

An analysis of policy reliance on entrepreneurship

Sizwe Mkwanazi

Department of Business Management, School of Management
College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Keywords

Policy, Entrepreneurship, Structure, Agency and Responsibilisation

Abstract

Entrepreneurship has become a grand term in government policy as a method to curb unemployment and joblessness amongst youth. Developing countries battling slow economic growth, graduate unemployment and lack of jobs have since devised entrepreneurship policies with hopes to address these challenges. However, these efforts have fallen short in recognising the issues of structure and agency in deciding such policy. This paper asks the question: What are the policy inferences on youth entrepreneurship based on its policy contents and statements? And the objective of this study is to analyse the key policy views on entrepreneurship. The literature review on structure and agency is explored in this paper where the political and individual agency are engaged. The methodological approach is a qualitative documentary analysis of two policies namely the National Youth Policy and National Development Plan. A mini-case study of a South African University is also presented in the paper. The findings show that students remain with little agency to none when it comes to the promotion of entrepreneurship on campuses. This is because the structure of policy enactment takes a top-down approach that suppresses other views that are not directly promoting entrepreneurship to deal with unemployment and joblessness amongst youth, in particular students and graduates. The key discussions of the paper show that the South African university is used by the state to drive policy promotions of entrepreneurship. The discussion exposes both structural and agency issues condoning the use of entrepreneurship to responsabilise youths through policy that they should create jobs via entrepreneurship. Whilst this view is common and popular, this paper challenges researchers and scholarship on entrepreneurship to further investigate the potential role of policy in enabling entrepreneurship amongst students other than to simply coerce them to the practice. The original contribution of this study is that it provides a different approach to entrepreneurship research showing the downside of entrepreneurship policy as opposed to research that generally promotes it.

Introduction

This paper is a documentary analysis of South Africa's NDP 2030 and the two NYPs spanning 2015–2030. The choice of words, messaging and policy commitments promoting entrepreneurship are discussed. In addition, the paper considers the chronology of the policies and the specific mentions of youth and students in both policy documents. The analysis deals holistically with the context of entrepreneurship in South Africa, basing this on the main policy positions, the way that youth are being drawn into entrepreneurship, and the broader challenges that face entrepreneurs. The study investigates the question: What are the policy inferences on youth entrepreneurship based on its policy contents and statements? The study's main objective is to analyse and explicate policy position(s) on youth entrepreneurship.

The paper comprises four main sections. The first section introduces the two policies analysed: the NDP 2030 and NYPs 2015–2030. This section deals with the chronology of these policies and the way they are implemented. The second section focuses on the policy messages and the way the state deals with youth livelihoods, their daily struggles, and lack of employment. In this section, I also illustrate ways that the government is using to pull and push youth into entrepreneurship. The third section covers the promotions of entrepreneurship in policy. The paper uses policy extracts to discuss the policy promotions of entrepreneurship directed at young adults. The final section situates this discussion within the sector of

higher education by focusing on the role of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in entrepreneurship, as defined in the policy documents.

Since it was introduced in 2012, the NDP 2030 has served as a panacea for all policymaking in South Africa. Various ministers under President Zuma's administration referred to the NDP 2030 in departmental strategic plans and programmes. This policy approach and implementation of the NDP 2030 continued since 2018, when President Cyril Ramaphosa took over the office of president. Relevant to this study is the DHET, which has shown commitment to the view expressed in Chapter 9 of the NDP that "universities must define their niches to enhance the ability to contribute to national objectives" (National Planning Commission, 2011 p. 318). A small segment of South African universities has since focused on entrepreneurship as their niche to address the national objective of promoting economic opportunity among youth (National Planning Commission, 2012a, p.14) and/or to comply with the demands of the NDP 2030. This emanates from policy promotions of entrepreneurship and pressures on universities to report their contributions towards the national policy objectives. The NDP 2030 is cascaded through different levels of governance at universities to achieve its influence on their approach to entrepreneurship.

This study is a review the NYP, following Apple's (2017) guidance about researching systems that create inequalities in society. This is not to assert that the NYP is responsible for inequities, but it is a literature review attempt to draw out a policy scenario applicable in the South African context. The NYP's objective is the creation of employment and the promotion of entrepreneurship among young people. It prescribes instruments such as the Youth Employment Accord that seek to drive employment opportunities in the private sector. Like the NDP, the NYP assumes that big businesses are well placed to create employment. The NYP is a youth-specific policy that focuses on increasing employment chances for young people is needed to prevent the profound personal and social effects of unemployment. Young people who cannot earn their own living find it difficult to move out of their parents' homes and be self-sustainable. They are often marginalised by their communities, unable to find a way to engage meaningfully with society. Young people generally do not qualify for the Unemployment Insurance Fund because it only covers those who have previously held a job (The Presidency - NYP, 2014, p. 3).

While the NYP is youth specific, it fails to define youth as a group and some of its unique profiles. Students have diverse and unique profiles, and the NYP often misses the opportunity to cater for them when a blanket reference is made to young people. As a result, the youth institutions developed under this policy have failed to provide effective help to student populations standing at the crossroads of employment and entrepreneurship. The NYP has a long process of applying for funding at NYDA, in this way defying the objective to strengthen the capacity of key youth development institutions and ensure integration and coordination in the delivery of youth services (The Presidency - NYP, 2015, p. 5).

Besides the intensified encouragement of students to think about entrepreneurship owing to the lack of jobs, funding and finance for young entrepreneurs is a cause for tension between students' lived experiences and policy claims. The policy claims that there are: programmes to support young entrepreneurs [which] should focus on enterprise education and training; business development, mentoring and incubation; funding and finance, and access to markets and affordable, well-located premises to conduct business (NYP, 2015, p. 19). Policy is not adequate in capturing the nature of this activity among university-educated youth who turn to entrepreneurship when struggling to find jobs.

