The role of specialised schools in poverty alleviation and economic development: A case study of Gauteng Province

by

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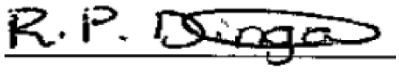
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my late mother, Madikgwa Ellen Dingalo. I wish you were here to witness my hard work and achievements. Continue to rest in eternal peace.

ABSTRACT

Poverty and unemployment remain significant socio-economic challenges in South Africa, particularly among the youth. In response, the Gauteng Department of Education introduced schools of specialisation (SOS) to provide learners with sector-specific skills aligned to labour market demands. This study explores the potential of the SOS to alleviate poverty and unemployment by accelerating economic growth in Gauteng. A qualitative research approach was employed to gain in-depth insights into the implementation and perceived impact of SOS. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, and district officials. In addition, learners were observed during practical activities to gain contextual understanding of how skills are taught and applied. This study employed a single case study design to facilitate an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, and purposive sampling was used to select participants. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the data. Ethical approval was obtained from the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee at the University of South Africa, and permission to collect data from schools was granted by the Gauteng Department of Education. The findings indicate that SOS contribute to skills development, improved learner employability, and stronger links between education and industry, all of which are critical for poverty reduction and economic participation. However, the study also identified challenges, including resource constraints, limited industry partnerships, and inconsistencies in programme implementation, which hinder the full realisation of the objectives of the SOS. The study concludes that while SOSs hold significant potential as a strategy for socio-economic development in Gauteng, their success depends on effective implementation, adequate resourcing, and sustained collaboration among stakeholders. The study recommended strengthening industry partnerships and policy support to enhance the impact of SOS and economic growth.

Keywords: Schools of specialisation, education, unemployment, youth skills, Gauteng, economic participation, industry partnerships, economic growth, poverty alleviation, socio-economic development

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 List of 36 Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng province…… ….7

Table 1.2 Breakdown of sampled participants……...15

Table 3.1 Participant groups ……58

Table 3.2 Data collection methods……60

Table 4.1 Teacher's biographical information……..67

Table 4.2 Principal's biographical information……..68

Table 4.3 District official biographical information……69

Table 4.4 Example of code groups and assigned codes ……70

Table 4.5 Code of document from ATLAS.ti……71

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 SOS corridors and focus areas in Gauteng Province……..6

Figure 2.1 Gauteng is the top contributor to the country's total GDP…….....28

Figure 2.2 Unemployment rate in South Africa in the year 2023…….46

Figure 4.1 Ad hoc network to identify relationships between the codes.....72

Figure 4.2 Jewellery skill taught at SOS 1……..…78

Figure 4.3 Plumbing skill taught at SOS 2……..…78

Figure 4.4 Welding lesson taught at SOS 3……...81

Figure 4.5 Music and Art skill taught at SOS 4……..…82

Figure 4.6 3D printing machine used at the SOS 5 by grade 9 learners……..…86

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAD	: Computer-Aided Design
CAPS	: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	: Department of Basic Education
DHET	: Department of Higher Education and Training
GDE	: Gauteng Department of Education
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
FET	: Further Education and Training
HCT	: Human Capital Theory
ICT	: Information, Communication and Technology
MCSP	: Multi-Certification Skills Programme
MEC	: Member of Executive Council
NSC	: National Curriculum Statement
PGCE	: Post Graduate Certificate in Education
POPIA	: Protection of Personal Information Act
REC	: Research Ethics Committee
RNCS	: Revised National Curriculum Statement
ROS	: Reorganising of Schools SASA South African Schools Act
SARS	: South African Revenue Services
SDLA	: Skills Development Levies Act
SETA	: Sector Education and Training Authorities
SOS	: Schools of Specialisation
TMR	: Transformation, Modernisation, and Reindustrialisation
TVET	: Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VET	: Vocational Education and Training
UNISA	: University of South Africa
WEF	: World Economic Forum
4IR	: Fourth Industrial Revolution

Contents

DECLARATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

DEDICATION iv

ABSTRACT v

LIST OF TABLES vi

LIST OF FIGURES vii

CHAPTER ONE 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION 1

1.2 BACKGROUND ON SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION IN GAUTENG PROVINCE 4

1.3 POSITIONING 8

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT 9

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY 10

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS 11

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS 11

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 13

1.9 RESEARCH PARADIGM 13

1.10 RESEARCH APPROACH 13

1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN 14

1.12 POPULATION AND SAMPLING 14

1.13 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES 15

1.14 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....16

1.15 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY.....16

1.16 RESEARCH ETHICS 17

1.17 LIMITATION AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY.....18

1.18 CHAPTER OUTLINE 18

1.19 CONCLUSION.....19

CHAPTER TWO 20

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 20

2.1 INTRODUCTION.....20

2.2 CURRICULUM CHANGES IN POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA.....20

2.3 WHY SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION EXIST.....22

2.4 THE KEY FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION 25

2.5 SKILLS PROGRAMMES FOR LEARNERS IN SOS 28

2.6 FOCUS AREA OF THE SOS OPERATING IN GAUTENG PROVINCE 33

2.7 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SOS.....36

2.8 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.....38

2.9 POVERTY ALLEVIATION STRATEGY IN GAUTENG PROVINCE 39

2.10 CONSTANT CHANGES IN THE WORLD OF WORK 42

2.11 THE CURRENT LABOUR MARKET DEMANDS 44

2.12 THE LINK BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND SHORTAGE OF SKILLS 44

2.13 CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION 47

2.14 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH 51

2.15 CONCLUSION 53

CHAPTER THREE 54

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY 54

3.1 INTRODUCTION 54

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM 54

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH 55

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN 56

3.5 POPULATION OF THE STUDY 57

3.6 SAMPLING 57

3.7 DATA COLLECTION 59

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS 60

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS 61

3.10 RESEARCH ETHICS 63

3.11 CONCLUSION....65

CHAPTER FOUR....66

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS....66

4.1 INTRODUCTION....66

4.2 GENERAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS....66

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS....69

4.4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS....74

4.5 CONCLUSION....93

CHAPTER FIVE....94

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS....94

5.1 INTRODUCTION....94

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY....94

5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS....95

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY....102

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS....102

5.5.3 STRATEGIC EXPANSION OF SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION IN THE PROVINCE.....103

5.6 CONCLUSION....104

5.7 REFERENCES....106

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE....137

APPENDIX B: GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PERMISSION 139

APPENDIX C: STUDY INFORMATION LETTER.....141

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM 143

APPENDIX E: PARENT CONSENT AND LEARNER ASSENT FORM 144

APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE.....145

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 146

APPENDIX H: DISSERTATION LANGUAGE EDITING 150

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Gauteng Department of Education coined the term Schools of Specialisation (SOS) IN 2016. The initiative invloved reorganising selected secondary schools to offer specialised programmes aimed at developing skills perceived to be relevant to the labour market and post-school pathways. These schools are designed to develop learners' skills and knowledge to match the needs of various industrial sectors. These skills are also expected to contribute to the growth of the South African economy (Gauteng Department of Education, 2019). It is anticipated that providing learners with skills development opportunities could lower poverty and hasten Gauteng Province's economic growth (Zambara, 2024). The SOS will add hands-on training and experience to learners' theoretical education, improving their skills and their chances of securing employment (Mathebula, 2017).

Schools in South Africa do not adequately teach learners the skills necessary for the job market, as a result, the anticipated returns on education are not materialising for many graduates due to a persistent misalignment between academic qualifications and labour m arket needs (Moloto, Ramasimi, Motsei and Muchie, 2025). The current curriculum simply gets learners through Grade 12 and into universities and TVET colleges (Massive Curriculum Shift, 2022). On the other hand, the SOS curriculum is designed to meet the demands of the current job market. According to Mendy and Madiope (2020), among the justifications for curriculum change are the nation's broader socioeconomic challenges, the state of the economy, and the demands of education stakeholders. With the introduction of SOS, the Gauteng Department of Education is trying to bridge the gap between what is taught in schools and what is required by the job market.

Several attempts have been made to modify the school curriculum, but very little has been done to teach skills learners can use to improve their lives, beyond providing them with a university or college entry certificate. Similar findings have been reported

by Ngobeni, Chibambo and Divala, 2023, who noted that the various curricular changes that South Africa implemented have not significantly reduced the country's current socioeconomic disparities. This becomes problematic because not all learners will meet the university and college entry requirements. But skills development training in schools might reduce the number of learners who stay at home after completing matric.

According to Ramra and Marimuthu (2021), learning institutions must provide learners with opportunities to grow and develop and equip them with the necessary skills to be ready for the workforce. Therefore, the SOS were introduced to address the shortage of skills and lack of opportunities for young people who have recently completed high school and secondary school.

Curriculum revision is urgently needed to better prepare young people still in school for the world of work (Kariuki, 2018). School curriculum should be designed to include emerging skills, equipping learners with the necessary skills to gain employment or create jobs for themselves (Akwu, 2023). This study examined the curriculum offered at the SOS and compared it with that of an ordinary public school. This comparison is addressed in Chapter 2.

The challenge of skills shortage is an ongoing problem in South Africa. For example, Statistics South Africa (2019) acknowledges that, particularly among young people, there is a shortage of intermediate skills, such as those of artisans. There has been skills development training in South Africa; however, van der Veen and Datzberger (2020) argue that youth empowerment skills training programmes have come under fire for failing to equip young people with the skills the market demands, often leaving them unemployed after completing their training. To help South Africans who are severely disadvantaged become employable in the labour market, policies such as the National Skills Act of 1998 and the Skills Development Act of 1998, as well as the Skills Development Levies Act (SDLA) of 1999, were introduced (Statistics South Africa, 2018). More recently, the Reconceptualised HRD Strategy 2025–2035 and its implementation framework, the Master Skills Plan (MSP) 2025–2030, serve as South Africa’s blueprint to reform the skills development system.

The Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) play a major role in providing skills development training in South Africa's learning institutions. Through the SOS, the Department of Basic Education aims to provide quality education, prepare learners for future careers, and address the critical skills shortage in South Africa (Gauteng Department of Education, 2023).

According to the Gauteng Department of Education (2022), learners from the SOS are applying problem-solving skills to address real-life challenges in communities, schools, the province, and the country at large, and are also attracting industry partners willing to partner with the SOS. For example, learners in one of the SOS have developed an automated hydroponic structure that grows food without using soil (Zambara, 2024). A Network Time Protocol Server to access GPS signals and accurate time while underground or in mines was created by a Grade 11 learner in another SOS (Zambara, 2024). This indicates that skills development and technological training are taking place in various SOS in Gauteng province.

Schoolchildren require more than a basic education. They need the skills to compete on a global scale, transform their communities, and be prepared to solve future challenges. Schools of specialisation have the potential to improve the lives of young people by providing them with sector-specific skills that enable them to contribute to the economy (SAnews.gov.za, 2019). According to Cloete (2022), the SOS aims to bridge the gap between Grade 12 and further education and employment, while leveraging partnerships to expand learner and teacher support. Cloete (2022) adds that these schools also look to expand learning opportunities so that SOS impact on employment is visible in the country.

With the introduction of specialised schools, youth unemployment may be tackled by equipping more young people with skills. Rising unemployment rates are a serious concern and highlight the need for education to be relevant and capable of preparing learners for success in the workforce upon graduation from high school (Mangwenyana, 2020). Unemployment impacts young people in South Africa to such a degree that it exposes them to additional socioeconomic problems such as poverty, violence, economic inequality, and a breakdown in the nuclear family (Cloete, 2015).

It is therefore critical to research ways to mitigate youth unemployment. SOS may be one of the strategies.

SOS may equip learners with a set of skills that enhances employability and sustains livelihoods. Mabasa, Mtshali, Makgato, and Skosana (2023) argue that youth unemployment is a growing challenge globally and that, in South Africa, learners with relevant skills are well positioned to form a workforce capable of driving economic growth. Gauteng has recorded the highest unemployment growth rate since 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). If SOS expands skills development across the province, Gauteng is likely to experience stronger economic development in the coming years. In the first quarter of 2025, the unemployment rate reached 32.9%, up from 31.9% in the fourth quarter of 2024 (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Statistics South Africa (2025) also indicates that youth aged 15–34 remain particularly vulnerable in the labour market.

In view of the above, this study sought to examine the role and potential of skills development in reducing unemployment among young people after completing high school, with a focus on learners in specialised schools. Against this background, the study investigated the potential of SOS to alleviate poverty and enhance Gauteng's economy by examining how the skills taught within SOS enable learners to acquire knowledge and apply it across diverse job and business contexts. The focus is on how SOS prepares learners for the future world of work and business. In conducting this study, the researcher held the view that, to justify investments in these specialised schools, their curricula must broaden learners' knowledge and equip them with transferable skills to address societal problems after graduation.

1.2 BACKGROUND ON SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

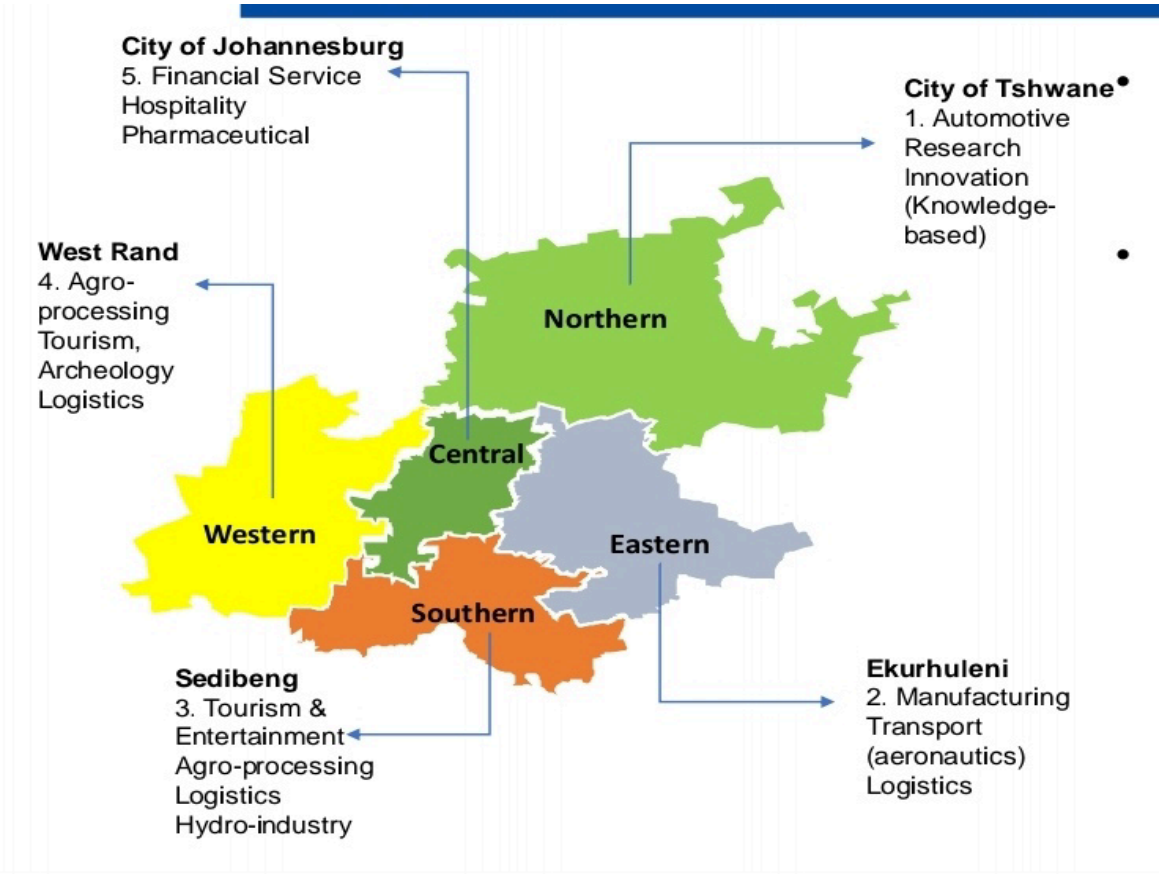
Since 2016, Gauteng has had 36 operating schools of specialisation (SOS). These schools' curricula include agriprocessing, agriculture, mining, sports, mathematics, sciences, information and communications technology (ICT), and performing arts (Bengston, 2023).

The SOS concept emerged from the Gauteng Department of Education's Reorganisation of Schools (ROS) programme, introduced to raise overall education quality and foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment (Gauteng Department of Education, 2019). ROS comprises several components, including Schools of Specialisation, the Twinning of Schools, and the Multi-Certification Skills Programme (MCSP). Each component targets a specific sectoral mandate: the SOS programme aims to develop top talent across five key disciplines and to position South Africa's future leaders (Gauteng Department of Education, 2019). The Specialisation component addresses the country's critical skills shortage (Bengston, 2023).

Twinning pairs a well-resourced suburban school with an under-resourced township school to enhance social cohesion and improve learner outcomes through shared resources. On the other hand, MCSP seeks to equip learners in Gauteng with essential practical skills beyond the standard NCS certificate (Bengston, 2023). The present study focuses on the SOS, not the other ROS project.

The SOS aligns with Gauteng province's Transformation, Modernisation, and Reindustrialisation (TMR) strategy to spur economic growth in the province (Bengtson, 2023). Educational foresight is used to ensure that academic subjects more closely reflect the economic opportunities available (Rushby, 2016). The specialisation and focus of these schools are determined by the economic corridor in which they reside. Gauteng province is divided into five economic corridors, namely the northern, central, western, southern, and eastern. The schools of specialisation are designed and positioned to support the development priorities of these corridors as outlined in the TMR framework. The figure below shows the five corridors where the schools are located and the key industrial activities in each.

Figure 1.1 SOS corridors and focus areas in Gauteng Province



Adapted from Bengtson's (2023)

Each school adopts one of five specialisations and a focus area, based on its economic development corridor. These are Maths, Science and ICT, Engineering, Commerce and Entrepreneurship, and Sports and Performing Arts.

The following table shows the 36 SOS currently operating in Gauteng province. The table also shows which focus area the school specialises in, as well as the part of Gauteng where the school is located.

Table 1.1: List of 36 Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng Province

District	Name of the School	Focus Area
1. Tshwane West	Mapanane Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Research and Innovation
1. Gauteng West	Phahama, Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Mining
2. Johannesburg West	Raymond Mhlaba Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Mining
3. Tshwane North	Sikululekile Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Research and Innovation
4. Sedibeng West	Thuto-Tiro Engineering SOS	Energy
5. Sedibeng East	Khanya-Lesedi Sport SOS	Sport
6. Sedibeng West	Jet Nteo Commerce and Entrepreneurship SOS	Tourism and Hospitality
7. Ekurhuleni South	Mpilisweni Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Manufacturing and Logistics
8. Ekurhuleni North	Thuto-Ke Matla Engineering SOS	Manufacturing of Industrial Equipment
9. Tshwane North	Lethabong Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Automotive
10. Sedibeng West	Khutlo-Tharo Performing and Creative Arts SOS	Arts
11. Tshwane South	Ribane-Laka Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Automotive
12. Tshwane South	Rosina Sedibane Sport SOS	Sport
13. Johannesburg Central	Curtis Nkondo Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
14. Gauteng West	Mandisa Shiceka Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Mining
15. Sedibeng East	Mohloli Maritime SOS	Maritime
16. Johannesburg South	John Orr Engineering SOS	Engineering
17. Sedibeng West	Dr Molefi Olifant Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
18. Ekurhuleni North	East Rand School of Arts	Arts
19. Tshwane North	Tebogwana Engineering SOS	Engineering
20. Tshwane South	Edward Phatudi Maths, Science & ICT	Maths, Science & ICT

21. Gauteng North	Ekangala Engineering SOS	Engineering
22. Tshwane North	Soshanguve Engineering SOS	Engineering
23. Tshwane North	PRO Arte Performing and Creative Arts SOS	Arts
24. Ekurhuleni North	MUnity Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
25. Gauteng East	Delpark Commerce and Entrepreneurship SOS	Commerce and Entrepreneurship
26. Ekurhuleni South	Katlehong Engineering SOS	Engineering
27. Johannesburg South	National School of the Arts	Arts
28. Gauteng West	Magaliesburg Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
29. Gauteng West	Wedela Engineering SOS	Engineering
30. Gauteng West	Madiba Engineering SOS	Engineering
31. Ekurhuleni North	Unity Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
32. Ekurhuleni North	Thembisa Commerce and Entrepreneurship SOS	Commerce and Entrepreneurship
33. Ekurhulenig North	Kwa-Thema Skills SOS	Technical occupation
34. Johannesburg North	St. Barnabas Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
35. Johannesburg North	UJ Metropolitan Maths, Science & ICT SOS	Maths, Science & ICT
36. Johannesburg Central	Letsibogo Girls SOS	Maths, Science, and ICT. Media and Communication

Adapted from Bengtson's (2023)

1.3 POSITIONING

As the researcher, I acknowledge that my background and professional experience within the education sector have shaped my interest and engagement with this study. Having served as a teacher in Gauteng province, I have been directly exposed to the process and challenges associated with curriculum implementations and skills development initiatives such as the SOS. This experience positioned me as an insider researcher, providing both familiarity with the research context and insight into the

practical realities faced by teachers, learners and district officials involved in the SOS programme.

