

Preparation of Students for the Corporate World

**By Sasabona Samuel Manganye former Vaal University of Technology
SRC President 2004 and 2006**

April 2008

Introduction

In the Republic of South Africa most of us young people have grown up believing that education is a key to a better employment which will lead to a better life. This perception has motivated some of us in working hard to complete our matric with good results so that we can obtain study bursaries to complete our tertiary education.

This perception becomes a reality to some young people who completed their tertiary education qualifications which enabled them to get good jobs which provide them with a better life and reduces the levels of poverty in their families. To some it becomes a dream that is not easy to realise. There are a number of factors which contribute to this dream unrealised in the preparatory stage of these students for the corporate world. These factors are both informed by the challenges generally facing the country and also the way in which these students get to be prepared for the corporate world by the institutions of higher learning.

Stats from Statistics SA suggest that although the rate of unemployed graduates is less in the overall unemployment in the country, the actual unemployment rate of graduates has increased by 50 percent between 1995 and 2005 which is the rapid growing unemployment rate in South Africa. The unemployment rate for graduate increases whereas the country is in-need of what is defined as scarce-skills by the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA).

Surely, we need to acknowledge that somewhere something is not going according to plan especially during the period where the country has a hunger for skills acquisition whereas institutions of higher learning are producing many graduates which are destined to join the pool of unemployment. In my experience as a student leader who participated in the governance of higher education institutions structures in the institutional level (Vaal University of Technology). I have identified a number of aspects that are contributing to this trend of unemployment as follows:

1. Entry Level

Most of the institutions of higher learning still enrol many learners in areas where the majority of unemployed graduates graduated from. An agonizing thing is that some of these students who are in the stream of unemployment are learners who have completed subjects like Mathematics, Science and Accounting with good symbols and points required for them to enrol in areas like

Engineering, Science and Technology as the dominating fields of scarce skills. Some of the reasons informing this mismatched of careers are as follows:

Lack of proper career guidance

Lack of adequate career guidance at secondary school level that leaves learners with no knowledge of the right career choices.

Late application

Late application by learners which forces them to enrol into any field of study they can get (any available course) without being aware of the repercussions of their chosen career choice.

Less Investment on Resources for Scarce-Skills Areas

As the government continues to put more funding into education, institutions of higher learning still invest less on infrastructure development on areas of scarce skills especially of Engineering, Science and Technology. These areas accommodate fewer students due to lack of infrastructure to accommodate more students. The perturbing factor is that most of the government funding is invested on paying exorbitant salaries for top managers of the institutions of higher learning.

Poor Quality of Education

The education in our country is of poor quality from primary, secondary and tertiary educational level. For example, only few matriculants complete their grade 12 with matric exemption. As a result most of them are subjected to choose studies which are not of their choice but dictated by their poor matric results.

2. Curriculum

The CTP Task Team report on Universities of Technology (Pretoria 2001, revised 2003) states that the Universities of Technology in particular are expected to produce graduates to the labour market and therefore should be closely aligned to the business sector to ensure curricula relevance. The curriculum in our education system is designed in the manner in which it prepares students to be more job seekers than job creators. We are taught of how best we can please employers rather than how best we can create jobs.

Although the universities of technology are expected to produce graduates that are ready made for the labour market, the reality is different in the institutions. Most of the Universities of Technology has lecturers that do not have industrial experience and as a result lecturers fail to provide practical experience to enable graduates to meet the challenges of the corporate world. The University of Cape Town, Development research Unit on its research for a labour market paradox

(2007) also acknowledges that most of the graduates are not of enough high quality.

Industries prefer to employ graduates that have completed the learnership program. In my view this poses a serious challenge to the credibility of the qualifications produced by institutions of higher learning in South African because every student in possession of an academic qualification is expected to be ready to be consumed by the labour market without spending an additional 12 months or more to be ready for the corporate world.

I have always had a view that if graduates are subjected to a learnership program before they can be ready for the labour market, why can't the learnership program be part of the curricula of higher education?