Policy: National Development Plan - Vision 2030

The NDP sets out the broader policy context in South Africa. It sets out focus areas such as poverty alleviation, addressing inequality, economic growth, and job creation. This is summed up as follows:

The plan's central goals are expanding employment and entrepreneurial opportunities on the back of a growing, more inclusive economy. This will require deepening the productive base, whether in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, or services. By 2030, South Africa should have a more diversified economy, with a higher global share of dynamic products, and greater depth and breadth of domestic linkages (National Planning Commission, 2011, p. 124).

The NDP shifts the responsibility of creating jobs to both the private sector and individuals. This is done without adequate availability of resources, infrastructure, or a favourable business climate. More specifically, in the case of students, those considering entrepreneurship are not confident that they would obtain funding and other resources to pursue such activity, and, for those interested in finding a job, their chances are slim because of the high unemployment. For this reason, the NDP fails to respond to the issues of students at university as far as transitioning to independence is concerned, even though, like the NYP, it places an emphasis on entrepreneurship in educational environments.

Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the theory of structure and agency. This theory assists this paper to engage with the inclination to believe that human beings can be the source of what happens in society when they exercise their capacities (Elder-Vass, 2010, pg 87). The structure is defined here as the university that interprets the entrepreneurship policy through its hierarchy, adopts a programme of action and rolls out such programmes to students. As such the university structure determines the agential class position (student role), precarity (self-employment or entrepreneurialism) and the outcome of self-organisation (Hardy, 2017). This literature review, therefore, argues that entrepreneurship is precarious, and that policy affects the entrepreneurial agency of students within the university structure. In other words students experience structural barriers, hindrances and limitations presented by being university students, and those presented by the policy enactment on campus (Allais, 2012).

Elder-Vass, (2010, p.88) defines agency from two views and these are political and individual agency. According to Elder-Vass political agency is exercised by things other than individual human beings e.g. groups (as systems) and defines individual agency as specific powers that individuals have and that they can exercise on their own. The political agency is practised or exercised by things e.g. a political system and individual agency constitute subjectivity; whilst structure is considered more objective e.g. government, the university (Archer, 2003 pg.1). These views on agency expose the theoretical challenge around the place of political agency within structure vis-à-vis the place of individual agency.

Literature on entrepreneurship, structure and agency remains sparse in that it is concentrated on some aspects of the debate. For example, Melin and Gaddefors, (2023) argue that nonhuman elements such as (green) environment need greater recognition as players in the context of entrepreneurship. This argument is legitimate to the cause of climate crisis and humanity; but does not address policy issues relating to a policy context where youth entrepreneurship is still an issue. Hardy, (2017) shows the urgency that is required in entrepreneurship literature to deal with how structure is used to promote entrepreneurship as well as the subsequent use of entrepreneurship to responsabilise youth. This shows that a greater scope to focus on human elements in entrepreneurship remains with regards structure and agency.

The overarching framework of this study is based on structure and agency. In summary, this literature shows briefly the dichotomous relationship between structure and agency. It also provides the differing views in terms of political and individual agency. When dealing with policy enactments youth is confronted with limitations of structure and some chances of exercising agency thus the necessity for literature to engage via this framework.

Research Methodology: Data Collection and Research Design

The paper employs a qualitative methodological research approach that aligns with educational research concerned with the role of policy in education. The approach emanates from a well-established purpose of educational research, shared by Atkins and Wallace (2012), who stated that “we carry out research into education in order to help us – and others – to a better understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning” (p.10). In pursuit of this purpose, this research builds on qualitative research studies including those of Bartlett and Vavrus (2014), Honeyman (2016), and DeJaeghere (2017). Bartlett and Vavrus argued that qualitative research is significant in indicating how national policies and external influence is in practice. Honeyman demonstrated in her monograph *The orderly entrepreneur: Youth, education, and governance in Rwanda* that the conversations and authentic engagements that

qualitative research enables allow researchers to explore new areas of research. The methodological approach here deals with a new area of research that is “entrepreneurship in education research”, explored better through qualitative tools of research than quantitative measures. De Jaeghere’s work dealt with policy and educational research in Tanzania, East Africa, and provides a useful qualitative framework for studying the role of policy in higher education. This framework, drawn from Bartlett and Vavrus, provides ways to compare findings horizontally across participants, then vertically, focusing on the hierarchy of the data and transversally, focusing on time and chronology of events. These all inform the qualitative methodological approach of this study.

A documentary analysis was performed by evaluating and codifying content relating to the discourse about entrepreneurship in South Africa. The NDP: Vision 2030 and NYP are source documents for analysis. Excerpts were drawn from these documents and analysed on NVivo alongside interview data. This process provided a clear picture about policy promotions of entrepreneurship and enabled comparison with the conceptualizations of entrepreneurship held by student participants.

These policies span over time and have targets attached to timeframes. The National Youth Policies considered in this study cover the years 2015–2020 and 2021–2025. The NDP covers 2010–2030. The horizontal analysis focuses on the promotions of entrepreneurship over these periods and the messaging of the policymakers about entrepreneurship against students and their experiences on campus.

