completed beneficiaries. Apprenticeship beneficiaries were questioned about their present employment status. Their responses are as per the figure 5 below.

4.3.1. Employment status and type of employment

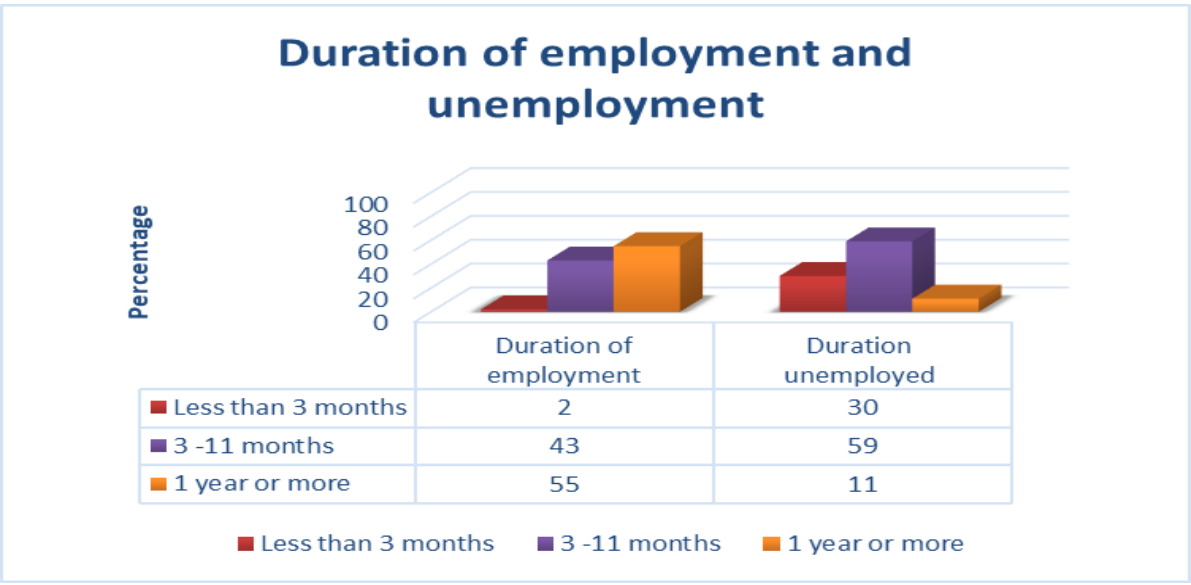
Figure 4: Employment Status of Apprenticeship Beneficiaries and Type of Employment



The employment status of the respondents shows that more than 60% of the beneficiaries are employed and 73% of them are employed permanently while the rest (27%) are employed on contract basis. Only 36% of the beneficiaries are unemployed and overall, the unemployed beneficiaries indicated that they are currently looking for a job.

4.3.2. Duration of Employment and Unemployment

Figure 5: Time taken to find employment and time spent being unemployed.



Beneficiaries were further probed on their duration of employment and unemployment to understand the time it took them to find employment and the time spent unemployed. The

results depicted in Figure 5, show that most beneficiaries were employed for a year or more after obtaining trade certificate at 55%, followed by 43% of beneficiaries who were employed between three and eleven months. Only a 2% of beneficiaries employed less than three months after obtaining trade test. The majority of unemployed (59%) were unemployed between 3-11 months. The unemployed beneficiaries believe that lack of skills and experience is the main reason for not getting employment.

4.4. Currently Employed Beneficiaries

Employment Distribution by Industry

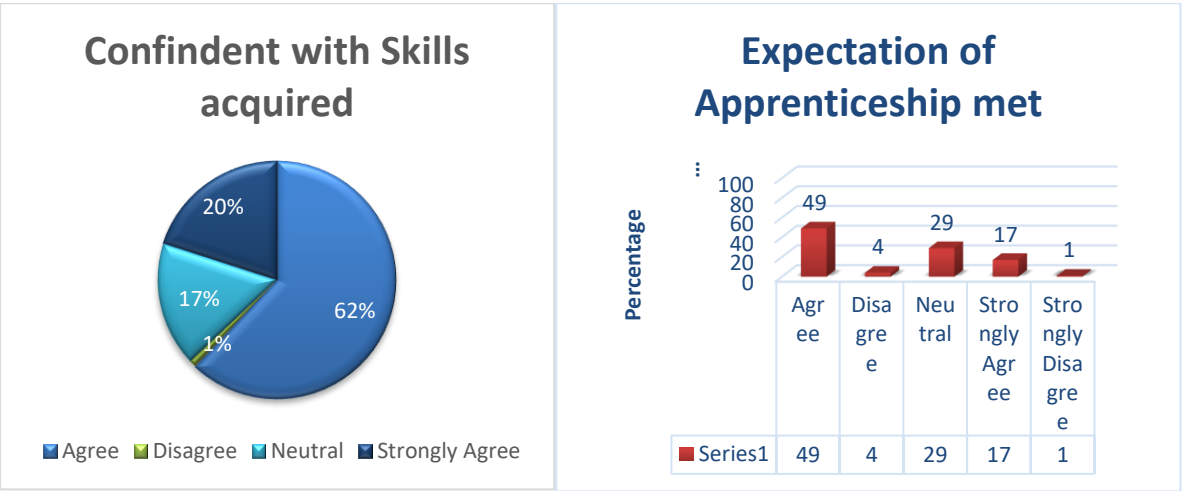
The top three industries that beneficiaries are employed in include: Other Food Products Industry (21%), Dairy Industry (17%) and Beer and Malt (10%).

