



Exploring the impact of the National Rural Youth Service Corps Programme on entrepreneurial development in the Free State Province

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DECLARATION

I, NM Mojapele, certify that the mini dissertation with the title “Exploring the impact of National rural youth service corps programme on entrepreneurial development in the Free State province”, submitted to the North-West University Business School within the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences for the Master of Business Administration (MBA), has not been previously submitted for any other degree or at any other university. I affirm that I am the author of this work and that appropriate credit has been given to all pertinent individuals referenced.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family, without whom I could never have completed it. Their unconditional support and trust in my ability gave me the confidence to persevere even at the most difficult times during this research process.

Thank you.

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I would like to thank the Lord for giving me good physical and mental health, wisdom and the ability to do the best I can in completing this research.

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ABSTRACT

The increasing number of unemployed youth in South Africa is generating economic, social, and political challenges nationwide. As a result of this challenge, South African government have initiated various programmes aimed at improving education, employment opportunities and entrepreneurial skills especially within rural communities. To alleviate the unemployment issue, the National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) Programme was established to provide rural youth with the necessary skills, discipline and pathway to becoming self-employed. The goal of this study is to explore the impact of National rural youth service corps (NARYSEC) programme on entrepreneurial development in the Free State province.

The study examined how youth development has been defined and measured through the various indicators that researchers and organisations use to measure youth entrepreneurial development. Suggested recommendations were provided regarding improving the design, delivery, and post-programme support of the NARYSEC Programme.

This study utilised a qualitative methodology to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the experiences of NARYSEC. A total of eleven primary data sources from NARYSEC graduates were obtained via semi-structured interviews as the primary source of collecting data and the researcher selected a purposive sample of youth that had participated in the NARYSEC training program in the Free State. The targeted sample size for this study was 15 participants, however the researcher only contacted and interviewed 11 youth and reached data saturation. The ATLAS.ti software was used for thematic analysis of all the data gathered from the participants to assist the researcher in identifying patterns in participant's narrative responses. The researcher identified 48 initial codes and then narrowed those codes down to 6 overarching themes. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed based on Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis model. NARYSEC programme's qualitative results illustrated a large part of how the programme can help develop young people's entrepreneurial foundation and foster positive views on being self-employed.

NARYSEC programme has helped improve participants' entrepreneurial awareness, built their self-confidence and developed their ability to apply their knowledge in a practical environment. many of these participants have experienced obstacles, such as limited financial resources, lack of adequate follow-up support after training, and for others there was a lack of mentoring opportunities which, collectively, have prevented successful transitions into entrepreneurship after completing the NARYSEC programme. As such, the study provides recommendations for

enhancing the design and implementation of NARYSEC to improve sustainable youth entrepreneurship in the Free State Province.

The study concluded by recommending the programme to Increase post-programme support through mentorship and advisory services, create access to finances and resources for new entrepreneurs and support enterprise growth through business Incubation and market linkages, as well to enhance land access procedures for graduates of the NARYSEC programme.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial development, Entrepreneurship, Free State Province, National rural youth service corps Programme, Youth, South Africa.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AgriSETA	Agricultural Sector Education and Training Authority
CRLR	Commission on Restitution of Land Rights
DDM	District development model
DLRRD	Department of Land Reform and Rural Development
DOL	Department of labour
DSBD	Department of Small Business Development
DWYPD	Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
EE	Entrepreneurship education
EI	Entrepreneurial intention
ESO	Entrepreneurial support organisations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GCIS	Government Communication and Information System
HE	Higher education
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International labour organisation
KSA	Knowledge skills abilities
NARYSEC	National Rural Youth Service Corps
NDP	National Development Plan
NRDF	National Rural Development Framework
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan

NWU	North West University
NWU EMS- REC	North West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLAS	Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy
POPI Act	Protection of Personal Information Act
SACCO	Savings and Credit Corporative
SEDFA	Small enterprise development and finance agency
SME	Small medium-sized enterprise
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
YED	Youth enterprise development
YEDF	Youth Enterprise Development Fund
YEDS	Youth enterprise development strategy
YOUWIN	Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In the 2025 State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa identified youth unemployment as a persistent socio-economic issue (Republic of South Africa, 2025). He indicated that the government is enhancing job search initiatives and public employment programmes to assist individuals in overcoming poverty. South Africa, like many other nations globally, faces challenges with youth unemployment. Data reveals that the unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 to 34 years stands at 45.5%, surpassing the national average of 32.9% recorded in the first quarter of 2024 (Stats SA, 2024). Furthermore, Maluleke (2024:12) noted that the number of unemployed individuals in South Africa has escalated from 5.2 million in the second quarter of 2014 to 8.4 million in the second quarter of 2024. Therefore, youth unemployment has risen over the last ten years, and the percentage of young people who have been unemployed for a long time went from 31.9% in the fourth quarter of 2024 to 32.9% in the first quarter of 2025 (Stats SA, 2025).

High rates of youth unemployment create significant risks, including the likelihood of social unrest, increased levels of poverty and long-term stagnation of the economy (Generation, 2024). Therefore, tackling this issue is important because it affects the economic and social health of the country (Magome, 2023). According to Meyer (2017:56), promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing employability through appropriate skills training are viable solutions to the escalating issue of youth unemployment. The International Labour Organisation (2025) asserts that effective skills development programmes significantly improve the employability of young individuals in facilitating their transition into the job market (Adrian, 2024).

