



The Influence of Agricultural Learnership Programme on Graduates' Job Prospects

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Purpose: This study aims to scrutinise the effectiveness of the agricultural learnership programme at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture, focusing on the perspectives of its graduates. By exploring their experiences, the study seeks to uncover the strengths and weaknesses of learnership training. The primary goal is to assess graduates' satisfaction with the program, its impact on their employability, the practical skills acquired, and its relevance to their current employment.

Study design/methodology/approach: 42 participants were recruited for the study, and their demographic characteristics, including gender and age distribution, were analysed. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study aimed to gather comprehensive insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of the agricultural learnership program.

Findings: The findings revealed that 82.1% of the participants reported satisfaction with the agricultural learnership program at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture, highlighting its effectiveness in addressing the skill development needs of unemployed youth. However, only 56.1% of the graduates secured employment upon completion, indicating potential improvement in job placement outcomes. While most graduates gained practical experience in business skills, livestock management, and routine agricultural practices, some participants expressed the need for a stronger emphasis on acquiring professional and experiential skills. Based on the study's outcomes, it is recommended that the program undergo tailored adjustments to better align with the specific needs of recipients, ensuring a more impactful and relevant agricultural skills development learnership training at Owen Sitole College.

Originality/value: The insightful recommendations offered in this study have the potential to guide policymakers in making informed decisions, leading to improved outcomes for the targeted population involved in the learnership development. Additionally, the study contributes valuable information to the existing body of literature and can serve as a foundation for future agricultural research endeavours.

Keywords: Learnership, Employment, Training, Skill Development Model, Owen Sitole College.

Introduction

Agricultural learnerships in South Africa are specialised programs designed to provide individuals interested in pursuing a career in agriculture with practical and theoretical training. These programs, offered by both public and private institutions, aim to equip learners with the essential skills and knowledge needed to contribute to the development of the agricultural sector in South Africa (Griessel et al., 2019, p. 8). According to the Academy of Science of South Africa (2017, p. 11), agricultural learnerships are available in various institutions nationwide, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, universities, agricultural colleges, and private training providers. Notable institutions offering agricultural learnerships in South Africa include:

- i. Agricultural Research Council (ARC).
- ii. AgriSETA.

- iii. Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) through Grootfontein Agricultural Department.
- iv. Provincial Departments of Agriculture, Agrarian Reform and Rural Development through the colleges in these provinces.
- v. National Youth Development Agency (NYDA).
- vi. South African Sugarcane Research Institute (SASRI).
- vii. University of Pretoria - Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences.
- viii. Stellenbosch University - Faculty of AgriSciences.
- ix. University of Fort Hare - Faculty of Agriculture and Agricultural Sciences.
- x. Tshwane University of Technology - Department of Agriculture and Food Science.

These institutions offer learnerships that provide theoretical knowledge and hands-on training in various agricultural fields, such as crop production, animal production, horticulture, and agribusiness management. In 2017, the Owen Sitole College of Agriculture introduced a full-time enrollment program for levels 2 and 4 of learnership in animal production (Chitepo & Tema, 2022, p.33). The agricultural learnership program, an integral part of South Africa's National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), is anticipated to play a crucial role (Cornelissen & Zana, 2022, p.28).

These recognised programs for work-integrated learning are structured to provide workplace learning linked to multiple work experience sites, resulting in a nationally recognised credential. The primary goal of the agricultural learnership program is to facilitate the entry of young individuals into the workforce and enhance their skills in the formal sector (Cornelissen & Zana, 2022, p.28). Research suggests that the success of agricultural learnership programs depends on their coverage of both sectors of the dual economy (Cornelissen, 2020, p.15). Erasmus (2019, p.14) concluded that agricultural learnership training offers significant opportunities for employed individuals to develop their skills and capacities while also providing unemployed individuals a chance to increase their employability. However, challenges remain in maintaining a proper balance between the two target groups and enhancing the capacity of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) (Erasmus, 2019, p.14). The theoretical underpinning of this study is grounded in social cognitive theory, which posits that learning primarily takes place through the observation of others, as outlined within the social-cognitive paradigm. Various foundational assumptions underpin social-cognitive theory, as elucidated by Torre and Durning (2015, pp. 105-116). This principle suggests that learning is facilitated by observing and imitating others.

Jaca (2018, p.61) highlighted flaws in the system of upskilling at intermediate- and high-skills levels, emphasising an overemphasis on developing abilities at the low-skills end. A significant cause for concern is the absence of provisions for succession in the agricultural sector (Mabiletsa et al., 2020, p.3). The first major issue is the lack of youth accessibility to information, understanding, and education. Inadequate education constrains productivity and skill acquisition, and limited access to information and expertise in agriculture may impede entrepreneurial efforts. There is a clear need to enhance young rural residents' access to education and incorporate agricultural skills into rural education, especially in emerging nations. Furthermore, agricultural training and education should be adapted to ensure that graduates' skills align with the demands of rural labour markets (Mungai, 2018, p.6).

