

Why learning a trade can open more doors for young people

Zizile Lushaba, human capital and skills development executive at the Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of Southern Africa (Seifsa), says learning a trade should be higher on the "what do I do after I leave school" lists of both parents and learners.



Zizile Lushaba, human capital and skills development executive at Seifsa

Lushaba believes that innovative, self-driven self-starters, who are technical and enjoy solving problems and working with their hands, make good candidates for artisan training, which can include becoming a welder, fitter and turner, boilermaker or pipe fitter, among other trade paths.

With the unemployment rate among young South Africans as high as 61%, the focus on post-school education and training must be on being employable, she says. Choosing a trade increases young people's chances of being employed as there is huge demand for more artisans in all sectors of the economy, and this is not only true of South Africa, she notes.

While degree-based careers may pay better, you have to be employed before getting paid. South Africa has many unemployed graduates, which just goes to show that a degree does not always guarantee a job, Lushaba notes. She also points out that there are far fewer trained artisans among the unemployed.

The emphasis on practical training makes newly qualified tradespeople infinitely more employable than university graduates.

Exposure to the workplace

"Trades require the following three elements — theory, simulation (practical training) and experiential learning (on-the-job training). Experiential learning allows the learner to be exposed to the workplace sooner than university graduates, which provides the opportunity to learn from professionals who guide and mentor them," says Lushaba.

Trades also offer learners who may battle to achieve the marks needed to study at university an alternative and sometimes far better options than simply slotting into whatever degree into which they're accepted.

"University is theory intensive, while a trade provides an opportunity for individuals who might not excel as much on theory but would be far better with hands-on practical exposure and learning. Being employed as an apprentice and/or qualifying as an artisan also provides earlier earnings prospects, which is a big benefit for many South African families," she says.

There are many colleges around the country where young people can learn a trade, says Lushaba. The Seifsa Training Centre in Benoni, Gauteng, for example, offers a wide range of artisan training — from welders to electricians, and it has also kept up to date with the needs of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), she says.

Many artisans find that their practical skills and experience are also perfectly suited to running their own small businesses, Lushaba says, as these skills are useful in day-to-day life.

Lack of qualified artisans a constraint to SA's economic growth

Zizile Lushaba 4 Apr 2023





Artisan shortage

Young people choosing to study a trade will also be helping the South African economy as there is a dire need for more artisans, she notes. In his 2023 State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the number of students taking part in artisan training in TVET colleges would be increased from 17,000 to 30,000 in the 2023 academic year. “One of the key ingredients for economic growth and competitiveness is the ability to attract skills, which the economy needs,” he said.



Source: Supplied

Many young people and their parents worry about how they can increase their chances of finding employment, especially with the unemployment rate being so high, says Lushaba. Artisans are always in demand — from the most to the least developed economies — and this is unlikely to change in the near future, she concludes.

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