Results and Findings

This section examines the rich descriptions in the NDP of (1) promotions of entrepreneurship, (2) economic transformation, (3) youth livelihoods, and (4) the role of higher education and training in national development. This analysis is situated in the research study’s interest to provide a holistic account of policy-related challenges confronting the youth, and the structure of economic opportunities in South Africa. The descriptions expose the policy assumptions of the youth’s taking up the identified economic opportunities. They also show how the higher education sector is treated as an arena to experiment with these policy ideas, with the youth in higher education as the test subjects. The last two subsections focus specifically on the roles that the National Planning Commission (NPC) proposed be adopted by universities and the NDP’s view of higher education in the national development agenda. The subsections also portray the complex and reiterative flow of ideas in the NDP 2030.

Chapter 9 of the NDP 2030 sets out the role of higher education in the national development agenda. It states that “universities are key to developing a nation” (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 318) and that they play three main functions. These are (1) to educate and train citizens with high-level skills for the employment needs of public and private sectors, (2) to produce knowledge, and (3) to provide social mobility, given South Africa’s apartheid history. These descriptions of the roles of universities emphasizes the need for higher education to be seen as providing for the needs of citizens. Those who come out of the universities must be job ready. This has been echoed in public debates on education, jobs, and the economy. Vally and Motala (2014) criticized the acceptance of this view by policymakers, practitioners, and by some graduates that universities must produce job-ready graduates while in the same breath they expect universities also to deliver fit-for-entrepreneurship graduates based on the view that graduates must create businesses if they do not find employment. However, this view is based on a narrow assumption that universities are simply meant to train people for jobs.

The NDP places the responsibility on universities for both producing knowledge and verifying whether it equips citizens for the changes occurring in society and in the economy. The NPC suggested that, for these responsibilities to be executed, universities must cultivate a culture of research and development. Furthermore, the NDP states that, for the research culture to be cultivated, the universities must increase the research output and throughput rate for master’s and PhD students and create a research environment that is welcoming to all (NPC, 2012, pp. 319–320). This placement of responsibility on universities by the NPC through the NDP 2030 exemplifies the way powerful policymakers can exercise their power over university management or decision makers.

The nature of the higher education propositions made in the NDP focus on historical issues of and futuristic ideas for national development. The NDP is minimalistic in addressing the current issues in higher education. The historical focus of the NDP is described as the need to redress the inequality, social injustices, and the apartheid legacy of anti-democracy. The NDP then states that universities provide opportunities to remedy the issues it describes. Furthermore, the NDP states that universities are important to opening new opportunities to people (NDP, p. 318). Regarding the future-focused ideas, the NDP suggests an increase in university enrolments and a spread between vocational, professional, and generic qualifications. In addition, the NDP states that universities need to increase the output of professionals and improve the educational outcomes at university. This shows the multiplicity of ideas in policy planning and the dominant ideas about areas in which universities are expected to contribute.

These descriptions and statements of the historical and futuristic foci in the NDP draw on 18 proposals (NDP, pp. 319–320) made by the NPC. The proposals can be categorized into four main segments (summarised in Table 4). These segments or focus areas are (1) staff development, (2) student enrolments, (3) an increase in graduates, (4) a conducive university environment, and (5) an inclusive university culture and partnerships. The proposals in the first segment seek to increase the number of PhD-qualified academic staff members and improve the quality of teaching and learning. This leads to the second segment of proposals, pertaining to student enrolments. In addition to staff improvements, the NDP states that student enrolments should increase by at least 70% by 2030, from a starting figure of 950,000 in 2010 (NDP, p. 319). The third segment is about increasing the number of graduates the low number of PhD graduates per million people per year. In 2012, this ratio was 28 PhDs per million. The NDP proposes 100 doctoral graduates per million per year by 2030. It also advises that these doctoral graduates should be in science, engineering, technology, and mathematics for South Africa to become a leading innovator. The fourth segment pertains to the creation of a conducive university environment that is “welcoming to all” (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 319). The fifth segment is about seeking partnerships to fill the gaps that the universities are unable to. The NDP states that private providers of higher education are partners that can contribute to enabling quality education and training at all levels. These proposals detail a past of low university enrolments and qualified university staff. They seek to redress by increasing numbers. They also envision the future of higher education, provided that the historical challenges are adequately remedied, including the achievement of an inclusive university environment. Although this is explained in other strategic planning documents, the NDP provides very few insights into the current situation and how it seeks to address the challenges that exist in South African universities.

Table 1: NDP’s proposals for higher education

Staff development	Student enrolments	Graduates	University environment/culture partnerships
• Increase number of academic staff members with PhDs • Focus on improving teaching and learning by accrediting lecturers as teachers. • Develop future academics.	• Increase the number of students enrolled at public universities. • Increase student numbers in STEM. • Offer extra support to underprepared learners. • Increase enrolments for master's and PhD studies.	• Increase the number of PhD graduates to 100 for every 1 million people, per annum. • Increase the number of women PhD graduates. • Focus on increasing the number of STEM PhD graduates "to lead innovation". • Support graduates to teach in the post-school system.	• Create a welcoming-to-all higher education/university environment. • Develop and expand university infrastructure, in particular, student accommodation. • Offer extra support to underprepared learners entering the university system. • Strengthen the culture of research and development. • Provide capacity-building grants (address privilege and disadvantage) • Partner with private higher education institutions to provide quality education. • Expand the coverage of distance higher education

The NDP's proposals and ideas about the role of universities show the planning conundrums that exist. The proposals are held between the historical and the futuristic. The government's failure to address at the most basic level the legacy of apartheid in spatial, educational, and social development continues to be evident, and this complicates the adequate future planning. This tends to burden universities with the responsibility to execute NDP policy proposals in an educational environment that represents only a small section of the South African society and using limited resources. Because of this practice, other ad hoc national plans masked as NDP tend to be cascaded down to universities for implementation. One example is the rolling out of the EDHE programme, which is enacted with the help of the Department of Higher Education and is designed to create student entrepreneurs and increase entrepreneurial endeavour among academics. While the NDP has made proposals regarding the role of universities in national development, these take up the capacity of already-constrained universities and "offload" onto the university the function of focusing on the differences that exist among university staff, students, and interest groups. Although the EDHE it is an initiative not mentioned in the NDP, it was founded based on developing capacity at universities and supporting student-led initiatives. This is a further example of how other programmes and initiatives have latched onto the ideas of the NDP in the interests of entrepreneurship. These ad hoc initiatives are seen as programmes that lead transformative efforts to deliver redress and create opportunity for students and staff members.