This study was initiated when anecdotal evidence suggested that the learnership training program might not meet its objectives. Thus, the author conducted this study to uncover crucial information for strengthening the program. The preceding analysis suggests that the current situation requires interventions to promote agricultural learnerships as a viable option for

youths, given the limited efforts by policymakers to attract and actively involve youth in agricultural activities.

The following research questions guide this study:

- i. Does the agricultural learnership program significantly affect graduates' job prospects?
- ii. To what extent are participants satisfied with the agricultural learnership programme?
- iii. What is the level of practical experience graduates acquire during the learnership programme?
- iv. Is the graduate's experience deemed suitable for the job in which they are currently employed?
- v. What other relevant experiences could have contributed to the student's preparedness for the workforce?

Theoretical framework

The study's theoretical foundation is rooted in social cognitive theory. According to the social-cognitive paradigm, learning predominantly occurs through observing others. Several fundamental presumptions are the foundation for social-cognitive theory (Torre & Durning, 2015, pp. 105-116). According to this principle, learning can occur through observing and imitating others. Models, as defined by Ottaye-Ebede, Shaffakat, and Foster (2020, pp. 611-625), are individuals who exemplify certain actions for others. Goal-directed behaviour is also presumed to exist within this framework, as social-cognitive theorists posit that individuals should establish objectives for themselves and adapt their behaviour as necessary to achieve those goals.

The learnership trainees at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture are visibly motivated to learn through practical instruction under the guidance of seasoned agricultural extension specialists. Albert Bandura developed the Social Learning Theory (SLT) in the 1960s, which evolved into the Systematic Concept Teaching (SCT) in 1986. SCT contends that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic interplay of the individual, environment, and behaviour (Sato, 2017, p. 256). What sets SCT apart is its emphasis on social impact and both external and internal social reinforcement. Additionally, SCT acknowledges how people learn and maintain certain behaviours, considering the social context in which these behaviours are exhibited.

Fundamentally, a person's prior experiences, which have the potential to influence readiness to grasp new competencies, are key components of this theory. In this context, SCT provides a robust platform for investigating the lived experiences of learnership graduates at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture (OSCA), emphasising learning from others in a pseudo-apprenticeship manner. In contrast to other theories that emphasise the initiation of skill development, SCT underscores the sustainability of skill development even after the training program is completed. This resonates with the continuity plan for skills development at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture, reflecting students' progression from one level of training to another as they advance professionally. The theory also highlights how agricultural leadership graduates acquire practical skills, entrepreneurial competencies, and leadership skills, fostering increased productivity in the agricultural sector.

Literature review

This section presents an overview of the literature regarding the historical overview of agricultural learnership programmes in South Africa, factors impeding agricultural learnership programmes' effectiveness, and the impact of agricultural learnership programmes on graduates' job prospects.

Historical Overview of the Agricultural Learnership Programme in South Africa

According to official estimates, the unemployment rate in South Africa is currently at 29.5%, thus affecting 4.5 million people (World Economic Forum, 2002-2003, p. 12). Many employees have been laid off due to economic difficulties and downsizing, especially in medium- and large-scale businesses. Furthermore, the country's economy has seen a structural shift toward more knowledge-based industries in the secondary and tertiary sectors, away from businesses based in the core field of agriculture. This change has profound effects on employment trends and the kind of skills needed in the labour market.

Many people today lack the knowledge or ability to handle new concerns. According to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) (2001) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2002, p. 23), just 4.2% of the total number of people had completed matriculation and some post-matriculation training or schooling in 1999. Therefore, closing the skills gap is a top priority for the country. The Department of Labour introduced the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999 (Republic of South Africa, 1999) to solve this issue. According to Konyana and Mason (2017, p. 10), the South African economy has been separated into skill development and quality verification sectors. All businesses and registered employers must pay an annual skills development levy based on the overall employee compensation cost. Companies were required to pay 0.5% of the compensation if their yearly payroll exceeded R250,000. This went up to 1%.

Furthermore, it has been mandated that a Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA) be established in each of the identified sectors. Each SETA is responsible for creating a sector-specific skills development strategy and distributing monies obtained from the Skills Development Levies back to companies for use in sanctioned skills development initiatives. SETAs will be evaluated to determine how well they implement targeted learnerships to transform the skills base in respective industries. The Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Learnership Regulations from April 2001 heavily regulate their existence. Learnerships are also frequently applied in environments with a variety of stakeholders.