I first conducted an introspection and considered the factors that drew my attention to the topic under study. My interest in this research topic developed when the then Member of the Executive Council (MEC) in charge of education in Gauteng, Mr. Panyaza Lesufi, launched the first SOS in the province to equip learners with skills to help them secure better jobs and showcase their talent within the school setting. The launch of more SOS in the province solidified my interest. As I was always concerned about conventional schools that taught mostly theoretical subjects, I became curious about how carefully curated practical skills could help learners fit into the labour market.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ordinary secondary schools in South Africa are known to be mostly inadequate at equipping learners with the skills necessary for post-secondary education or the workforce (West & Meier, 2020). Most learners leave the education system without meeting the prerequisites for admission to universities or colleges and without the fundamental skills needed for immediate employment, leaving them with few options to engage in the economy (Mangwenyana, 2020). Furthermore, research shows that instructional strategies remain largely teacher-centred and didactic, with little progress in foundational literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills (Cunningham, 2018). Also, over the years, we have seen the educational domain shift from the traditional approach of memorisation to a practice-oriented approach of critical and flexible learning. Additionally, the curriculum does not effectively address the specific skill shortages in South Africa's labour market, instead prioritising academic performance over practical competencies (Boateng et al., 2017).

In response to the challenge, SOS were introduced in Gauteng province, focusing on job-relevant skills through practical, market-aligned education (Gauteng Department of Education, 2019). This initiative was further solidified by President Cyril Ramaphosa's announcement to convert ordinary public schools into technical high schools offering vocational and occupational training streams (Presidency, State of

the Nation Address, 2019). The intent of SOS is to equip learners with employable skills and facilitate smoother transitions into TVET colleges of the world of work.

However, there isn't much factual data on how well SOS in Gauteng are carrying out this duty. Although the goals of SOS are outlined in policy documents, few studies examine how these institutions implement policy and whether they are successfully providing students with market-relevant skills.

Therefore, this study sought to examine the potential of SOS in equipping learners with employable skills, thereby enhancing their economic prospects and contributing to poverty alleviation in Gauteng. Specifically, it will examine how SOS prepare learners with practical competencies for the job market and the extent to which this contributes to economic prospects and poverty alleviation. The findings of this study will add to the growing body of information on the effects of specialisation schools and offer suggestions for practice and policy in the implementation of SOS in the Gauteng province.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to investigate the potential of Schools of Specialisation in equipping learners with skills relevant to the job market and, in the process, supporting the development of Gauteng Province’s economy. The study sought to contribute to the emerging body of knowledge on the economic impact of specialisation schools in the context of skills shortages and high unemployment rates among high school graduates and young people more generally. The aim of this study was therefore to establish how the skills gained at the different SOS might help to alleviate poverty and improve the economy of Gauteng Province.

To address the above aim, I formulated the following sub-objectives:

I. To explore principals' and teachers' perceptions of current labour market demands in Gauteng and their implications for Schools of Specialisation.
II. To examine how Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng currently align their curriculum and assess the effectiveness of their training programmes in meeting labour market demands

III. To explore how the Schools of Specialisation tailor career guidance and counselling services to prepare learners for employment opportunities and economic participation.
IV. To examine challenges that Schools of Specialisation encounter while delivering their mandate of teaching the skills that are aligned with job market demands.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To address the above aim, the study sought to answer the following research question: What is the potential of Schools of Specialisation in equipping learners with skills relevant to the job market and to the development of the economy in Gauteng Province?

The sub-research questions helping to answer the main research question are as follows:

I. What are principals' and teachers' perceptions of current labour market demands in Gauteng and their implications for Schools of Specialisation?
II. How can Gauteng specialisation schools align their curriculum and evaluate the effectiveness of their training programmes to meet the demands of the labour market and the economy?
III. How do Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng Province tailor their career guidance and counselling services to ensure learners are aware of and prepared for employment opportunities?
IV. What challenges and barriers do Schools of Specialisation encounter in fulfilling their mandate of equipping learners with relevant job market skills?

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

For the purpose of this study, the following key terms are defined operationally:

1. **Schools of Specialisation (SOS).**
   Schools of Specialisation refer to public secondary schools in Gauteng Province that have been identified and resourced by the Gauteng Department

of Education to focus on specific curriculum areas, including Mathematics, Science, Technology, Commerce, Performing Arts, and Sports. These schools aim to produce learners with specialised skills aligned to industry needs from Grade 8 to Grade 12.

2. **Poverty Alleviation**

   In this study, poverty alleviation refers to strategies and interventions aimed at reducing poverty by equipping learners with marketable and technical skills through SOS education. It involves enabling learners to become economically self-sufficient, to secure employment, and to contribute to household and community income

3. **Economic Development**

   For this study, economic development refers to the process of improving the economic wellbeing and quality of life of communities in Gauteng Province through the production of a skilled and competent workforce. It involves the contribution of SOS graduate to key economic sectors within the province.

4. **Skills Development**

   Skills development in this study refers to the acquisition of both technical, practical and workforce competencies by learners in SOS that are relevant to specific economic factors. This include vocational training, entrepreneurship skills, and the application of theoretical knowledge in real-world industry contexts.

5. **Labour Market.**

   Labour market demands operationally refer to specific skills, qualifications, and competencies required by employers and industries in Gauteng Province. In the context of this study, it relates to the gap between the skills produced by mainstream schools and those required by the provincial economy.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the scientific processes by which a research problem may be explored in depth. It is a science that examines the methodical processes used in research (Mishra & Alok, 2017). This section provides pertinent information on the methods and processes used to conduct the study.

1.9 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm encompasses the researcher's assumptions, worldview, and approach to inquiry, shaping what is studied, how it is examined, and how the findings are interpreted (Okesina, 2020). Paradigms are commonly categorised as positivism, realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). This study adopts the interpretive paradigm, which emphasises understanding how people perceive and interpret their world (Ugwu, Ekere, & Onoh, 2021). The interpretive paradigm is appropriate in this study because it focuses on uncovering whether learners and other stakeholders view SOS as a viable catalyst for economic growth and poverty alleviation, as well as the meanings attached to the skills learners acquire through SOS schooling.

1.10 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach refers to the systematic and structured ways in which researchers conduct their inquiry (Hassan, 2024). The three main approaches are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods (Taherdoost, 2020). This study adopted a qualitative approach.

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the process and the social and cultural contexts that shape various behavioural patterns (Wagner et al, 2012). Qualitative data are generally non-numerical because they are text-based and cannot be easily reduced to numbers. A general definition of qualitative research is any naturalistic investigation that uses text-based data rather than numerical data (Hossein, 2020).

The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study because data were collected and analysed without the use of statistical or quantitative techniques. Furthermore, the aim was to understand and explore the research problem rather than to control variables (Hossein, 2020). Accordingly, this approach was well-suited to thoroughly investigate SOS in Gauteng.

1.11 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that enables the researcher to answer the questions they have posed (Ragin & Amorojo, 2019). This entails the collection of empirical data, gathered directly or indirectly through observation, experimentation, or other scientific methods used to confirm or disconfirm a scientific theory (Costa, 2024). In essence, research design refers to the general procedures a researcher uses to consistently and logically combine the various components of the study (Mishra & Alok, 2017).

This study employed a single case study design. Case studies explore complex social phenomena in their natural contexts (Ragin & Amorojo, 2019). The single case study design facilitated an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and practices within the SOS. Data were collected primarily through observations and semi-structured interviews to capture rich, descriptive insights into teaching and learning processes in an SOS.

1.12 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Population refers to the set or group of all units on which the research findings are to be applied (Shukla, 2020). The population is the entire group from which the conclusion is drawn; in this case, the 36 SOS are the population. A sample is a fraction or a proportion of a whole that provides information about the source from which it is taken (Shukla, 2020). In the present study, the sample is a specific group of schools and individuals from whom data were collected. The data were collected from five of the 36 SOS. Additionally, individual participants in the SOS were purposively sampled, which involves identifying a specific set of traits within the entire population (Thomas,

2022). The specific trait was teachers and managers who teach or handle curriculum matters in the SOS.

One principal per school, one teacher per school, and one district official from each of the three districts: Ekurhuleni South, Gauteng West, and Sedibeng West. The selected schools were diverse, as reflected in their curricular focus, socio-economic contexts, languages, and racial composition. This diversity ensured that the study collected rich, contextually relevant data to help address the research questions. The sample composition is presented in the table below.

Table 1.2: Breakdown of sampled participants.

Schools	Total teachers	Teachers sampled	Principal sampled	District officials
A	42	1	1	1
B	32	1	1	1
C	37	1	1	1
D	53	1	1	-
E	48	1	1	-
Total	212	5	5	3

As shown in Table 1.2, the five sampled schools collectively employed 212 teachers, of whom five were purposively sampled, one from each school. In addition, one principal per school and three different officials were included, bringing the total sample to 13 participants. This distribution ensured balanced representation across schools and districts, while maintaining a manageable sample size for in-depth qualitative inquiry.

1.13 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

In qualitative research, data are commonly gathered through observations, focus group discussions, and interviews (Sukmawati, Sudarmin, & Salmia, 2023). In this study, the primary data collection methods were interviews and observations. These

data collection techniques were deemed suitable for generating rich, in-depth data on the potential of SOS to fulfil its mandate and promises to the taxpayers of Gauteng province.

Observations were conducted at selected SOS sites during data collection. These observations enabled the researcher to document classroom settings, the general atmosphere, teacher–learner interactions, available resources, and curriculum-related matters. The interviews and observations complemented each other in addressing the research questions.

1.14 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data interpretation, or data analysis, is the process of making sense of data to generate actionable insights (Elhady, 2023). It involves examining data to identify patterns, trends, and relationships and then communicating the results in a meaningful way (Hossein, 2020). Mokgoro (2021) notes that data analysis is a crucial phase of the study that determines whether the research questions have been adequately addressed.

For this qualitative study, a thematic analysis was used to summarise and make sense of the data and present the results of the analysis. Thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns in the data and presents them as overarching themes (Lochmiller, 2021). It can be defined as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (Lochmiller, 2021).

In this study, thematic analysis was applied to interview and observation data. The process involved carefully reading the data, coding recurring ideas, grouping codes into categories, and developing themes that reflect participants' shared experiences and perspectives. These themes helped in explaining how vocational skills are taught, developed, and implemented within the SOS.

1.15 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness is a key concept in qualitative research used to verify the accuracy of data and findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2023). It is commonly considered in terms of four

criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Maree, 2016). Trustworthiness is essential for affirming the value of qualitative research within the academic community (Kakar, Rasheed, Rashid, & Akhter, 2023). A detailed discussion of trustworthiness is provided in Chapter 3.

1.16 RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethical considerations involve protecting participants' identities and rights, including obtaining written consent, securing permission to collect data, and ensuring the secure handling and eventual destruction of all data that may be used to identify the participants (Maree, 2016).

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of South Africa's College of Education Research Ethics Committee. Permission for data collection in schools was granted by the Gauteng Department of Education. All permissions, including those from participants for the audio recording of interviews , were secured in writing following established research guidelines. Each participant received a consent form to sign prior to participation, and participants were assured of the confidentiality of any personal information they revealed during data collection. Participants were also guaranteed safety from harm, including emotional and psychological harm.

To preserve anonymity, the names of schools and participants were not disclosed, and interviews were conducted in private, quiet rooms. The researcher was the only person able to match participant identities to their voice recordings. Participation was voluntary, with clear information provided about the study's purpose, duration, methods, and potential uses of the findings. Feedback on the study would be provided after completion. No monetary incentives were offered, and participants were not pressured to participate in a particular way. Furthermore, participants were informed of their right to decline to participate or withdraw their participation at any time without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

1.17 LIMITATION AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Time and resource limitations restricted the number of schools and individuals that could participate in the study. Additionally, data triangulation was limited by a lack of access to some of the schools' documents, including learners' books, which were considered confidential.

A study's delimitations are the features that result from the boundaries defined by its scope limitations, as well as the deliberate exclusionary and inclusionary choices made when the study plan was developed (Coker, 2022). This study was limited by its geographical scope, focusing only on Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng Province. Participation in this study by SOS stakeholders was also limited to district officials, principals and teachers. Learners were observed during practical activities offred by the SOS, they were not part of the interviews. SGB, community members, parents, and policy makers were not part of the study. Additionally, the scope was restricted to information obtained using qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured interviews and lesson observations, and therefore did not include quantitative performance metrics for statistical analysis.

The study assumes that participants will provide honest and accurate information, and that SOS have the potential to contribute to reducing youth unemployment in Gauteng Province.

This study is demarcated to contribute new empirical evidence on Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng, an area with limited existing research, by exploring their implementation in relation to labour market.

1.18 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This research project consists of five complete chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 covered the introduction, background, rationale, motivation, and problem statement of the study. It also covered the research aims, objectives, and research questions.

Chapter 2 discussed the holistic view and the effects of skills development training on fighting unemployment and poverty, as well as meeting the demands of the job market. It critically assessed how skills development is used to combat the triple threat, especially among youth. It further discussed the different strategies employed by the Gauteng Department of Education and the Gauteng Province government to enhance skills amongst the youth and reduce youth unemployment.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology and tools used to collect, analyses, and report the data. This included the tools and measures used to store the data. It also outlined any field outliers to ensure the data is reliable and credible.

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis process and the results.

Chapter 5 discussed the findings in relation to the literature, interpreted them using theory, made recommendations, and drew conclusions.

1.19 CONCLUSION

The concept of a School of Specialisation aims to nurture highly capable learners by offering a specialised curriculum and by fostering demonstrated potential across the province. Moreover, SOS is envisaged as a mechanism to ensure that learners acquire skills needed to contribute to Gauteng's economy and to help reduce poverty. Accordingly, the study examined whether SOS can achieve the Gauteng Department of Education's core objectives. This chapter has outlined the background to Schools of Specialisation and discussed the need for skills development as a strategy to combat unemployment, especially among youth, and as a driver of Gauteng's economic growth. It has emphasised the study's importance and problem statement by examining how the SOS curriculum is designed to equip learners with targeted skills development. The chapter also set out the research aims and objectives and formulated the research questions, underscoring the role of skills development programmes in schools as a strategy to reduce poverty and stimulate regional economic growth. The next chapter is the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 examines the role of SOS in Gauteng in addressing skills shortages. This chapter also reviews the local and international literature, focusing on current thinking and debates on the concepts of skills development. The review is structured around the following areas that informed this study: skills shortages, youth unemployment, poverty reduction strategies, economic growth, vocational education, future jobs, and comparisons between the current school curriculum and the curriculum taught at the SOS.

In this literature review, I argue that the ordinary school curriculum does not adequately prepare learners for the world of work; it simply prepares them for Grade 12 and university entry. This chapter highlights the Gauteng Department of Education's plan to launch 36 SOS by March 2024, emphasising the importance of vocational education in aligning curricula with future job demands, as 65% of current students will work in jobs that do not yet exist (World Economic Forum, 2018). The Gauteng Department of Education introduced the SOS to enable learners to apply their skills in a fast-changing world of work.

The chapter discusses the mismatch between educational outcomes and labour-market needs, advocating early specialisation in Grade 8 to enhance skills development. It concludes that SOS can significantly contribute to poverty alleviation and economic development by equipping learners with relevant skills for the modern workforce. The main thrust of this chapter is to demonstrate how SOS have the potential to prepare learners for future work, equip them with the skills needed to accelerate economic growth, and serve as a tool to alleviate poverty in Gauteng.

2.2 CURRICULUM CHANGES IN POST APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Curriculum refers to what is taught in schools and encompasses the set of subjects offered, as well as the broader social processes that shape, implement, and assess

education (Mulenga, 2019; Priestley & Xenofontos, 2021). In practice, the curriculum is determined by the Minister of Education, and schools typically list the subjects they offer, all of which must align with the Department of Education's prescribed curriculum.

Since 1994, South Africa has undergone four major curriculum reforms: Curriculum 2005 (C2005), introduced in 1997; the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in 2002; the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in 2007; and, currently, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), introduced in 2011. The driving aim of these reforms has been to build knowledge, prepare learners to be responsible citizens, and equip them to meet the needs of the job market (Ellah, 2023).

However, scholars differ in their assessment of whether these reforms have achieved this aim. While CAPS is designed to address the urgent need to equip learners with contemporary industrial skills (Mtshali & Pillay, 2023), other scholars have identified a persistent gap between policy intent and classroom outcomes. CAPS seeks to develop learners who are creative and imaginative, effective communicators, and competent problem solvers, capable of functioning well both independently and in teams (Mantshongo, 2023). Despite this intent, ordinary public schools struggle to implement it in practice.

2.2.1 Shortcomings of the school curriculum in ordinary public schools

This section examines the current curriculum in ordinary public schools, contrasts it with that offered in specialised schools, and assesses the latter's relevance for addressing Gauteng's skills shortages.

The existing curriculum structure offers a limited scope for learners to acquire essential national skills. Whatever little practical training learners receive remains largely within schools, with little collaboration or partnership with industry to expose learners to real-world work environments and prepare them for employment (Fataar, 2018). As McKay (2019) argues, education should transform learners and equip them with lifelong skills that support sustainable livelihoods.

There is a call to move beyond textbook-based learning and to adopt experimental pedagogy that integrates essential life skills with subject knowledge (Cheong, Leong,

& Hill, 2021). The 21st century is characterised by rapid technological change driven by globalisation and shifting work requirements, making it critical for the education system to cultivate skills that help learners meet these demands. Internationally, education systems have been criticised for not adequately preparing youth for the workforce, which requires strong communication, creativity, innovation, and robust problem-solving abilities (Vivekananda, 2019). Many countries now use digital simulations and models to aid teaching, as these tools help clarify difficult concepts and assist visually oriented learners (Masenya, 2024; Okumu & Opio, 2023). Given the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of technological advancement and the learning process, schools must continually adapt if they are to remain relevant in the foreseeable future.

Although these scholars focus on different aspects of the curriculum crisis, their arguments are complementary. Fataar (2018) and Cheong et al. (2021) agree that the current curriculum in ordinary public schools is too theoretical, with Fataar (2018) emphasising the lack of industry collaboration and real-world of work exposure, while Cheong et al. (2021) highlight the over-reliance on textbook-based theory.

2.3 WHY SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION EXIST

According to the literature, it has always been difficult to align educational outcomes with the demands of the labour market; this issue has been exacerbated by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Tajuddin, Bohari, and Majdhoub, 2022). This challenge has been a long-standing concern in South Africa's basic education system. To address the challenge, the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) launched the SOS initiative in 2016.

By May 2025, Gauteng had established 36 fully fledged SOS, including the recent Ribane-Laka Maths, Science and ICT School of Specialisation, which was commissioned by Gauteng Premier, Panyaza Lesufi. The SOS framework remains underpinned by the South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996). To consolidate the existence and function of SOS, policy directives such as the Gauteng Education Rejuvenation Strategy, the GDE Strategic Plan, and the Transformation, Modernisation and Re-industrialisation (TMR) Agenda have been enacted. This study

aims to elaborate on these GDE-inspired enactments to provide readers with a clearer understanding of the overall drive and ethos of the SOS initiative.

2.3.1 From theory to hands-on learning: The GDE strategic plan

I contend that the theoretical approach to teaching and learning implemented in ordinary schools denied learners the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning. Mabizela (2024) supports this assertion, noting that the GDE enacted its strategic plan in 2018, intended to guide it in improving the quality of education in Gauteng schools and to ensure that the curriculum offered meets the demands of the 4IR.

The GDE strategic plan also aimed to equip learners with industry-driven skills (Mtshali, 2021). In line with these goals, GDE ensured that the education offered in SOS combined theoretical and practical learning. In so doing, the strategic plan underscored the need to integrate hands-on training and work-related experience with the theoretical learning that was prevalent in most schools.

2.3.2 The Gauteng Education Rejuvenation Strategy of 2016

The Gauteng Education Rejuvenation Strategy of 2016 is described as a multifaceted initiative by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) aimed at improving the quality of education in the province (Zambara, 2024). In the context of Schools of Specialisation (SOS), the strategy sought to ensure that the curriculum was revised to accommodate the teaching of technical and vocational skills to learners from Grades 4 to 12, to facilitate their transition to the industrial sector upon completion of Grade 12.

2.3.3 The Transformation, Modernisation and Re-industrialisation (TMR) Agenda

In 2019, the Premier of Gauteng, Panyaza Lesufi, described the TMR as a framework that the provincial government put in place to intensify Gauteng's efforts to accelerate economic growth and development. The concept of transformation primarily focused on demographic, industrial, and spatial transformations. The Gauteng provincial government was seeking ways and means to transition from a resource-centred economy to one driven by advanced technological innovations and manufacturing

(Mtshali, 2021). Affirmative action initiatives, such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) and the Black Industrialists Programme, were initiated. All these projects require technically minded, hands-on manpower; hence, I propose that the provincial government's overtures were intended to build a competent manpower base capable of meeting the challenges posed by 4IR.

The Premier of Gauteng, Mr Panyaza Lesufi, explained that, for the Gauteng Provincial Government, modernisation encompassed adopting technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to improve operational efficiency and reduce costs (Gauteng Provincial Government, 2023). On the other hand, the industrialisation drive sought to ensure that industries produce more, encourage economic inclusion, and consolidate and attract investment in industries. To ensure these efforts become a reality, deliberate reforms were introduced to existing educational policies, so that the workforce required to champion them is trained in the early stages of human development. Through these plans, the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) ultimately identified and reorganised 36 schools and mandated them to teach learners technical and vocational skills they can use after completing Grade 12.

2.3.4 The value of schools of specialisation

SOS are vital for several reasons, including providing school children with skills development training, combating poverty, and accelerating economic growth. According to Zambara (2024), the African continent as a whole faces a catastrophic outcome if the educational system fails to equip learners with the skills needed for future careers.