3. Drop out

As institutions of higher learning prepare learners for the corporate world, some of them do not manage to reach the destination of completing their studies. This is informed by a number of challenges and the most common ones are financial and academic exclusion:

Financial Exclusions

The SA history has contributed negatively in many families and as a result many students fail to further their studies because of financial exclusions despite the government and private sectors efforts of funding for education for students from historically disempowered families.

Academic Exclusion

Being a learner that has experienced a poor quality education from primary to secondary level, it becomes challenging for one to meet the challenges of tertiary education and as a result it leads to exclusion base on the continuation of studies policy as championed by many tertiary institutions.

In most of the tertiary institutions, there are not well designed supporting structures to support learners from entry level to ensure that they are equal to the challenges posed by tertiary education.

4. Participation Activities

Another major challenge which is facing many students is a lack of participation in leadership activities. Participation in leadership activities plays a vital role in contributing to the performance of students in the corporate world.

The labour market needs graduates that can think beyond what they were taught in the lecture room and participation in leadership activities has been proven as

one of the factors enabling students to think independently and beyond the lecture room.

Universities of Technology for Co-operative Education

In the light of the above mentioned factors, it is also imperative to understand that the process of learners' enrolment must be complementary to the output process. This means that the input of learners must also be influenced by the labour market so that our education does not contribute to the pool of unemployment.

It will take a good working relation between the Tertiary Institutions, Trade Unions, Government and Private Sectors in finding an everlasting solution to all challenges facing our country. Until such time that we develop our Universities of Technology to reflect a true model of co-operative education, we will always face these challenges. The private sectors and government departments must partner with Universities of Technology for the following reasons:

- To ensure that the curriculum meets societal needs. This will avoid studying subject content that are irrelevant in developing our society and also in developing our graduates to have a capacity to create employment and to be ready made for labour market;
- To ensure that tertiary institutions enrol learners who on completion of their studies will be able to be consumed by the labour market as they would have acquired relevant skills as required in the society. Academics and researchers have always predicted the need for certain skills in the market and it therefore makes it easy to plan ahead for the skills needed;

This is the model used by number of developed countries and I had an experience with some of the institutions in Germany where most of their learners are guaranteed employment as they study under support from the private sectors. Another advantage of adopting a co-operative education model is to ensure that any graduate produced by higher education in South Africa is ready to be consumed by labour market without being subjected to further learnership or internship programs as they will already have gained some work integrated learning experience as part of the curriculum.

Conclusion

The above mentioned factors are not all but some of those that contribute negatively in the preparation of learners to corporate world. As I conclude, I need to make some recommendations with regard to the following:

- Proper career guidance in secondary educational level which will enable learners to make correct career choices;
- Tertiary institutions should develop effective structures that will ensure that:
 - Learners enrol for the right field of study and if not qualifying rather than enrolling in any field of study, recommendations must be made for those learners to improve their symbols either through intro programmes or re-registering those outstanding matric subjects;
 - Learners get supporting structures to assist them in meeting challenges of tertiary education to avoid academic exclusions;
 - Contribute to the funding of students education to avoid more financial exclusions. The best solution to this is for all students activist to continue championing the dream of free education as it remains a solution which is realistic;
 - Make extra mural activities compulsory to all students and this will empower them in performing well in the corporate world;
- Tertiary institutions must involve more industrial experts in developing their curriculum without the domination of academics with more qualifications but not having industrial experience;
- Ensures that tertiary institutions employ well qualified lecturers with industrial experience and this will also need institutions to provide more incentives to attract lecturers with industrial experience;
- Ensures more investment on areas of scarce skills than investing more to the pool of unemployed graduates;

Lastly, the declarations of the Presidential Jobs Summit which shows a collective commitment by the Government, labour and business in a number of areas to address the high levels of unemployment needs to be revisited to ensure a total implementation as they were very much realistic on programs to assist in reducing unemployment rate in our country.

A commitment to transforming our higher education sector from all of us will ensure the proper preparation of learners to the corporative world which will ensure economic growth, less unemployment and also to halve poverty especially in our historically disempowered communities.