
**ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS THE CAREER CHOICE OF PREVIOUSLY
DISADVANTAGED YOUTH IN SOUTH AFRICA: TO BE OR NOT TO BE?**

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ABSTRACT: *The previously disadvantaged youth in South Africa face numerous challenges, one being the need to choose a particular career path, since there are a number of factors that impact their decision and steer them in a specific career path. This exploratory study addresses some of these factors and also highlights the important ones. Although a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used, there was greater focus on the qualitative aspects, since focus group and one-on-one interviews and informal discussions were conducted with relevant people. It emerged that the following factors impacted the youth's career choices, namely, lack of proper education and training with respect to career guidance, often resulting in them not being adequately equipped to make fully informed decisions, lack of mentorship and role models in the entrepreneurial world, and family and cultural upbringing. It thus became apparent that much more needs to be done by both government and the private sector collaboratively in order to encourage entrepreneurship in South Africa. This includes better education and training with respect to career guidance, increased access to mentors, and a change in the mind-set of the youth, especially with regards to entrepreneurship.*

KEYWORDS: youth; career choice; entrepreneurship, education and training

INTRODUCTION

From various reports, it is possible to assume that South Africa is facing an unemployment and education crisis, since the youth (15–24 years) unemployment rate is approximately 31.4%, with approximately 3.3 million of the 10.4 million youth not in employment (Stats SA, 2013). The youth, especially those from previously disadvantaged communities who are categorised as NEET,¹ are considered to be disengaged from both work and education (Stats SA, 2013:13). The 2012 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) annual survey reports that only 14% of South Africans intended to start their own businesses, and 15% of these were people aged 18 to 24 years (GEM, 2013). Furthermore, there was a slight increase (3%) in 2009 in the total entrepreneurial activity (TEA), which rise could have been attributed to the 2010 FIFA World Cup although, in general, unemployment is on the increase.

Kew (2012, p. 35) reports that a study conducted for the Western Cape Youth Commission found that 66% of young South Africans were interested in starting a business. In order to determine

¹ NEET rate = (Number of unemployed youth + number of youth not in the labour force) – (number of unemployed youth and youth not in the labour force but who are in education or training)/Total number of youth x 100.

whether such an interest may be interpreted as a predisposition towards entrepreneurial behaviour, the survey probed the career options of the respondents and reported that formal employment, namely, working in either a corporate or large business was cited by the majority (46%) of respondents, followed by employment in government departments (25%). However, Kew's (2012) study also revealed that less than 10% of the respondents had indicated starting their own business as their career option. The aforementioned findings are somewhat similar to what appeared in the 2010 Young Upstarts Report, where 65% of young people indicated interest in starting a business. However, the percentage of young people actively planning to turn this 'interest' into a reality was less than 10%, and only 8% of the respondents indicated that they planned to start their own business within a year (Herrington et al., 2011).

In light of the above, this study on which the paper is developed, aimed to determine the reasons why South Africa's previously disadvantaged youth aspire to follow a particular career path, and to ascertain what factors influence their decisions. More specifically, the objectives of the study on which this paper is written include: to establish whether socio-economic factors (cultural upbringing, social background and beliefs) play a role in the preferred career choices of previously disadvantaged youth, to determine whether the need for wealth, financial security and stability affects their career choice, and to ascertain whether the lack of support in terms of education, training and mentorship affects the career paths that are chosen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Kerka (2000), career choice is influenced by multiple factors, including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalisation, socialisation, role models, social support and available resources, including information and financial resources. Bandura et al. (2001 as cited in Edwards & Quinter, 2011), argued that in each individual, the career choice process is influenced by several factors, including the context in which the individuals live, their personal aptitudes, social contacts and educational attainments. Turton and Herrington (2012) assert that the "Entrepreneurial Framework Conditions" most likely to have an impact on the transition from intentional entrepreneurship to early-stage entrepreneurial activity, are government policies in terms of the process for starting a business, *finance and education*. However, Smorfitt (2008) argues that there has been too much focus on the part of the SA government in providing finance directly to new businesses, rather than overcoming business failure that has been caused by the inability of entrepreneurs to acquire the necessary *entrepreneurial skills* (Turton & Herrington, 2012). Adequate education is a particular barrier facing the youth in sub-Saharan Africa, and the region is still plagued by significantly low levels of literacy, poor numeracy skills, high drop-out rates, particularly at the secondary schooling level, and low numbers of tertiary education enrolments. Several researchers (Kew, Herrington, Litovsky & Gale, 2013) posit that young people in sub-Saharan Africa are less prepared to compete in the global environment, when compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the world. It is however interesting to note that factors specifically mentioned by the previously disadvantaged youth include financial stability and the following has been stated in the Transformation Audit 2012 "They may prefer the guarantee of a regular, often higher, income over the uncertainty related to a new business venture that may, at least initially, require sacrifice in terms of income" (Rankin, Roberts, Schoer, & Shepard, 2012).