SOS were launched with the aim of using ICT as a key instructional tool to improve skills in particular subjects and contribute positively to the Gauteng province's economy (Mabizela, 2024). SOS were developed to offer a more advanced curriculum that equips learners with skills relevant to the current economy and increasingly prepares them for a variety of professions upon completion of basic education (Mabizela, 2024). According to Sholugu (2022), SOS ensure that learners leave school with the relevant skills to attend university, join companies, or even become self-

employed. Learners in SOS may also have the option to start their own businesses or work right away at top companies in their fields (Shologu, 2022). As it stands, regular public schools are deficient in some respects, and their curricula have not been radically revised to meet employers' requirements by imparting practical, hands-on skills. To address the skills challenge, SOS introduced a curriculum to address skills shortages among school leavers and graduates.

2.4 THE KEY FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION

The main roles of SOS are the development of high-demand skills in specific sectors and ensuring that such skills are aligned with Gauteng's economic and industrial needs, posits Zambara (2024). The schools are envisaged to take a leading role in imparting learners with the prerequisite industry-driven skills and directly preparing them for the job market at a very early stage.

To ensure this role is carried out successfully, Shologu (2022) notes that SOS had to develop scarce STEM skills that incorporate Mathematics, Science, and ICT. Shologu (2022) further states that schools had to address improving what stakeholders regard as specific skills, such as automotive disciplines, electronics, aviation, agriculture, maritime, and creative arts.

Although the DBE may provide certain skills and certification to the learners, the system struggles to provide work-related experience notes (Mabizela, 2024). Hence, the SOS need to keep on devising some innovative ways to bridge this gap between ordinary school learning and the practical approach that the higher education institutions seek to promote, and it is crucial for the job market that needs practically oriented manpower who would be handy in ensuring the industrialisation of Gauteng (Bhebhe, 2023).

2.4.1 The potential of schools of specialisation to alleviate poverty and accelerate economic development in Gauteng

Among the functions of the SOS is the creation of artisans who will play a significant role in a country's economic efforts, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation. Shenoy and Shailashri (2023) reveal that skills development is essential for South Africa's

economic growth and social development. Shenoy and Shailashri (2023) further posit that, to succeed in this tough environment, one must possess both skills and efficiency. Cappelli (2024) also corroborates Shenoy and Shailashri's (2023) assertions, attesting that skills development can help reduce poverty by making people more employable. Enhancing skills serves the dual purpose of ensuring career advancement and job satisfaction for individuals, as well as improving graduates' employability (Shenoy & Shailashri, 2023).

One strategy to combat poverty and inequality in developing nations is skills development and training (Ismail, 2018). Skills development, according to Axen (2023), is the ability to perform intricate tasks or work-related duties with ease and adaptability. The process of equipping learners with the skills needed to enter the workforce is known as skills development (Mabeba, 2019). According to Abrahams (2020), skills development is important because, as in all industries, the manufacturing and engineering sectors are changing rapidly, requiring continuous upskilling or reskilling to ensure employees' competencies remain relevant and current. Due to changes happening around the world, it is important to continuously develop people's skills to stay relevant in the face of rapid change. Abrahams (2020) believes that such overtures can be achieved by introducing skills development training at an early age. According to Mabeba (2019), a need therefore arises to focus on skills development training, especially amongst the youth. Such an initiative will address the evident skills shortage and skills mismatch in South Africa (Mabeba, 2019).

A skill mismatch occurs when employees possess more or fewer skills than are needed for a job, which harms the economy, society, and the individuals who perform it (City Insight, 2020). In South Africa, skills mismatch is primarily characterised by technical under-skilling (Habanabakize, Habiyaremye & Nwosu, 2022).

The idea of a skills mismatch emerges when considering new professions or job categories for which there are relatively few qualified candidates (Fanayana, 2022). Yamanda & Otchia (2020) argue that there is a significant gap between the skills learners acquire and the skills industries expect. The purpose of SOS is to rectify this mismatch by teaching learners relevant skills. Mncayi and Shuping (2021) also note that there has been an ongoing trend indicating that the lack of skills development in

South Africa is due to a mismatch between educational achievement and job requirements, which continues to give rise to underemployment.

There is a shortage of various skills in Gauteng province that people can use to develop the economy and combat unemployment. According to Mncayi & Shuping (2021), without these skills, people in the province would face challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and economic stagnation. According to Sakyere, Wentzel, Viljoen, Kanyane and Pophiwa (2019), the skills shortage needed for economic growth applies to many countries worldwide, including South Africa. The whole country is experiencing a shortage of skilled labour, and Gauteng, as a province, contributes to this shortage; therefore, skills development needs to be taken seriously in the province.

The Gauteng Province faces a skills shortage that hinders economic growth and contributes to unemployment (Zambara, 2024). This shortage aligns with a global trend where many countries, including South Africa, lack the skilled labour needed for economic advancement (World Economic Forum Report 2023). The loss of skilled workers to countries like Australia, New Zealand, and the United States exacerbate this issue (Sakyere et al, 2019).

Companies report that a lack of qualified personnel and a significant skills gap impede industry transformation (World Economic Forum, 2023). Without skilled individuals, companies cannot hire as many people, contributing to rising unemployment rates (South African Statistics, 2020). Some companies' priorities profit over investing in skills development, further limiting workers' opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Despite ongoing skills development strategies in Africa, the skill gap persists, hindering economic and social progress (Langeni, 2020). Rapid technological advancement intensifies this problem, as reliance on technology reduces the demand for manual skills (Guirbert, Hamuguchi, Highi, Hino, Leibbrandt & Shifa, 2018). Gauteng's status as a major population centre and leading contributor to South Africa's GDP underscores the need for a skilled workforce to sustain economic development and growth within the province (South African Statistics, 2020). Equipping individuals

with the necessary skills is crucial for fostering economic prosperity and addressing unemployment challenges in Gauteng (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Gauteng has become a major economic hub on the African continent, as large numbers of people continue to migrate to the province for economic opportunities (Guirbert, Hamuguchi, Highi, Hino, Leibbrandt & Shifa, 2018). David et al. (2018) further note that Gauteng province's revenue output makes Gauteng the highest contributor to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Figure 2.1: Gauteng Province is the top contributor to the country's total GDP



Source StatsSA (2023).

It is evident from Figure 2.1 that, with this large population and the province's opulent status compared to other provinces, there is a need for more skilled people who can contribute to the province's GDP and help continue developing the province's economy.

2.5 SKILLS PROGRAMMES FOR LEARNERS IN SOS

This section presents a brief comparison and an elaborate contrast between the education offered by ordinary schools and that offered by SOS. Musowe (2020) asserts that SOS provide an inclusive learning environment that caters to students with diverse needs, whereas ordinary schools often provide inadequate support to

learners with special needs. Musowe (2020) further posits that SOS can provide a more appropriate, personalised learning environment compared to ordinary schools, where classrooms and learning facilities may not be as open and accessible to all.

On the other hand, Mantshontsho (2023) highlights that SOS ensure its educators are well-trained and invests in their training to address the challenges associated with teaching in such schools. These schools provide both specialised teaching and specialised resources, whereas in ordinary schools, teachers often lack sufficient training to address students' diverse needs.

The SOS align with the views of Mobo and Sabondo (2019), who advocate for hands-on teaching to ensure learners gain the practical skills they need. Mobo and Sabondo (2019) further argue that educators should appreciate that education and lesson-delivery goals centre on addressing learners' experiences and feelings and on making critical decisions about the best intervention methods to aid learners in gaining new knowledge and expanding their knowledge base. This approach, advanced and recommended by Mobo and Sabondo (2019), is more evident in SOS than in ordinary schools, where educators seem not to care about the outcomes of their instructional activities.

SOS seem to align with the suggestions of McGrath and Akoojie (2020) that, as lessons take place in a school with a vocational and industrial bias, educators should always ensure there is a transparent and deliberate platform for engagement between learners and their educators. Such a development is seldom witnessed in ordinary schools. SOS seems to adhere to the principle that learning in such institutions, or any educational institution, should be all about what students do rather than what educators do. Such a spirit, according to Musowe (2020), should foster a dialogical process between the educator and the learner whilst ensuring learners’ tasks are practical and aligned with the desires of industries and other entrepreneurial entities. Mantshontsho (2023) highlights that in ordinary schools, activities that engage learners are gradually disappearing; hence, the SOS endeavors to revive a wholesome learning process that integrates theory with intensive practical work.

The poor state of educational facilities in ordinary schools, according to Mantshontsho (2023), is detrimental to the imparting of vocational or industrial skills. SOS are perceived as being on the right track by key stakeholders and may help the province address the challenges of aligning certain aspects of education with the dictates of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The next subsections provide an overview of SOS from an international context.

2.5.1 The Indonesian experience

Indonesia has introduced Focus Schools, akin to specialised options within the education system. Suharno, Pambudi, and Harjato (2021) explain that these schools were created to deliver holistic vocational education and cultivate skilled manpower, a goal that traditional Indonesian schools did not adequately meet. Dwiyono (2023) emphasises that the first priorities for Focus Schools are: identifying capable leaders to champion the initiative, creating a conducive working environment, and motivating educators so they commit to the Focus Schools approach. He views leadership identification and teacher motivation as essential first steps toward producing a skilled workforce. Dwiyono (2023) further argues that governments in underdeveloped countries bear the responsibility to identify and train effective leadership and to motivate teachers; without this, such programs cannot yield skilled manpower across all schools.

Mertayasa (2024) added that the practical learning experiences offered by Focus Schools are crucial to the vocational thrust, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving, which facilitate smoother transitions to industry and help learners complete their programs. Collectively, Indonesian scholars contribute valuable insights into strengthening the country's focus-school model and improving graduates' employability. Mertayasa (2024) also notes, in line with Dwiyono (2023), that many underdeveloped countries struggle with implementing such programmes; he cites Tanzania's Ujamaa experiment in the 1960s as a notable example of a failed approach that contributed to economic difficulties and increased reliance on foreign aid.

2.5.2 The Tanzanian approach

Mmbanga (2024) contends that although Ujamaa failed in Tanzania in the 1960s, a newer policy, the Inclusive Classroom, introduced in 2010, is advancing inclusive education and vocational training in schools and gaining traction. Mmbanga attributes this progress to the Ministry of Education's commitment to providing essential logistical support, including ICT installation and well-equipped science, building, and welding workshops in many schools. Since 2013, the Inclusive Classroom has produced competent artisans who have readily entered Tanzania's industries (Mmbanga, 2024). Ngalaye (2024) corroborates this view, arguing that the Inclusive Classroom has transformed Tanzania's vocational training landscape and significantly boosted the country's capacity to generate skilled manpower for its economic development.

2.5.3 The Chinese experience

Wu and Ye (2018) describe China's inclusive education approach as prioritising the learning environment that supports learners with special needs. This aligns with Gauteng's SOS objective of serving diverse learning contexts and needs. The authors note that Chinese schools blend academic and practical learning through BASIS Bilingual schools, which integrate the Chinese curriculum with international curricula to prepare graduates with globally marketable practical skills. Wu and Ye (2018) further outline that Chinese schools offer a combination of academics and practical's through the basis of Bilingual and international schools that integrate the Chinese curriculum with international curricula to ensure graduates from BASIS Bilingual schools meet global demands that emphasise graduates who possess adequate practical skills. This research views the SOS approach in South Africa as a deliberate effort by the Gauteng Province to fuse academic and practical training to produce graduates who can easily transition into industry.

The Chinese Journal for Special Education (2021) reported that China has intensified its efforts to provide teacher-training programs with a practical focus. The programmes have trained educators to create a conducive environment that facilitates the prerequisite and vital development of learners' abilities through theoretical instruction, practical instruction, technological support, and professionalism. The SOS curriculum

is similar to the Chinese approach because learners are more exposed to practical activities than to theory, which is mainly taught in ordinary public schools.

To summaries, this study emphasises that the literature reviewed in this chapter, on the qualities of SOS compared to ordinary schools, reveals that the skills taught at SOS are more practical in preparing learners for the world of work than those offered by ordinary schools' curricula. The literature clearly shows that the programmes in SOS schools are modelled so that most learners who enroll in such schools are likely to leave with skills they can use in the world of work, regardless of whether they acquire a university or tertiary college qualification. Literature has, at the same time, revealed that ordinary schools impart or enable learners to gain knowledge from classrooms that are devoid of practical prowess and induction into what would prevail in an ideal workplace setting. Skills taught at the SOS increase the chances of learners finding work after completing their studies. As Shologu (2022) points out, SOS equip learners with various crucial competencies in the automobile sector, including welding, fitting and turning, electrical engineering and excavation.

The education sector must take responsibility by addressing the economic demands for industrial skills and the desire to advance society (Ramadigela, 2020). Such an overture is necessary if ever the education system is to produce learners who are effective in different workplace settings and who can contribute to the socio-economic development for themselves and the Gauteng province and South Africa at large. Kana and Letaba (2024) argue that an appropriate curriculum that preserves industry synergies and is responsive to the Fourth Industial Revolution (4IR) is required, and that this needs to be a top priority for the provincial and national government. Similarly, Sehlako, Chibambo and Divala (2023) note that curriculum injustices persist where basic education fails to integrate 4IR skills. The programmes in the SOS are structured in such a way that learners are exposed to the requirements of different industries.

The SOS approach exposes learners to industry requirements and can help them improve their livelihoods, contribute to their communities, and support broader socio-economic development in Gauteng and South Africa. Mtshali and Singh-Pillay (2023) argue for sustained investment in socio-economic development and for innovative methods of teaching hands-on skills, while Nonyana, Mtshali and Maeko (2024) and

Nkwanyane (2023) stress that teachers should be well-trained to conduct practical activities and that vocational programmes must remain responsive to employer needs in order to equip learners with marketable skills upon completing Grade 12.

2.6 FOCUS AREA OF THE SOS OPERATING IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

The SOS specialisation or disciplines are in Mathematics, Science & ICT, Sports, Commerce and Entrepreneurship, Engineering, and Performing and Creative Arts (Bengston, 2023). The sub-sections that follow outline the focus areas that the 36 different SOSs established in Gauteng province offer to the learners.

2.6.1 SOS specialising in information, communication, and technology

Among 36 SOS programmes, six fields of specialisation exist, and an SOS may select one area to shape its curriculum (Mtshali, 2021). Sections 2.6.1 through 2.6.6 outline the six common SOS specialisations found across schools. In recent years, information and communication technology (ICT) has advanced rapidly, prompting many SOS to foreground ICT in their offerings. This shift is driven in part by the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) and the rise of artificial intelligence, which underscores the need for digital competencies in education. As Penprase (2018) notes, ICT is indispensable in teaching and learning today. Technology is widely acknowledged for simplifying task completion and enhancing efficiency in societal operations.

Ratheeswari (2018) argues that ICT can make teaching and learning more manageable and efficient, provided teachers possess the requisite knowledge and skills to leverage new digital tools to help learners reach high academic standards. Preparing learners to adapt to 4IR-driven changes is crucial for effective ICT use in SOS (Amunga & Mavundla, 2021). Dei (2018) contends that a well-designed ICT infrastructure increases student–teacher interaction, fosters critical thinking, and helps students engage more deeply with the material. Das (2019) adds that ICT advancement can improve education quality by boosting learner motivation and foundational skills.

2.6.2 SOS specialising in business and entrepreneurship

Some SOS focus on business and entrepreneurship. Ngcobo and Khumalo (2022) identify entrepreneurship education as a priority in South Africa, aimed at building entrepreneurial capacity from the ground up. Given the high unemployment rate, equipping learners with entrepreneurial skills can help them start their own ventures. Gamede (2020) also suggests that rising unemployment levels, a stalled rate of job creation, and a muted economic recovery can be addressed by focusing on entrepreneurial activity as a means to generate economic growth. Viewed in this light, such SOS can help develop township economies in Gauteng and alleviate poverty in township communities.

2.6.3 SOS specialising in performing arts

There are SOS that specialise in performing arts, with music as a key subject. Lerumo (2018) argues that implementing a CAPS-aligned music curriculum alone is not sufficient, due to misalignment between university degree programmes and CAPS requirements. Sakhiseni (2023) suggests that universities should align their curricula with CAPS to prepare educators who fit the school system and can interpret the CAPS framework effectively. Professional music educators face several challenges, and the only fully recognised music education professionals are those with a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), which enables them to teach Creative Arts even if they do not master all musical components (Sakhiseni, 2023). Performing arts programmes aim to prepare learners for careers in the entertainment industry.

2.6.4 SOS specialising in the tourism and hospitality industries

Many schools now offer Tourism and Hospitality at the secondary level because these subjects are hands-on and in high demand in the job market, increasing graduates' post-secondary opportunities. Tourism and Hospitality can contribute to local economic development, with industry projections estimating substantial demand for full-time workers by 2025 (Andreessen, 2018). Tourism and Hospitality can contribute to local economic development, with industry projections estimating substantial demand for full-time workers by 2025 (Andreessen, 2018). At present, SOS, focusing

on hospitality and tourism, aims to play a significant role in shaping the impact of tourism on the economy. Van der Merwe, Kleynhans, and Roberson (2019) note numerous employment opportunities in hospitality, a sector that is expanding rapidly and already accounts for about 10% of global employment. However, there is a necessity to shift teaching tourism in schools from fragmented, theory-based methods to experiential, value-driven learning that engages learners in solving real-world sustainability issues (Shumba & Dube-Xaba, 2023). Given the sector's contribution to employment and economic growth, SOS, specialising in tourism and hospitality, has a critical responsibility to produce graduates who are both industry-ready and capable of addressing Sustainable Development Goals.

2.6.5 SOS specialising in sports

The Minister of Sports, Arts, and Culture has stated that school sports are the 'bedrock' of sport development in South Africa, meaning they are the foundation of sport development in the country (Call to Incorporate, 2023). In addition, the Department of Basic Education recognised that school sport provides a foundation essential to the learner's overall development and is fully supportive of the academic curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2021).

Socioeconomic status also influences children's participation in and uptake of sports, with parents in low-income communities needing greater awareness of sports as a potential economic driver and career path (Post, Rosenthal & Rauh, 2019). An SOS specialising in sports, if well promoted and implemented, could contribute to youth development and national sport capacity (Gauteng Department of Education, 2023).

2.6.6 SOS specialising in mining

The Mining industry is another sector through which a country's economy can be developed. Some SOS specialise in mining in pursuit of the GDE projection that some learners need to be trained to become mining entrepreneurs. According to the Gauteng Department of Education (2023), learners enrolled in such courses have already begun to demonstrate their diligence in resolving challenges in the mining sector by developing a few innovative solutions. For instance, learners at one SOS in

the West of Gauteng province have invented a Network Time Protocol Server that enables access to GPS signals and accurate time while underground. In addition, learners have developed an application which detects whether miners are wearing their safety helmets and created a model machinery that can improve mining processes (Zambara, 2024). These innovations indicate that learners have a growing understanding of various mining operations and great potential within the mining sector (Gauteng Department of Education, 2023).

2.7 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN SOS

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is another aspect which is included in the SOS curriculum. VET is a form of education that focuses on mastering skills at work (Suharno, Pambudi & Harjato, 2020). VET is based on practical training that prepares a person for a specific job function or trade, with a strong emphasis on the skills and knowledge required for a particular occupation or industry (Oxford Academy, 2023).

Governments worldwide are increasingly interested in determining whether vocational education differs from general education in equipping learners with the skills they need to succeed after graduation (Silliman & Virtanen, 2019). This is due to the negative effects of technological advancements and the declining employment prospects of individuals without a college degree (Autor, 2019). In countries such as Indonesia, vocational education has been seen as a contributor to high employment amongst school graduates (Suharno, 2018).

Giving VET high priority in schools has many benefits, including reducing youth unemployment, reducing poverty, producing skilled labour, and boosting economic growth (UNESCO, 2022; World, ILO, and UNESCO, 2023). The curriculum in SOS emphasises practical activities, which is similar to the educational approach in counties like China, where theoretical and practical instructions are combined. According to Fengchen, Shuli, and Junpeng (2023), vocational and technical education can modernise and rationalise curriculum teaching and lay a solid foundation for cultivating new talent. Technical and vocational education is a key component of a practical skills-acquisition programme that promotes employability and decent work, and is regarded as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable economic

development, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (UNESCO, 2022; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024

International organisations such as UNESCO emphasise the importance of vocational streams in the secondary school curriculum (Chamadia & Shahid, 2018). In agreement, Mirabel, Daile, and Sawagegn (2022) add that having Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in school-based settings will introduce essential primary skills for the growing child, thereby laying the foundation for future learning. Such an initiative would enable high school graduates to make a smooth transition into industry. It would, at the same time, benefit many graduates economically and help the province and the nation address the skills shortages that industries face.

2.7.1 The link between TVET colleges and the SOS

South Africa's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges have long struggled to supply industry with a suitably qualified workforce (Windapo, 2016). Makgato and Moiloa (2019) contend that the SA TVET system has not kept pace with evolving industry needs. Consequently, TVET providers must deliver skills that align with employers' actual requirements (Okwelle, 2017). A persistent shortcoming is the emphasis on theoretical classroom instruction at the expense of hands-on, workshop-based training, leaving graduates ill-equipped for modern industrial work (Papier, 2017). As a result, TVET institutions continue to face challenges in equipping students with the contemporary technical competencies demanded by today's and tomorrow's workplaces (Amran, Ananta, Hanafiah, Ali, & Mohd, 2020).

In this context, Brey et al. (2021) argue that post-school education and TVET should be the primary avenue for purposeful, responsive skills development that meets current and future economic needs. Yet the sector has not operated at an optimal level to generate the skills required to drive economic growth.