Factors impeding Agricultural Learnership Programmes' effectiveness

Lack of motivation on the part of students

According to research findings by Royal (2018, p. 7), some farm learners are less driven to learn and improve their circumstances as there are inadequate incentives to stimulate the acquisition of core skills at the FET level. In general, it was noted that many students are only enrolled in the Learnership Programme because they were selected for it rather than because of a sense of passion or desire. Based on such selection, some students were found unwilling to commit to the agricultural sector (working from 5 am to 9 pm regardless of the weather). As a result, they searched for specific employment opportunities, particularly office jobs, which are extremely rare and do not exist (Royal, 2018, p. 8).

Inability to secure employment upon graduation

After completing the learnership programme, a significant portion of pupils find themselves unemployed, according to an analysis of the employment situation of previously enrolled learners (Burger, 2015, p. 2). Lack of information about work chances, the scarcity of suitable jobs, the Department of Agriculture's or FET's inadequate or nonexistent aid with job seeking, and the lack of initiative on the side of students to actively pursue employment are a few factors contributing to this. The Learnership Programme Certificate, particularly NQF2 (which only offers basic training within the agricultural sector - the same training as grade 10), is another

factor responsible for the lack of employment among previously registered learners assigned the demand for higher skills training qualifications by employers. To address these challenges, the DoA and FET Centres could consider changing the learnership application process with the assistance of the DoA and FET (a prospective student has to secure an internship/job shadow) at a farm or agriculture-related business upon applying for the Learnership Programme (Burger, 2015, p. 4).

Inadequate programme duration

According to Erasmus (2019, p. 7), officials state that learners gain valuable skills, e.g., soft skills and life skills, from the learnership programme. However, it was pointed out that the duration of the programme is short and, in turn, limits the time in which learners can fully grasp the content or apply the knowledge and skills they have gained. Farmers and other industry role players indicated that the learners lack the practical skills to work on a farm. Although they might show insight into the theoretical background of farming, it is apparent that the learners do not have practical experience. Farmers who sent their current farm employees to one of the learnership programmes reported that the skills they acquired made the workers more well-rounded (i.e., the learners grasped the business side of farming and contributed more in terms of productivity). Some of the problems with this are that even if farmers send their current employees for additional training through the Agriculture Learnership Programme, there is no guarantee that they will be embraced for the programme essential to the farm (Erasmus, 2019, p. 8). A typical example was learners in fruit farming who were accepted into vegetable production programmes due to a lack of interest in other programmes at the designated centre (Erasmus, 2019, p. 8).

Low skills levels

One of the farmers made an intriguing claim, stating that a learner had applied for a job possibility but was unable to fulfil a straightforward task (the learner needed to catch an ostrich) when given the opportunity (Nesengani et al., 2021, p. 3). The learner received no practical training; therefore, the farmer concluded that he would not benefit from having him on the farm. The farmers also stated that very few students would be given a chance to work in positions higher than general labourers because of the lack of hands-on experience of the learners. The main justification was that farm managers needed more extensive hands-on training in farm operations. The conclusion is that students are not hired for higher roles since they cannot supervise or train other employees because they lack the necessary skills (Nesengani et al., 2021, p. 5).

Low level of productivity

Various stakeholders generally noted that the learnership programme did not result in a material rise in agricultural productivity. The primary cause is a lack of efficient or enough practical training for students. The learners chosen for the programme cannot complete the activities necessary on a farm because they are unaware of the commitment to working in the agricultural sector (Mateaus et al., 2014, p. 14).

Lack of passion

Kotze (2017, p. 4) claims that learners chosen for the programme may not be devoted to or passionate about the agriculture sector. It has been suggested that the selection standards be changed to guarantee that students are interested in the agriculture sector. This could be accomplished by giving preference to students already working in the field (e.g., those who have interned on farms or have lived on farms). The distribution of stipends was delayed, which

was brought up as another issue. Some officials believed this resulted in resource waste because training is given to people who do not intend to engage in agriculture. After all, the stipend drives some learners not truly interested in agriculture (Kotze, 2017, p. 6).

Inadequate budget allocation

Relying on the learnership programme's yearly reports, it is clear that the programme keeps within the budget allotted, and it is clear from the interviews with the officials that the general consensus is that the budget allotted is adequate to handle the current tasks. The officials recommended allocating additional cash to practical initiatives. The distribution of stipends was delayed, which was brought up as another issue. Some officials believed this caused resource waste since training is given to people who do not intend to engage in agriculture because some learners are motivated by the stipend and are not genuinely interested in agriculture (Normans, 2016, p. 3).

Passive student selection criteria

The existing requirements allow applicants who do not particularly care about or have an interest in agriculture to be accepted, which has various problems. The selection criteria should give preference to candidates who have experience working in the agricultural sector already (through education, research, training, current employment, community service, etc.), as well as candidates who can show documentation of internships with agricultural sector employers (Ncube & Khumalo, 2022, p. 9).