While gaining access to capital is a fundamental first step for young entrepreneurs seeking to start and expand their businesses, for many, *mentorship* is as critical as capital to their success, and some studies (Kew et al., 2013) reveal that a significant number of young entrepreneurs feel isolated and find it difficult to run their businesses with no support or advice from a mentor. In a study conducted by Perrone et al. (2001, cited by Edwards & Quinter, 2011) on the influence of role models on the career decisions of college students, it was found that both role model supportiveness and the quality of the relationship with the role model, played a role in the career choice of students.

Urban (2007) argues that *cultural values* influence entrepreneurial behaviour, and many studies on ethnic entrepreneurs have been based on issues of culture, with a growing body of literature supporting the argument that national culture influences a variety of economic management behaviours. It is also acknowledged that substantial variations in entrepreneurial activity exist between countries, with cultural and social norms being emphasised as both the major strength and weakness of entrepreneurial support structures. According to Hewitt (2010, cited by Edwards & Quinter, 2011), most people are influenced by the careers that their parents favour. Several researchers ((Taylor, Harris, & Taylor, 2004; Shumba & Naong, 2012) argue that “Parental support and encouragement are important factors that have been found to influence career choice, and children may choose what their parents desire simply to please them”. Lipscomb (2014) asserts that “To one degree or another, society and the way you're brought up influences your life choices, including your choice of career.” Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006) also reported that the students' parents had a significant influence on their personal career decisions. Similarly, Rahmawati et al. (2012, p. 465) stated that parents also play an importance role in the career choices of the youth because they function as the carriers of the value, emotions and experiences in respect of self-employment. This finding both highlights and supports the notion that the way in which a young learner is brought up, their cultural upbringing and the perceptions and beliefs of their parents will influence what they aspire to as a career choice.

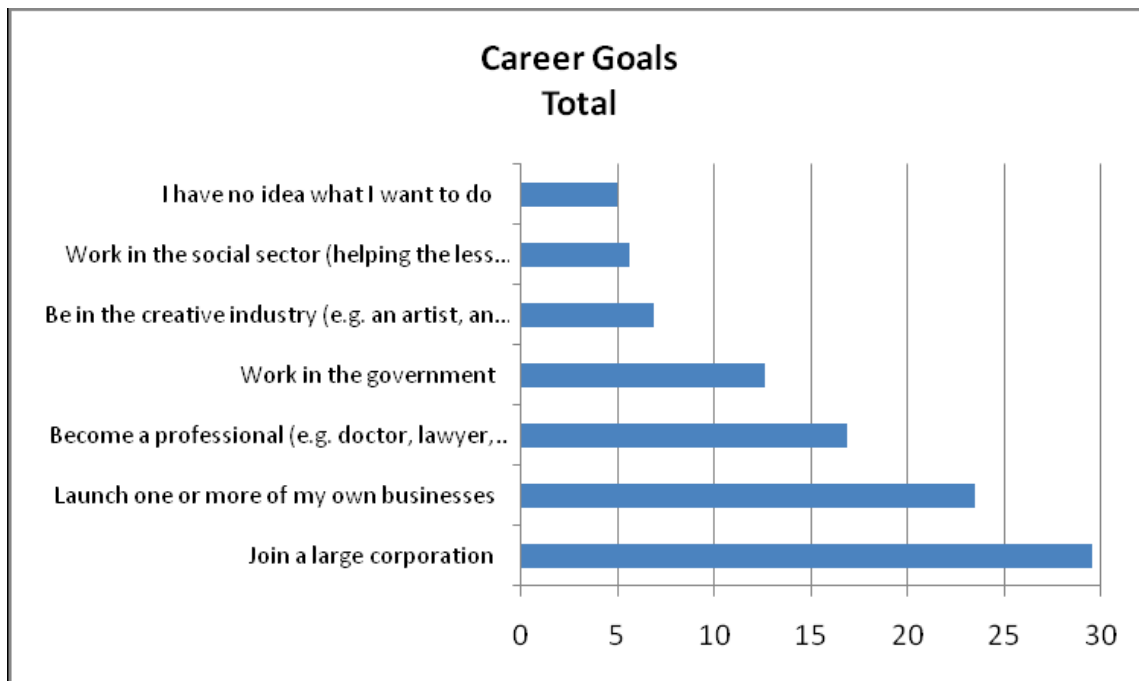
Deakins and Freel (2003, p. 224) divided the business start-up process into a number of stages, namely, idea formulation, opportunity recognition, pre-start planning and preparation, entry and launch, and post-entry development. The aforementioned researchers assert that there are a number of factors that may impinge on the process at every stage, and these may either encourage further development or they may have an adverse influence, perhaps causing the nascent entrepreneur to terminate the process (Van Vuuren & Groenewald, 2007). “The need for young people to feel stable and secure with regard to their income, social protection, and the ability to reconcile work and family life should not be underestimated. Lack of guarantee on these things sometimes makes obstacles for would-be entrepreneurs“(Rahmawati, Hasyiyati, & Yusran, 2012, p. 464).