Within South Africa, TVET colleges and Universities of Technology are the main training institutions addressing the shortage of manual skills (Mtshali & Ramadigela, 2020). The introduction of SOS can thus be seen as a complementary effort by the

Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) to augment the work already undertaken by TVET colleges and technology universities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020).

Against this backdrop, SOSs aim to expose learners to industry-relevant skills even before they enter TVET colleges. Echoing DHET, the GDE seeks to instil hands-on practical skills that meet industry needs, ensuring that graduates acquire job-relevant competencies (Paulos, 2023).

2.8 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

There are many ways to define skills development, but for this study, it is defined as the process of equipping students with the prerequisite practical and industry-related skills to prepare them for the workplace (Mabeba, 2019). The importance of skills development is discussed in detail in this section, and an attempt is made to explain why it is important to equip learners with skills they can use to develop themselves and the communities in which they reside.

The focus of the Gauteng Province and the nation at large should shift from the demand for skills to the supply of skills, and the curriculum should be designed to ensure that learners are adequately skilled to meet the demands of the labour market and the country’s economy (Mncayi & Shuping, 2021). According to Mhlanga et al. (2023), developing more skilled learners would benefit the country in sectors that, at present, champion skills development and are regarded as the most essential. It will also raise production levels in Gauteng's industries and gradually boost growth in the provincial and national economy.

2.8.1 The Impediments faced by the Skills development programme

The South African government has launched a development programme to put the nation on a path to economic prosperity, and one of its key components is skills development (Brey, Brownell & Motala, 2021). However, concerns about the disparities between industries and education never go away (McGrath & Yamada, 2023).

Over the past ten years, the South African economy has experienced very slow growth, and the low number of young people entering the workforce has contributed to the rise in the country's unemployment rate. The country's unemployment rate increased from 24.69% in 2010 to 28.18% in 2020 (Stats SA, 2020). This unwelcome scenario has been exacerbated by the fact that under-skilled graduates being pushed into the job market do not match the skills required by the industries concerned and are detrimental to the economy's growth (Brey, Brownell & Matala, 2021). The implication is that Gauteng and South Africa still desperately need the production and supply of more skilled manpower to assist the provincial and national governments in improving the economy. Brey et al. (2021) posit that producing such skilled manpower can be achieved by teaching relevant skills to learners as early as high school, but the intensity of such efforts is, at present, far from satisfactory (Brey et al., 2021).

To address the teething challenges Gauteng faces in putting in place a sound skills development initiative, Zahidi (2023) notes that employers plan to focus on enhancing employees' leadership and social influence. According to Zahidi (2023), 40% of companies have invested heavily in resilience and employee flexibility. On the other hand, 32% of companies have focused on improving employees' agility, which is currently found wanting. Some companies, which constitute 30%, have concentrated on boosting curiosity and lifelong learning. With more skilled people in the country and the province, companies may be able to hire them, thereby reducing the unemployment rate.

2.9 POVERTY ALLEVIATION STRATEGY IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

Poverty levels in South Africa have remained high and have not yet decreased since 1994 (Makhubu, 2021). According to Stats SA (2019), poverty decreased between 2006 and 2011, but poverty levels increased again in 2015. The South African government is still being held accountable for the country's high poverty levels (Makhubu, 2021). According to Nkosi (2022), 20% of the country's population can be categorised as living in abject or extreme poverty. Poverty is rampant in the country, but urban areas such as Gauteng Province face unique challenges due to their location. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, more people are gravitating towards Gauteng Province, putting the province in a position to create more jobs for its

residents; however, poverty levels continue to rise due to a lack of employment opportunities.

Gauteng Province is one of the most populous provinces in the country, with Johannesburg having the highest rates of unemployment and poverty. Poverty can exacerbate or lead to a wide range of other social issues, including lack of education and access to healthcare, unemployment, starvation, ineffective employment and widespread economic disparity among others (Hassan, Bukhari & Arshed, 2019).

This section sought to explore poverty alleviation strategies in Gauteng Province, as poverty and deprivation are considered priorities for the South African government (Molepo & Molepo, 2022). The section also emphasises the importance of poverty alleviation.

The goal of poverty alleviation is to improve the lives of those currently living in poverty. Another term frequently used synonymously with poverty alleviation is poverty reduction (The Borgen Project, 2019). According to Molepo and Molepo (2022), in South Africa, efforts to eradicate poverty have been part of the development agenda since the country became a democracy.

Over the years, the Gauteng Provincial Government has launched many initiatives to combat youth unemployment by equipping Gauteng youth with skills to improve their lives and reduce unemployment (Bvuma & Manewick, 2020). According to Mahase (2022), the Tshepo 1 million (T1M) skills empowerment initiative was launched to change young people's lives by providing employment opportunities through skills training. This is one of many examples showing how Gauteng Province has tried over the years to address the skills shortage, with the introduction of SOS as another recent measure.

The Ilima-Letsema programme was initiated by the South African government to encourage sustainable farming practices and raise households' incomes in communities (Nkgudi, Maake, & Masekoameng, 2022). The purpose of the programme was to create jobs and alleviate poverty in the Mid-Vaal Local Municipality

in the Gauteng Province (Nkgudi et al., 2022). Nkgudi et al. (2022) regard this overture as another example of the province's initiative to address the skills shortage.

Recently, there has been a Nasi Ispani initiative. A programme launched by the Gauteng provincial government to address unemployment in the province. The programme is for all unemployed youths and aims to facilitate their training in various skills and eventually place them with employers aligned with the skills they have acquired (Dlamini, 2024). The programmes and initiatives discussed above show how the Gauteng Province has sought to address poverty and unemployment over the years by introducing various initiatives, especially for young people.

2.9.1 Tax levy on skills development

This section examines how the South African government has developed initiatives to ensure skills development within the country. The skills development levy is an example of such initiatives.

To promote skills development and growth in South Africa, a skills levy was implemented. The Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) and Skills Development Levies Act (No 9 of 1999) were enacted by the South African government to address the country's skills shortage (South Africa, 1998; South Africa, 1999). The Act's primary goal is to lessen the effects of the skills deficit while promoting public and private involvement in developing the skills needed for an economy that is continually evolving. The purpose of the Skills Development Levy is to raise income to develop the skills of the South African workforce, improve workers' quality of life, enhance youth's prospects of finding work, and enhance labour mobility (South African Revenue Service, 2019).

Employers are required to contribute 1% of their employees' salaries to the skills development levy. The money goes to Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the Skills Development Fund to pay for training (Department of Labour, 2018). The levy is a compulsory scheme for funding education and training, as envisaged in the Skills Development Act of 1998. The levy came into effect on 1 April

2000 and is payable monthly by employers to the South African Revenue Services (SARS).

The Skills Development Act (SDA) 97 of 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act (SDLA) of 1999 have been pivotal in promoting and implementing skills development in the country (Abrahams, 2020).

The Skills Development Act was introduced by the Department of Labour to promote labour-market policies for skills development (McKay, 2019). The levy is another initiative the government has implemented to promote skills development across the country.

2.10 CONSTANT CHANGES IN THE WORLD OF WORK

The world of work is constantly changing due to shifting demographics and greater diversity, greater global integration and technological advancement, and increased competition in product markets for recruiting and retaining the best talent. This suggests that learners need to gain early-career experience in workplace skills, knowledge, and behaviour (Herbert, Rothwell, Glover & Lambert, 2021). According to Stone (2022), school counsellors had a lot on their plates even before COVID-19, guiding students towards success in a rapidly changing workforce. Learners need to gain early career experience in the workplace, including skills, knowledge, and behaviour (Herbert et al., 2021).

The Future of Jobs Survey estimates that 34% of all business-related tasks are performed by machines, with the remaining 66% performed by humans (Zahidi, 2023). This suggests that the labour force is slowly being replaced by technology, and that school learners need to be taught what is relevant to the labour force's requirements.

2.10.1 Future jobs for Gauteng Province

Gauteng province has experienced rapid population growth due to natural urbanisation and rural-urban migration (Sebetlela, 2022). This is why there are ways to create jobs for the province's population to accelerate economic growth. According to Kai Chu et al. (2019), human labour has increasingly been replaced by machines in

jobs that require repetitive manual and cognitive work. It is because of this that the SOS produces learners with skills that no machine can replace, keeping people in the job market rather than replacing humans with machines.

People are now being hired for professions that require more advanced communication skills, computer proficiency, and analytical thinking (Levy & Murnane, 2020). Because of technological advancement, people don't feel empowered to help solve global problems by developing the inventions or solutions needed to do so (Kai Chu et al., 2019).

Nobody can accurately predict what future jobs will look like. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), technologies, data analytics, climate change, environmental management, encryption, and cybersecurity are expected to be the next job creators in the next five years. It is therefore for these reasons that SOS needs to be in line with what is expected in the future, rather than continuing to teach learners an outdated curriculum. The World Economic Forum (2018) stated that 65% of students in school today will work in jobs that do not currently exist, and that 47% of today's jobs will be useless in 5 years. This suggests that educational institutions need to develop a new curriculum to equip learners with skills that match future jobs.

2.10.2 Preparing the learners for the world of work

School education should go beyond the classroom and into the real world of work, and explore the opportunities available for developing learners' proficiency through interaction with professionals in the workplace. Scepanouic (2019) states that one of the challenges faced by learning institutions is how to provide learners with the knowledge and skills that will support them in long-term employment. Industry professionals also ensure that graduates have an education that meets the demands of the labour market (Ramraj & Marimuthu, 2021).

It has come to light that educational institutions do not fully prepare learners for the labour market or effectively convey to them the need to develop soft skills (Succi & Canovi, 2020). In addition, institutions must provide learners with opportunities to grow and develop, and equip them for the world of work (Ramraj & Marimuthu, 2021).

Therefore, the effectiveness of secondary schooling, including Schools of Specialisation (SOS), must be evaluated against its ability to bridge that gap between classroom learning and evolving labour market demands.

2.11 THE CURRENT LABOUR MARKET DEMANDS

The world is undergoing significant changes, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is a major part of them (Adam, 2024). Valentine and Victoria (2022) report that the areas of change include Artificial Intelligence (AI), digitalisation, Internet of Things (IoT), robotisation, and blockchain technology. According to Mhlanga and Moloi (2020), these changes are affecting almost every part of our lives and our daily personal and work experiences. These technologies have driven an evolution in which various tasks previously performed by humans are now replaced by 4IR technologies (Kiviranta, 2018).

As noted by Mhlanga and Moloi (2020), the changes brought by 4IR, as well as those outlined by the World Economic Forum (WEF), suggest that an estimated 65% of children starting primary school will go on to work in completely new professions or jobs that do not yet exist. This suggests that schools need to keep up with the trends that are happening around the world so that learners are not taught things that will not work or advantage them in the future.

Companies need to keep up with labour market demands; hiring people who meet them is necessary. The changes bring efficiency and a better quality of life to many; however, they could disrupt the job market for many others as well (Schwab, 2016).

2.12 THE LINK BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT AND SHORTAGE OF SKILLS

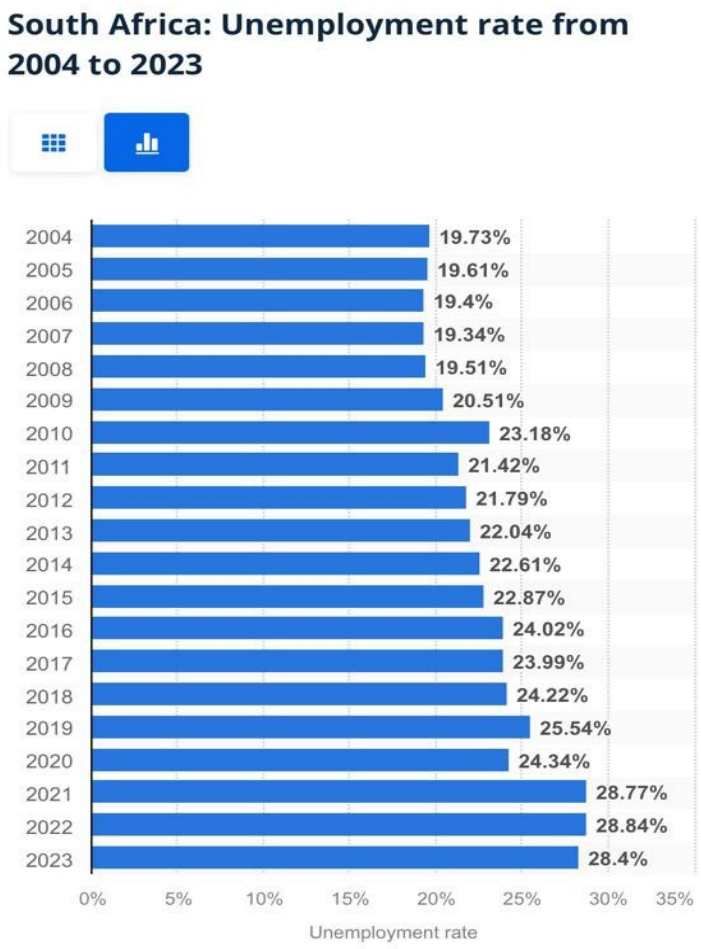
The youth unemployment rate suggests that young people lack the knowledge or expertise needed to drive economic growth (Mabeba, 2019). However, if young people gain skills early, they can use them to become entrepreneurs, welders, electricians, and so on. These skills can be learned from the existing SOS.

In the past, there has been a gap between workforce supply and economic development due to technological disruptions, territorial mobility, migration, and skills

mismatches, caused by a lack of work experience and work-related skills among individuals (Codefop, 2019). It is said that technological changes and higher skills and qualifications demands are not fully met by training systems (Zainea, Toma, Marinescu & Chitiiea, 2020). Due to rapid technological development, the skills employers seek differ from those offered by job seekers (European Commission, 2020). The skills shortage or mismatch is often associated with youth unemployment. This also underscores the need for educational institutions to teach the skills employers require.

South Africa's high unemployment rate primarily affects young people, with almost 60% of them being unemployed (Mseleku, 2022). This is because most young people do not have skills relevant to make them employable. South Africa is ranked the country with the highest unemployment in the world. The figure below shows the report released by Statistics South Africa on the unemployment rate in South Africa in the year 2023.

Figure 2.2: Unemployment rate in South Africa in the year 2023



Source: Statistics of South Africa (2023)

To address the skills shortage, most companies are now looking for individuals who are highly motivated but can also be further trained to improve performance. This implies that most companies are looking for people who can address their skills shortages rather than employ unskilled workers.

According to Mhlanga, Khoza, and Skosana (2023), university and college graduates who obtain qualifications but still lack the relevant skills to meet the country's needs are left unemployed. Hence, it is important to equip learners with skills to better prepare them for the world of work. South Africa is currently experiencing quite atypical economic growth and unemployment due to a skills shortage (Mhlanga et al., 2023).

2.13 CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION

Despite the immense benefits that SOSs offer, they also have their own problems. One such problem concerns learners who may face challenges associated with the limitations of SOS (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2021). The SOS, like any other institution, has limitations that may prevent the school from fully realising its potential and meeting the aims of the Gauteng Department of Education. In this section, the limitations and delimitations of SOS will be discussed to help clarify the rationale for turning schools into SOS.

2.13.1 The recruitment of teachers

Schools of Specialisation have their own limitations that pose serious challenges to their administrators and educators. The first such limitation concerns the recruitment of qualified, experienced teachers to advance a unique curriculum that most from ordinary schools have never been exposed to.

Teachers play an important role in the teaching and learning process, aiming to prepare learners to be employable in the future (Mhlanga, Khoza & Skosana, 2023). It is equally important that the Schools of Specialisation employ and recruit teachers who are relevant to teach subjects offered at the specific SOS. According to Tchereva (2018), teachers at technical schools are required to have a thorough knowledge of various trades and practical engineering experience. It is envisaged that, equipped with knowledge, these teachers would be aware of the employability skills businesses require and ensure that their approaches equip learners for the realities of the workplace.

2.13.2 Development of business plans

Developing business plans that reflect specialisation and relevant learners' support activities is vital to SOS’s success. Many factors can make it difficult for an SOS to run effectively. Learners may not be exposed to relevant activities that should be conducted at the SOS and therefore rely on theory-based rather than practical activities. This is similar to what prevails in TVET institutions: there are serious resource shortages for training students in relevant skills. The observations made by

Sephokgole, Ramadigela, and Makgato (2022) that the lack of infrastructure, tools, and resources has a detrimental effect on the delivery of high-quality TVET programmes, as it prevents lecturers from giving students sufficient exposure to practical skills, resonate well with the situation in some SOSs. It has been observed that some other SOS still lack basic electricity supply, especially in the townships.

2.13.3 Limited scope

The Schools of Specialisation focus on a specific area; this may limit learners' exposure to other subjects of interest, eventually forcing them to study at other schools that do not even offer practical subjects.

Pressure and stress: Specialised programmes such as robotics may be demanding. This may cause increased stress and pressure on learners and teachers. Workplace-related stress has been escalating in recent years (Montana, Martinez, & Lemus, 2023). As in any ordinary school, demands such as prolonged standing, continuous voice strain, noisy environments, and an overwhelming number of learners to teach create stressful situations (Montana et al, 2023). This is no exception in Schools of Specialisation; teachers get stressed as well, thereby creating more problems for the effective running of the school.

2.13.4 Inequity

Access to specialised schools may be limited by factors such as location, income, and background. Mabulana and Mukuna (2022) argue that township schools are less privileged and that the government has not built adequate infrastructure to ensure the SOS learning project succeeds. Mabulana and Mukuna (2022) state that, even though the initial intention of SOS projects was to promote inclusive learning, selective learning still occurs in some township schools because schools are failing to bring the prerequisite technology into the classroom. Some township schools are not electrified, so bringing in gadgets like computers and installing a fully-fledged ICT system to promote e-learning and other modes of instruction that may link learners to developments in industry is not easy at the moment. It is also not easy to deploy technocrats to township schools to teach industrial-related subjects (Montana, 2023).

2.13.5 Narrow career focus

Early specialisation might lead learners to commit themselves to a specific career path too early, thereby potentially limiting future opportunities. According to Previarzya and Asmarany (2023), making a career choice is not easy for learners, and they often feel confused and unsure about what they will become in the future. SOS make decision-making even harder by limiting learners' choices to specific career fields based on what is taught at such schools.

If more study options had been available within the same school, it would have been possible to observe misallocated learners switching programmes (de Groote & Declercq, 2022). Learners who are placed in the wrong grade or focus area in a School of Specialisation, based on their abilities, may be at risk of failing or disengaging from their studies. Therefore, offering several study focuses within a school can improve study outcomes by reducing the number of learners switching from one specialisation to another (de Groote & Declercq, 2022).

Specialised schools may be perceived as elite or exclusive, potentially creating a sense of separation from other learners in ordinary schools. Elitism is the sociological phenomenon in which a group is perceived by others as far removed from the majority and, in some respects, superior (Hughes, 2021).

2.13.6 Delimitation of SOS

SOS offer a curriculum strongly focused on a specific area of expertise. The curriculum should be practical and include an extended curriculum and extended school hours.

There are benefits, especially for learners, because they gain comprehensive expertise in their chosen field, preparing them for higher education and careers. Le Grange (2021) identifies the following benefits of SOS: learners gain comprehensive skills in their chosen fields through ample hands-on experiences they encounter or are subjected to in their schools. This makes learners ready for higher education and careers in industries or other entrepreneurial fields. Le Grange (2021) further states that specialised training enhances learners’ technical, creative, and critical thinking

skills. It also enhances career opportunities: Learners from SOS often have a competitive edge in their chosen field.

On the other hand, Ramnarian (2023) posits that SOS enhance networking opportunities by enabling learners to connect with like-minded peers, industry professionals, and mentors, thereby building valuable networks. Such a development is also applauded by Ramnarian (2023), who states that there is no better way to psychologically prepare the learner for the future industrial world than to provide conditions that even improve the learner's self-esteem.

Mabulana and Mukuna (2022) also note that most newly established SOS are equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. Mabulana and Mukuna (2022) observed that SOS often have modern equipment, technology, and infrastructure, providing an advanced learning environment. According to Barrett, Treves, Shmis, Ambasz, and Ustinova (2019), it is important to ensure the best infrastructure in such institutions to minimise the accessibility and effectiveness of the education being delivered. For a School of Specialisation to run smoothly, having all the necessary facilities will benefit the school. Yangambi (2023) adds that learners perform better in schools that have new or renovated infrastructure than in older schools. The Gauteng Department of Education wants to ensure that SOS in the province have the best learning facilities.

The SOS also benefit from the presence of expert instructors, who are often industry-experienced and skilled at providing practical guidance and real-world insights (Yangambi, 2023). According to de Groote and Declercq (2022), specialisation in one focus area can yield benefits in attracting a more homogeneous peer group or specialised teachers.

Smaller class sizes allow for more individualised attention and support. If the classroom is overcrowded, it can lead to increased aggression among learners, decreased engagement, and lower learning outcomes (Yangambi, 2023). In SOS, classes are smaller, and learners receive undivided attention from their teachers.

Specialised schools prepare learners for the demands of their chosen field, closing the gap between education and industry expectations. By attending an SOS, learners can

gain a competitive edge, develop valuable skills, and pursue their passions in a supportive and expert-led environment. Therefore, such learners are better prepared to enter the employment world than those from ordinary schools.