Entities such as the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) are responsible for the growth and sustainability of small businesses and youth enterprises (Department of Small Business Development, 2023:4). The Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA) is an agency under the DSBD with a dedicated mandate related to supporting youth entrepreneurship in South Africa (Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency, 2024). Furthermore, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) provides grant funding, business management training, mentorship, market linkage facilitation, and entrepreneurial development support for the youth (National Youth Development Agency, 2017:1).

The National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) programme highlights the critical need for young South Africans to initiate their own businesses. The main goal of the NARYSEC programme is to recruit unemployed young people in rural areas and to build their capacity by

means of different skills development initiatives; hence, it aims to help to enable the transition of the recruited young individuals to engage in economic activities as well as offering post-programme support to youth who have completed the programme and additionally connecting them to economic opportunities (DLRRD, 2022:10-11). The NARYSEC programme provides a wide range of skills targeted at enhancing South African rural youth's employability, potential for self-employment, and a sense of civic responsibility.

To address the issue of youth unemployment, a diverse strategy is required that integrates focused employment schemes, skill-building initiatives, and educational reforms. Moreover, to foster a supportive atmosphere for youth employment, it is essential to facilitate partnerships between governmental bodies, the corporate sector, and community organisations. Furthermore, implementing policies that encourage small business growth and entrepreneurial ventures that allow young people to establish their own career paths (Statistics South Africa, 2024).

Entrepreneurship is employed in developing nations such as South Africa to tackle unemployment, slow economic growth, and poverty (Malebana, 2016). The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development requires a monitoring and evaluation system for its NARYSEC programme to use in assessing the progress of youth members who have successfully completed the programme and established their own businesses. This, in turn, will assist in determining the impact of the programme impact in upskilling young unemployed people in rural areas in South Africa.

The main objective of this chapter was to provide an outline of the study's background, define the problem with which the research study dealt, Research objectives, and explain the significance of the study. This chapter provided a base from which the rationale for studying the impact of the NARYSEC programme can be understood.

1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Since the establishment of democracy in South Africa in 1994, the government has prioritised the reduction of youth unemployment through various initiatives to facilitate the entry of young individuals into the workforce (Rebel Group Advisory Southern Africa, 2017). Structural unemployment in South Africa is attributed to multiple factors, including a mismatch between the skills imparted in educational institutions and those required in the labour market. Young people in rural areas encounter significant challenges, such as limited access to resources, education, and opportunities, which hinder their economic participation (Ryk, 2020:35).

While policies have been established for many years to facilitate workforce readiness and to generate jobs for the increasing population of young individuals seeking employment, youth unemployment persists as a critical problem in various African countries. Notably, South Africa has reported some of the highest youth unemployment figures on the continent (De Lannoy *et al.*, 2018:15).

According to President Cyril Ramaphosa's state of the nation address, citizens will now have the convenience of accessing all support services in a single location, rather than navigating through multiple government offices. He also reiterated the key importance of agriculture in fostering economic growth, guaranteeing food security, and creating employment opportunities. Additionally, he proposed several significant initiatives aimed at boosting agricultural output, supporting farmers, and broadening market access (Republic of South Africa, 2025). These programmes reinforce the notion that the youth represent the future leadership of a nation and neglecting their development may impede societal advancement in the long run (Mmbengwa *et al.*, 2021:4). Paradoxically, the youth in South Africa perceive agriculture as unattractive; careers in this sector are less appealing compared to other professions. Consequently, young individuals in South Africa are hesitant to engage in agricultural careers or entrepreneurial ventures within this field. Despite agriculture being a vital sector for employment in South Africa, it continues to face challenges in attracting limited participation by the youth.

Khan (2021:15) indicates that young individuals view careers in agriculture as unappealing, primarily due to beliefs regarding inadequate financial compensation, the physical demands of the work, and a perceived lack of contemporary technological integration. This perspective has resulted in an industry workforce that is predominantly older and often lacks literacy skills, particularly among those from historically marginalised communities. Consequently, this situation adversely affects South Africa's efforts to reduce the rapidly increasing youth unemployment rate (Aboaba, 2021:423).

In spite of the fact that the South African government has implemented numerous initiatives, including AgriSETA training programmes and funding opportunities specifically for the youth, there continues to be a noticeable reluctance among young people to pursue careers in this industry (Mapunda *et al.*, 2020:3). Since the NARYSEC programme has successfully trained a large cohort of youth in agriculture-related areas, it is imperative to explore its impact in effectively shifting youth's perceptions about the agricultural sector and whether it has fostered entrepreneurial ventures in this sector.

1.2.1 National Rural Youth Service Corps Programme

The NARYSEC programme was established in September 2010 as one of the initiatives aimed at reducing the high youth unemployment rate in the rural areas of South Africa. The programme's founding objectives include recruiting unemployed youth in rural areas, training them through programmes of further education and training connected to local community development projects in rural areas and to also assist them in developing multidisciplinary skills through civic education. The programme's ultimate purpose is to provide young people with the necessary skills to create jobs or to start their own enterprises (DLRRD, 2022).

According to the Department of Employment and Labour (2022:69), the NARYSEC programme exposes participants to different skill set which promotes a culture of discipline, patriotism, community service, and technical and vocational skills, thereby preparing youth for careers in agriculture, administration, construction, and engineering. The programme caters for individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 who meet basic literacy standards. Its goal is to focus on skill areas identified through market research conducted at the start of the programme with input from skills development experts and other relevant stakeholders (DLRRD, 2022).

Ryk (2020:36) notes that young people in the Free State entering the job market lack knowledge in several key areas, such as technical skills, financial literacy, life skills, business management, and entrepreneurship skills. In response, this training was crafted to empower young participants by fostering confidence and self-belief, which included learning about personal finance management, accessing financial services, and understanding the basics of starting a business.