According to Steenekamp, Van der Merwe and Athayde (2011), some research studies have suggested that early, formal entrepreneurship education affects the attitudes of students and this, in turn, may direct them towards certain future careers (Do Paco, Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, & Dinis, 2008, p. 4). According to Steenekamp et al. (2011) the early stimulation of such attitudes may even encourage entrepreneurship. Thus, if the youth are not receiving the information and training they require in order to follow an entrepreneurial path, they will not know what options

are available to them once they have finished studying, other than that they need to find a job in the corporate world. “According to Orford et al. (2004, p. 4), South Africa ranks in the lowest quartile of all the developing countries with only five out of every hundred adults being an entrepreneur, and one of the key factors in changing the status quo is education” (Niewenhuizen & Groenewald, 2008, p.130).

It would appear from the brief literature review that low entrepreneurial activity stems from the fact that the majority of young people shy away from starting their own businesses, which implies that entrepreneurship is not perceived as a career which they should aspire to, although it (entrepreneurship) is viewed as an important means tool increasing employment opportunity and alleviate poverty. According to “The Young Upstarts Report” (2011, p. 6), in some cultures entrepreneurship is seen as being born from necessity, instead of something to which to aspire to or strive for. As reflected in figure 1, the youth in South Africa are more likely to want to work in corporate jobs as opposed to starting their own businesses.

Figure 1: Career goals of youth in South Africa (2011)



Source: The Young Upstarts Report – Instant Grass 2011 for Virgin Unit (2011, p. 16)

Turton and Herrington (2013, p. 9) support the findings reported in the “Young Upstarts Report” (2011), when they stated in the GEM Report (2013), that “The youth’s attitude towards entrepreneurship is favourable in South Africa. However, the prevalence of survivalist businesses in the respondents’ communities and a lack of role models decrease the desirability of entrepreneurship as a career choice, which may help to explain in part why South Africa’s pool of intentional entrepreneurs is small.”

According to the Ernest and Young (EY) barometer, there is a weakness in South Africa as regards education and training in entrepreneurial skills (Ernst & Young, 2013). It is also recorded in the GEM (2010) report that there is a lack of entrepreneurship education and training in primary and secondary schools in South Africa, a situation which will be difficult to mitigate given that teaching entrepreneurial skills at school is beyond the capabilities of most teachers (Turton & Herrington, 2012, p. 36). Education was accorded the lowest mean score by the national experts, thus indicating that South Africa's education system is not effectively developing individuals with the skills and confidence required to consider entrepreneurship as a valid career choice (Turton & Herrington, 2012, p. 6).

Against the brief literature reviewed, in order to shed more light on the career choices of disadvantaged youth's career choice behaviour, a study was conducted among a convenience sample of youth across several provinces in South Africa.