This section turns to the descriptions of the NYP's promotions of entrepreneurship in higher education. Although the NYP makes mention of other post-school programmes designed to promote entrepreneurship, I focus here only on those aimed at university students. The study analyses the policy descriptions of the programmes and the statements carried by these documents on how they intend to promote entrepreneurship among youth and students in higher education.

First, the policy sets out that the government, through its agencies, has committed a budget of R2.7 billion (approximately £136 million) to finance youth-owned and -controlled enterprises. This can be described as a financial commitment to fund all programmes intended to increase entrepreneurship among youth for the period of 2015–2020. The budgeted finances are an incentive for governmental agencies to cascade the programmes in such a way that they reach the bottom of the pyramid, where the students are. Whether or not the students access any tangible financing for their entrepreneurship activity is a different question, but for now, it is important to note that the government has allocated funds for campaigns that promote entrepreneurship among the youth.

Second, the policy promotes specific forms of entrepreneurship. These are activities that create youth-owned and -controlled businesses and/or cooperatives (NYP, 2015). The creators of these policies seem to be obsessed with youth ownership of businesses. For example, the NYP (2015) states:

Many young people have started their business or cooperative ... The number of youth-owned and controlled businesses in South Africa is not well known due to poor report. Initiatives are being implemented to support youth-owned companies in terms of finance, business skills and market linkages across the public and private sector. (DPWYD, 2014, p. 19)

Programmes to support young entrepreneurs should focus on enterprise education and training; business development, mentoring and incubations; funding and finance, and access to markets and affordable, well-located premises to conduct business. (The Presidency, 2014, p. 19)

NYP 2015 seeks to create and promote ownership of means of production through entrepreneurship. The policy also promotes “control” as a key aspect in the form of entrepreneurship that youth should pursue. Policy further directs the prioritization of youth cooperatives and the creation of new ones at mass scale as vehicles for entrepreneurship among the youth. These forms of entrepreneurship require youths to aspire to ownership, control, and the cooperative values, which are sections that the policy does not address adequately. This policy ideal is challenged by the majority control of the means of production by White-owned companies. For this reason, policies need to address ownership and control more broadly than to assume that entrepreneurship is an answer to the lack of youth-owned businesses.

The third element of policy is about promoting enterprise education, training, business development, mentoring and incubation as practical mass youth-enterprise-creation activities besides financing. The NYP 2015–2020 promotes enterprise education among youth those in higher education. It considers universities as fertile fields to cultivate entrepreneurs and instil the values described in the previous paragraph. Governmental agencies such as the NYDA and Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) regularly present training workshops to promote entrepreneurship and to provide basic business-management skills for those seeking to start a business. These workshops take place on university campuses during the entrepreneurship week in September or October, and students are drawn in to take part by pitching their ideas to potential mentors or funders. Attendance of both the training workshops and participation in business development are requirements for applying for NYDA business start-up funding. Those students showing interest are then enrolled into business-development programmes such as business-planning training, run by consultants, and market-feasibility assessments for those selected to pitch to mentors or investors. In addition, the students receive mentorship and, if selected, they enter incubation programmes promoting formal entrepreneurship and instilling entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviours that are considered desirable in running a business. The policies use incubation as a space to entrench their idea of creating youth-owned and -controlled business that have access to markets and have well-located premises to conduct business. The governmental agencies collaborate with universities and fund the creation of campus-based incubators. These programmes are powerful and leave student participants with little freedom as they create businesses that conform to the norms of policy, such as those that do not require resources such as land. This is because access to land is still a problem, as it is owned in majority by White monopoly businesses and beyond the means for small student-run businesses to purchase.

Furthermore, the fourth identifiable set of promotions of entrepreneurship in policy are the development and support of existing youth enterprises and cooperatives (DPWYD, 2015, p. 19). Policy acknowledges that there are existing youth-owned and -controlled businesses and that these must be supported. It then uses these businesses as examples to attract more young people into entrepreneurship. Ordinarily, these examples are used specifically to promote entrepreneurship as an opportunity for independence from a job and as an opportunity for self-employment – being one’s own boss. In addition, these promotions are also used to share propositions about future steps that the government needs to take to better support these youth-owned businesses. This includes, as stated in policy, the “support through procurement opportunities and enterprise development, exploring beneficiation as a tool for creating

future industrialists” (NYP, 2015, p. 19). Young people still have not benefited from procurement, as it remains a problematic issue raised in the more recent NYP 2020–2030.

I now turn to the fifth focal point identifiable in the NYP 2015–2020. This point is about the inter-governmental collaborations that promote entrepreneurship among youth. These collaborations mainly involve the Department of Small Business Development, DHET, and governmental agencies such as the NYDA and SEDA. The collaboration efforts are intended to promote entrepreneurship by creating mass parallel campaigns and support packages for young people aspiring to become entrepreneurs. These collaborations further aim to produce governmental reports about the spending of funds allocated to NYDA for youth enterprise development. This policy intention supposes that reports will portray the governance of the entrepreneurship campaigns as transparent and in a positive light. Policy also uses collaboration to draw out “the challenges faced by young entrepreneurs and profile success stories” across departments (NYP, 2015, p. 19). The way policy frames the purpose of collaborations to promote entrepreneurship among entrepreneurs display the government’s self-serving interests. It also shows the government’s interest to ride the wave of entrepreneurship in the interest of creating for itself a positive image among all interest groups and youth formations, and to attempt to display capitalism as a system that provides equal opportunity when it does not (Goldman and Tselepis, 2021).