1.2.2 Free State Province

The Free State province is the second smallest populated province in South Africa and the second least populated per square kilometre. The total area of this region is approximately 129,825 km² and contains a total of 2,834,714 people, which represents 5.1 per cent of the country's total population. The capital city, Bloemfontein, is the judicial capital of South Africa. Other towns within the province include Welkom, Kroonstad, Sasolburg and Bethlehem. The regional administrative structure of the Free State includes a single metropolitan municipality, Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality and four district municipalities, Thabo Mofutsanyana, Lejweleputswa, Fezile Dabi and Xhariep, that are further divided into eighteen local municipalities (Yes Media, 2025).

1.2.3 Youth entrepreneurial development in South Africa

Youth entrepreneurial development has gained momentum in the critical fight against youth unemployment and promoting inclusive economic growth, particularly in developing areas. As

stated by Chigunta (2017:2), the term youth entrepreneurship refers to the occurrence of young people in the establishment and operation of business ventures driven by the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods, self-reliance, and innovation. This would generate new jobs and an entrepreneurial spirit of resilience among the youth. The literature suggests that factors such as entrepreneurial education, finance, mentoring, and policy environments significantly impact youth entrepreneur's success (Al-Fattal, 2024:1). Furthermore the effects of linking entrepreneurship to national development have shown that young people will increase their economic and social empowerment and will also be able to make significant contributions to the communities in which they live (Chigunta, 2017:5). Thus, youth entrepreneurial development is increasingly becoming a way to unlock human capital, encourage innovation, and a tool to alleviate specific economic and social problems faced by the youth.

Idam (2014:2) distinguishes entrepreneurship development from other processes by an emphasis on identifying and exploiting opportunities through innovative processes under circumstances of uncertainty. Its objective is to create new businesses or to rearrange existing businesses to create value and employment for stakeholders. The key focus is mainly on businesses that have the potential to grow through new marketing strategies, products, or processes. Entrepreneurship differs from other forms of small businesses or ordinary self-employment, as it involves innovation, risk-taking and discovering new opportunities (Idam, 2014:3).

Although South Africa has confirmed the importance of Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to the economy, insignificant activity relating to entrepreneurship exists, specifically among young people. SMEs constitute 90% of all businesses and contribute over 50% to the Gross Domestic Product (Mbuya *et al.*, 2016:3). Small and medium-sized businesses in South Africa represent a high percentage of all businesses, approximately 98.5%, which produce an estimated 40% of the country's total Gross Domestic Product (UNDP, 2024:3).

Major obstacles persist in terms of access to capital, lack of entrepreneurial culture in education systems, and scarcity of mentoring and support structures. In South Africa, where youth unemployment hovered near 35% in quarter one of 2025, this form of development is fundamental (Stats SA, 2025). The NARYSEC programme represents a noteworthy initiative in advancing youth entrepreneurship development in South Africa.

1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Youth unemployment remains one of South Africa's most significant socio-economic concerns. The majority of unemployed people in the country are between the ages of 15 and 34 (Stats SA,

2024:6). In response to the unemployment challenge in the country, The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, introduced the National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) programme, in 2010 as a skills development programme aimed at capacitating unemployed youth through education and training (DLRRD:2022). The programme has provided educational interventions that have enrolled and trained more than 22000 young people (South African Government, 2025). However, evidence suggests participants of the NARYSEC programme continue to battle to transition into meaningful economic activity after completing the programme, particularly when having to start or to continue to be involved in an entrepreneurial activity (Ryk, 2020:14).

This reflects a gap in understanding the extent to which the NARYSEC programme empowers its successful recruits with practical skills, resources, and support for the world of entrepreneurship. The programme's aim in terms of youth empowerment through entrepreneurial development seems noteworthy; however, it remains unknown whether the impact of the programme is sustained for rural youth. Despite the investments by the government, little empirical evidence exists as to whether participants who have completed the NARYSEC programme are able to transition into viable economic activities, particularly in rural communities. Thus, this study seeks to explore the impact of the programme on youth entrepreneurial development.

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.4.1. Primary objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the impact of the NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, South Africa.

To address the main objective, the following secondary objectives were formulated.

1.4.2. Secondary objectives

- To gain an understanding of youth entrepreneurial development and how it is measured.
- To explore the influence of mentorship, training, and support services within the NARYSEC programme, designed to foster youth entrepreneurship.
- To explore the lived experiences of NARYSEC participants on their perceived efficacy of the programme after completing the programme in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills.
- To determine challenges encountered by NARYSEC participants in starting and sustaining their own businesses.
- To recommend how the NARYSEC programme's implementation can be enhanced to effectively facilitate youth entrepreneurial development.

1.5. Research questions

The following research questions are formulated for this study.

1.5.1. Primary research question

What is the impact of the NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, South Africa?

1.5.2. Secondary research questions

- What is youth entrepreneurial development, and how is it measured?
- What is the influence of mentorship, training, and support services within the NARYSEC programme designed to foster young entrepreneurship?
- What are the lived experiences of NARYSEC youth regarding the perceived efficacy of the NARYSEC programme, after completing the programme in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills?
- What challenges are encountered by NARYSEC youth in starting and sustaining their businesses?
- How can the NARYSEC programme and implementation be enhanced to effectively facilitate youth entrepreneurial development?