Research Method

Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used. A questionnaire was used to obtain a better understanding of some basic aspects of the research topic before embarking on the qualitative study. The main reason why a qualitative approach was chosen is because this study was both exploratory and descriptive, and especially since this approach is regarded as being effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours and social contexts of particular populations (Northeastern University, 2014).

The participants in the survey and the focus group discussions comprised a convenience sample of 60 students from previously disadvantaged² communities around the country. Their level of education varied from matriculation, to a post graduate degree. Of the 60 students, 46 responded to the survey, while only 44 participated in the focus group discussions.

One-on-one informal interviews were also conducted with certain young entrepreneurs either in person or via telephone. Nine entrepreneurs who were contacted to participate were aged between 24 and 43 years, and had varying degrees of entrepreneurial experience and all held a post graduate qualification; three were 'serial' entrepreneurs, while the other six had each operated one successful business. Three focus group discussions were held with individuals who ran entrepreneurial support organisations; one with the director of an organisation that supports entrepreneurial endeavours, the second with a serial entrepreneur who now runs a successful incubator company, and the third with the managing director of an international, entrepreneurially focussed organisation.

² Prior to 1994, the South African population was segregated under apartheid, and communities were classified as Black (which includes African, Indian and Coloured) and White. The White minority apartheid government had devoted very little resources to developing the Black communities, thus they were highly disadvantaged.

FINDINGS

Survey response

It emerged from the survey that the majority of the respondents (96%) stated that, once they had finished studying, they would most probably want to work in a corporate environment. However, this figure dropped slightly to 85% when these respondents were also requested to indicate whether they would prefer working in a corporate environment or starting their own business. This reveals an entrepreneurial disposition, despite the factors that would prevent them from pursuing this particular career option. Interestingly, when the students were asked if they could be an entrepreneur and own their own businesses, an overwhelming majority (96%) indicated that they would choose this career option. This, in turn, highlights that, given the right tools and guidance and by creating a conducive environment, entrepreneurship could be the preferred career path choice. Table 1 summarises the responses to the various questions.

Table 1: Survey Responses

	Question	Response	No. of responses	Percentage
1	Age group	20 to 23 years	43	93%
		24 to 27 years	3	7%
2	Province in which the respondents resided	Gauteng	7	15,2%
		KwaZulu-Natal	8	17,4%
		Western Cape	5	10,1%
		Northern Cape	0	0
		Eastern Cape	15	32,6%
		Free State	3	6,5%
		Mpumalanga	3	6,5%
		Limpopo	5	10,1%
		North West	0	0
3	Ethnic Group	Black	31	67%
		White	7	15%
		Coloured	6	13%
		Indian	2	4%
		Asian	0	
		Other		

4	If you are studying, are you thinking of a job in a corporate environment or would you want to start your own business after graduation?	Corporate	44	96%
		Own business	2	4%
5	If you are currently employed, are you working in a corporate environment or do you have your own business?	Corporate	3	7%
		Own business	0	0
		N/A	43	93%
6	Whether you are studying or working, would you prefer to work in a corporate environment or have your own business?	Corporate	39	85%
		Own business	7	15%
7	What has made you to choose the above stated career path?	Financial stability	17	37%
		Opportunities	18	39%
		Support	2	4%
		Educational background	7	15%
		Cultural upbringing	2	4%
8	What is your highest level of education?	Matriculation exemption	17	37%
		Certificate	0	0
		Diploma	4	9%
		Degree	23	50%
		Post graduate degree	2	4%

9	What are you studying towards?	Diploma	6	13%
		Degree	36	78%
		Post graduate degree	4	9%
		Honours degree	0	0%
		Masters' degree	0	0%
10	If you could be an entrepreneur and run your own business, would you do so?	Yes	44	96%
		No	2	4%
11	If yes, what would help you to follow an entrepreneurial path? (tick all applicable)	Proper education/Training in entrepreneurial skills	34	74%
		Financial support and stability	20	43%
		Family support	9	20%
		Guaranteed wealth	4	9%
		Mentorship	18	39%
12	What would stop you from following an entrepreneurial path? (tick all applicable)	Lack of proper education/Training in entrepreneurial skills	23	50%
		Lack of financial support and stability	29	63%
		Lack of family support	2	4%
		Lack of personal wealth	10	22%
		Lack of mentorship	12	26%
13	Does your background/upbringing and culture determine what career path you should follow – whether it be corporate or entrepreneurial?	Yes	17	37%
		No	29	63%