Insufficient public awareness of the programme

People who urgently want work-integrated training frequently are unaware of the Learnership Programme. The result is that the best candidates for enrollment frequently miss the programme and may have openings that might be filled. In order to guarantee that people are aware of the programme and the learners graduating from it, it is advised that this should be tackled through collaborations with farmers and other industry key stakeholders (Zantsi & Nengovhela, 2022, p. 4).

The impact of the Agricultural Learnership Programme on Graduates' Job Prospects

It is imperative to provide a brief overview of agricultural learnership programs to understand their function and relevance. According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 2006), Further Education and Training (FET) encompasses educational and training initiatives leading to credentials at levels 2 through 4 of the National Qualifications Framework. FET levels, acknowledged by SAQA, lie above general education but below higher education. In essence, learnership programs allow students to acquire essential skills and training needed for employment or entrepreneurship as an alternative to higher education training programs. A learnership is an employment-related training and education initiative that forms part of FET courses, resulting in a SAQA-recognized qualification upon the successful integration of theory and practice. The Agriculture Learnership Programme specifically addresses skill shortages in the agriculture industry, offering unemployed individuals the chance to develop skills for employment and qualification.

Furthermore, the responsibility for providing opportunities for industry-specific education and training rests with the Department of Agriculture. The initiative, known as Further Education and Training (FET), caters to individuals interested in pursuing careers in the agricultural sector. The Learnership Programme aims to equip learners with knowledge and skills to enhance their employability and overall well-being. It is crucial to note that while the Learnership Programme was under evaluation from 2005 through 2012, significant adjustments

were implemented in 2014, considering the need for more effective practical instruction (Kraak, 2005).

The significance of learnerships is well-appreciated by both employers and students. These skill-building initiatives cultivate multi-skilled workers, enhancing productivity in farms or organisations. However, due to economic constraints, some farms may be unable to employ all trained individuals. The availability of skilled personnel in the market is a favourable development for smaller businesses that may be unable to afford or qualify for staff training. According to learner surveys, unemployment decreased from 72% to 44% among those initially unemployed when they entered the learnership program. This success fosters optimism among those still seeking employment opportunities (Maririmba, 2017).

Research Method

This study employed a mixed research method incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data, including age, gender, learnership level, and employment status, were collected, while qualitative methods were used to explore challenges faced during the learnership. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with randomly selected learnership graduates to gather insights into their experiences at the chosen institutions.

Unit of Analysis and Sampling Procedure

The study’s population spanned a three-year period, from 2019 to 2022, focusing on enrollment trends at all levels. In the academic year 2019–2020, 40 students participated: 20 at level 2 and 20 at level 4. Enrollment increased to 60 students in 2020–2021, including 20 at level 2, 20 at level 3 (who were in level 2 the previous year), and 20 first-year students at level 4. The following year (2021–2022) saw 36 students, 17 at level 2 and 19 at level 4; despite most graduates facing poor socioeconomic conditions, attending the institutions exposed all students to comparable situations, making them the study’s target population. Owen Sitole College, chosen for its diverse learner population and academic excellence, offered various services and tools to investigate education quality in underserved areas. Thematic coding was employed to manually analyse qualitative data from participant interviews, which were transcribed by a professional transcriber and aligned responses with study goals.

Descriptive statistics

This section presents participants’ biodata, including gender, age, qualifications obtained, and the year of completion. The demographic information describes the participants to whom research instruments were administered, establishing the relationship between participants’ demographic characteristics and the collected key data.

Qualifications

Information on the learnership qualification obtained, as presented in Table 1, revealed that the majority, 14 (36%) of the participants, obtained the level 4 Plant Production Certificate, while 10 (26 %) of the participant obtained the level 2 Animal Production Certificate. Furthermore, 8 of the participants (21%) have obtained the level 4 Animal Production Certificate, while the least number of the participants 7 (18%) have obtained the level 2 Plant Production Certificate.

Table 1: Qualification obtained after learnership

Gender		Male	Female	Total
		14 (34.2%)	27 (65.9%)	41 (100.0%)
Age	18-27	28-37	38 and above	Total
	15 (36.6%)	24 (58.5)	2 (4.9%)	41 (100.0%)

Qualification Completion Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	6 (14.6%)	8 (19.5)	7 (17.0%)	11 (26.8)	9 (21.9%)
Qualification Obtained				Frequency	Percentage
Level 2 Animal Production				10	25.6%
Level 2 Plant Production				9	21.9%
Level 4 Animal Production				8	20.5%
Level 4 Plant Production				14	35.9%
Total				41	100%

Source: Data processed

Gender

Information from Table 1 reveals that 27 (66%) participants were females, while the remaining 14 (34%) were males.