I now discuss the final point focusing on the policy’s conceptualized view of how youth-owned and -controlled businesses will and/or must trade, generate revenue, and grow. The policy suggests and promotes that young entrepreneurs must relate to opportunities in the different sectors of the South African economy. The policy further suggests that this must be done through preferential procurement by the government. The policy’s conceptual view is that youth-owned businesses stand a chance to trade with the government and can generate good revenues from public procurement contracts. Policy sees this as an opportunity to create a crop of youth-owned businesses that will be developed to comply with tax and labour regulations to benefit from state procurement. The trade, revenue, and growth trajectories of youth-owned and -controlled businesses are conceptualized by policy within the limited frame of public procurement, participating in governmental enterprise-development programmes and achieving growth through market linkages facilitated by governmental agencies. These policy views and suggestions have very little concern for the inequality and poverty affecting the youth who must create these kinds of business.

Discussion

The debate on structure and agency sharpens the contrasts between these concepts as well as the realities under which both exist. Policy ideas that are generated through top-down approaches demonstrate structural powers and the struggle for individual agency. Youth policy in South Africa remains exclusionary and continues to regard entrepreneurship as a substitute for jobs rather than an exercise of individual agency. As such Chapter 3 of the NDP places a greater emphasis on economic transformation and growth than on entrepreneurship:

Policy Extract

“Economic transformation is about broadening opportunities for all South Africans, but particularly for the historically disadvantaged. It is about raising employment, reducing poverty and inequality, and raising standards of living and education. It includes broadening ownership and control of capital accumulation. In addition, it is about broadening access to services such banking services, mortgage loans, telecoms and broadband services, and reasonably priced retail services. It is also about equity in life chances and encompasses an ethos of inclusiveness that is presently missing. This includes equity in ownership of assets, income distribution and access to management, professions, and skilled jobs.” (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 138)

The NYP pays more attention to entrepreneurship and sees it as a feasible response to addressing the economic inclusion of youth. The NDP does not adopt this simplified approach to youth economic participation that the NYP does. This presents a policy disjuncture and misalignment. This also means

that that youth agencies responsible for youth policies e.g. the NYDA and National Youth Council, seek simple routes such as entrepreneurship in dealing with complex policy matters like economic transformation and ownership of the means of production. The following extracts show how the NYP is mostly preoccupied with promotions of entrepreneurship:

Young people feel excluded, largely due to high unemployment rates and their inability to participate economically. (NYP 2020–2030, p. 13)

To deal with the above challenges, a comprehensive youth-specific policy recognises diversity of youth; focuses on improving the education system; increases the skills and economic opportunities including employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people; protects youth who are vulnerable including those with disabilities, not in education, employment and training. (DPWYD, 2019, p. 14)

The following is a proposed policy intervention on problem-solving for employability and entrepreneurship:

Progressively introduce practical subjects such as entrepreneurship and e-commerce, agriculture, computing financial trading and investment, green economy, technical skills, and handwork (artisanship) across the education value chain. (DPWYD, 2019a, p. 17)

The NYP contains further proposed policy interventions for economic reconstruction (following the Covid-19 pandemic):

Introduce innovate ways to support young entrepreneurs in a manner that prioritises removing barriers to and creating spaces to help businesses thrive by making data affordable and targeting sectors that are ripe for innovation. (DPWYD, 2019a, p. 20)

The NYDA and the Department of Small Business Development to implement grant funding and business support for 100 000 young entrepreneurs in the next three years. (DPWYD, 2019a, , p. 20)

Finally, the NYP also proposes policy action for a universal income grant:

Support young people and young discouraged job-seekers' efforts to enter labour market by introducing a Basic Universal Income Grant – an incentive similar to the Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant primarily to support youth to transition into employment or entrepreneurship. (DPWYD 2019a, p. 20)

These terms show the NDP as a document focusing on the macro issues of development at the exclusion of those specific to individuals and demographic groups. This explains in part the difference that exists in the conceptualizations of entrepreneurship among different people in the South African society.

This section describes the use of the alternative terms in the NDP. I begin first with the use of and reference to economic growth. The NDP 2030 presents six priorities for national development. Two priorities anchor economic growth. These priorities are stated as “uniting all South Africans around a common programme to achieve prosperity and equity” and “bringing about faster economic growth, higher investment and greater labour absorption” (NDP Executive Summary, p. 16). The NDP, through these priorities, portrays its versatile position and approach to achieving economic development. It seeks to achieve economic development and address vast problems that exist in the South African society.

The economic growth objective is presented in the NDP 2030 as one that, if pursued and achieved, will change the lives of poor South Africans. This plan supposes that economic growth will increase individual incomes, create new jobs, and eradicate hardship for poor households (NDP 2030, p. 117). The NDP 2030 rarely separates job creation from economic growth, and the NPC has used job creation as slogan to promote the NDP 2030 to the public and through this gain support (National Planning Commission, 2012a, p. 16). Although the NDP 2030 sees economic growth as the most significant solution to the problems faced by low-income families and poor people, the plan under-appreciates the problem of poverty and poor citizens.