14	Would your background/upbringing, culture and family encourage you to follow a corporate career path or an entrepreneurial career path?	Corporate	40	87%
		Entrepreneurial	6	13%

It is evident from table 1 that the majority (39%) of the respondents indicated 'opportunities' as the main reason for choosing a corporate career path, with financial stability following close behind at 37%, while 15% of the respondents cited educational background. The aforementioned implies that in the absence of proper education and training on entrepreneurship, learners would be influenced by other factors to choose to follow a corporate career path. Although cultural upbringing (socioeconomic conditions) did not appear to play a major role in influencing the decisions of the respondents to follow a corporate career path, later in the survey an overwhelming majority (87%) of respondents indicated that their cultural upbringing, family and background (socioeconomic conditions) would encourage and influence them in deciding to pursue a career in the corporate world. It is clear from table 1 that, 74% of respondents cited proper entrepreneurial training and education as the factor that would play the most important role in their decision to follow a specific career path, with 42% citing financial support and stability, followed closely by proper mentorship (39%).

Similarly, when asked about the factors that would stop them from following the entrepreneurial path, 63% cited the lack of financial support, 50% cited the lack of proper education especially and entrepreneurial training, while a lack of mentorship ranked third at 26%. This highlights that the aforementioned factors are most important in the career decisions made by the youth.

Guaranteed wealth and a lack of personal wealth scored low, although from the focus group sessions with the same group of respondents, the pursuit of wealth and financial stability were cited as a significant motivating factor in encouraging them to aspire to follow a corporate career path. This, in turn, may lead us to assume that there is a tendency to look to wealth as a determining factor but, when compared to other factors, it does not seem to play much of a role in career path decisions.

Focus group discussions

The same group of respondents who had completed the survey were invited to participate in informal discussions on their career path aspirations. It emerged that following a corporate career path was a more secure option, compared to following an entrepreneurial path. However, the respondents also indicated that, if they were given the necessary tools and resources, they would definitely consider an entrepreneurial path, but they believed that it was an easier option to work in a corporate environment, and acquire the skills they may require in an entrepreneurial environment. Skills and entrepreneurial training were high on the list of the youth, and they

indicated that they needed to receive the right training in order to follow an entrepreneurial path. In addition to the knowledge they believed they would acquire in the corporate world, it was the confidence that they would gain that would empower them to venture into an enterprise. It also became evident that socio-economic conditions also play a determining role in influencing the decisions of the youth to choose a specific career path. These include upbringing, culture and family life, all of which have an impact on their decision making process.

Interviews with entrepreneurs

The researchers delved deeper into the findings from the survey and focus group interviews by obtaining data from entrepreneurs and some experts in the entrepreneurial field. The majority of these 'one-on-one' interviews were conducted with younger entrepreneurs (aged between 24 and 43), who were from different social and cultural backgrounds. Seven of the nine entrepreneurs came from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, and all started their working lives in the corporate world and, once they had gained sufficient experience and the opportunity had presented itself, they embarked on an entrepreneurial journey. One of the entrepreneurs had been forced by circumstances to follow an entrepreneurial route at a young age, but wanted to find a job in the corporate world as this is where he had always aspired to be.

It was interesting to note that of the two of the three entrepreneurs who had followed an entrepreneurial path immediately after school, had come from entrepreneurial families and received the necessary support and backing of their families from the day they started their business.

It was possible to deduce from the conversations with both the youth and the entrepreneurs that the pursuit of financial stability and security is one of the main factor that may persuade a young learner not to follow an entrepreneurial path. There appears to be a general belief that financial stability and some form of security are not always attainable immediately one starts working.

It also emerged that another reason why they had initially worked in corporate environment was the fact that they had never been taught the skills at school or university that would have enabled them to venture out on their own in the business world. They had all agreed that they received either good or adequate schooling but one of the nine respondents had never been exposed to either *business skills* or to some form of *entrepreneurial training*. They indicated that , potentially, some sort of entrepreneurial training may have given them the courage to follow their dreams from the outset of their working lives. The entrepreneurs also highlighted the lack of proper role models, in their communities and also of people who could guide youngsters along the way as being possible reasons why the youth were prevented from contemplating an entrepreneurial path..