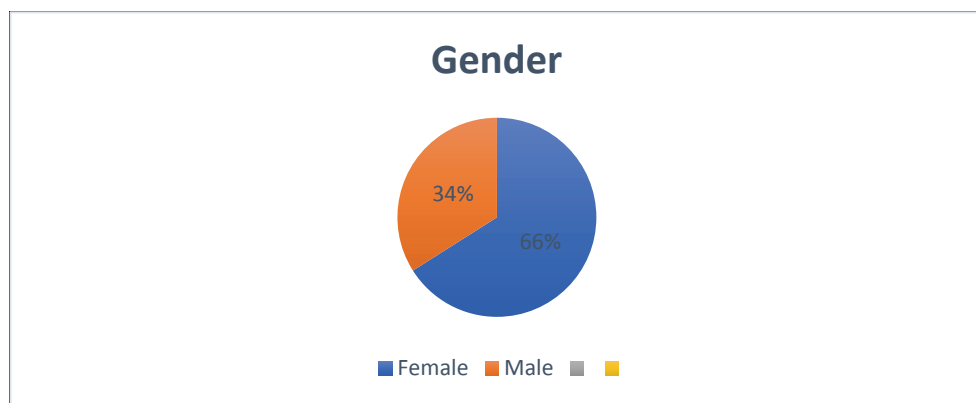


Figure 1: Gender distribution of participants

Source: Data processed.

Age

Regarding age distribution, most participants were in the age bracket of 28-37 years (59%), followed by age 18-27 (37%). This shows that most of the participants are youths and within the targeted age bracket suitable for this study. This implies that the participants were an ideal group for studying the learner’s perception of the learnership programme offered by Owen Sitole College. Meanwhile, the results could be valuable for policymakers dealing with learnership training issues, particularly at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture.

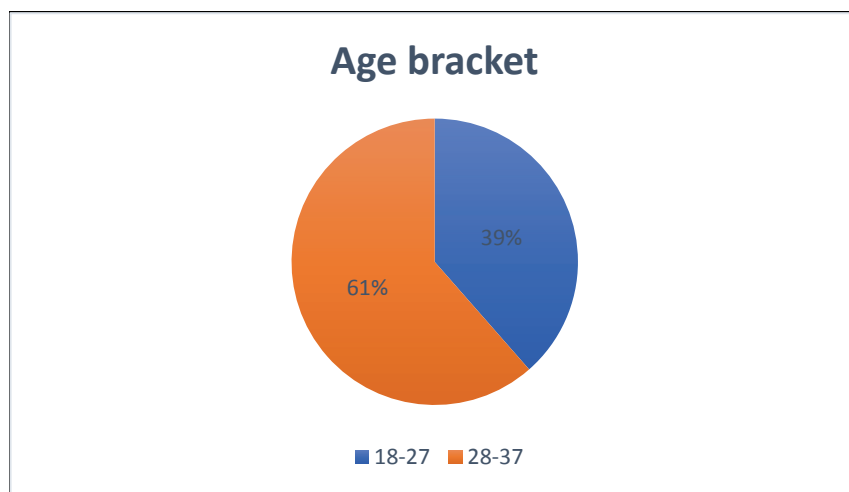


Figure 2: Age bracket of the participant

Source: Data processed

Thematic Analysis

This section presents research findings based on the four research questions stated in the first chapter of the study.

Research question 1: Does the agricultural learnership program significantly affect graduates' job prospects?

Participants' responses showed that 43.9% of the participants were neither engaged in self-employment, education, nor employment. Additionally, 33.3% of the participants were self-employed, 15.4% were studying, and 7.7% were employed. The previous suggests that the agricultural learnership programme does not guarantee the immediate employment of its graduates. Additionally, the discovery that 33.3% of the participants were self-employed suggests that they may have leveraged the skills acquired during the learnership program to establish their farm enterprises.