Furthermore, the NDP 2030 asserts that private and public sector investments in educational infrastructure are needed to support a thriving economy (NDP 2030, p. 324). As with other debates and ideas in the NDP 2030, education and students, are drawn into various plans. The NDP 2030 suggests that

technology and market changes require education systems that provide skills relevant within and beyond national borders and across sectors (National Planning Commission, 2012, pg. 324). This view brings together all systems providing education and training – primary, secondary, and post-school players. The NDP 2030's assertions about educational infrastructure disregard any differences and difficulties that exist in how an economy can be supported, and it underestimates the barriers to obtaining educational infrastructure. It portrays the private- and public-sector investments as desirable to create access, affordability, and suitability of educational infrastructure, yet the investments are producing the exclusions that the NDP is trying to address.

I now turn to the EDHE, one of the governmental agencies that drives four entrepreneurship programmes at universities. The agency is founded on the NDP and ministerial view that institutions of higher education must contribute to the economy, tackle unemployment, and build sellable solutions. The EDHE has a multi-pronged focus on entrepreneurship, covering student entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship development in academia, and developing entrepreneurial universities. The EDHE creates national entrepreneurship programmes and monitors their implementation on university campuses. In addition, the EDHE pursues national and international partnerships for entrepreneurship programmes on campuses. For example, EDHE has partnered with the Student Entrepreneurship Week (SEW), a German concept of promoting entrepreneurship on campuses. Annually, universities in South Africa are given grants to the value of R10,000 (500 GBP) to host the SEW activities in the third quarter of the year.

South African University hosts entrepreneurship activities under programmes such as SEW, and others as directed by EDHE. However, South African University is even more intentional about entrepreneurship at a campus level. The university has a centre for entrepreneurship development, which rolls out incubation and startup support programmes. The essence of the Centre for Entrepreneurship at South African University is to create founders, support economic development and microenterprises in the communities in which the university operates. The centre has a specific focus on supporting students at the university to explore business ideas and convert these into viable businesses. The centre responds to EDHE and national calls to confront challenges that face young people, such as the lack of jobs and low involvement in the economy. Through such centres at campuses across the country, policy can rear its neoliberal approach to development, converting students into entrepreneurs and fleshing out partnerships that foster entrepreneurship on campus.

University staff members play a central role in actualizing the plans and programmes set at the level of the governmental agencies. There are four categories of university staff involved in the promotions of entrepreneurship at South African University. These are the vice chancellor and senior executive management, administrative staff at top and middle level, and the coordinators in the Centre for Entrepreneurship. These staff members are contracted under specific key performance indicators (KPIs) that enforce the top-down policy influence on universities such as South African University. The vice chancellor works with the deputy vice chancellors, deans, and senior management staff to develop strategic plans aligned to national policy and processes of implementation. For example, the 2025 strategic plan of South African University shows that the university is committed to contributing to economic growth and development in South Africa. This strategic view is based on the mission of the NDP and Universities South Africa Forum (USAf) to contribute to the building of an inclusive economy in South Africa. The lecturing staff are supposed to align their curricula to the national goals, although some resist following new ideals or tailoring their lecturing to serve such ideals. However, universities have a way of drawing the policy focus into their classrooms or lecture halls. South African University is deeply vested in entrepreneurship, and therefore, most of their students are exposed to the idea of founding a start-up or creating a microenterprise. The coordinators of the Centre for Entrepreneurship follow up such developments in lecture halls by creating space for ideation and the pitching and funding of student ideas. Staff members “tick the boxes” in their KPI checks; however, there are no guarantees that the students will receive support.

Another segment of staff is the administrative block. These staff members have student-facing roles and deal with inquiries, campus experiences, and the processing of requests from students to participate in the different programmes set up by the university. They include those who create information technology systems that support the broader university and those administrative officers who, for example, promote the work of the Centre for Entrepreneurship at South African University.

At South African University and indeed in other universities, the student population may be divided into two segments of political orientation: those students who are inactive and those who are active in student politics and political movement(s). These have a bearing on how students co-exist on campuses and the way they process campus developments. Politically inactive students are affected by the broader issues that concern the politically active students. There are other reasons for lack of participation, such as lack of urgency, dealing with a challenging academic programme, and taking time to adjust to the university environment. However, all students, active and inactive, have an awareness of challenges that face students and understand how policy influences developments on campus. The #FeesMustFall protest demonstrated the way(s) in which student movements process and deal with policy-based decisions. The fee increases endorsed by DHET led South African students to protest and demand a 0% fee increase. The protest movement also forced the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), to deal with the political ideology underpinning the fee increases. This yielded some consciousness on the part of the ruling class to revisit their decisions about fees. Students at South African University depend on affordable fees to study at the university; any increase would result in more financial exclusions. The student voice, when examined from the perspective of #FeesMustFall, has the potential to break through the layers of policy influence by pushing back through vice chancellors, the DHET, the national government, and the political bodies.

Students have broad arrays of interests, talents, study backgrounds, needs, and aspirations for leadership. Students at each institution elect a student representative council (SRC), a formal body advancing their interests at different levels. The SRC is supposed to challenge the hierarchy that by default places students at the bottom. However, the political approach of most SRCs – affiliating with big political parties – can be found wanting. For example, the South African Students Congress (SASCO), an ANC-affiliated political student movement, was met with criticism during #FeesMustFall. The criticism was that the SASCO SRC was protesting a decision made by their mother body, the ANC. In times like these, students feel betrayed by the same SRC, and feel that it is a hierarchy higher than them. The #FeesMustFall movement therefore showed a more revolutionary approach to how students deal with challenges outside of formal structures, including their SRCs. They confront the government and the governing party or regime directly through revolutionary means and leaderless protests.