1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the method and structure used to find answers to research questions (Botha, 2017:68). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018:352), a research design is an organised set of processes for gathering, analysing, and making sense of data. Exploratory design is a two-stage process that utilises qualitative data as a foundation for the development and understanding of the quantitative data collection process. The qualitative data is acceptable for quantitative research, and the distinct phases are straightforward to execute (Asenahabi, 2019:86). Exploratory research plays a crucial role in the early stages of a study as it helps researchers gain new and valuable insights into a topic that may not yet be well understood. It encourages creativity and flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore a phenomenon in-depth and from multiple perspectives. Importantly, exploratory research helps clarify the objectives and direction of a study, guiding subsequent research phases. It is also highly adaptable and applicable across a range of disciplines, making it a valuable methodological tool regardless of the specific research field (Saka *et al.*, 2023:1387). This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design to explore the impact of the NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, South Africa. According to Schoch (2020:248), exploratory research is particularly effective when aiming to understand participants' experiences in real-world settings.

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a broad term that includes all the theoretical underpinnings, justifications, and systems of methodologies employed in a study. It not only includes the methods, such as surveys and interviews, but also the reasons for their application, the connection between the methods and the underlying research philosophy, as well as the methods for gathering and evaluating data, and the measures taken to ensure the study's rigour. Saunders *et al.* (2023:178) assert that methodology relates to the logic of how the research is being carried out, why certain methods are selected and how these methods relate to the overall research goals. The Research Onion model, developed by Saunders *et al.* (2023:131), was followed in this study.

1.7.1. Research philosophy

The research philosophy is characterised as a collection of assumptions and perspectives concerning the progression of knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:131). The first phase of a research process involves defining the philosophical perspective via a research paradigm. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51) define a paradigm as a theoretical framework and foundational belief system distinguished by its assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and axiology. In essence, it is a matter of understanding and looking at the truth of the world. Positivism and interpretivism are two commonly used paradigms in scientific research and analysis. Each paradigm shapes how individuals perceive knowledge and reality, serving as the basis for all research grounded in philosophical principles (Kuhn, 2015:3). Interpretivist researchers are of the view that in-depth thought is the only way to truly understand anything (Rahi 2017:1). Bryman *et al.* (2015:20) point out that, an interpretative paradigm relies on comprehending the subject through individuals' experiences and perspectives rather than the researcher's interpretation of the issue. This study adopted an interpretative paradigm.

1.7.2. Methodological choice

Methodological choice is a decision made by the researcher to collect and analyse data using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods in a research study (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:185). Quantitative research examines the relationship between variables, often tested on a specific type of a measurement (i.e., instrument) on the contrary qualitative research examines the meaning individuals or groups attribute to human or social issues, utilising an action or process of inductive analysis or interpretation (Mohajan, 2018:1). Mixed methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative formats of collection of data, using designs and philosophical assumptions simply offers a broader knowledge of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:51). In this study a qualitative approach was adopted as it enabled the researcher to examine the rationale behind

participants' perspectives on youth entrepreneurial development and to explore their lived experience whilst in the NARYSEC programme which is difficult to examine when using quantitative approach that mainly focuses on collecting and analysing extensive numeric data statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:174). Qualitative method emphasises depth and perceptions rather than statistical representation (Cypress, 2015:20).

1.7.3. Approach to theory development

An important question when planning a research project is the extent to which answering the research questions involves testing or theory building. This outcome is displayed as two distinct approaches to reasoning, namely deductive and inductive (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:154). A deductive approach is when you start out with a theory from the literature and develop a method of collecting data to test whether the theory is accurate (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:155). Whilst the inductive method is a methodical process whereby theory is developed depending on the observations the researcher makes during their activities (Rahi, 2017:2). It is a procedure by which one deduces or derives ideas and hypotheses about a given item or variable. In this study employed an inductive approach was employed.

1.7.4. Time horizon

Time horizons indicate the length of a research study (Setia, 2016:261). Bryman (2016:42) mentions that two kinds of time horizon systems exist in research, namely cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. The difference between these designs lies in the frequency of data collection. Cross-sectional research involves collecting data at one moment in time, whereas longitudinal research involves collecting data several times over a given period, usually at fixed intervals (Thomas & Zubkov, 2023:104). This study employed a cross-sectional time horizon, as data were collected at a single point in time.

1.8. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review occupies a crucial role in all sorts of research. It entails the methodical examination, explanation, and critical review of prior studies to highlight existing obstacles, unresolved concerns, and potential research questions. It encompasses a compilation of relevant sources, both published and unpublished, that present facts, theories, data, and perspectives from a specific standpoint (Mohammed, 2021:2)

For this study, the literature review was conducted in a systematic manner to identify and synthesise the existing knowledge base related to youth entrepreneurial development programmes, entrepreneurial education, and the effects of government initiatives such as the

NARYSEC programme. To accomplish this, a variety of sources of information were consulted, including but not limited to peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, government reports, and seminal works.

Academic databases, such as the NWU library, Google Scholar and Ebscohost, along with other databases, were utilised to identify recent literature. The keywords used to search these databases included "youth entrepreneurship", "entrepreneurial development", "skills development programmes in South Africa", "NARYSEC programme", "rural youth empowerment", and "outcomes from entrepreneurial training". Both contemporary literature published post-2015 and seminal literature in the fields of entrepreneurship and youth development were reviewed to establish theoretical and contextual foundations for the study. These reviews also provided direction for developing the research questions and determining the methodological approaches for collecting and analysing the data.

