

# Chapter 8

## Employability Skills as a Foundation for Success: An Exploration of Youth Experiences in Skills Acquisition Programs

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Employability skills are increasingly recognized as essential for empowering young people particularly in developing countries where youth unemployment poses a significant challenge. This study explored the experiences of youth engaged in community-based skills acquisition programs, specifically focusing on their development of employability skills, perceived relevance, and the factors influencing their successful acquisition. 15 youths who finished their program participated in focus groups and interviews. To ascertain important issues pertaining to community-based skills acquisition as it relates to employability skills, a thematic analysis was performed. The analysis identified three central themes, 12 sub-themes and two sub-subthemes based on the research questions. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the program as it related to the development of employability skills, offering insights for vocational skill training, training institutions, instructors and master craftsmen, educational institutions, and youths students seeking to acquire practical skills.*

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## BACKGROUND

Employability skills, play a crucial role in an individual's success in the workplace, extending beyond mere technical expertise. These skills encompass communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving, allowing individuals to thrive in various work settings. Unlike technical skills, which are often specific to particular jobs, employability skills are versatile and applicable across multiple roles and industries, making them vital for job preparedness and sustained career advancement. Significantly, employers increasingly value these skills, recognizing their significance in meeting the challenges of the modern job market (Andrews & Higson, 2008), and prioritize soft skills over technical competencies when evaluating the employability of graduates (Succi & Canovi, 2020). As globalisation and technology advancements continue to transform the workplace, there is a greater emphasis on abilities that enable people to navigate complicated and changing situations while contributing creatively to organisational goals. As a result, employability skills have become critical not just for obtaining employment, but also for building economic independence and resilience in the workforce (Cranmer, 2006; Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

In many developing nations, youth unemployment continues to be a significant issue. Young individuals are particularly vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment, primarily due to inadequate access to essential education and training for acquiring vital skills (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2019). This crisis is especially pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa and certain regions of Asia, where rapid population growth coincides with a scarcity of job opportunities and a lack of educational infrastructure to facilitate skills development (Hino & Ranis, 2013). The resulting skills gap creates a major obstacle to sustainable employment, as many young people do not possess the necessary competencies to fulfill the requirements of contemporary workplaces. To address this challenge, community-based skills acquisition initiatives have been developed, aiming to align the skills of young individuals with the expectations of employers. These initiatives combine vocational training with the development of employability skills, equipping participants with both technical and interpersonal skills crucial for career success (Elder & Koné, 2014).

The emphasis on employability skills within community-based initiatives aligns with a wider movement in global workforce development, which underscores the necessity of preparing young individuals with the competencies required to navigate a swiftly evolving job market. According to Bakhshi, Downing, Osborne, and Schneider (2017), abilities such as advanced problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and innovative thinking are anticipated to gain even greater significance as automation and artificial intelligence reshape conventional workforce structures. Programs aimed at skill development within communities, often tailored to local

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