The permeation of policy through to the university campus and into student experiences of campus does present contentions. The major contentions are about the role of policy stakeholders in higher education and on campus, the changing views of university management on important issues e.g. cutting budgets for student welfare but increasing budget for entrepreneurship programmes or others, trust for the SRC, and the lived experiences of ordinary students. First, policy players, as shown in Figure 1, cascade down their decisions onto campus and exert pressure on university management through agencies established for this purpose. This portrays university management as being in collusion with the government and playing into the hands of DHET. The creation of policies on curriculum development and adjustment to meet industry needs is one of the ways in which DHET is changing universities. This demonstrates shifts from a purely academic programme to vocational training at university, hoping to serve the industry demands for certain skills. In addition, however, policy also advocates entrepreneurship among students and graduates. This haphazard move also presents other challenges, such as funding for such students and misery in case of failure. The DHET and university management take little responsibility for all of this.

For the second and final points on the policy influences, I refer to the issues of trust (or lack thereof) in the SRC and the lived experiences of ordinary students. As already indicated, the SRCs at South African University and in similar universities, in the majority, are politically affiliated. In 2015/2016 SRCs were

dominated by SASCO, an ANC student branch. During this time, however, students had cause to protest the ANC-led government. The proximity of SRCs to the political ruling class presents issues of trust. The broken trust came about from the trend of the SRCs' spending hours in meetings and conferences only to come out as losers pre and post #FeesMustFall. Students have since developed a lack of trust in SRCs and seen them as seeking political expediency at the expense of their constituents' demands. For example, after #FeesMustFall, some of the SRC members involved in the marches were appointed to become members of parliament. They have since abandoned the cause of student demands, seeing themselves instead as a ruling class that has become more concerned with other societal issues. For this reason, the presence of SRCs in the policy flow and influence is neither a solution nor an alternative to sense-making about policy implications for student life at universities such as South African University.

The DHET projects its programmes as being centred on the needs of students. However, students have a different view. For example, the delays in the disbursement of NSFAS funding at South African University lead to protests almost annually. This demonstrates that the DHET is out of touch with student realities. Students need the allowances at the beginning of the academic year because they depend solely on this money for various expenses including food, toiletries, accommodation, and airtime vouchers. They also depend on these allowances to be able to pay for public transport to reach South African University to register and check into their accommodation. But the delayed provision means that these students – the same students that DHET purports to be concerned about – spend their first days on campus without food and cash for daily expenses until their allowances are disbursed. Although the policy agencies monitor other things, they do not prioritize the immediate livelihood needs of students, consequently creating a disjuncture. Even the entrepreneurship initiatives and allocations of staff fail to address the existential needs that students are concerned about. The neglect of students in policy priorities and structure has detrimental effects on how students traverse university life and their ability to cope with their academic programme.

Practical Implications and Conclusions

Policy influences South African University's approach to teaching, learning, and research. The DHET sets policy for public institutions such as South African University, as has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. While policy is enforced across institutions in South Africa's higher education landscape, it is greater at South African University than in the historically White Afrikaans and English universities. This is because these institutions have the financial means that allow them to exercise some large degree of financial autonomy in developing new infrastructures and programmes. In contrast, South African University must follow policy directions and keep up with the views of the government about running subsidized qualifications relevant to industry.

South African University's character is one established on neoliberal push and pull factors. The push factors include complying with the DHET policies that require the production of employable and industry-ready graduates. South African University is pushed through policy performance indicators for universities and can suffer consequences for non-compliance, such as being called out for not putting employability at the top of the university agenda. Entrepreneurship is a pull factor, as it gives South African University an edge of being a university that produces job creators, but also a benefit of relevance in the broader policy discourse promoting entrepreneurship. South African University rides the wave of entrepreneurship, raising funding for programmes, naming students with interest in enterprise as "founders", and funding some graduates to grow their start-up enterprises.

Vally and Motala (2017), Fongwa, (2018), Pillay and Mqolomba (2022) have provided local literature on the problem confronting institutions like the South African University. Vally and Motala (2014) critiqued policy influence on universities, including their obsession to contribute to economic growth. They found the higher-education views on economic growth and development reductionist, as evidenced in the following quotation:

The value of education should be defined in socio-economic, cultural, and political terms, and not reduced solely to the needs of economic growth. Knowledge, skills, and the competencies derived from

education and training processes are of course critically important for all societies and the well-being of nations. However, the reduction of their value to the needs of employers in a market-dominated economic system, to the exclusion of their wider societal purposes, is a serious limitation on the social role (Vally & Motala, 2014, p. 3).

Alexander (2014, cited in Vally & Motala 2014) challenges the growing adoption of policy approaches that seek to dictate what universities say about societal issues and how they talk about them to their students. Alexander stated that policy permeates the university structures of governance, forcing the view that universities must create and maintain partnerships with the government and industry players. In addition, Alexander cautioned against the commodification and vulgarization of knowledge through such partnerships. South African University's entrepreneurship approach to the pressing societal problem of unemployment among young adults and graduates is the type of behaviour that Alexander challenged. The approach, instead of focusing on creating globally competent graduates and citizens, is producing new service providers in the name of entrepreneurship. The developments at South African University show that universities have created a place for entrepreneurship and use this as their approach to interpreting and dealing with problems in society. The university sees entrepreneurship as an opportunity to use societal problems as justifications for promoting entrepreneurship among students and to direct students to create microenterprises that can "hopefully" address such problems.