2.14 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

A theoretical framework is a structure that supports and describes a theory. A theory is like a lens through which the researcher views the study, and the researcher uses it to interpret the findings more clearly (Sreekumar, 2023). It serves as the foundation upon which research is constructed (Adom, 2018). A theoretical framework structures the study, helping the researcher select appropriate research approaches, analytical tools, and inquiry procedures.

2.14.1 Human capital theory

This study is anchored in human capital theory. The concept traces back to Adam Smith (1776) in The Wealth of Nations, where a person's “capital” is the result of education and the costly acquisition of talents. These talents become part of the individual’s fortune and, as an asset to society, contribute to economic growth.

According to this theory, individuals have a capital value, the ability to acquire valuable skills at a cost which yields monetary returns that benefit both the individual and the economy (Becker, 1964). Investments in skills development and education elevate productivity and employability, thereby enhancing economic well-being (Bodibe, 2024; Allais & Marock, 2020). This theory was chosen for its emphasis on acquiring work-related skills as a pathway to better employment and sustained economic advancement in the context of 4IR (Kraak, 2023)

2.14.2. Strategic human capital theory

The study also draws on strategic human capital theory (SHCT), which extends the core ideas of human capital by stressing the alignment of individual skill development with strategic objectives. This approach encourages investing in youth to cultivate skills and educational attributes that form a competitive, high-value human capital

base capable of commanding higher wages across employment contexts (Yates, 2017). While SHCT emphasises alignment with broader goals (Tan, 2024), caution that it can place a heavy burden on young people if structural barriers hinder access to education. Nonetheless, strategic human capital theory can be viewed as a refinement and complement to the foundational human capital theory. Elements of SHCT will inform the analysis of findings and the recommendations in later chapters.

2.14.3 Endogenous growth theory

Endogenous growth theory posits that long-run economic growth originates from internal forces within the economy, such as knowledge creation, innovation, human capital development, and policy design, rather than external factors (Schiliro, 2019). It highlights the government's role in providing incentives and subsidies to stimulate private-sector activity. Although endogenous growth theory is not the primary framework of this study, its emphasis on the active role of local and national government in development will be used to evaluate how such policies influence SOS.

The main theoretical framework for this study is Human Capital Theory (HCT), which is supplemented by Endogenous Growth Theory and Strategic Human Capital Theory.

According to the Human Capital Theory, investing in education and skill development increases individual productivity and promotes overall economic growth. Given that the GDE positions SOS as an initiative to equip learners with job-market-relevant skills, HCT provides a relevant framework for exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the potential "returns" of these educational investments.

However, general and specialised talents cannot be distinguished by HCT alone. To assess the extent to which SOSs acquire specialised, competitive skills in particular economic sectors, Strategic Human Capital Theory is incorporated (Boon, Eckardt, Lepak & Boselie, 2018).

Key ideas from these theories, including skills development, specialised human capital, employability, and innovation, were used in this study to guide the development of interview questions and the analysis of data. Specifically, participant

perceptions were interpreted in terms of whether SOS are viewed as mechanisms that build human capital and contribute to economic prospects.

Therefore, this theoretical framework provided the analytic lens through which to explore stakeholder perspectives on the role of SOS in addressing skills shortages in Gauteng.

2.15 CONCLUSION

Developing skills through schooling is essential for producing a generation of qualified, highly productive workers. Schools should incorporate practical curricula and expand nationwide skills development initiatives to prepare learners for the labour market. The literature review examined SOS and its potential contribution to Gauteng's economic development, while acknowledging gaps and limitations. Many scholars argue that SOS graduates deserve greater workplace recognition than graduates from ordinary schools, given the specialised skills taught in SOS programmes. The review also aligned with the study's research questions, objectives, and aims. The next chapter discusses the research methodology adopted for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter reviewed literature on the topic under study. This chapter explores the methodology used to research SOS, specifically by interrogating their potential to address skills shortages and contribute to economic development in Gauteng. Given the significance of this topic, various schools and teachers were selected to participate in the study, which employed a qualitative approach. This chapter describes the overall methodology, including the research paradigm, research approach and design, population and sampling, and the study's geographic location. Data collection and analysis processes, as well as the procedures implemented to ensure validity and reliability, are also discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a philosophical framework that underpins the entire structure of a study. It articulates researchers' beliefs about reality (ontology), how knowledge can be acquired (epistemology), the nature of value and the criteria used to evaluate it (axiology), and the methodologies deemed appropriate for exploring that knowledge (Landi, 2024). According to Mohammed (2023), these foundational principles influence every step of the inquiry process, including the formulation of research questions, the selection of methods, and the interpretation of data. Ontology is the science of nature that studies everything that exists in the actual world and how things are (Ni'Mah, Murjazin, Nurhuda, Muhammad, and Al Fajri, 2024). An area of philosophy called ontology examines the various ways something can be said to exist and asks what it means to be and to exist. (Ni' Mah et al., 2024). Epistemology is the science that studies the sources, structures, and techniques of knowledge, as well as the question of whether knowledge is correct (Ni'Mah et al., 2024). In epistemology, "know what we know" refers to the nature, extent, source, forms, claims, and even possibilities of knowing (Kayumova & Strom, 2023).

According to Khatri (2020), various paradigms exist within scholarly research, each reflecting different worldviews. Positivism holds that reality is objective and measurable (Alhoussawi, 2023). It promotes structured experimentation and statistical analysis to establish universal truths. Post-positivism softens this position, acknowledging that knowledge is never perfect and that findings must be treated as probabilistic (Mbhiza, 2024). Critical theory foregrounds power dynamics, advocating for research that challenges social injustices and empowers marginalised communities. Pragmatism, meanwhile, emphasises utility and flexibility, allowing researchers to select methods that best suit the problem at hand (Omodan, 2024).

This study was informed by the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality and the importance of understanding experiences from the participant's point of view (Guraya et al., 2023). Interpretivists hold that individuals interpret their experiences in light of their social environments, backgrounds, and values (Mohammed, 2023). It encourages researchers to collaborate with participants in co-constructing knowledge through dialogue, reflection, and immersion in lived contexts.

The interpretivist paradigm was well suited to this research, which sought to explore the perspectives of teachers, principals, district officials, and learners within SOS in Gauteng Province. These schools, positioned as strategic institutions for addressing economic inequality and youth unemployment, offer a distinctive lens on educational transformation in South Africa. Furthermore, Interpretivism allowed for reflexivity, prompting the researcher to critically examine their assumptions about education and poverty reduction and to foreground participants' voices as central to the study's findings.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

In research, a research approach refers to the overarching strategy or framework that guides how a study is conducted, from the formulation of research questions to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Alam & Asmawi, 2024). It reflects the philosophical assumptions, methodological choices, and practical procedures that

shape the inquiry (Creswell, Plano, & Clark, 2017). Research follows three approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

In this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted to explore the role of SOS in Gauteng in addressing skills shortages and contributing to economic development. Qualitative research is distinguished by its emphasis on understanding human experiences, behaviour, and social phenomena through rich, descriptive data rather than numerical measurement. According to Alam and Asmawi (2024), qualitative inquiry is a methodological strategy designed to reveal underlying meanings, patterns, and contextual nuances embedded in lived experiences. This approach is especially suited to education research, where the goal is to interpret participants' perspectives and the institutional realities they navigate.

The use of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to investigate the “how” and “why” behind institutional behaviour, instructional leadership practices, and curriculum implementation within SOS. Through methods such as interviews and observations, the researcher gathered in-depth insights into how principals, educators, and learners perceive the development of skills aligned with economic demands. This interpretive lens supported a deeper engagement with the research problem by focusing on participants’ subjective experiences rather than generalising across populations. Furthermore, the qualitative framework provided space for emergent themes and unexpected findings, allowing the study to remain responsive to the complexities and variations within Gauteng’s specialised educational landscape.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a plan or strategy for organising a study and making it practical, for responding to research questions using evidence and collected data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This study employed a qualitative single case study design (Yin, 2018). The case is the Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng, with embedded units comprising participants from different districts.

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and Yin (2018), the goal of a single case study design is to explore a bounded system or case in depth within its real-life

context, using multiple data sources. This research design was used to understand the implications of Schools of Specialisation (SOS) in Gauteng Province. The single case study design helped obtain rich, contextual data in an actual school setting, offering practical, specific insight into the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The single case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of SOS as a contemporary phenomenon. The study population comprised district officials, principals, and teachers connected to the 36 SOS in Gauteng Province. Consistent with the sampling description, learners formed part of the observed school context but were not included as interview participants. Data was therefore collected through interviews with officials, principals and teachers, complemented by observations of the learning environment. The use of multiple data sources allowed for a holistic understanding of the case (Yin, 2018).

3.5 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

In research, population refers to the entire group of units, individuals, or entities to which the outcomes of a study are intended to be generalised (Shukla, 2020). In this study, the population comprised 36 established SOS in the Gauteng province, from which a sample of five schools was selected. The eligible population comprised all 36 SOS, as the study investigated the implementation of the SOS mandate across all specialisation streams. This ensured a manageable scope while preserving diversity in geographical location, area of specialisation and other contextual parameters. The study population comprised district officials, principals, and teachers connected to the 36 SOS in Gauteng Province. Learners formed part of the observed school context but were not included as interview participants.

3.6 SAMPLING

The process of selecting study participants from a broader population using specific procedures and criteria is known as sampling (Rahman, 2023). A sample denotes a subset of the population selected for empirical observation and data collection. For a study's results to be credible, the researcher must establish an appropriate sample

size sufficient to address the research objectives (Memon, Ting, Cheah, Thurasamy, Chuah, and Cham, 2020).

This study used purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher identifies a predetermined set of traits within the entire population and uses them to select and recruit suitable research participants (Thomas, 2022). In the present study, the researcher intentionally selected participants who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study, the potential impact of SOS on the economy of Gauteng Province, and poverty alleviation. The participants were also selected through variation sampling to ensure that the principals of the SOS were from different districts within the province (geographical variation). Furthermore, participants were selected based on the school's focus area or specialisation. For example, this ensured that no two schools following a similar specialisation were selected.

Below is the table of the participant groups from the five participating schools.

Table 3.1: Participant groups

Participant group	**Numbers**
Schools Principals	5
1 Teacher per SOS	5
District Officials	3
Total	13

A total of 13 participants were included in this study. The sample size was determined by data saturation to ensure that the data were comprehensive and sufficient to address the study's objectives (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Through purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selected participants based on their expertise, relevance to the SOS programme, and diverse perspectives across Gauteng districts. This study adopted a qualitative single case study design, with the SOS programme in Gauteng as the single case with embedded units across districts (Yin, 2018).

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

In this study, data were collected through interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with district officials, principals and teachers, while observations were conducted in the school context with learners present. There are three common types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. According to Ogunrinde (2024), structured interviews involve a predetermined set of questions; semi-structured interviews allow greater flexibility, with a mix of prepared and spontaneous questions; and unstructured interviews are conversational and guided by participants' responses.

This study used face-to-face semi-structured interviews because they allow flexibility in questioning, enabling researchers to explore unexpected topics and themes that arise during the conversation.

Semi-structured interviews are a method of gathering data in which the interviewer is not required to follow a set of formal questions (Adedoyin, 2018). The interviewer is expected to ask open-ended questions, allowing for a conversation with the participants (Adedoyin, 2018). According to Adams (2019), a semi-structured interview combines closed-ended and open-ended questions, frequently with follow-up questions. This method of interviewing was used to create space for the researcher to fully understand how the SOS operates, compared to ordinary public schools, and to address the objectives of the study.

The process of collecting unstructured first-hand data by observing people at a study location is called observation (Creswell & Gutterman, 2019). It allows researchers to observe and interpret behaviour, interactions, and environmental dynamics as they unfold naturally, providing data that may not be accessible through interviews or surveys alone (George, 2023). Qualitative observation can be categorised into structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Taherdoost, 2022). Structured observation involves predefined categories and checklists, often used to quantify specific behaviour. Semi-structured observation blends focused observation with flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt their lens as new patterns emerge. Unstructured observation is open-ended and exploratory, enabling the researcher to

observe phenomena without a rigid framework and to interpret events holistically (Yadav, 2022).

In this study, unstructured non-participant observation was conducted. Unlike participant observation, which entails the researcher actively engaging in the setting, which can foster deeper immersion but may influence participant behaviour, non-participant observation allows the researcher to remain detached, thereby preserving the authenticity of the observed interactions (Uwamusi & Ajisebiyawo, 2023). This technique enabled the researcher to document classroom interactions, instructional methods, and learner responses without disrupting the natural flow of activities. The observations complemented interview data and contributed to methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of the findings. Non-participant observations were conducted in selected classrooms. Learners were observed from a distance as part of the classroom context. They were not interviewed, and no data were collected directly from learners. A summary of the data collection methods used in the study is presented in the table below.

Table 3.2: Data collection methods

Forms of Data Collection	Type of Data	Definition of Type of Data
1. Observation	Class lessons and field notes	Unstructured text data and pictures taken during observation by the researcher
2. Interviews	Transcriptions of open-ended interviews.	Unstructured text data is obtained from transcribing audio recordings of interviews.
3. Documents	Field notes are recorded in field notebooks.	Data on what is experienced in the field and interaction with people

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Data analysis is a systematic process that involves inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and interpreting data to reveal meaningful information, identify patterns, and inform decision-making (Hassan, 2024). It helps researchers make sense of raw information and draw evidence-based conclusions.

Qualitative data analysis uses interpretive techniques to examine non-numerical data such as text, images, or observations to uncover patterns, categories, and insights. Unlike quantitative approaches that rely on numerical representation and statistical testing, qualitative analysis engages with textual, visual, or contextual data to illuminate the complexities of human experience, social dynamics, and contextual phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Several qualitative analysis approaches can be used, each with different aims and methods. This study used thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2022) to identify recurring themes, patterns, and concepts across the interview transcripts and observation field notes. The process began with interviews with district officials, principals and teachers, which were recorded on the researcher's mobile device using a digital recorder. Observation notes on the school context, where learners were present, were recorded in field notebooks. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that all relevant verbal and nonverbal cues, such as pauses, laughter, and sighs, were accurately captured. Transcription preserves the richness of qualitative data, including expressive gestures that deepen interpretive analysis (Cope, 2016).

After transcription, the data were reviewed for accuracy and then imported into Atlas.ti (version 25), a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates systematic thematic analysis. The process involved coding the transcripts, identifying recurring phrases, and clustering perceptions into meaningful themes. Thematic analysis was chosen for its ability to highlight similarities and differences among participant narratives, enabling the identification of emerging conclusions and patterns (Nowell et al., 2017). The use of Atlas.ti enhanced the rigour and transparency of the analysis by supporting efficient data organisation, code management, and thematic development aligned with the study's interpretive paradigm.

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence that researchers and readers can place in the accuracy, consistency, and neutrality of a study's findings (Ahmed, 2024). It is the qualitative counterpart to validity and reliability in quantitative research, ensuring that the research authentically represents

participants' experiences and is conducted with methodological rigour (McLeod, 2024). To ensure rigour and integrity, this study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024; Rashid, 2025).

3.9.1. CREDIBILITY

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings and the extent to which they accurately represent participants' experiences (Rashid, 2020). In this study, credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of data sources (Interviews and observations), and member checking, where participants reviewed transcripts and interpretations for accuracy (Birt et al., 2016; Rashid, 2025). These strategies ensured that the researcher's interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts.

3.9.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts (Rahid, 2020). According to Flick (2020), it is the capacity to apply research findings to different contexts or groups. In this single case study, transferability was enhanced through thick description of the research setting, participant demographics, and the operational environment of the Schools of Specialisation (SOS) programme in Gauteng. Such contextual detail allows readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Ahmed, 2024).

3.9.3 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of research findings over time (Rahid, 2020). It ensures that the research process is logical, traceable and clearly documented (Padgett, 2026). Providing accurate and detailed information about the research process is a requirement for dependability (Thanjekwayo, 2023). To ensure dependability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail documenting decisions made during data collection, transcription, coding and thematic analysis.

3.9.4 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability concerns ensuring that findings are shaped by participants' voices rather than the researcher's biases, and that interpretations are clearly derived from the data (Ahmed, 2024). In this study, confirmability was supported through reflexive journaling, transparent documentation of analytic decisions, and the use of Atlas.ti software to systematically manage and trace each piece of data to its original source. Member validation (Ahmed, 2024; Uwamusi and Ajisebiyawo, 2023) was used to further strengthen the confirmability of the interpretations.

3.10 RESEARCH ETHICS

Research ethics refers to a set of moral principles that guide the conduct of research to protect the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of participants (Ahmed, 2024). In qualitative research, ethics ensures that the researcher acts with integrity, transparency and accountability throughout the research process. Ethical principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and non-maleficence are essential for building trust and ensuring credibility of findings (Ahmed, 2024).

Before commencing the study, the researcher submitted a formal application to the College of Education Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the University of South Africa (UNISA), detailing the purpose, methodology, target population, and ethical safeguards associated with the project. Following the review process, the REC issued an ethical clearance certificate (see Appendix A), authorising the study to proceed within the specified parameters and timeframe. This approval ensured that the study complied with UNISA's ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Subsequent institutional approval was sought from the GDE to gain access to the selected SOS (see Appendix B). Approval letters were obtained from the relevant district offices, school governing bodies, and principals, confirming institutional consent to conduct fieldwork within their schools. Only educators and learners (for observation purpose only) at officially designated SOS were considered eligible

participants in line with the study's objective to explore the role of such schools in addressing skills shortages and contributing to Gauteng's economic development.

Before data collection began, potential participants were identified and provided with the information they needed to express interest in participating in a proposed study. All participants received a comprehensive information sheet outlining the study's aim, procedures, risks, benefits, and ethical safeguards. Voluntary participation was secured through written informed consent for teachers, principals and district officials. For classroom observations, written parental consent and learner assent were obtained for learners under 18 to be observed during practical lessons (see Appendix E). Learners were not directly interviewed, and no information that could identify individuals was collected during observations. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence and assured of confidentiality and anonymity, in accordance with ethical guidelines provided in the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and UNISA's Policy on Research Ethics.

The interview and observation protocols were designed to minimise potential discomfort. All interviews were conducted in familiar environments chosen by participants, and care was taken to ensure the questions posed did not cause distress. No physical, psychological or reputational risks were anticipated. The researcher made every effort to respect participants' autonomy, protect their dignity, and maintain data security throughout the research process. To maintain ethical integrity, individuals who did not meet the selection criteria, such as educators from non-specialisation schools or those unwilling to participate, were respectfully excluded from the study.

Permission to conduct research was first sought from the Gauteng Department of Education to access school premises and district offices around Gauteng Province. The researcher approached schools and district offices only after receiving permission from the GDE. The GDE permission letter was presented to the participants upon arrival at the schools and district offices.

All data, including audio recordings, transcripts and field notes, were securely stored on a password-protected computer. The data will be retained for 10 years in

accordance with UNISA's Policy on Research Ethics, after which it will be permanently deleted.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter detailed the methodological framework underpinning the study, beginning with a thorough explanation of the selected research paradigm, design, and qualitative approach. The chapter proceeded to describe the structure and execution of the empirical component, including the sampling strategy, population parameters, data collection techniques, and analytical methods. The chapter also presented the approach to data analysis, highlighting the use of Atlas.ti 25 to organise and analyse qualitative interview data. The software supported systematic thematic analysis, enabling the identification of core patterns and insights that address the study's central research questions. The role of the interpretive paradigm was outlined with attention to reflexivity, along with the ethical procedures followed, including formal clearance from the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Committee (REC) to safeguard participants' rights and well-being. Measures to ensure trustworthiness, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability, were also addressed. The results derived from this analysis will be presented and discussed in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the data analysis process and presents the results for the study on Schools of Specialisation (SOS) in Gauteng Province. The results presented are based on one-on-one interviews with district officials who oversee the SOS in the province, as well as with principals and teachers of the selected SOS. In the Gauteng Province, principals and teachers of the selected SOS. Principals and teachers contributed to the data collection process through interviews, while additional insights were drawn from observing educators and learners in classroom and workshop settings. Through an analysis of the policies and procedures implemented across the different SOS, the study sought to determine whether learners were provided with the skills needed for the workforce and opportunities for skill enhancement to support the province's economic development.

4.2 GENERAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The biographical information of the participants includes gender, age, qualifications, and work experience. The information is important for determining the participants' profiles. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the names of teachers, principals, and district officials are represented using pseudonyms such as T1 for Teacher 1, P1 for Principal 1, and D1 for District official 1, and so on.

Table 4.1 presents the biographical information for each teacher participant.

TABLE 4.1: TEACHERS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Participants	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Years of experience
T1	Male	37 years	Bachelor of Science in Pure and Applied Chemistry	14 years
T 2	Female	30 Years	Bachelor of Education Degree	6 years
T3	Male	44 Years	Bachelor of Education Degree	19 years
T4	Male	27 years	Bachelor of Education Degree	3 years
T5	Female	34	Bachelor of Education Degree	8 years

Table 4.1 presents the biographical information for each of the five teacher participants and shows that three were male and two were female. Their ages ranged from 27 to 44 years, suggesting that the participants were relatively young teachers with many years ahead in the teaching profession. All the teachers held a degree qualification.

TABLE 4.2: PRINCIPALS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Participants	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Years of experience
P1	Male	55 Years	Master of Business Administration Doctor of Philosophy in Education	18 Years
P2	Female	55 Years	Bachelor of Education Bachelor Honours in Curriculum Studies	14 Years
P3	Male	61 Years	Diploma in Teaching	32 Years
P4	Female	62 Years	Bachelor of Technology in Engineering Mathematics	35 Years
P5	Male	45 Years	Bachelor of Education Bachelor of Education Honours in Education Law	21 Years

Table 4.2 presents the biographical information of the principals. Of the five participants in the study, three were male, and two were female. All the principals have served the teaching profession for 14 years or more. This implies that the SOS project in these schools is managed by experienced personnel familiar with the workings of the education system.