Absorption by Host Organisation

Given the fact that young people are currently having difficulty finding employment that allows them to participate in the economy, apprentice absorption is a pressing concern on the South African labour market (Stats SA, 2022b). It was found that beneficiaries (38%) are employed in the same industry where they completed their apprenticeship. Majority of the beneficiaries (62%) are not employed by companies that trained them. This low percentage of apprentice intake upon completion by companies may indicate that some employers take on apprenticeships to develop skills for the sector, rather than with the intention of hiring them permanently.

Relevance of Apprenticeship

Figure 6: Skills and Expectation Regarding the Apprenticeship Programme

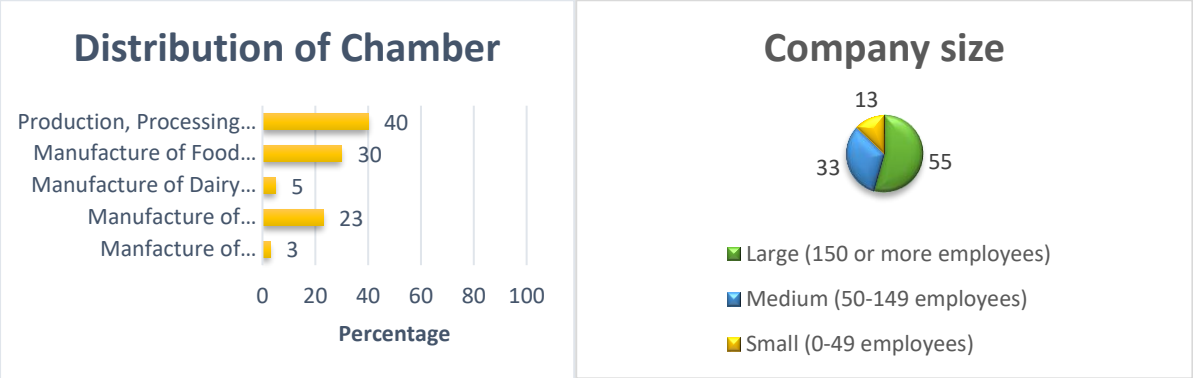


It is crucial to have knowledge about the success of an apprenticeship, skills obtained and how it relates to the jobs that beneficiaries acquire. Such data provides insights for the relevance of the apprenticeship for sector. Regarding skills gained, a majority (62%) of beneficiaries are confident with the skills acquired. Over 75% of beneficiaries in the study used the technical skills gained during the apprenticeship at their place of employment. Majority (65%) of the beneficiaries agreed the expectations that they had about their apprenticeship training were met.

4.5. Employer Perceptions

4.5.1. Profile of Employers

Figure 7: Employer Profile by Chamber and Company Size



All five FoodBev SETA Chambers were represented in this study. The Production, Processing and Preservation of Meat Fish, Fruit, Vegetable, Oil and Fats Chamber had the highest number of participants at 40% while the Manufacture of Breakfast Product Chamber had the lowest number of participants at 3%. The distribution of companies that participated in the study according to size shows that 55% were large companies, followed by 33% Medium-sized companies and 13% Small companies. Despite constituting the largest segment of FoodBev SETA registered companies, small companies were not well-represented. This can be attributed to their lack of participation in apprenticeship programme.

4.5.2. Recruitment and Apprenticeship Programme

Research has shown that employers are seeking competent and skilled employees in the context of ongoing changes in technology, work processes, and global institutional

transformations (International Labour Organization, 2021). This current study found over 80% of the employers recruited artisans from the labour market, more than 90% of the employers who completed the struggled to recruit artisans. While 59% of employers absorbed completed apprentices from their respective apprenticeships. Over 50% of the employers indicated that the current pool of artisans in the labour market does not have skills that are in line with the job requirements. This is illustrated in the table below:

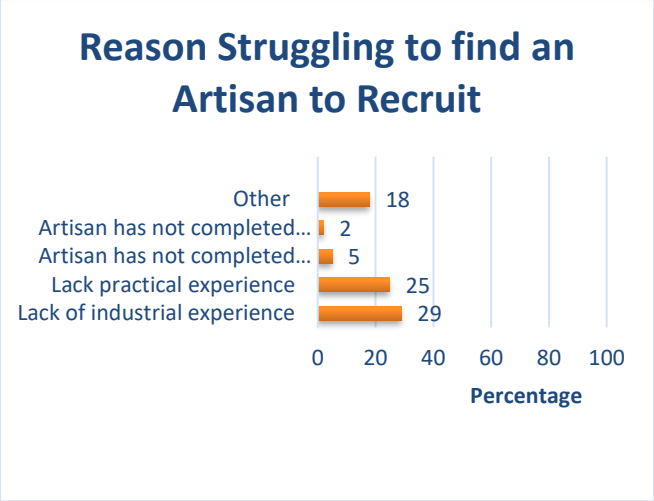
Table 1: Training and Recruitment of Artisans

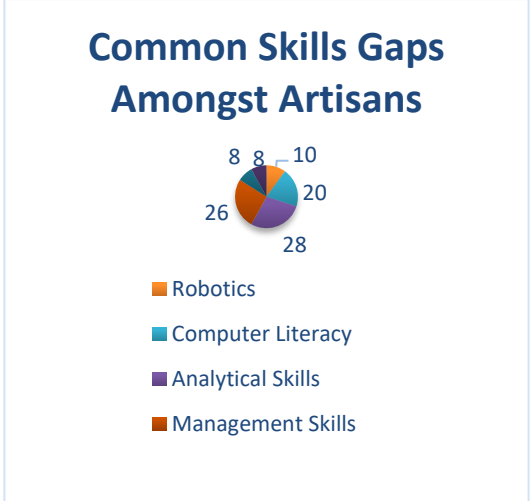
Apprenticeship and Recruitment of Artisan	Yes	No
Does the organisation train candidate on Apprenticeship	50	50
Does the organisation recruit artisans	50	50
Does the organisation recruit artisans from the labour market	89	11
Does the employment market have sufficient Artisan to recruit from	19	81
Does the organisation struggle to find Artisans to recruit	93	7
Are current artisans equipped with adequate skills set by the demand of the job	52	48

4.5.3. Recruitment of Artisans and Skills Gaps

According to the employers, work experience is a crucial factor to improve employability. Some of the reasons cited by companies for being unable to find suitably qualified artisans include scarcity of artisans in the labour market, lack of practical and industrial experience as shown in figure 8. In terms of skills, the results of the survey show that analytical and management skills are the most common skills gaps amongst artisans. Furthermore, computer literacy, robotics and mathematical literacy skills were also rated as common skills gaps amongst Artisan.

Figure 8: Reasons cited by employers for failing to recruit artisans and skills gaps amongst artisans.





4.5.4. Relevance of the Apprenticeship Programme

Employers indicated that the apprenticeship programme is still adequately delivering on its mandate of producing its intended skills and expertise. More than 70% of the employers strongly agree that the apprenticeship programme is relevant to their organisations while over 60% reported that, despite the challenges, the programme still produces its intended skills set. The employers indicated that the apprenticeship programme is efficient. The results suggest that the FoodBev SETA Apprenticeship programme plays a substantial role in the transfer of skills to apprentices. However, employers indicated that apprentices often lack core competencies such as attention to detail, basic comprehension and communication skills, attention to detail, factory experience and adapting to a corporate environment.

Table 3: Relevance of the Apprenticeship Programme according to Employers

Relevance of the Apprenticeship Programme	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The apprenticeship programme is still relevant to the organisation	79	16	0	5	0
The apprenticeship programme is still producing its intended skills set and expertise	63	21	16	0	0
The organisation apprenticeship programme is efficient	47	32	16	0	5

Employers further indicated that there are challenges with the programme. The quality of candidates has been indicated as a substantial challenge which affects the quality of the certified apprentice. Employers further indicated that the need for practical training within the respective trade, combined with the practical and industrial experience is vital in producing a versatile artisan for the sector. Finally, insufficient funding was indicated as a challenge that hampers the development of future artisans.

5. DISCUSSION

This section summarises the key findings of the study by linking them to the objectives. The findings are discussed in conjunction with the literature and are organised into two themes that cover the aim and objectives of the study.

5.1. Employability of Apprenticeship Programme Beneficiaries in the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector

The study found 64% of the apprenticeship beneficiaries in the study were employed, while a minority were employed by their host company. The majority of the beneficiaries indicated that they were employed because of the apprenticeship programme and used the skills gained at their place of employment. The findings reveal that the majority of the employed beneficiaries are employed permanently while only 27% of the beneficiaries are employed on contract. Literature indicates recently certified beneficiaries are employed on a part time and contract basis (Mzabalazo Advisory Services, 2022). Contract employment brings issues associated with a lack of job security and translates to lack of commitment on the job. However, contract or part time employment offers beneficiaries to gain experience and for the employer to determine if the beneficiary is competent for the job. The finding also revealed that most of the employed artisans were not employed by the host companies, only 38% were employed by the host company. These beneficiaries who were absorbed by the host company will be able to build on their practical and industrial which will be beneficial over time.