1.9. QUALITATIVE REVIEW

The purpose of conducting a qualitative review is to interpret and analyse qualitative data to comprehend and describe the phenomena, experiences and perspectives in which they occur. Qualitative reviews are especially suitable for understanding complex issues related to human behaviour, emotions and social interaction, as opposed to quantifying variable relationships and establishing statistical relationships (Ugwu & Eze, 2023:20).

This study employed a qualitative review design to explore the experiences and perceptions of youth who had been involved in the NARYSEC programme. The study's objectives included examining how participants had engaged with the programme's entrepreneurial development, identifying any challenges they encountered and determining the outcomes associated with participating in the programme. The semi-structured interview technique was used as the primary method of collecting data, to allow participants to provide open-ended responses to the research questions.

1.10. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

1.10.1 Target population

Martínez-Mesa *et al.* (2016:326) define a target population as the total group of people from which a researcher aims to extract insights. It encompasses the entire cohort of subjects whose traits are vital to the researcher. The study population for this study consisted of existing NARYSEC youth for the years 2023 and 2024, between the ages of 18 and 35 years, who resided in Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyane, Xhariep district and Mangaung Metro municipality in

the Free State province. The targeted population for this study comprised 75 unemployed youth who participated and completed the NARYSEC programme in 2023 and 2024.

1.10.2. Sampling

Sampling is a method that researchers use to intentionally select a smaller sample of people or objects from a larger population as part of observation or experimentation consistent with their aims (Sharma, 2017:749). Researchers use sampling because it is impractical to look at all individuals within the entire population as it relates to their research (Sharma, 2017:749).

1.10.2.1. Sampling size

Creswell and Creswell (2018:248) describe a sample size as the number of people in the sample and the steps followed to get to that number of people. The targeted sample size for this study was 15 participants. According to Vasileiou et al. (2018:2), sample sizes used in qualitative research are generally much smaller and purposefully selected as compared to quantitative research samples, which are typically larger and randomly selected. To allow sufficient depth of inquiry, a total sample size of 15 youth participants was selected. This sample size was deemed consistent with accepted standards of qualitative research that suggest smaller, homogenous samples may be used when the focus of the study is on gaining insight into how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences and processes, rather than attempting to establish statistically generalisable results (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:157).

1.10.2.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria are explained as the essential qualities of the target group that researchers will utilise to address the study issue. Criteria for inclusion often encompass demographic, clinical, and geographical criteria (Patino & Ferreira, 2018:84).

The inclusion criteria for the participants included:

- Male and female youth between the ages of 18 and 35 years
- Youth who received agriculture-related training under the NARYSEC programme
- Youth who have existing businesses following the exit from the NARYSEC programme
- Youth residing in Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana district
- Youth who successfully completed and exited the programme between 2023 and 2024

Exclusion criteria are qualities of possible participants who meet the inclusion requirements but have additional characteristics that could make the study less successful or increase the likelihood of unfavourable outcomes for these people (Patino & Ferreira, 2018:84)

The exclusion criteria were:

- Youth who participated in the NARYSEC programme from other provinces, and the exclusion of two districts in the Free State province, which are Xhariep and Mangaung municipalities.
- Youth members who did not complete the NARYSEC programme in 2023 and 2024
- Youth who have completed the NARYSEC programme but have not attempted to start a business
- Youth who have transitioned into formal employment since the completion of the programme.
- Youth who were not trained in agriculture-related training (during or prior to entry into the programme?)
- Youth who established enterprises prior to participation in the NARYSEC programme will be excluded.

These criteria ensured the study remained focused on the entrepreneurial outcomes of the programme.

1.10.2.3 Sampling technique

Sampling technique is a method used by researchers to choose a portion of the population that reflects the entire population to conduct research (Makwana *et al.*, 2023:764). Two types of sampling techniques exist, namely, probability sampling and non-probability sampling methods. Probability sampling methods require the use of random selection, which means every member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:1). Non-probability sampling methods, conversely, do not assume every individual has a chance of being represented which may introduce bias into the sampling process (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:2). This sampling research strategy includes convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. Researchers might choose to use non-probability sampling when performing exploratory research or when time and resource constraints might eliminate the possibility of using a probability sampling strategy (Morton *et al.*, 2015:83). In this study, purposive sampling was adopted. The directed approach of purposive sampling ensured that individuals with specific characteristics or behaviours related to one of the research variables were included (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:4).

As a form of non-probability sampling, purposive sampling does not utilise random selection methods, as the researcher intends to obtain perspectives from people who have attributes or experiences that can provide relevant information to the proposed study.

1.10.2.4. Recruitment of participants

Lam *et al.* (2015:178) found that many studies used combinations of active recruitment (i.e., recruiting all participants by direct invitation and engaging their communities). In a similar fashion, engaging community organisations that potential participants trust has been shown to be useful, especially for groups that are harder to reach (Sha *et al.*, 2017:4).

Upon receiving ethical approval from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), recruitment for this project began. The participants were invited to partake in the study via e-mail correspondence. In addition to inviting participants to the study, the invitation also outlined the purpose of the study and assured the participants that their responses would remain confidential, and it also included an informed consent form. This methodology was selected as it allowed the researcher to efficiently communicate with the potential participants and provided a clear communication channel to track their responses. Reminder and follow-up messages were sent to participants on a weekly basis to increase the participation rate.