TABLE 4.3: DISTRICT OFFICIALS' BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.

Participant	Gender	Age	Qualifications	Years of experience
D1	Male	59 Years	Diploma in Teaching Honours Degree specialising in Leadership and Management	37 Years
D2	Female	55	Bachelor of Arts Postgraduate Certificate in Education Honours in Curriculum Studies	32 years
D3	Male	53	Bachelor of Education Degree Honours in Education	40

Table 4.3 presents the biographical information of the three district officials who participated in the study. All three officials possessed degree-level qualifications that rendered them suitable to supervise a curriculum project such as the SOS. Their extensive experience and qualifications positioned them well to provide an informed perspective on curriculum implementation and supervision within the SOS project.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

Data analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti software. Thirteen interview transcripts, observation notes and personal reflections were uploaded to the software for analysis.

An interview schedule consisting of open-ended questions was used for the one-on-one interviews. The interview audio recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai software, and Atlas.ti was used to organise the data into document groups (discrete datasets), code the data, group similar codes, and identify emergent themes.

Participants' exact statements served as the basis for the analysis, and themes were developed inductively from the data.

4.3.1 Coding

Data coding in qualitative research means assigning labels or codes to sections of texts that carry a unit of meaning (Mncanca, 2022). Coding was followed by systematically categorising, organising and analysing text segments to uncover underlying patterns.

A total of 13 transcripts, five observation notes, and personal reflections were analysed, and 414 initial codes were created. Later, similar codes were grouped together into code groups. Table 4.4 below shows an example of code groups and the assigned codes.

Table 4.4 Example of code groups and assigned codes

Code Group	**Codes**
Alleviating poverty in Gauteng province	Alternative pathways Person-centered approach Personal growth Understanding Vision
Economic acceleration strategies	Career advancement Economy
Budget to run the SOS	Budget Budget allocation Budget constraints Financial burden Financial challenges Frustration

As shown in Table 4.4, similar codes were grouped to form broader code groups that later informed theme development.

	Pricipal 1 Gr=25Pricipal 1 Gr=25	Principapal 5 Gr=23Principapal 5 Gr=23	Principal 2 Gr=18Principal 2 Gr=18	Principal 3 Gr=0Principal 3 Gr=0	Principal 4 Gr=6Principal 4 Gr=6	Teacher 1 Gr=15Teacher 1 Gr=15
○ Academic pressure Gr=2○ Academic pressure Gr=2	1	0	0	0	0	0
○ Academics Gr=2○ Academics Gr=2	0	0	0	0	0	2
○ Academics (2) Gr=1○ Academics (2) Gr=1	0	0	0	0	0	0
○ Achievement Gr=2○ Achievement Gr=2	0	0	0	0	0	0
○ Adaptability Gr=2○ Adaptability Gr=2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Alleviating poverty in Gauteng province Gr=5; GS=5Alleviating poverty in Gauteng province Gr=5; GS=5	0	0	2	0	0	2
Budget to run the SOS Gr=11; GS=7Budget to run the SOS Gr=11; GS=7	2	1	0	0	0	1
Challenges of the SOS Gr=22; GS=5Challenges of the SOS Gr=22; GS=5	6	3	1	0	2	1
Change education system Gr=14; GS=5Change education system Gr=14; GS=5	6	1	0	0	0	2

Table 4.5 Code document from Atlas.ti.

Atlas.ti 25 was also used to facilitate thematic analysis through inductive and in-vivo coding.

4.3.2 GROUPING INTO CATEGORIES

In the second stage of data analysis using Atlas.ti, the codes and grouped codes were revisited to identify emerging themes, concepts, and relationships. The Atlas.ti software enabled the creation of chains of multiple codes and the linking of quotations to create networks, which were vital to third-stage coding. These network diagrams were qualitative visual representations of the data and greatly assisted with the third stage of coding.

Themes were developed through network analysis, and the codes were then connected to show their relationships.

The following figure depicts the relationships between codes. Each code was analysed to assess whether it constitutes a component of, a property of, is related to, contradicts, influences, or is associated with another code. An ad hoc network for identifying relations to the codes was created, as shown in Figure 4.1 below.

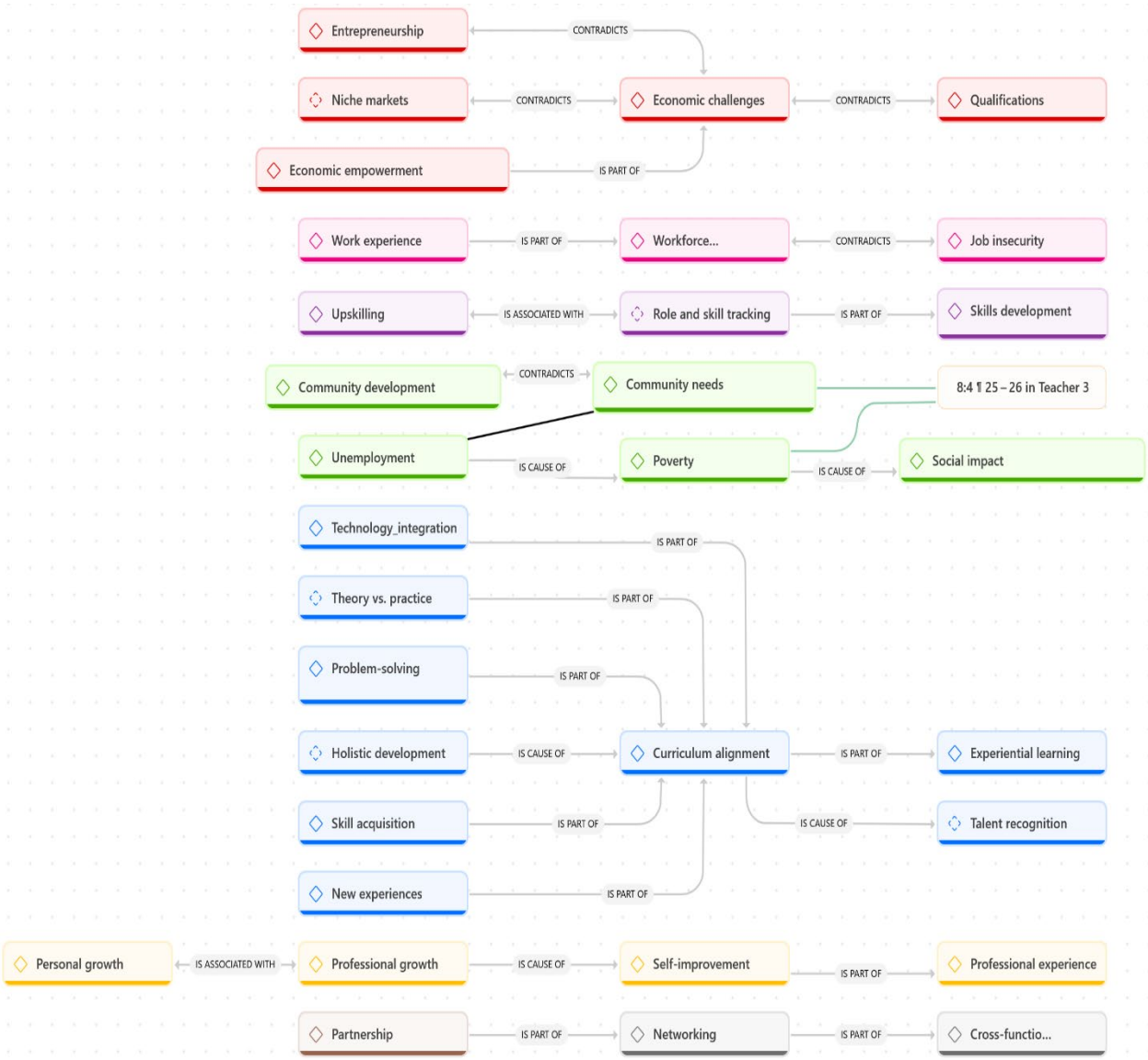


Figure 4.1 Ad hoc network to identify the relationship between the codes

4.3.3 THEME IDENTIFICATION

Themes represent abstract patterns of meaning that explain a phenomenon. The analysis revealed recurring ideas and perspectives, categorised into the following five themes.

Theme 1: Skills acquisition

Gauteng Province requires school graduates with relevant skills who can demonstrate their prowess in their respective fields.

This theme addresses **sub-research question 2**: How can Gauteng specialisation schools align their curriculum and evaluate the effectiveness of their training programmes to meet the demands of the labour market and the economy?

This theme also addresses **sub-research question 4**: How do Schools of Specialisation in Gauteng Province tailor their career guidance and counselling services to ensure learners are aware of and prepared for employment opportunities?

Theme 1 emerged from code groups relating to practical training, curriculum alignment, skills development and workplace readiness. The theme was supported by data from teachers, principals and district officials, as well as classroom observation notes.

Theme 2: Industrial needs and the curriculum development process

Industries in Gauteng have unique needs that the school curriculum must address, and it must be holistic to meet these demands.

This theme addresses **sub-research question 1**: What are principals' and teachers' perceptions of current labour market demands in Gauteng, and what are their implications for Schools of Specialisation?

This theme also addresses **sub-research question 2** (stated above) and **sub-research question 4**: What challenges and barriers do schools of specialisation encounter in fulfilling their mandate to equip learners with relevant job market skills?

Theme 3: Skills development for employability

Learners gain market-relevant technical and vocational skills through practical training across various SOS, thereby improving their readiness for employment.

This theme addresses **sub-research question 2** (stated above)

Theme 4: Industry partnership linkage, entrepreneurship and innovation

Effective skills development requires collaboration with industry through work-integrated learning and internships to align the curriculum with job market needs. Entrepreneurship education in SOS should promote innovative thinking, self-employment, and skills development that drive local economic growth and job creation.

This theme addresses **sub-research questions 1, 3** and **4** (stated above)

Theme 5: Challenges of running the SOS

The major challenge in running the SOS is insufficient resources and funds to run the schools effectively.

This theme addresses **sub-research question 4** (stated above).

4.4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This section presents the study's results based on the five themes from the previous section.

4.4.1 Theme 1: SKILLS ACQUISITION

This theme explores how learners acquire practical and technical skills that prepare them for future careers. The results show that including specialised subjects and hands-on training within the SOS equips learners with job-relevant competencies. The following subheadings or sub-themes expound on Theme 1.

4.4.1.1 Skills development acquisition for poverty alleviation

The South African government introduced the Skills Development Act in 2020 as part of the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP). The plan was introduced to ensure that South Africa has adequate, appropriate, and high-quality skills that contribute towards economic growth, employment creation, and social development.

It is important that we understand how the SOS contribute to the GDE's plan to equip learners with the necessary skills. Therefore, deeper insights were sought into SOS activities that help learners develop their talents. This section uses verbatim quotations from interviews with five SOS principals. Principals were asked about their views on the importance of equipping learners with the skills taught in SOS.

Principal 1 responded as follows:

"The biggest crime is that a learner spends 12 years, or 13 years, in school. The government uses taxpayers' money to pay teachers only, and at the end of it all, that person turns out to be not economically viable. That's a crime. Therefore, the SOS project is desirable in that it imparts skills to learners, especially learners who prefer a hands-on and practical approach to learning."

The response highlights concern about learners completing 12 years without viable skills.

Principal 2: broadened the scope of the discussion as follows:

"We believe that the solution to the future as a school is to give kids skills, and we believe that by so doing, we solve societal problems. Not every child will go to university. We need more artisans than people working in offices. Therefore, I strongly contend that SOS plays that crucial role."

Principal *3* had the following to say:

'After attending formal education for more than 12 years, the school leavers fail to find gainful employment or to get an economically rewarding job. This is cause for concern when one takes into consideration the resources invested in every learner. The SOS approach to learning is therefore important in imparting skills that learners would use in their future careers."

As seen in the responses above, school principals PP1, 2, and P3 shared a similar perspective on the importance of equipping learners with the skills taught in SOS.

They all agree that learners need to be taught in a way that, upon finishing school, they can contribute to the economy and not increase the country's unemployment rate.

Principal 4 had a somewhat different view, as captured in the following response:

"I cannot commit myself to the positive impact of the SOS project because its implementation was lopsided; some schools implemented it holistically. They had everything that mattered to produce positive results and change the fate of the learners, but some schools lacked facilities and resources and could not change their learner throughput rate. Therefore, the gains and losses sustained in this project balance".

Principal 4's view is that the SOS project is like many past projects, where only a few people benefit, while many gain almost nothing, and the pass rate remains low despite the intervention.

Principal 5 shared a similarly concerning perspective.

"I do not see the benefit of the SOS project because it is not visible in some schools, especially those in the densely populated areas of Gauteng. The SOS project, therefore, does not cover every child and hence its benefits are debatable."

The view of Principal 5 could amount to a complete rebuff of the SOS project, as it does not cover all learners in Gauteng.

In a nutshell, three principals endorsed the SOS initiative and provided sound reasons for their support. One principal was neutral, and the other did not endorse the SOS project with equally sound arguments. It is apparent from these views that the important role of SOS in alleviating poverty in Gauteng province through the skills it teaches is acknowledged, though some areas of concern have been noted.

This finding addresses RQ1 by presenting principals' perception that SOS equip learners with practical skills. It relates to the main research question by demonstrating the potential of SOS to provide job-relevant skills that support economic development in Gauteng.

4.4.2 THEME 2: INDUSTRIAL NEEDS AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Theme 2 highlights the specific and unique needs of Gauteng's industries that must be addressed through alignment with the SOS curriculum. Participants emphasised that curriculum designers should align teaching and learning with the demands of sectors such as manufacturing, technology, and creative industries to ensure learners are adequately prepared for employment.

This theme also emphasises that curriculum development should be guided by collaboration between education and industry. A holistic curriculum is achieved when both sectors jointly ensure that learning outcomes respond to industry requirements.

The following subheadings or subthemes provide details to clarify Theme 2. The results presented under this theme are based on classroom observations.

4.4.2.1 Alignment of Skills taught at the SOS with the economic needs

Classroom observation of skills taught at the SOS revealed that learners engage in more practical activities than expected at an ordinary school. These are skills learners can use to either work as entrepreneurs or in different industries and companies that need the skills they acquired at the SOS.

The teacher at School 1 began a 45-minute lesson with a practical activity in which learners had to create a jewellery item from scratch. It was my observation that learners can use these skills to create items from various metals and sell them, or to showcase their creativity. The work done in this class is shown in the following images.



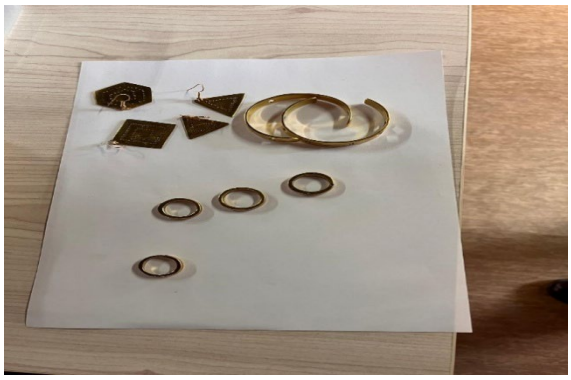


Figure 4.2: Jewellery skills taught at the School of Specialisation 1.

During observation 2, I observed that learners were taught plumbing and welding skills. These skills showed me that learners can go out into the community and fix appliances like geysers, toilets, showers, and many other items.



Figure 4.3: Plumbing skills taught at the School of Specialisation 2

The observation indicated that skills development enables learners to take charge of their learning and highlight their strengths. Skills taught at the SOS also help learners develop skills they can use throughout their lives. The findings provided evidence that learners are motivated to focus more closely on work-related skills that industries require.

4.4.3 THEME 3: SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR EMPLOYABILITY

This theme focuses on how skills equip learners with practical and technical know-how to enhance their employability. Participants highlighted that targeted training and exposure to specialised fields such as Engineering, IT, and creative arts equip learners with competencies that prepare them for the labour market.

The inclusion of entrepreneurial education further enables learners to create self-employment opportunities, contributing to economic growth and reducing youth unemployment. The following subheadings or subthemes help to unpack this theme.

4.4.3.1 Preparing learners for the world of work and employment opportunities

The results suggest that skills taught at the SOS are modelled to prepare learners for the world of work. Learners are equipped with essential skills that make them employable straight after high school, or they can choose courses that will prepare them to be employable after graduating from institutions of higher learning.

In Chapter 2, I argued that there is an urgent need for educational transformation to equip learners with skills aligned with the economic needs of Gauteng province, given a mismatch between what is taught in schools and the skills required by the economy and labour market. To explore this further, I asked teachers in interviews whether the teaching approaches at the SOS exposed learners to labour-market expectations, which are essential to preparing them for the evolving economy.

The participants' responses validated the emerging theme of skills development for employability, as captured in the following responses.

Teacher 1: *"The approaches do expose learners to labour market needs. For instance, if you are exposing them to a career, you are able to expose them to instructional apparatus like the smart boards, you immerse them in internet usage, and through such activities, and they become acquainted with labour market practices. They gain vital experience through action."*

Teacher T2 had the following to say:

“It is a case where we are now able to expose the learners by actually taking them into the workplaces for them to be exposed.”

Teacher T3 shared a similar view and expanded as follows:

“You look at things like when they have to go to companies, such as Sci-bono or Alumo, in which they do workplace training, as well as things like your Moot Court, where we can take them out for exposure, where they now immerse themselves.”

Teacher T5 also had a similar view on the matter:

“I also look for ways in which we can expose them to the experiences by taking them outside of the school.”

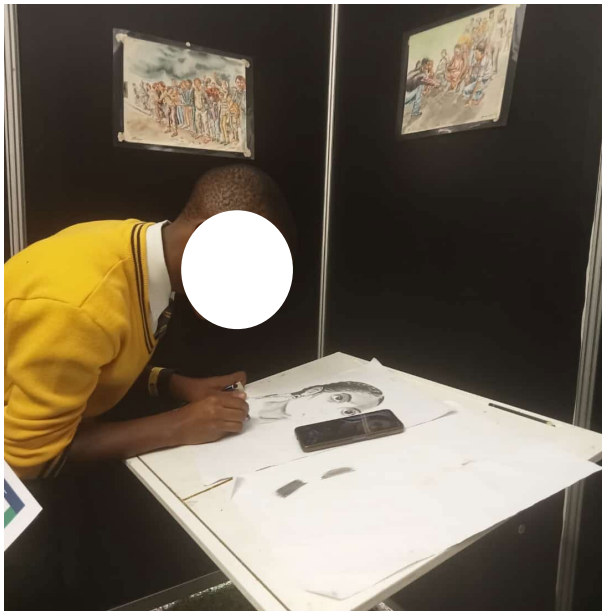
All five teacher participants in the study emphasised the importance of exposing learners to a real workplace; they indicated that learners are not only taught theoretical knowledge, but are also given direct workplace exposure, which bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. This is contrary to what prevails in ordinary schools, where such opportunities are rare to find or nonexistent.

To support teachers’ responses on whether learners are exposed to the needs of the job market, a practical activity was observed in which learners engaged in a hands-on lesson focused on the skills demanded by the labour market. This observation not only confirmed the teachers’ views but also highlighted the school’s role in preparing learners for workplace readiness. A photograph was included as image 3 to provide visual evidence of this activity and to demonstrate how practical exposure equips learners with competencies that are often absent in ordinary schools.”



Figure 4.4: Welding lesson taught at SOS 3

The welding skills shown in the picture above are highly relevant to the job market. The manufacturing, construction, automotive, mining, and energy industries consider the skill critical to their trades. The practical lesson provided in the picture above provides learners with marketable skills that enhance their employability and prepare them to contribute meaningfully to the economy.





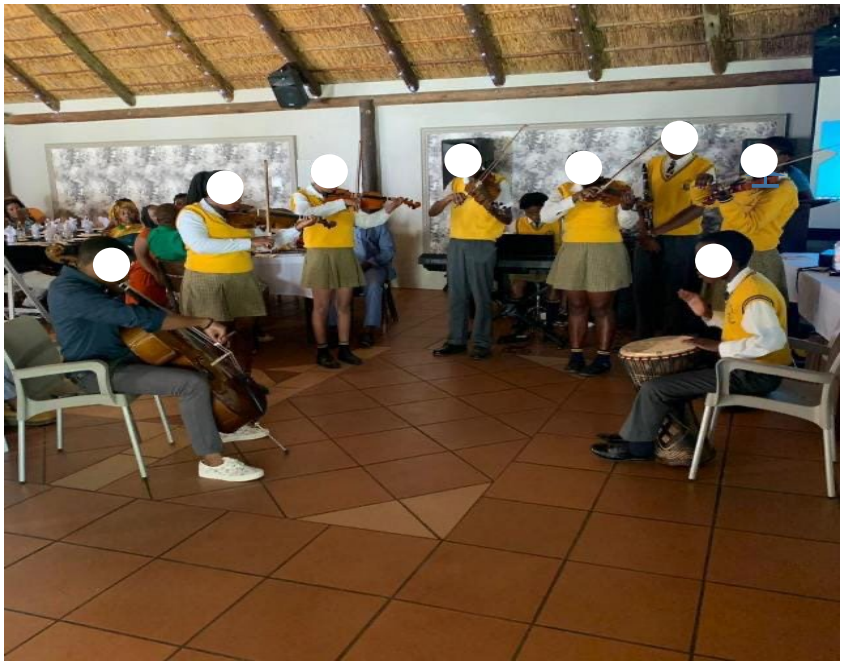


Figure 4.5: Music and Art taught at the SOS 4

Performing arts is one of the skills that is taught at the SOS. Learners either learn how to draw, dance, or play music. Skills in performing arts help learners contribute to the Gauteng economy by preparing them for careers in the creative and cultural industries, which are among the province's fastest-growing sectors. Through training in music, drama, dance, and related fields, learners not only develop artistic talent but also entrepreneurial skills, enabling them to create jobs and generate income.