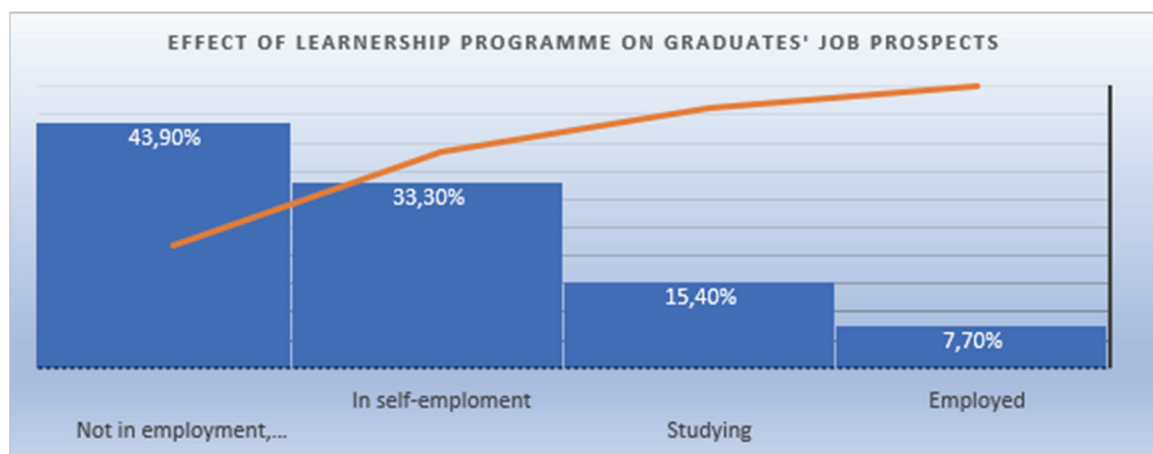


Figure 3: Effect of learnership programme on graduate's job prospects.

Source: Data processed.

Research question 2: To what extent are participants satisfied with the agricultural learnership programme?



Figure 4: Learner of the extent of satisfaction

Source: Data processed.

Participants' responses showed that 82.1% acknowledged they were satisfied with the training they received during the learnership programme, whereas 7.7 % had a contrary view. The foregoing suggests that most participants appeared satisfied with their

learnership training; however, it would be interesting to uncover why 7.7% of the participants were dissatisfied with the learnership training programme. A comprehensive understanding of this shortcoming could help to shape future policy and practice of Owen Sitole College of Agriculture.

Research question 3: How much practical experience did the graduates gain during their learnership?

Responses from the participants on the practical experience the graduates gain during their learnership during the agriculture learnership programme are presented below.

In this context, “LG” signifies ‘learnership graduate’ and the alphanumeric (*) is used to highlight similar responses emanating from two or more participants to avoid unnecessary repetitions:

*LG 1: Herbicide application, weeding & rigging. unit per hectare, basic tractor operation, irrigation and harvesting.
*LG 2: How to harvest, plant, how to manage poultry farm etc
LG 3: I know how to put ear tags on the cattle and how to inject a cow.
*LG 4: Problem-solving and working under pressure.
LG 5: I trained in different agribusinesses, including dairy farming, use of farm equipment and financial management on the farm.
*LG 6: Dairy production cleanliness, observing and inspecting animal health and maintaining piggery and poultry sections.
*LG 9: I gained the ability to operate the centre pivot during the irrigation time.
*LG 10: Planting skills, spacing and depth.
LG 14: I can feed the calf, see the animal in the oestrus cycle, and help when the animal is struggling to give birth.
LG 22: How to cultivate it was not my thing before, but now I love to do agriculture.
LG 23: Presentation skills.
LG 25: Using greenhouse.
*LG 26: Handling of animals, dehorning, feeding skills of different animals, slaughtering skills.
*LG 29: Milking of cows using machines, operations and maintenance of tractor, mixing and measuring the cow's feed, counting and scaling of cattle fencing, vaccinating cattle, tagging, and branding.
*LG 32: I learned how to start a successful business.
LG 33: Dehorning of cows, giving birth when the animal is struggling.
LG 34: I learnt to pay more attention to animals. I learnt to be patient and to love them.
*LG 41: Plant and soil care.

Most participants expressed that they have benefited from the learnership programme in various ways; in other words, the learnership programme has equipped them with various skills. This notion is strengthened by most participants indicating that they have acquired diverse skills such as business skills, livestock management, and routine agricultural practices such as planting, harvesting, dehorning, vaccination, feeding and rendering birth assistance to animals, among others. It could be deduced from the previous that the learnership programme might have added some value to participants' career prospects. However, it is acknowledged that some of the participants had a contrary view.

Research question 4: Was the experience appropriate for the job the student was employed in?

In this regard, 76.9% of the participants indicated that the learnership programme had contributed positively to their employment, whereas 23.1% had a contrary view. In light of the previous leadership training program it seems to have added some value to participants' career prospects; nonetheless, this finding also demonstrates that there is room for improvement in aligning the dynamics of the programme to the specific needs of the recipients. In other words, regular evaluation of the programme is crucial to identify what to add or remove from the programme.

