

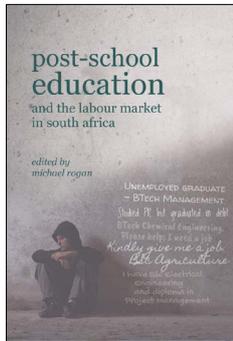


Check for updates

Why are so many young people NEETs?

BOOK TITLE:

Post-school education and the labour market in South Africa



EDITOR:

Michael Rogan

ISBN:

9780796924636 (paperback);
9780796924605 (PDF)

PUBLISHER:

HSRC Press, Cape Town; ZAR250

PUBLISHED:

2018

REVIEWER:

Jenny Grice^{1,2}

AFFILIATIONS:

¹Freelance editor, Johannesburg, South Africa

²Former official of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), Johannesburg, South Africa

EMAIL:

Jennygrice1957@gmail.com

HOW TO CITE:

Grice J. Why are so many young people NEETs? *S Afr J Sci* 2019;115(7/8), Art. #6462, 1 page. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2019/6462>

ARTICLE INCLUDES:

- Peer review
- Supplementary material

PUBLISHED:

30 July 2019

Post-school Education and the Labour Market in South Africa, edited by Michael Rogan, makes the bold claim that 'it offers the most detailed examination of the SA PSET (post-school education and training) to date'.

In the foreword, then Minister of Higher Education and Training, Naledi Pandor, explains that its 13 chapters derive from Theme 5 of the government's Labour Market Intelligence Partnership's (LMIP) six-themed project. LMIP is researching and analysing skills supply and demand to improve planning of the human resources development needs in the country.

The major task of Theme 5 is to answer two key questions that continue to beset our society: (1) why some young South Africans who have completed school are unable to access any kind of post-school education and training (PSET) and (2) why others, despite some tertiary education, find themselves in the same predicament. Researchers have labelled this category of people as NEETs – youth who are *not* in employment, education or training. South Africa has more than 6 million NEETs, only 6% of whom have some type of tertiary education.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹, in 2017 South Africa led the 'NEET' pack of more than 40 countries from developed and developing countries with 37.2% of youth categorised as NEETs. This book breaks down this figure further to claim that 50.7% of 23–24-year olds are NEETs. A distant second was Turkey at 27.2%. As the OECD states, NEETs 'are at risk of becoming socially excluded – individuals with income below the poverty-line and lacking the skills to improve their economic situation'¹.

Given this backdrop, any book that takes on the challenge of exposing the detailed ramifications of learners' pathways through the education system, post-school and into (or 'not into') the labour market is to be welcomed.

The book has three main sections and each of its 13 chapters has been written by 20 recognised experts in their fields. The first section explores how learners progress through and from school into higher education. The link between study choices at tertiary level and employment follows in the second section, while the third examines whether learners become employed after completing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and workplace-based training.

Rogan excels in giving an overall outline of the different sections in the book and their purpose. Chapters are well structured, each with an introduction setting out the intention and concluding with a summary of the findings. Complex data are appended at the end of the chapter to prevent readers from getting bogged down in figures and tables and losing track of the argument. All these techniques will help busy readers skim through the key findings if pressed for time. Each chapter is data-rich, relying on largely quantitative data to inform the authors' analyses. Rogan's concluding chapter expertly draws the findings of the different chapters and sections together.

Within the first section, researchers found that poor basic education continues to impact negatively on learners in moving successfully through school into PSET and completing PSET. However, the NEET problem could not simply be explained as 'school drop-outs'. Surprisingly, data showed that many NEETs had passed through school smoothly, some even achieving university entrance at matric, but were not entering university.

Funding was posited as a major reason for this, with writers urging that unless there is a substantial change to the current funding model, government's enrolment targets for PSET will not be met. On another surprising note, 'A' students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend universities than their counterparts from advantaged backgrounds because current funding models favour top-performing disadvantaged students.

Poor awareness of options post school, particularly regarding workplace-based training and TVET Colleges, was another reason posited for low participation in PSET.

On paper, TVET colleges should provide a route into the labour market for those who leave school in Grade 9. In practice, however, researchers found that TVET colleges were full of matric students. The authors of the chapter were unable to give reasons. Was it due to lack of places, and/or funding for universities? Or perhaps that TVETs themselves were targeting matrics to raise their pass rates?

Given poor basic education, adult education programmes could provide much needed education and skills for those who failed at school in order to link them with the labour market. Instead, researchers found a disjuncture between these programmes and skills needed for the workplace or to enter PSET, leaving these students stranded in NEET-land yet again. By contrast, work-based learning programmes seem more successful in placing completers in jobs although there is poor uptake of younger learners in these programmes. Once again the authors were unable to explain why.

The sphere of vocational training has seen massive policy changes over the last 20 years. Researchers were cautious (largely because of their small sample of learners) in pronouncing on whether the new National Certificate (Vocational) is succeeding in improving the link between education and work.

Readers should not expect to find definitive solutions to the NEET problem. Many chapters conclude with unanswered questions and recommend further research to explore these unknowns. Nevertheless, the findings do reveal much-needed details of the PSET sector that the reader is unlikely to find elsewhere.

I felt the researchers' frustration in being unable to answer all the questions raised by their research. I would have liked to have the quantitative data balanced with more qualitative investigations that allowed for more nuanced explanations that addressed some of these issues, but perhaps this is the meat of another book.

Nonetheless, this is a very useful volume that researchers, students and policymakers in the education field will welcome as a reference work and as an indicator of government policy.

Reference

1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) (indicator). c2019 [cited 2019 May 22]. <https://doi.org/10.1787/72d1033a-en>

© 2019. The Author(s). Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.