4.4.4 THEME 4: INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP LINKAGE, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

This theme focuses on collaboration between schools and industry through work-integrated learning and internships. These partnerships ensure that learners gain real-world experience and that the curriculum remains relevant to the job market.

4.4.4.1. Multi-certification accreditation by different companies and SETA

During the one-on-one interviews, most participants stated that the SOS is part of the multi-certification programme launched in 2023 by the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Education in Gauteng. The principals of SOS were asked how the

certificates advanced the cause of preparing learners for the world of work, and their views are presented below.

Principal 1 shared valuable insights when stating that *"the aim is to ensure that the child does not enter high school from grade eight, spend five years, then exit with only one certificate, which is the matric certificate. At least a skills certificate should also be acquired during this period of learning."*

Principal 2 asserted the following:

"One of the key objectives of schools of specialisation is to promote multi-certification. This refers to learners not only completing their matric and obtaining their matric certificate, but also acquiring additional skills and competencies throughout grades 8 to 12".

Principal 3 shared the same sentiments regarding the multi-certification programme in SOS.

"*The multi-certification approach enables learners to receive supplementary qualifications from accredited institutions, which provide training in specific skills and issue a recognised certificate upon completion."*

The multi-certificate programme may yield benefits for the economy, as learners are allowed to use their accredited certificates upon leaving school. This is where learners will demonstrate the skills they gained through the programme.

Principals 4 and 5 had different views on the multi-certification programme.

Principal 4: "*The programme is too ambitious and not realistic given the school's resources. Teachers are not adequately trained to support learners in both academic and vocational pathways."*

Principal 5 was more direct in his critique of the programme.

“Learners feel overwhelmed by having to balance matric requirements and additional certificate courses. And some of the certificates offered are not recognised by industries and higher education institutions, so it is a waste of time.”

The implication of these assertions is that earning industry certificates in high school prepares learners better for life after school. The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) established the multi-certification programme to train learners in plumbing, welding and metalwork, and computer-aided drawing. These fields equip learners with scarce skills that are key drivers of job creation and self-employment. With various partners supporting the GDE, learners receive accreditation and certification for programmes completed in the Further Education and Training (FET) band after passing a relevant assessment.

To illustrate, SOS 1 has partnered with an ICT company to train Grade 10 learners in Computer-Aided Drawing, and learners received a certificate of competence. SOS 2 has secured a partnership with a research and development company, through which learners received certificates in welding and metalwork in 2021.

Overall, while the multi-certification programme is well-intentioned, its success is hindered by resource constraints and questions of relevance.

4.4.4.2 Resources to enhance the SOS functionality

Research has shown that inadequate teaching and learning resources undermine educational standards, as learners are unable to access the quality of education they deserve. Academic performance is closely linked to the availability of facilities, and when these are lacking, the learning process is negatively affected. When learners are subjected to lessons in which the lack of resources is evident, no SOS can properly equip them with the skills needed to accelerate the economy.

Two of the sampled teachers mentioned a shortage of teaching and learning resources. They claimed that the lack of teaching materials prevents the SOS from running efficiently. School 1 specialises in maritime economics and marine science, and it needs a swimming pool to teach learners aspects of these subjects, but the school does not have one. The need for a swimming pool in a maritime SOS is that

learners need to learn survival skills in case of an emergency at sea, especially those studying towards ship engineering, navigation, and various activities, technologies, and sciences that support work at sea.

School 2 specialises in sports, but it does not have a gym, running tracks, or a netball court.

School 3 specialises in performing arts, but it does not have a hall where learners can practice different art forms. When there is a shortage of learning resources, the students will not achieve the specific objectives.

However, the data collected indicated that Schools 3 and 4 have adequate teaching and learning materials and can function as a complete SOS. Learners at one of these schools can print 3D materials using the machines available there. The other school has laboratories where practicals for welding, plumbing, and coding are undertaken.





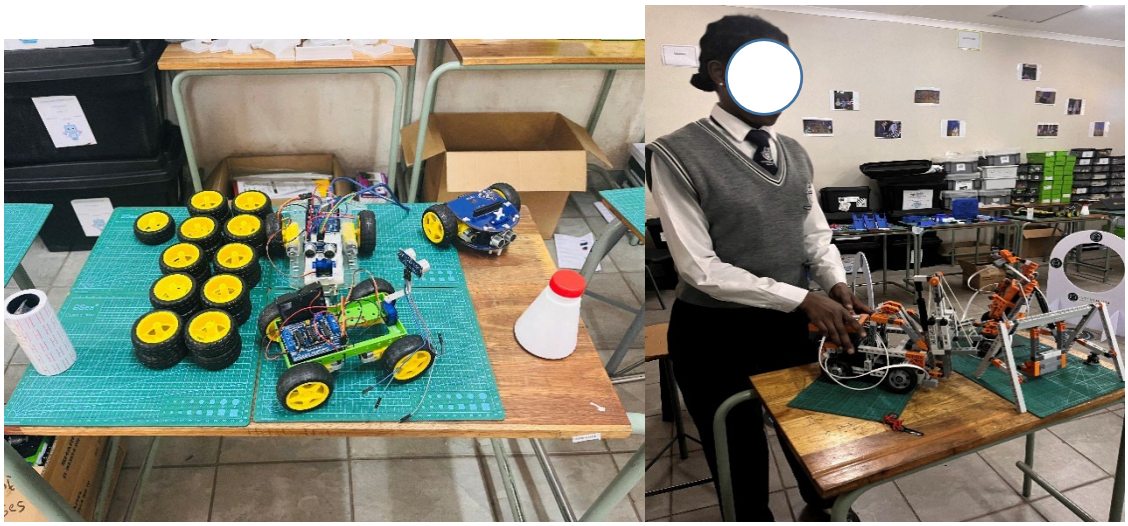


Figure 4.6: 3D Printing machines used at the SOS by Grade 9 learners.

The practical lesson observed above shows learners engaging with robotics, coding, and 3D printing technologies, which are central to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Such skills are critical in preparing learners for future careers in technology-driven industries.

4.4.4.3 Budget allocation for the SOS

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) categorises schools in the country into five quintiles, which are aggregated measures of resource availability at the school and in the community. The selected SOS in this study are all categorised as quintile 1 (i.e., the most under-resourced and non-fee-paying schools). These schools receive similar government support and host learners from similar communities. The SOS receives two forms of budget: the SOS budget and government funds, as stated in section 34 of SASA. Public schools in South Africa are eligible to receive government funding to ensure the proper exercise of children's right to education.

The budgets and needs of the schools of specialisation differ from those of ordinary schools, as training learners in SOS requires crucial tools. Data collected from different SOSs indicate that the budget is insufficient to run the SOS. However, other participants felt that the GDE's budget allocation is sufficient and that the schools should be able to operate efficiently and raise funds to fill the funding gaps. During the

interview, some principals noted that the Department of Education's budget allocation was insufficient to run the schools as fully functioning SOS.

Principal 1 had the following to say:

"In terms of funding, you may have X amount the first year, the following year it gets lowered, and even lower in the following years. That's why, as an SOS, you must have partners to sustain programmes. This grant is temporary, just to get us going. So we must market our SOS."

Principal 2 raised a concern similar to Principal 1's regarding funding gaps.

"We get fair financial assistance. I mean, looking at the economic climate, I would say the department is doing its utmost best to fund the SOS schools. It is for us as principals and management and the school governing body to take the challenge, raise funds, get partners, and, you know, to attract the industry into the school, so that the school, for it to be sustainable, we need external funding, and this school to be adopted by the private sector. It's not sustainable that the money will come from the department, I want to be honest. So, yeah, it's a good foundation that we get from the department."

Principal 3 held a different view altogether.

"I'm arguing now that we can do it without the department's funding. Why is it that the department needs to pump money into a school to work? If you are successful, you should make sure that your ideas are profitable. A viable school is a school that can fund its activities through its own ideas."

Principal 4 lamented the government's insufficient funding.

"We do not receive enough funds that match the actual needs of specialised subjects, especially those requiring expensive tools, machinery, or technology."

Principal 5 added that the problem is that the Department of Basic Education cuts the budget allocation each year. *"Budget reduction has negatively affected our ability to sustain specialised programmes, forcing us to compromise on quality."*

The principals indicated that budget allocation for SOS is inadequate and misaligned with the specialised needs of the curriculum. These challenges suggest that budgetary constraints undermine the effective implementation and sustainability of specialised programmes, limiting the school's ability to fulfil its intended mandate.

4.4.5 THEME 5: CHALLENGES OF RUNNING THE SOS

The results suggest that the major challenge in running the SOS is the resources and funds required to run the schools effectively. Another challenge identified was separating the SOS curriculum from the mainstream school curriculum. Of the five sampled SOS, only one operates as a fully functioning SOS.

Among the concerns raised by the participants were inadequate support from the Gauteng Department of Education, demotivated and occasionally undertrained teachers, and insufficient resources.

Teacher 1 expressed frustration by stating that:

"I think one of the challenges that we face quite dearly is the contextual challenge in that the environment upon which the school is set. It's still very much a challenge because the learners and their mindsets haven't yet, uh, adjusted to what a school of specialisation is, and this is portrayed by their discipline, by their behaviour."

Teacher 2 said there are no challenges in running the SOS.

She said, *"I think there are no challenges except that the demands of SOS, which is the school, should perform above 95% every term. There should be no learner failing, and we only admit learners who are at level 3 and above."*

The participants stated this was a challenge because these demands limit the schools' capacity to admit learners, resulting in fewer learners overall.

Teacher 3 mentioned that, in his view, the SOS is facing one major challenge: *"limited support from the department, their support is there, but it is not targeted where it is needed."*

He further stated that "*you will have support for everything, for management, for different subjects, but the support for those particular new subjects, the support is lacking, that is the biggest challenge."*

Teacher 4 faced a different challenge, as did their own SOS.

"I think the biggest challenge we face is the commitment from the teachers. That is because there isn't any remuneration for the extra work teachers are putting in, and the demands of the SOS. Teachers use their personal time to do skills-related activities outside the normal school timetable."

It is evident from the participants' responses about running an SOS that each SOS faces its own challenges. As the researcher, I concluded that most of these challenges are not fundamentally different from those experienced in ordinary schools.

This finding directly addresses RQ4 by identifying the key challenges and barriers SOS encounter, namely funding shortages, resource gaps, and inadequate support structures. This relates to the main research question because these challenges limit SOS's potential to equip learners with relevant job market skills and contribute to economic development in Gauteng Province.

4.4.5.1 School visits

The results showed that the SOS received many visits from district officials and head office officials. Departmental officials visited the SOS mainly to monitor the school's performance and the use of the budget and resource allocation. According to the participants, an SOS is expected to achieve above 90% in its matric results each year, which is why there are so many visits from officials.

4.4.5.2 Updating teaching materials for the subjects taught at the SOS

The teachers were asked: "What resources or support do you feel are lacking in terms of teaching specialised subjects?"

The results indicate that little emphasis is placed on ensuring that teaching and learning materials are sufficient at the SOS, with some schools lacking the equipment to teach specialised subjects.

Teacher 1's view was that *"the learners have only one small machine to do robotics, and internet connectivity is a challenge when Grade 9s are doing coding."*

Teacher 2 echoed similar views regarding the teaching and learning materials at the SOS.

"Another challenge is that we were supposed to have computers to be an ICT school, but we are still lagging because we don't even have computer labs"

A recurring agreement among participants was captured by Teacher 3, who stated the following:

> *One of the critical challenges we face is the cost of resources and materials required for specialised subjects. As I already explained, school budgets have been reduced by more than 50%, yet specialised programmes such as Engineering Graphics and Design (EGD), as well as Coding and Robotics, require costly equipment such as 3D printers. A single 3D printer can cost between R20, 000 and R25, 000, and to cater for a class of 40 learners, at least four printers are needed, amounting to nearly R100, 000 for just one subject in the FET phase. This cost escalates further when considering that Coding and Robotics is offered across multiple classes in Grade 8 and Grade 9, each requiring its own resources. To have all these items, the school would need at least R200, 000 to adequately resource these programmes.*

Teacher 5 shared the same sentiments about budget constraints in running the SOS effectively. He had the following to say:

"There is not enough laboratory equipment, computers, or specialised tools needed for practical lessons. Our budget doesn't cover the cost of essential teaching aids."

Teacher participants reported that budget limitations in SOS restrict access to essential teaching resources, equipment, and learning materials. These financial constraints also limit opportunities for professional development and practical student activities, hindering the effective delivery of specialised subjects.

4.4.5.3 Reskilling and up-skilling teachers in the SOS

The results further indicate that the Department of Basic Education needs to up-skill and reskill teachers so that what they teach in schools remains relevant to the job market and the competitive world. The teachers at the SOS are undergoing training to teach subjects such as Robotics and Coding. The teacher development unit in the Gauteng Department of Education provides training to keep teachers up to date with trends in education systems around the world.

The SOS is about equipping learners with relevant skills; therefore, the results underscore the importance of teachers being upskilled to fulfil this mandate.

The teachers were asked: How can Gauteng specialisation schools align their curricula and evaluate the effectiveness of their training programmes to meet the demands of the labour market and the economy?

Teacher 1 answered as follows, *"I would say, although there is effort from our teacher development unit, there is not enough training, as some of the training is not covered, especially for your specialised subjects"*

District Official 1 reflected the following:

"Teacher development is very active in visiting those schools and trying to identify the skills gap within the educators, and part of their responsibilities is to organise several workshops where we are reskilling and upskilling educators. It is a programme, a continuous programme that is done and conducted by data development"

District Official 2 shared a similar view.

"Reskilling and upskilling teachers in the schools of specialisation is an ongoing priority. We recognised that some of the specialised subjects are new to many

teachers and require additional support. At the district level, we are working with provincial departments and external stakeholders to provide professional development workshops, short courses and industry exposure programmes."

District Official 3 agreed and added, "...*however, resource constraints and limited availability of subject experts sometimes slow down the process."*

Both teachers and district officials acknowledged the importance of reskilling and upskilling teachers in the SOS. This suggests that sustained investment in teacher development is essential for the effective delivery of specialised subjects.

4.4.5.4 Insufficient resources for instructions and lack of subject advisors

These results also revealed that teachers across all sampled SOS do not receive adequate support from subject advisors, particularly for newly introduced subjects such as Marine Science, Maritime Economics, Dance, and Drama. The schools mainly receive support from district officials who lack qualifications in the mentioned subjects, as there are no subject advisors qualified in those subjects.

Teacher 1 made the following remarks:

"And also giving support with newer subjects, like your marine sciences, because we do not have any facilitators or education specialists at the district level, you'll find that we get people coming from the Western Cape, people coming from GDE or province, to support with those new subjects."

Teacher 2 strongly concurred, stating the following:

> *We are dependent on facilitators from head office, and those facilitators are not only dealing with our schools, but also remember, they are dealing with schools provincially. So there is an absence of facilitators who are skilled in terms of trades. So when we get a facilitator, maybe this term, we will see the same facilitator from the head office. And they only like to come once a term. Therefore, making progress there is really posing a challenge to us, because*

we have to look at reports that are left by facilitators that are coming once a term.

Teacher 3 also concurred.

“But here within our district, for example, we don't have facilitators that are really relevant to trades.”

Teacher 4 also added: *“We don’t have a facilitator for Marine Science. The Physical Science facilitator is helping out with the subject, and she does not have much knowledge on Marine Science, so I could say she is just helping out while we are waiting for a proper facilitator.”*

The participants’ responses revealed a systemic challenge within the province: a shortage of qualified facilitators for specialised subjects. This impacts the effective implementation of a specialised curriculum. This points to the need for stronger policy enforcement and strategic investment to ensure that specialised schools are staffed with facilitators capable of delivering on the programme’s intended goals.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The data analysis process was outlined in this section, along with an in-depth discussion of the results in line with the research questions guiding the study. Participants emphasised that reducing poverty requires equipping learners with employable skills. The importance of multi-certification and workforce readiness was also covered in this chapter. A detailed discussion of the challenges and barriers that schools of specialisation face in fulfilling their mandate to equip learners with relevant job-market skills was presented. The next section presents the discussion of findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Located in the interpretive paradigm and guided by the human capital theory, this qualitative study sought to examine the potential of SOS to accelerate economic growth and alleviate poverty in Gauteng. Data were analysed thematically, and the results were presented in the previous chapter. This chapter discusses the major findings, the study's limitations, and recommendations. In the discussion, the chapter will compare the current findings with those from the literature and incorporate the theoretical framework.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The main research question guiding this study was:

What is the potential of schools of specialisation in equipping learners with skills that are relevant to the job market and the development of the economy in Gauteng Province?

The study was driven by the following research sub-questions:

I. What are principals' and teachers' perceptions of current labour market demands in Gauteng and their implications for Schools of Specialisation?
II. How can Gauteng specialisation schools align their curriculum and evaluate the effectiveness of their training programmes to meet the demands of the labour market and the economy?
III. How do schools of specialisation in Gauteng Province tailor their career guidance and counselling services to ensure learners are aware of and prepared for employment opportunities?
IV. What challenges and barriers do schools of specialisation encounter in fulfilling their mandate of equipping learners with relevant job market skills?

This chapter will now turn to the discussion of the findings.

5.3 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study's findings on whether SOS equip learners with the skills to prepare them for work are examined in the following subsections, in the order of the sub-research questions. Thereafter, the discussion will attempt to provide a conclusive answer to the main research question.

5.3.1 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO SUB-RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Question: 1. What are principals and teachers perceptions of current labour market demands in Gauteng and their implications for Schools of Specialisation?

The main finding was that most participants agreed that the SOS project was desirable because it provided learners with industry-specific skills. SOS were considered particularly relevant to learners who prefer a hands-on and practical approach to learning.

This finding resonates with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, where Mtshali and Pillay (2023) posited that the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is structured to enable educational institutions to respond to the urgency of preparing learners with contemporary skills that are demanded by industry. The literature review indicates that, in line with the objectives of the SOS project, CAPS aims to develop learners who are creative, imaginative, effective communicators, and problem solvers, capable of functioning well both individually and in teams (Mantshongo, 2023).

The principals all concurred that, if well developed, learners from SOS would fit well into the occupations for which they have been prepared, particularly high-demand occupations. Rassol (2021) identifies occupations in high demand, including the digital economy, energy, infrastructure development, data science, web development, electrical engineering, toolmaking, crop analysis, agricultural science, and trades.

The semi-structured interviews and classroom observations helped to examine whether the skills taught at the SOS matched the demands of the current job market. Two key findings emerged from the studied sample. Firstly, the SOS are divided into

focus areas (e.g., ICT, engineering, and so on), thereby targeting specific skills that match job market demands. Secondly, the schools' curriculum is aligned with the major economic activities in their surroundings (e.g., vehicle manufacturing, mining, and so forth), as determined by the Premier of Gauteng.

Another key finding was that although the current labour market demands and economic development trends in Gauteng province are clear, addressing them is somewhat difficult because the province lacks well-trained teachers to teach specialised subjects in some SOSs. Consequently, schools resort to hiring people who are not qualified professional teachers, but who work in the private sector or in companies to assist with teaching certain subjects.

This finding resonates with Adams's (2024) call for institutions to invest in staff professional development and to move with the times, particularly the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which has brought about new changes and compels all sectors of the economy to adapt. The participants likewise stressed that teacher development was the cornerstone of successful upskilling to meet the demands of 4IR and address current labour market needs.

These findings further support Mhlanga and Moloi's (2020) argument that the changes brought about by the 4IR and the recommendations of the World Economic Forum (WEF) compel schools to keep pace with global economic trends, ensuring that children are taught up-to-date, economically relevant curricula.

In the same vein, Schwab (2016) noted that companies, too, should keep pace with labour market trends and avoid operating in silos. This will help them hire people who not only meet current job demands but also have additional skills that can improve efficiency and the employee's quality of life. This serves as a direct call for schools to keep abreast of changes by aligning with industries to ensure that school products remain relevant to modern industries.

The researcher noted that across Gauteng Province, there are apparent discrepancies in the level of development of each SOS, with some schools fully equipped while others lack resources and specialised teachers for certain subjects. Skills

development varies from one SOS to another, with some adopting a more visible approach than others. The study found that other schools are given the status of an SOS, but take time to holistically transform into their new designated role.

The main finding is that, though some SOS do not fully adhere to the skills training required to meet current labour demands and supply the industry with competent, skilled people, all SOS are making a genuine effort under challenging circumstances.

This finding aligns with existing literature that positions curriculum reforms as a response to industry needs (Mtshali & Pillay, 2023). However, while previous studies discuss CAPS broadly, this study extends the literature by providing empirical evidence from stakeholders that SOS are perceived as particularly effective at delivering industry-specific, practical skills. Thus, the finding confirms the policy intent and extends understanding of how that intent is perceived at the implementation level in Gauteng SOS.