Thirty-six percent of the beneficiaries were found to be unemployed. Unemployed beneficiaries indicated that adequate skills and industrial experience were the main reasons for their unemployment status. These results are consistent with a MERSETA (2020) research which found that lack of post trade test experience is a contributing factor towards the unemployment status of apprenticeship programme beneficiaries. The results of this study further revealed how employers perceive practical and industrial experience as the main reason for struggling to recruit artisans. This is an indication that industrial and practical experience as well as adequate skills are important characteristics for a recently certified artisan to have to be considered by employers. These results reflect those of Munir (2021) who found that most employers were not able to fill positions because candidates did not have industry experience and adequate skills.

Supplementary skills are important to possess as they create a well-rounded employee in the workplace. Although supplementary skills go beyond the apprenticeship, they are important

skills to have and continue to master as a prospective employee. Employers in the study indicated some of the common skills gaps found among artisans include robotics, analytical skills and management skills. Evidence from literature also point that employability hinges on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes everyone possesses, the way candidates use those assets and presents them to employers (Wang et al., 2022).

Findings from employers' show that high and persistent levels of unemployment, together with artisans' vacancies that remain unfilled are attributed to lack of skills or mismatches between jobs and skills. The study found that skills gaps such as robotics, analytical skill and management skill negatively affect the labour market outcomes of apprenticeship programme beneficiaries.

These findings support research on employability of apprentices which revealed that apprentice who have occupational competency are more likely to succeed in their work and more likely to be employed by their host companies once their work placement end (Mariasiu and Raboca, 2017). Over 50% of employers believed that current artisans have adequate skills set for the demands of the job. Furthermore, the study has revealed that apprentices who have completed a FoodBev SETA-funded apprenticeship programme are able to find employment where majority of the skills gained are used. However, their employability hinges upon, firstly, an effective apprenticeship programme, secondly, practical, and industrial experience. Thus, consistent with the study's definition beneficiaries require the necessary skills from the apprenticeship, industrial and practical experience to attract employers operating in the food and beverages manufacturing sector and possibly other sector of the South African economy.

5.2. Employers Perceptions Regarding FoodBev SETA Apprenticeship Programme

The findings indicate that employers find FoodBev Apprenticeship relevant in developing artisans for their respective companies and the sector. The results showed that most employers agreed that the apprenticeship programme is relevant to their organisations while over 60% reported that, despite the challenges, the programme still produces its intended skills set. Over half of employers in the study absorbed their completed apprentices which is consistent with the Mzabalazo Advisory Services (2022) which found a good absorption rate of beneficiaries. The challenges faced by employers in this study are substantial and would affect the quality of artisans. Practical and industrial experience is a crucial factor in developing a versatile artisan. Employers are struggling to find experienced artisans because they have

no industrial experience or practical exposure among prospective candidates. By ensuring the programme has practical experience components at different sites would assist apprentices in acquiring industrial experience. Funding is crucial to realise the former as well as assisting companies to bolster the programme and develop more artisans.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was to determine the employability of apprenticeship programme beneficiaries in the food and beverages manufacturing sector. The study targeted companies that employ artisans and FoodBev SETA -funded apprenticeship programme beneficiaries between 2017/18 and 2021/22 financial years. Majority of employers indicated that the current artisans do have the skill set that is required for the job. This study has shown that an effective apprenticeship programme is a significant determinant of employability for apprenticeship programme beneficiaries. Moreover, the results indicated that practical exposure and industrial experience are critical aspects for beneficiaries to be considered be considered employable. One significant finding that emerged from the study was that employers are satisfied and still see the apprenticeship programme as important for the sector. It was also shown that the apprenticeship programme is effective and relevant to the sector. The beneficiaries are certified with the skills and experience they obtained from the programme which allows them to transit from training to work.

Recommendations

- ✓ Establish a system for conducting tracer and impact studies to assess the employability and efficacy of apprenticeship. This will help the SETA to identify various factors that are most important for success of apprentices and help to recommend adjustments to the apprenticeship programme.
- ✓ The SETA needs to ensure that apprentices are aware that they are funded by the SETA to complete their programmes this will not create hurdles during tracer and impact studies.
- ✓ The study indicated that there are beneficiaries that are qualified yet are unemployed, some took more than a year to get employment. Therefore, there is a need for further interventions for young people who are qualified artisans to increase chances of employment. This can be achieved through partnerships with public and private companies that can host the qualified unemployed candidates to improve their industry experience.

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