Mabasa (2022), in writing about building the free African university, challenged corporatization and social exclusion in South African tertiary institutions. Like Vally and Motala (2014), Mabasa argued that the post-apartheid post-schooling system has made some strides in relation to access, but bemoaned the exclusions produced by the same system (social structure) because of the capitalist approach to development in South Africa. Mabasa added that:

The resilience of this social structure, and the forms of social exclusion it produces, is facilitated by policy prescripts based on the principles: minimal state intervention; individualization of social problems; market led development, privatisation, and Eurocentric modernization. These have permeated all social spheres and institutions including higher education. (p. 66)

The policy prescripts outlined above echo the overarching argument in this chapter: that policy influence fragments and stratifies any collective effort among students seeking to deal with complex socio-economic challenges. I argue furthermore that students are driven into believing that entrepreneurship is the solution to their problems both on and off campus. The promotion of entrepreneurship on campus enforces the policy prescripts and influences that policymakers are responsible for cascading down through various structures. This has a detrimental effect on students and individualizes their social problems and reinforces the ideas of market-led development on unsuspecting students.

International literature explains the South African University case study through the lens of push and pull factors. South African University is pushed into entrepreneurship by policy; this according to the mission of the Centre for Entrepreneurship. The centre's mission statement provides that it is committed to the economic growth priorities of the NDP. The policy push factors recall for Honeyman's (2016) question: "We will help the state, but will the state help us?" (p. 196). In asking this question, Honeyman sought to understand the permeation of Rwanda's entrepreneurship policy in schools. Honeyman revealed that students practise entrepreneurship only to earn academic credentials, unlike the view in policy that these students will create jobs as entrepreneurs. According to Honeyman, the youth in her study sought a government that can solve the jobs crisis without placing the responsibility on them. The youth felt neglected by their government and therefore had a systemic responsibility to themselves through entrepreneurship, much as is the case at South African University.

Honeyman (2016) and DeJaeghere (2017) explained that universities are pulled into the entrepreneurship agenda of policy by some of the crude benefits that policymakers are made to believe about the phenomenon, both in higher education and for society. Universities are made to believe that having students and graduates who are involved in entrepreneurship improves society through the new jobs that are created. This also adds to the false sense of pride about students who create businesses while

studying and the use of the profiles of such students to promote entrepreneurship. This puts some students under pressure, but those students involved or pulled into entrepreneurship become part of a complex social experiment without their knowledge. For this reason, the promotions of entrepreneurship at institutions such as South African University, including the policy influence in higher education, require extensive scrutiny.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This paper contributes to literature on structure and agency. It challenges scholarship in entrepreneurship to consider issues of structure and agency in the promotion of entrepreneurship. The prevalence of promoting entrepreneurship through policy has become huge a project and leaves universities with very little choice but to comply. In addition, the paper has shown how the government cascades down its neoliberal ideas for development such as entrepreneurship. The influence of the government is far-reaching. It suppresses other forms of student existence and practice. Future research must probe the barriers to student entrepreneurship that are caused by structure at university.

Research Note

This research paper is part of a broader PhD study.

References

- Allais, S. (2012) ‘“Economics imperialism”, education policy and educational theory’, *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(2), pp. 253–274. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.602428>.
- Apple, M.W. (2017) ‘What is Present and Absent in Critical Analyses of Neoliberalism in Education’, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 92(1), pp. 148–153. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2016.1265344>.
- Archer, M.S. (ed.) (2003) ‘Introduction: how does structure influence agency?’, in *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139087315.001>.
- Atkins, L. and Wallace, S. (2012) *Qualitative Research in Education*. 1 Oliver’s Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957602>.
- Bartlett, L. and Vavrus, F. (2014) ‘Transversing the vertical case study: A methodological approach to studies of educational policy as practice’, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 45(2), pp. 131–147.
- DeJaeghere, J. (2017) *Educating entrepreneurial citizens: Neoliberalism and youth livelihoods in Tanzania*. Routledge.
- Elder-Vass, D. (ed.) (2010) ‘Agency’, in *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 87–114. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511761720.005>.
- Fongwa, S.N. (2018) ‘Towards an Expanded Discourse on Graduate Outcomes in South Africa’, *Education as Change*, 22(3), p. 23 pages–23 pages. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/3337>.
- Goldman, G.A. and Tselepis, T. (2021) ‘“What’s puzzling you is the nature of my game”: What the grand narrative of entrepreneurship doesn’t say’, *International Entrepreneurship Review*, 7(1), pp. 7–19.
- Hardy, J.A. (2017) ‘(Re)conceptualising precarity: institutions, structure and agency’, *Employee Relations*, 39(3), pp. 263–273. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-06-2016-0111>.
- Honeyman, C.A. (2016) *The orderly entrepreneur: Youth, education, and governance in Rwanda*. Stanford University Press.
- Melin, E. and Gaddefors, J. (2023) ‘Agency in entrepreneurship: preparing entrepreneurship theory for another view of context’, *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 29(11), pp. 184–205. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-10-2022-0916>.
- National Planning Commission (2011) *National Development Plan: Vision for 2030*. Available at: <https://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030> (Accessed: 24 February 2020).
- Pillay, S.R. and Mqolomba, Z. (2022) *Chasing Freedom*, CODESRIA Books Publication System. CODESRIA Books Publication System. Available at: <https://publication.codesria.org/index.php/pub/catalog/book/537> (Accessed: 23 September 2022).
- The Presidency, R. of S.A. (2014) *National Youth Policy 2015-2020 | South African Government*. Available at: <https://www.gov.za/documents/national-youth-policy-2015-2020-8-jun-2015-0000> (Accessed: 24 February 2020).
- Vally, S. and Motala, E. (2014) *Education, economy & society*. Unisa Press.