1.11. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection entails an organised way of getting accurate information from people who are taking part in a study (Cooper & Chindler, 2014:84). The objective of qualitative data collection is to collect information for research and analysis, encompassing thematic analysis. The primary method employed to gather qualitative data for this research was a qualitative approach, which involved virtual semi-structured interviews with NARYSEC participants. According to Saunders *et al.* (2023:470), the different types of interview questions that a researcher can use in collecting qualitative data namely open-ended questions, probing questions and closed-ended questions. With open-ended questions, Participants are able to characterise and explain a scenario or event. An open-ended inquiry can be used to uncover attitudes or gather information by encouraging the interviewee to give a thorough and insightful response (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:470). Probing questions are used to elicit past responses that are relevant to the research issue. Although sometimes written as open questions, they request a specific focus or direction, often repeating parts of the participants' own comments (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:470). Closed questions may be used as introduction questions when you begin questioning about a particular interview theme, to collect specific information, or to confirm a fact or perspective.

Semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data for this study. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher compiles an interview schedule ahead of time that relates to the study. The interview guide consists of 12 open-ended questions under separate themes, which include

participants' background information, entrepreneurial knowledge and skills development, business start-up and growth, perceptions and impact, as well as recommendations to improve the programme. The questions were drawn from an existing study conducted by Ryk (2020:127-128) and were aimed at exploring the lived experiences of each participant during and after participation in the NARYSEC programme. Interviews were conducted via the online MS Teams platform, and it took 35 and 45 minutes to conduct the interview with each participant. Consent was requested from each participant prior to the recording of each interview.

In this study, open-ended questions were employed to enable participants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in their own language, which is crucial for qualitative research.

1.12. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a systematic process that uses statistical tools to condense, show, explain, and analyse data (Islam, M. 2020:10). Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2016:297), involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. This method was employed because of its flexibility and its ability to provide rich, detailed, and nuanced insights into participants' narratives regarding their entrepreneurial journeys within the NARYSEC programme.

1.13. TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY

1.13.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research refers to the validity and relevance of the methods used, as well as the accuracy with which the research findings represent the data collected (Noble & Smith, 2015:2). In qualitative research, trustworthiness demonstrates faith in the data to produce a high-quality study (Connelly, 2016:435). Trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research are crucial in making sure that the findings and the representations of the findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

This study has embraced several strategies to establish trustworthiness and credibility based on the criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and operationalised in recent methodological literature (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:4). A combination of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability methods was used to establish credibility for this research (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3).

1.13.2. Credibility

Credibility checks the study's internal validity to make sure the results correctly reflect the experiences, perceptions, and points of view of the people who took part. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations. There are several strategies that were used to ensure credibility. For this study, credibility was achieved by triangulation. Triangulation refers to using several studies or sources in the research process to gain a comprehensive grasp of the study's subject or phenomena (Vavuniya *et al.*, 2023:106). Triangulation has been applied by comparing data collected from verbatim transcripts of the interviews, audio recordings of the interviews, and field notes taken during the interview sessions. This improved the trustworthiness of the results from the thematic analysis because it ensured participants' validation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314).

1.13.3. Confirmability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:290), confirmability refers to the researcher providing enough information about the study setting and research methodology to allow readers to assess whether the results may be relevant to their own situation. Maintaining awareness of potential bias and taking proactive measures to prevent influencing the results improves confirmability.

1.13.4. Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) define transferability as the degree to which qualitative research findings can be generalised to diverse environments or populations. This pertains to the extent to which the findings can be applied to diverse environments or circumstances. A description was employed within this research to provide an outline of the features of the sample within the NARYSEC programme. The detailed accounts of how the data collection processes occurred, the creation of the interview schedule and the participants' experiences were explained in detail. This will allow for the possibility of being assessed by other researchers as to whether the findings from this study may apply to youth entrepreneurship initiatives operating in similar rural or semi-rural areas within South Africa.

1.13.4. Dependability

Dependability relates to the researcher explaining how the findings were derived to build trust in the process and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). Dependability pertains to the evaluation conducted by participants concerning the credibility of the study's findings, interpretations, and recommendations; this evaluation is grounded in the data supplied by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). The methodological decisions of the research, shaped by the comprehensive and flexible characteristics of thematic analysis and inductive reasoning, provided a foundation

for reliability in this study. The researcher underscored the study's reliability by illustrating the methodical data collection and analysis process, emphasising its consistency and replicability.

1.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research are a set of principles that guide the research practice (de Chesnay, 2015:101). When doing a research study, ethics are the most important thing. The study followed an ethical pathway from start to finish to preserve the integrity of the research process and to protect all participants in the research study. The research proposal was submitted to the Scientific Committee of the Business School for consideration. Once the Scientific Committee approved the proposal, it was then submitted to the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the North-West University provided ethics approval for this study. Once it had fulfilled its ethical obligations, the study received full ethical clearance for the researcher to commence data gathering. The ethics clearance number for this study is NWU-00775-25-A4.

This study implemented the following ethical considerations and actions to ensure compliance:

1.14.1 Permission to conduct research study

The researcher received formal permission to conduct the study from the gatekeeper to ensure that the study followed institutional and organisational procedures for approval. The NARYSEC programme is a programme under the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development; thus, the Director: Free State Province, who is responsible for the programme's administrative management in the province, was contacted for permission. A formal written request outlining the study purpose, objectives and ethical considerations was sent to the Director.

1.14.2 Process of obtaining informed consent

Lune and Berg (2017:46) describe informed consent as the voluntary agreement of individuals to take part in a study, made with full awareness and understanding, and without any form of coercion, deception, pressure, or improper influence. Participants were asked to complete and sign an informed consent form before taking part in the study. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the study and sought permission to conduct the research from the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development. A cover letter was provided to the participants outlining the study's goals and objectives, as well as the contact persons should they have any further questions. Informed consent is a crucial element of adherence to Section 37 of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) 4 of 2013, which mandates a voluntary,

specific, and informed expression of consent prior to the commencement of research (Adams *et al.*, 2021:4).