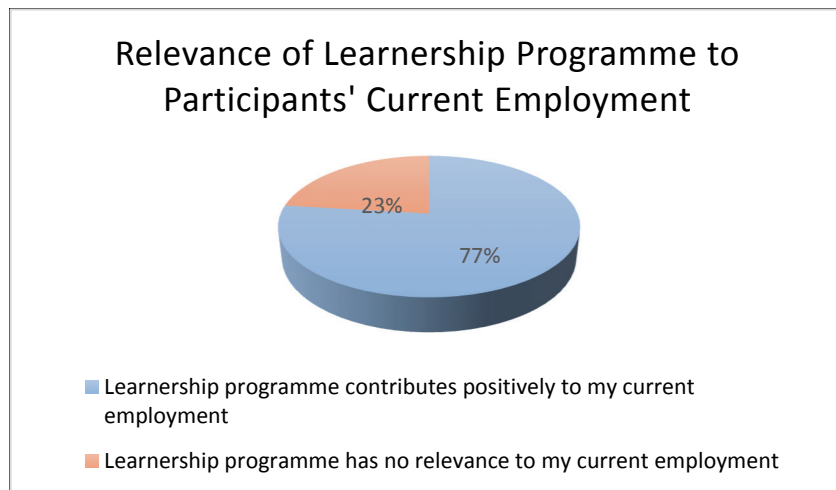


Figure 5: Relevance of learnership programme participants' current employment

Source: Data processed

Research question 5: What other experience would have assisted the student in work?

In this context, participants' responses showed that about 82.1% acknowledged they were satisfied with the training they received during the learnership programme, whereas 7.7% had a contrary view. The participants who claimed to have been dissatisfied with the learnership programme suggested several measures that could have assisted in making the programme more beneficial. Their responses are presented below.

*LG 21: I chose maybe because I still need to know more knowledge; the teachers did try, but there was not enough time to give us a lot of knowledge and training, and we were also interrupted by COVID-19.
*LG 23: The training was about 30% theory and 70% practice, but for me, it was 70% theory and 30% practice.
*LG 24: Because some of the practicals that we did were already half done so that part of practical that was done we never saw how it was done.
*LG 27: Since I have not received enough practical experience, I think I need more time for practicals.

This finding indicates that the majority of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the programme, while a significantly lower proportion of the participants did not believe so. As a result, the dissatisfied participants highlighted several experiences that could further assist the learnership students, such as the need for more in-depth practicals and a more favourable mix between theory and theory. Furthermore, this finding underscores the need for a more comprehensive learnership experience which could provide students with relevant skills.

Discussion of findings

This section discusses the study's findings on the Learners' Perception of Agricultural Skills Development Learnership Training Programmes offered by Owen Sitole College of Agriculture. According to Kalusopa (2011, p.119), unguided and unsupported discussions may lead to incorrect interpretations and inaccurate conclusions, even if the data was collected correctly and analysed.

Findings regarding participants' characteristics

In this regard, data relating to the demographic characteristics of the participants were part of the first section of the interview schedule (Appendix A). A total number of 42 participants were interviewed. The results of the study describing the respondents' gender indicated that the

majority of the participants were females (66%), while 34% were males. This finding did not directly answer any of the research questions; it only suggested that the agricultural learnership programme is more appealing to the female gender in this study. The dominance of female students in the tertiary education sector is not restricted to Owen Sitole College of Agriculture, as the majority of South African Institutions of Higher Education have seen a significant increase in the number of female students in contrast to the male population (Okeke-Ihejirika, Moyo & Berg, 2019, p.1).

Regarding age distribution, most participants were in the age bracket 28-37 years (59%), followed by age 18-27 (37%). This shows that most of the participants are youths and within the targeted age bracket suitable for this study. In addition, this implies that the participants were an ideal group for studying the learner's perception of the learnership program offered by Owen Sitole College of Agriculture. The results could be valuable for policymakers dealing with learnership training issues, particularly at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture. It suggests that youth are showing genuine interest in agricultural studies.

Findings regarding the level of satisfaction of participants with the agricultural learnership programme

The results showed through the responses of the participants that 82.1% of them acknowledged that they were satisfied with the training they received during the learnership programme, whereas 7.7% expressed that they were not satisfied with the training they had received. From the previous results, it can be deduced that the participants recognised the worth of the agricultural learnership training programme at Owen Sitole College of Agriculture. This finding correlates with the view of Mohlamme (2019, p. 83), who submits that Learnership programmes efficiently satisfy the skill development needs of a significant proportion of unemployed young people in South Africa. The previous implies that the learnership training programme offered by Owen Sitole College of Agriculture is relatively satisfying to the beneficiaries, but there is room for improvement.