5.3.2 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO SUB-RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Question: How can Gauteng specialisation schools align their curriculum and evaluate the effectiveness of their training programmes to meet the demands of the labour market and the economy?

The main finding for this research question is that SOS can align their curriculum through a deliberately designed, hands-on curriculum that responds to industry's current demands.

The reviewed literature underscored the urgent need for educational transformation to enable learners to acquire skills that make them significant players in addressing the economic needs of Gauteng Province. The current mismatch between what is taught in schools and the skills needed in the economy and labour market was laid bare.

Interviews with principals confirmed insights from the literature review, particularly the notion that establishing a holistically hands-on, labour-market-aligned SOS curriculum is challenging. The findings indicate that some participants felt that SOSs are not adequately equipped to produce highly competitive graduates, and that more should

be done to provide modern machinery and tools. In this regard, Zambara (2024) notes that Gauteng faces a severe skills shortage and literature suggests that South Africa's current curriculum does not adequately address this crisis. Zambara further argues that this challenge hinders economic growth and contributes to a high unemployment rate. In like manner, the World Economic Forum Report (2023) listed South Africa among the countries worldwide facing a serious skills shortage, as most of its skilled workforce had migrated to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

These findings also lend credence to the assertion that skills gaps in countries like South Africa make it difficult to transform SOS to align with market and economic needs (Guirbert et al., 2018).

It must be reiterated that some participants felt that the SOS are not adequately equipped to produce graduates who are highly competitive and who can easily fit into the industrial set-up. The implication is that, even though teaching approaches at the SOS exposed learners to the needs of the labour market to prepare them for the evolving economy, more should be done to fully equip the SOS with modern machinery and tools.

Considering the above, Langeni (2020) noted with concern that, despite ongoing skills development strategies in Africa, the skills gap persists, hindering economic and social progress. Statistics South Africa (2020) has noted that Gauteng’s status as a major population centre and a leading contributor to South Africa’s GDP underscores the province’s need for a skilled workforce to sustain economic growth.

To address the concerns raised above, the participants revealed that the schools are doing everything possible to establish partnerships with various companies and to put in place signed memoranda of understanding to ensure that the schools and the companies share a common understanding of their operations. Through this approach, schools would ensure the SOS curriculum is aligned so learners are taught what companies look for when recruiting.

Another crucial observation from this study is that learners in SOS gained hands-on experience in skills such as plumbing and welding, enabling them to repair appliances, geysers, toilets, showers, and other household items in their communities. Acquiring these skills implies that the SOS curriculum aligns with labour market needs insofar as it produces competent plumbers and welders.

Importantly, these findings resonate with human development theory, which advocates achieving economic productivity by investing in individuals or enhancing their capabilities to increase their productivity. The human development theory also aligns with the participants' views, who believed that a genuine drive to impart skills to learners was necessary to spur economic growth, reduce unemployment, and alleviate poverty.

These findings are linked to Sub-RQ2, as they show that while partnerships and memoranda of understanding are mechanisms used by SOS to align with the labour market, resource constraints remain a barrier to producing graduates who are competitive in it.

5.3.3 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO THE SUB-QUESTION NUMBER 3

Question: How do SOS tailor their career guidance and counselling services to ensure that learners are aware of and prepared for employment opportunities?

Key to addressing this question was what Teacher 1 referred to as the need to invest in people and make them appreciate that they are the means towards change and prosperity. This idea agrees with the views expressed in the human capital theory, which underscores that people have a capital value, which is the ability to acquire skills through education that comes at a cost. In turn, as Wright, Coff and Moliterno (2014) posit, those skills have monetary value, benefiting the individual and the economy.

The school principals concurred that SOS has a clear mission: to ensure that all who enrol acquire the skills offered through the SOS curriculum. This view underscores the principals' belief that skills training and development are grounded in human development theory, which promotes economic productivity by investing in or enhancing individuals.

As Floreani (2014) posits, such investments and enhancements are made through education and skills training, which equip individuals to find employment, become economically active, and increase productivity.

On the other hand, Teacher 4 mentioned that they were unsure of how to adequately expose learners to the world of work. This could be a result of not being exposed to or not being prepared to teach skills outside the classroom. Since there is little cooperation or connection between schools and businesses or industries, the learners may not be well informed about the world of work. Another challenge was clearly stated by Principal 1, who noted that SOS face a contextual challenge in the environment in which the school is located. The environment does not fully support change; hence, even the learners' mindset has not fully adjusted to what a school of specialisation is. It therefore takes a long time to prepare learners for the demands of employment and to ensure they meet them precisely.

To conclude, regarding how SOS tailor their career guidance and counselling services, it was apparent that further efforts are needed to make the SOS project more appealing to the majority of learners. Therefore, this finding confirms the importance of career guidance as highlighted in the literature. It extends previous research by showing that in Gauteng SOS, the tailoring of guidance is constrained by resource and capacity challenges. This suggests that for SOS to meet their mandate, targeted support for career guidance services is required.

5.3.4 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO THE SUB-QUESTION NUMBER 4

Sub-question 4: What challenges and barriers do Gauteng schools of specialisation encounter in fulfilling their mandate of equipping learners with relevant job market skills?

The findings indicate that SOS encountered several challenges. However, the four foremost barriers hindering SOS from fulfilling their mandates are: (1) the difficulty of finding experts to assist with skills development in schools, (2) inadequate school infrastructure, (3) insufficient funding, and (4) lack of acceptance of the SOS project by all stakeholders.

Starting with the first challenge, participants reported difficulty finding people with expertise to teach certain skills in the SOS, as most teachers are trained in the mainstream curriculum rather than the SOS curriculum. Mhlanga, Khoza and Skosana (2023) argue that SOS must realise that attaining their stated goals hinges on their ability to recruit and employ teachers who are relevant and qualified to teach subjects offered at the specific SOS. Tchereva (2018) echoes a similar sentiment, stating that teachers from technical schools should have a thorough knowledge of different trades and practical engineering experience, so that they are aware of the employability skills that businesses require of learners and ensure that their approaches equip learners for the realities of the workplace.

The second major challenge raised by the participants concerned the school infrastructure. In view of this, Sephokgole, Ramadigela, and Makgato (2022) argue that the lack of infrastructure, tools, and resources has a detrimental effect on the delivery of high-quality teaching in SOS, as it prevents teachers from providing learners with sufficient exposure to practical skills.

The third challenge is that government funding for the SOS is insufficient. This has prevented schools from accessing adequate resources to equip learners with skills, resulting in schools still teaching the mainstream curriculum rather than a specialised curriculum across grades. Most schools teach the specialised curriculum only in grades 10 and 12.

The last major challenge raised by the participants is that SOS are schools that are currently being transitioned into SOS. In the interim, the school community struggles to accept the changes, leading to palpable resistance among teachers and learners alike. This is because SOS requires more work for educators, as an additional 2 hours are required beyond the current notional time allocation.

5.3.5 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

Question: What is the potential of SOS in equipping learners with skills that are relevant to the job market and the development of the economy in Gauteng Province?

This study concludes that the SOS project has the potential to equip learners with relevant skills, but numerous drawbacks limit their success. It has been found that SOS are necessary because learners are taught practical skills and obtain certification from grades 8 to 12, which they can use to further their emerging careers should they drop out of school. Thus, learners do not just leave with a matric certificate, but also with multiple other certificates they would have acquired through the SOS.

The results have shown that the multi-certification skills programme (MCSP) ensures that learners in Gauteng receive diverse skills training and earn certifications at every grade. Furthermore, learners get to participate in real activities that prepare them for the future job market and the requirements it entails. This is because, at the SOS, learners experience what it is like to be in the workplace through placements with companies that are part of the SOS or adopt it. However, as this chapter points out, industry partnerships need to be strengthened to deliver on their promise.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this qualitative study is the inability to generalise findings to all SOS and to different contexts. However, rather than generalising the findings, the study aimed to obtain a deeper insight into the inner workings of each SOS under study.

Another limitation was the small sample size, due to some school principals declining interview invitations to participate in the study.

Despite these limitations, this study will help shift the perspectives of many Gauteng teachers and South Africans in general, enabling them to support the SOS project's skill development initiative.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study’s findings, the following recommendations are suggested for implementation.

5.5.1 Have a fully resourced SOS to accommodate both teachers and learners.

According to the results, the teachers identified a barrier to the SOS's ability to provide learners with the skills they need: the lack of teaching and learning materials in schools. For instance, the performing arts SOS lacks the tools required to instruct artistic, dramatic, and dance classes. The only equipment offered at the school is for the music component. Furthermore, the maritime SOS lacks a swimming pool, which is required for teaching and learning. It is recommended that all instructional materials required for the SOS to operate to its maximum potential be supplied by the Gauteng Department of Education. The GDE should allocate ring-fenced budget specifically for the procurement of modern machinery, tools, and technology aligned to each SOS focus area. Furthermore, partnerships with industries should include provisions for equipment donations and shared workshop facilities.

5.5.2 Allocation of budget and teacher training.

It is recommended that the SOS seek benefactors and sponsors to help cover all or some of the school's expenses. Additionally, schools should raise funds to support their operations. This approach is being used by a certain SOS in the Ekurhuleni South district, and the school is operating effectively. This, however, can be achieved with the Department of Education's treasury providing higher grants than schools currently receive. Additionally, teachers need training and up-skilling opportunities to equip learners with the skills they need. According to Abdualiyeva (2023), teachers must grow and develop their skills, knowledge, and expertise to remain current and effective in their practice. This may be achieved through ongoing training by the teacher development units across the province's schools and districts. The GDE should implement ongoing training and up-skilling programmes for SOS teachers to develop their knowledge and expertise in specialised areas. This will ensure teachers remain current and effective in their practice, thereby improving the quality of skills training and graduate employability.

5.5.3 STRATEGIC EXPANSION OF SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION IN THE PROVINCE.

The findings of this study suggest that SOS have significant potential to equip learners with skills relevant to the job market and to contribute to the economic development in

Gauteng Province. However, it was revealed that existing SOS are constrained by systemic challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, difficulty in recruiting teachers with technical expertise, and lack of stakeholder acceptance. Expanding SOS without addressing these challenges risks replicating current deficiencies. It is recommended that the GDE first conduct a comprehensive capacity audit of all existing SOS and address identified gaps in resources, infrastructure, staffing, and funding. Once baseline operational standards are met, the GDE should strategically identify and convert additional schools into SOS, prioritising underserved districts to increase equitable access to specialised skills training.

Furthermore, universities should be engaged to introduce SOS-specific subjects into teacher education programmes to ensure a pipeline of qualified teachers.

This phased approach will ensure that expansion does not compromise quality. It will enable new and existing SOS to operate optimally and produce learners with usable skills, thereby reducing the number of school leavers without employable competencies and contributing to Gauteng's economic development.

SOS should be positioned as a strategy that eliminates school leavers and produces learners with usable skills, and all SOS should ensure that all learners learn at least two sets of skills from grade 8 to grade 12. Moreover, the skills and certificates learners acquire should be accredited, and learning should be combined with on-the-job training. Companies should work with the SOS or, even better, adopt it to offer experiential learning.

Lastly, a quantitative study is recommended to gain a broader understanding of staffing needs, resource availability, and teacher and learner experiences in the SOS, among other factors.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Participants from various schools shared a wide range of viewpoints and experiences about teaching at SOS, as well as the objectives and goals these institutions hope to achieve. The findings revealed that equipping learners with skills prepares them for the workplace, as they acquire useful abilities they can utilise in their careers. The

ability of learners to create usable items by hand was observed in the classrooms, and the skills the modern economy demands were demonstrated through the talents they developed at the SOS. Based on these findings, it is apparent that SOS have the potential to contribute to economic development and poverty alleviation in Gauteng and across the country.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 08 January 2025

Ref: **2024/11/15/000000391/07/RB**
Name: **Ms Rehilwe Precious Dingalo**
Student No.: **44909845**

Decision: Ethics Approval form

Dear **Ms Rehilwe Precious Dingalo**

Researcher(s): Name: **Ms Rehilwe Precious Dingalo**
E-mail address: 44909845@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: **0735362198**

Supervisor: Name: Dr Mzoli Mncanca
E-mail address: mncanms@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: **012 429 4877**

Title of research: *The potential of schools of specialisation to alleviate poverty and accelerate economic development in Gauteng.*

Qualification: MEd

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above-mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period **2025/01/08** to **2028/01/08**.

*The **low risk level** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on **15 November 2024** in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. The study's risk level is Category 2- Low risk: Human participants are involved and there is foreseeable risk of inconvenience. Non-vulnerable adult participants and non-sensitive information is involved.
9. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2028/01/08.** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2025/01/08/00000391/07/RB** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof RB Monyai
Acting Head: CEDU Research
monyarb@unisa.ac.za

Prof Mpine Makoe
Executive Dean: CEDU
gakisme@unisa.ac.za

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APPENDIX B: GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PERMISSION

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	30 July 2024
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2024– 30 September 2024 2024/232
Name of Researcher:	Dingalo R.P
Address of Researcher:	12313/27 Navada Street
	Bervelly Hills/ Veereniging
Telephone Number:	0766521047
Email address:	refiloe.dingalo58@gmail.com/ 44909845@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Research Topic:	The potential of schools of specialisation to alleviate poverty and accelerate economic growth in Gauteng province.
Name of University:	UNISA
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	5 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Gauteng West, Sedibeng East

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

30/07/2024

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Dr. Gumani Mukatuni
DCES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 30/07/2024

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX C: STUDY INFORMATION LETTER

Tel:
Email:

24 July 2024

Title: The Role of Specialised Schools in Poverty Alleviation and Economic Development: A Case Study of Gauteng Province.

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Rehilwe P. Dingalo. I am conducting a study for a Master of Education qualification under the supervision of Dr Mzoli Mncanca, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education, at the University of South Africa. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled: **The Role of Specialised Schools in Poverty Alleviation and Economic Development: A Case Study of Gauteng Province.** This study received written approval from the College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee of the University of South Africa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher upon request.

This study will collect information to provide a deeper understanding of how schools of specialisation (SOSs) equip learners with skills relevant to the job market, and how the skills taught at the SOSs can help alleviate poverty and accelerate economic development in Gauteng.

You are invited because of your experience and the role you play at the SOSs. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed for 30 minutes, and the interview will be audio-recorded. Teachers and learners will be observed during lessons focused on enhancing learner skills.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you are not obliged to participate. You are assured of no foreseeable risks or harm because of your participation in this study.

Should you agree to participate, you will be provided with a consent form to sign before participating in this study.

You are assured of the confidentiality of personal information that will be collected as part of this study. Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one, except the researcher and the supervisor, will know of your involvement in this study. Please note that participation is completely voluntary and no money or rewards will be provided for participating in the study. You will not be told how to answer the interview questions; you are free to answer them however you like, or to refuse to answer any or all of them.

On completion of this study, a summary of findings will be sent to you via email, and a full copy of the dissertation will be sent to you on request via mncanms@unisa.ac.za.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how the study has been conducted, please feel free to raise any concerns directly with me or my supervisor by emailing mncanms@unisa.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return it to me after this meeting.

Regards

Ms Rehilwe P. Dingalo (Researcher)

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I _____ (Participant Name), confirm that the person requesting my consent to take part in this research has informed me of the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the audio recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname Participant Signature & Date

_____ _____

Ms Rehilwe P Dingalo (Researcher)

_____ _____

APPENDIX E: PARENT CONSENT AND LEARNER ASSENT FORM

CONSENT FOR MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE

Parent/Guardian consent:

I, _____, give my consent for my child to participate in the study.

Signature_____Dte:_____

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I, _____, agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can withdraw at any time and that my data will be kept confidential.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Should you have any further questions about your participation, please feel free to contact me on 07665XXXXX.

Yours sincerely

_____

MS R.P DINGALO

RESEARCHER

APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Date and Time	
Location	The school's name will change depending on the school being observed.
Observer	Ms R.P Dingalo (Researcher)
Subject	Teachers teaching practical skills
Grade	Grade 11 Learners (Class sizes differ)
Purpose	To investigate how practical skills are taught at SOS to enhance learners' skills development
Method	Photographs, note-taking
Data collection	Pictures of learners /teachers doing practical work
Duration	45 Minutes
Frequency	One day/school
Debriefing	After the observation, the researcher will reflect on the lesson with the teacher and record any relevant data for the study

These are the questions I will ask myself while conducting observations

Section A: General questions while observing

1. Are most learners actively doing, or just watching?
2. Who is leading and who is quiet in each group, and why?
3. Do learners ask each other for help before asking the teacher?

Section B: Practical skills and application questions

1. Can learners correctly use the tools/equipment for this subject?
2. Do they follow the correct sequence/steps, or skip/mix them up?
3. How do learners apply theory from class to this practical? Can I hear them explain why they are doing a certain step?

Section C: Reflection questions

1. What surprised me in how learners approached the task?
2. What can't I tell yet that I need to watch the next time?
3. How can I describe the key focus of the SOS? E.g. more industry-related focus, focus on higher-level skills, career focus vs mainstream school focus.
4. Bias check: What assumptions did I almost make? What did a learner or teacher do that challenged it?
5. These are the questions I will ask myself while conducting observations at the various

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview purpose: To determine how the SOS equips learners with skills necessary to alleviate poverty and accelerate economic growth in Gauteng province.
Duration: 30 Minutes

1. Introduction and ice breaker questions: Please tell us about your experience of working at the SOS.
2. Demographic Information: Gender, qualification, years of experience, and age.

Guiding Research Question: What are the current labour market demands and economic development trends in Gauteng Province?

Teachers Questions

1. Describe your experience since this school changed from being an ordinary public school to a school of specialisation.
2. What skills do you think are important for learners to acquire to thrive in Gauteng's evolving economy?
3. How do you adapt your teaching approach to expose learners to the needs of the labour market to prepare them for the evolving economy's needs?

Principals' Questions

1. How do you collaborate with industry in and around the school or employers to ensure they assist with aligning the school's curriculum with the current labour demands and economic development trends?
2. Is the curriculum taught at this school able to equip learners with skills that they can use after finishing school to work in relevant industries that help improve the economy of the province?

District Officials' Questions

1. How do you ensure that the curriculum taught at the SOS addresses the skills gap between what learners learn in school and what is required in the Gauteng job market?

2. How do you stay up to date with the best practices and research in curriculum to ensure that it focuses on improving the economy of Gauteng province?

Guiding Research Question: How can Gauteng specialisation schools align their curriculum and evaluate the effectiveness of their training programmes to meet the demands of the labour market and the economy?

Teachers' Questions

1. Do you get enough training from the district and Gauteng Department of Education to teach the specialised curriculum the school is teaching that helps to equip learners with skills that meet the demands of the labour market? Please elaborate on how.

District Officials Questions

1. How do you upskill teachers' skills in making sure that they deliver the best curriculum that aligns with the needs of the labour market? Is there a budget allocated to training teachers with these skills?

Guiding Research Question: How do schools of specialisation in Gauteng Province tailor their career guidance and counselling services to ensure learners are aware of and prepared for employment opportunities?

Teachers' Questions

1. How do you track that learners from this SOS get employed quickly because of the specialised skills taught at this school?
2. How do you support learners who may be struggling with certain aspects of the curriculum offered at the school?

Principals' Questions

1. Is the curriculum of this SOS relevant and aligned with industry needs and trends? Please elaborate.
2. Do you think relevant industries are on board with supporting different SOS according to the focus area the school is following?

District Officials' Questions

1. How do you involve stakeholders such as industries/companies or similar to municipalities in supporting or adopting a relevant SOS that teaches skills that are what the company or industry do?
2. What strategies do you use to monitor learners' progress and understanding of the curriculum of the SOS?
3. How do you facilitate professional opportunities for teachers to enhance their curriculum knowledge and teaching skills?

Guiding Research Question: What are the challenges and barriers faced by schools of specialisation in effectively equipping learners with relevant job market skills in Gauteng Province?

Teachers' Questions

1. What challenges do you face in teaching at the SOS?
2. What resources or support do you feel are lacking in terms of teaching specialised subjects?
3. What are the challenges in preparing learners for careers in specialised subjects and ensuring that the curriculum meets the demands of the current job market?

Principals' Questions

1. Can you elaborate on some of the challenges faced by the SOS in ensuring that the curriculum of the school is aligned with the demands of the job market?
2. How do you manage and allocate resources to optimise school performance, considering that the SOS needs special resources that will enhance learners' skills?
3. Do the schools receive sufficient funding and resources from the Department of Education to operate as a full specialisation school?

District Officials' Questions

1. What are the challenges you face in making sure the curriculum of the SOS is aligned with the demands of the current job market?
2. How do you monitor the curriculum at the SOS to ensure that teachers deliver specialised training to provide high-quality instructions and guidance?

3. What challenges does the Department of Education face when reorganising a school to become an SOS?

4. Do teachers and principals generally adhere to the SOS's operating principles, including in their curriculum?

APPENDIX H: DISSERTATION LANGUAGE EDITING

DECLARATION FOR LANGUAGE EDITING

English Language Editing Services
SATI membership number: 1000363
Tel: 0843101128/0767264354
E-mail:
mziso1@gmail.com;jmadzimure@yahoo.com

13 February 2026

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I, the undersigned, have language edited the completed research of

REHILWE PRECIOUS DINGALO

for the Master of Education in Educational Management

and the thesis entitled: **THE POTENTIAL OF SCHOOLS OF SPECIALISATION TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AND ACCELERATE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN GAUTENG.**

The responsibility of implementing the recommended language changes rests with the author of the thesis.

Yours truly,



Dr J.Madzimure Ziso

PhD English