1.14.3 Anonymity

Anonymity refers to safeguarding participants' identities to guarantee that responses are not associated with their personal information (Alderson & Morrow, 2020:10). All information that was acquired from the participants is kept confidential, and participation was anonymous. The researcher ensured anonymity by anonymising data; all identifying information, such as names, geographical locations and email addresses, was removed from both the data and the final report for publication. The participants' personal information was replaced with pseudonyms for anonymity purposes, and has been substituted with unique codes, which ensures data cannot be traced back to the specific individuals.

1.14.4 Confidentiality

Data collected was treated as confidential and was not shared with any third parties that are not actively involved in the study process. The research data is stored safely in a locked cabinet and in password-protected files. After the research study is over, the data will be destroyed after five years. Personal information about participants and their direct contributions to the research study was not made public. The research adhered to the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI Act), which mandates: when and how one chooses to share information (consent is required); the type and extent of information a person chooses to share; and transparency and accountability for how the information is used. The collected data was only used for research purposes.

The participant's rights to privacy, secrecy, and anonymity were explained to them by the researcher, who made sure they knew they could withdraw from the study at any moment if they believed their rights were being violated. Participants got an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality prior to the interview, and the researcher did not utilise any participant identities in the findings. A form requesting informed consent was distributed, protecting this privacy and anonymity. To guarantee the confidentiality of the participants, the final report did not contain the participants' personally identifiable information.

1.17. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.17.1 Field of study

The proposed study fell within the field of entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State, South Africa.

1.17.2 Geographical Demarcation

This study focused on Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, and Thabo Mofutsanyane districts, which are districts in the Free State province of South Africa.

1.18. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018:156) assert that the limitations of a study pertain to potential shortcomings typically beyond the researcher's control, strongly linked to the selected research design, financial limitations, or other variables.

This study encountered the following limitation: due to its qualitative nature, the results could not be statistically generalised to a larger population, and the scope was influenced by limited time, budget constraints, and the availability of participants. The study is geographically limited to the Free State, and in certain districts in the Free State, these limitations may tend to restrict the representation of various points of view from other areas of the country.

1.19 LAYOUT OF THE STUDY

This research comprises five chapters:

In Chapter 1, the scope of the study is introduced, detailing the research problem, objectives and questions. The chapter also outlines the research problem and the study's scope, establishing the framework for the subsequent chapters. It also includes some of the aspects of the research design that were included in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the role of youth entrepreneurial development in economic growth and employment creation, the contribution of mentorship, support services, and entrepreneurial education to youth entrepreneurial success, Youth entrepreneurial development programmes and the policies influencing youth entrepreneurial development in South Africa

Chapter 3 offers an in-depth description of the study's research design, and methodology, philosophical structure, methodological choice, approach to theory development, research strategy, time horizon, population and sampling, data analysis process, ethical procedures, data collection procedures, and measures that were used and how the reliability of the research was guaranteed to ensure the study's trustworthiness and credibility.

Chapter 4 analysed and interpreted the findings from the qualitative data gathered from the participants.

Chapter 5 summarises the conclusions from the literature review and qualitative research. Conclusions were derived from these observations, and recommendations were presented.

1.20. CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced this mini dissertation by providing context to youth unemployment in South Africa; although many policies and initiatives have been implemented, youth unemployment remains unacceptably high. There is a long way to go before we successfully translate government programmes into sustainable forms of employment or entrepreneurship. The chapter has highlighted youth entrepreneurial development as a potential channel for economic participation, mainly through skills development.

The problem statement, research aim, objectives and research questions were all clearly defined to identify the focus of this research. Additionally, the limitations of the study were outlined to define both the academic and practical applications of this research.

Chapter 2, the literature review, provides a comprehensive and critical overview of the body of knowledge regarding youth entrepreneurial development programmes and the critical success factors required for successful youth entrepreneurial development. It also provided a comparative analysis of comparable international and local youth development initiatives in order to position NARYSEC in the larger policy, theoretical and practical domains.

CHAPTER 2 YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided the introduction and background to the study. It outlined the research problem, research objectives and research questions, the research design and methodology, delimitation, limitations, and the layout of the study were discussed. This chapter aimed to conduct a literature review on entrepreneurial development. It examined how youth entrepreneurial development is defined and measured through the various indicators, such as entrepreneurial intention, self-efficacy, business survival, and job creation, that researchers and organisations use to measure youth entrepreneurial development. This part of the chapter analysed the definition so that the first research objective is satisfied and an understanding of youth entrepreneurial development has been reached, along with how this development has been measured.

The literature review is structured around these four themes.

- i. The role of youth entrepreneurial development in economic growth and employment creation,
- ii. The contribution of mentorship, support services, and entrepreneurial education to youth entrepreneurial success
- iii. Youth entrepreneurial development programmes
- iv. The policies influencing youth entrepreneurial development in South Africa

The chapter frames a coherent and legible framework, moving from broader theoretical debates about the concept of youth entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial development to the specific case of the NARYSEC programme. The framing of the literature review and analysis of themes attempts to contribute to the current body of knowledge in the field of entrepreneurial development.