It was deduced from the responses cited above, that the family unit and the prevailing socio-economic conditions contributed to this decision making process, which in turn highlights the fact that young people are impressionable and they may be guided by such conditions and influenced to follow a certain career path, with the majority gravitating towards the "safe", corporate path.

To summarize, the findings are interesting in that the lack of access to start-up capital or seed funding, as well as the bureaucratic and government restrictions were not cited as the important factors impacting the youths' decision to become entrepreneurs. The following were the factors which were dominant influencers.

- The social environment in which the students found themselves 'sent the message' that that the formal, corporate world is where the money is to be made. In addition, these young adults are expected to support their families because they have been afforded a decent education and have earned a qualification. Linked to the aforementioned, is the notion that the corporate world is significantly less risky compared to the entrepreneurial world. As a result the majority of the participants indicated that the financial security and stability of employment in a corporate environment is far more appealing than the entrepreneurial world.
- The participants had limited or no exposure to business/entrepreneurial skills and, in fact, had not been taught these skills. This is also the reason why they preferred to pursue a career in a corporate environment initially, so as to enable them to acquire the necessary skills in a "less risky" environment before embarking on their own ventures.
- Together with the lack of entrepreneurial training is the lack of mentorship and role models to guide them in making the optimum career path decisions. They participants indicated that, if they had someone to support and mentor them, then this would give them the courage to turn an idea or dream into reality by starting their own businesses.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher concurs with the recommendations in the Endeavour report that the widespread "consumer" mentality, especially in the Black community, needs to give way to a "productive" mentality (Endeavor South Africa, 2010). As a nation South Africa needs to cultivate a culture of entrepreneurship in schools, universities, communities and homes. The majority of people who will start businesses in the future are currently in the educational system. Integrating entrepreneurial learnership programmes into the educational system in high schools may be critical in developing the skills which are necessary to start and run successful businesses (Kroon et al., 2003). According to the entrepreneurship guru, JT Foxx, as cited by Garrun (2013:9), "[e]ntrepreneurial skills need to be taught from an early age. It has to start in the homes with parents preparing children for the world out there, and with schools that run programmes aimed at imparting the skills required to be entrepreneurial."

There is need to help to entrench an entrepreneurial culture by celebrating entrepreneurial role models and using them to promote entrepreneurship as an aspirational career choice. The researches concur with Shumba and Naong (2012) who stated that, "[i]n order for students to make the right career choice, the family (parents) should be encouraged not to force their children into careers. With parental guidance and support, children are able to make the right career choice."

It is also imperative that proper mentorship programmes are set up so that a larger percentage of young adults than is currently the case may have the opportunity to gain access to people who are able to guide them and help them to turn a dream into a prosperous business. Contrary to the beliefs

of the youth there is need to consider the view of the entrepreneurship guru, JT Foxx, as cited by Garrun (2013:9) who stated that “It’s obvious that there is no future security in employment at corporate organisations and that new entrants into the world of work are going to have to create their own livelihoods. Young people must be taught to sell themselves, to have confidence and to make short-term sacrifices for long-term benefits. Instant gratification is not a goal to strive for.” Thus, according to Foxx, coaching and mentoring are vital.

Youth learnership programmes are one of the most suitable ways in which to enhance the development of the youth through practical experience and the acquisition of work-specific skills. Accordingly, youth entrepreneurial learnership programmes should be implemented by local schools and businesses, on a voluntary basis and as soon as possible (Kroon et al., 2003)

Since the study findings reveal that a career path in the corporate world is significantly more enticing and aspirational for the youth from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, there is need to remove the ‘obstacles’ cited as well as clear the misperceptions if we intend to steer more young people on an entrepreneurial career path, so that they can become job creators rather than job seekers, and so contribute to poverty and unemployment alleviation in South Africa. Some strategies include inter-alia, the following: proper entrepreneurial training and education from a fairly young age; mentorship and guidance for the youth to help them to start their own businesses; a change in the mind set and perceptions of certain cultures so that entrepreneurship is seen in a positive light; and put the correct structures in place to ensure that venturing out on your own will be a less financially risky path than it is at the moment.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher feels that there should be more in-depth research conducted into the research problem and that a larger sample as compared to the sample in this study should be used. The researcher would suggest that learning institutions and even government address the research problem and delve into the options which may be made available to further encourage and promote entrepreneurship as a career path choice.

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