Findings regarding the effect of agricultural learnership programme on graduates' job prospects

The responses from the participants showed that 43.9% were neither engaged in self-employment, education, nor employment. Additionally, 33.3% of the participants were self-employed, 15.4% were studying, and 7.7% were employed. The previous suggests that the agricultural learnership programme does not guarantee the immediate employment of its graduates. Additionally, the self-employed participants indicated that they might have utilised the skills acquired during the learnership programme to set up their farm enterprises. This finding correlates with the work of Mandondo & Troskie (2021, p. 40), who aver that, in contrast to popular belief, the learnership training offered beneficiaries limited employment opportunities. This implies that it is imperative to address the issue of learnership trainees being idle after graduation if the government is to achieve its primary goal of establishing the learnership training programme: unemployment reduction.

Findings regarding the practical experience the graduates gained during the period of their learnership training

The participants' responses above indicated that the majority of the participants have benefited from the learnership programme. This notion is affirmed by several participants, who indicated that they had acquired diverse skills such as business skills, livestock management, and routine agricultural practices such as planting, harvesting, dehorning, vaccination, feeding, and rendering birth assistance to animals, among others. It could be deduced from the preceding

that the learnership programme might have added some value to participants' career prospects. However, it is acknowledged that some of the participants had a contrary view. This finding corresponds with the view of Cornelissen and Rabie (2023, p.90), who submit that learnership training programmes create a platform for young people to acquire professional and experiential skills. This implies that it is essential to view learnership training in the light of acquiring skills such as creativity, innovativeness, and resourcefulness.

Findings regarding the alignment of the student's experience with the requirements of their employment position

In this regard, 76.9% of the participants indicated that the learnership programme had contributed positively to their employment, whereas 23.1% had a contrary view. In light of the previous, the learnership training programme seems to have added some value to participants' career prospects. Nonetheless, this finding has demonstrated that there is room for improvement in aligning the dynamics of the programme to the specific needs of the recipients. This finding contradicts the work of Naidu (2019, p. 67), who submits that the graduates of learnership programmes are compelled to pursue occupations unrelated to their training due to low job retention rates.

Findings regarding the other experience that would have assisted the student in work

As stated earlier, the participants' responses showed that about 82.1% acknowledged they were satisfied with the training they received during the learnership programme, whereas 7.7% had a contrary view. The participants who claimed to have been dissatisfied with the learnership programme suggested several measures that could have assisted in making the programme more beneficial, as presented below. These findings gain significance from the observation of Koyana and Mason (2019, p.736), who opines that as a means of ensuring that none of the program's beneficiaries leaves the program unemployed, learnership students may be required to acquire entrepreneurial skills during their training period and after that operate as agricultural entrepreneurs upon graduation.

Conclusion

This study has presented numerous insights into learners' perceptions of agricultural learnership training programmes offered by Owen Sitole College of Agriculture, shedding light on various aspects of learnership graduates' profiles. These include their satisfaction with the training, career prospects, practical skills acquisition, alignment of learnership training with current work, challenges faced, and the potential for developing a collaborative learnership training model. The study emphasises the importance of experiential learning and its positive impact on skill development. While most participants expressed satisfaction with the program, there is room for improvement in ensuring the active engagement of graduates in agro-allied projects post-training and aligning the training with individual beneficiaries' needs. The central conclusion is that a collaborative learnership training model holds the potential to generate jobs, enhance agricultural productivity, stimulate economic growth, and strengthen agricultural sustainability in South Africa.

Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from the study's findings:

Revise Curriculum Content: Curriculum planners must revise the learnership qualification curriculum by incorporating more farm business management components. This could involve adding modules on risk management techniques, market analysis, and financial planning.

Including case studies and real-world experiences can enhance hands-on experience, improving problem-solving abilities within the agriculture sector.

Enhance Post-Learnership Employment Opportunities: Policymakers need to provide ongoing mentorship and support to learners after program completion to facilitate successful entry into the job market. Include career counselling services and workshops on resume writing, interview skills, and job search strategies in the curriculum during the learnership to boost employment prospects.

Improve Alignment with Individual Learners' Needs: The institutions of learning need to implement differentiated instruction to customise teaching methods, materials, and assessments according to individual learner needs. This fosters a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Regular assessment and timely feedback enable ongoing adjustments to enhance personalised instruction.

Increase Practical and Experiential Learning: Higher education institutions could enhance experiential and hands-on learning by assigning students tasks covering the entire value chain, from production to marketing. This approach enables the application of theoretical knowledge in practical scenarios, fostering deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Ensure that 70% of the practical component covers all theoretical training received.

Limitations

The limited geographical scope and the exclusive focus on Owen Sitole College of Agriculture's graduate population mean that the findings may not be generalisable to South Africa.

Secondly, obtaining honest opinions from some participants proved challenging, possibly due to fear of persecution. This might have hindered information sharing regarding institutional challenges in the selected college of agriculture despite assurances of confidentiality and granted permissions. A more comprehensive study encompassing multiple agricultural colleges in South Africa would help validate or refute the findings of this study, necessitating extensive research efforts on this topic.

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