2.2. THE ROLE OF YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT IN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT CREATION

2.2.1 Youth entrepreneurial development

Mustaffa and Aziz (2020:203) state that Entrepreneurial development is a continuous, innovative and inspiring process and that it plays an important role in the economic development and in creating significant changes in businesses. Youth entrepreneurial development provides an

opportunity to help alleviate some of the most developmental problems (Chigunta, 2017:2). For example, it can provide a means of alleviating high levels of youth unemployment, particularly in the Free State province where, the unemployment rate is still high at 37.9% and has increased to 49.2% for youth that are not in education, employment, or training (Stats SA, 2025:13). Many of these youth are either school dropouts without basic reading and math skills or graduates who don't have the skills employers seek (Stats SA, 2025:13).

Youth entrepreneurial development became critical in the fight against youth unemployment and in promoting inclusive economic growth, particularly in developing areas (Chigunta 2017:2). The term youth entrepreneurship refers to the involvement of young people in the establishment and operation of business ventures driven by the pursuit of sustainable livelihoods, self-reliance, and innovation. Such activities would generate new jobs and stimulate an entrepreneurial spirit of resilience among youth (Chigunta 2017:2).

Entrepreneurial initiatives are created to support the development of entrepreneurial culture through leadership training and community involvement in developing entrepreneurial intentions of youth who live in rural areas (Ajzen, 1991:179).

2.2.2. Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is an expansion of the Theory of Reasoned Action, which was required due to the previous model's shortcomings in addressing behaviours over which individuals have only partial volitional control (Ajzen, 1991:181). Ajzen (1991:188) emphasises that the most important component of the TPB is an individual's intent, and this represents an individual's willingness to act and is the most direct factor influencing behaviour.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was used in this investigation. The idea shows that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control all influence a person's intention to engage in behaviour (Sanmugam, 2025:97). The Theory of Planned Behaviour is validated broadly in studies of youth entrepreneurship. In a study conducted by Ndofirepi (2020), it was found that positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and a high perceived behavioural control significantly influenced entrepreneurial intentions of university students in South Africa (Ndofirepi, 2020:5).

Sanmugam (2025:101) conducted a study in Sri Lanka in which he determined that entrepreneurial intention was influenced by perceived behavioural control and attitudes, both of which were enhanced through soft skills such as problem solving, confidence and resilience. His

findings indicated that individuals with higher emotional intelligence and self-efficacy exhibited stronger entrepreneurial intentions and supported the argument made by TPB that psychological capabilities are essential for determining entrepreneurial behaviour.

The theory was developed to clarify all behaviours related to individual self-control; the key component in this theory is the model of behavioural intent (Ajzen, 1991:179). The theory emphasises that developing the correct intention, attitude and perception of ability to carry out the behaviour is critical for entrepreneurial ventures. However, many rural youth face barriers such as limited access to finance, social networks and limited or no formal education and training regarding the skills required to run an enterprise (Ryk, 2020:23).

This theory is the underpinning of the current study as it forms the basis framework in understanding how the NARYSEC training and support affect the youth participants' entrepreneurial intentions and activities. The analysis of participants' attitudes, norms, and perceived control assists in explaining how some of the graduates successfully proceed into self-employment while others remain unemployed, despite undergoing similar interventions.

Previous studies have shown the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) within entrepreneurship. A study by Mahlaole and Malebana (2021:57) found that while the attitudes and the perceived control greatly influenced the entrepreneurial intentions of South African university students, gender had no significant influence. The findings indicated that all factors of the Theory of Planned Behaviour have a link with entrepreneurial intention (EI). The results indicate that the TPB may be considered an effective instrument for assessing students.

2.2.3. Tracing the development of youth entrepreneurship: from emergence to modern approaches

Youth Enterprise development is a carefully planned, multifaceted process that is essential to the long-term success and longevity of a business. It signifies more than just growth or expansion; it is a comprehensive transformation that improves a company's capabilities, market presence, and internal processes (Brzezinski, 2024:1396). The evolution of Youth Enterprise Development (YED) can be mapped in phases. Initially, entrepreneurial development was generalised; youth were not regarded as a special group. However, by early 2000s a study identified youth entrepreneurship as a field requiring targeted intervention (Alzate *et al.*, 2024:1). The 2010s showed a distinct move towards inclusion, ecosystem building, and linking youth entrepreneurship with national development and livelihood strategies (UNICEF, 2019:1). By the

2020s, digital entrepreneurship, sustainability, gender-responsive approaches, and resilience after COVID-19 are clear (McIntosh & Zeitlin, 2022:1).

In Africa, certain entrepreneurial trends have come into focus. Firstly, many African entrepreneurs operate out of necessity, as formal job opportunities do not exist for them. According to OECD (2017:3), most African youth are in business because they need to and not necessarily because they identified an opportunity to start their businesses. Secondly, there is an increase in the number of initiatives aimed at developing a more inclusive ecosystem of entrepreneurship, namely digital innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators, which help young entrepreneurs navigate through the process of idea generation to scaling up (UNCDF, 2020). Thirdly, governments are now focusing on youth entrepreneurship as part of their national development plans and have implemented large-scale programmes which they support. Supported initiatives include Nigeria's YouWiN, Kenya's YEDF, and South Africa's NYDA (Sumaworo, 2023:992).

Entrepreneurial education, funding, mentoring, and policy environments are some of the factors that impact the success of youth entrepreneurs (Al-Fattal, 2024:1). In addition, the effects of linking entrepreneurship to national development have shown young people increase their economic and social empowerment and are able to make significant contribution to their communities in which they reside (Chigunta, 2017:5). Therefore, Youth entrepreneurial development is increasingly becoming a way to unlock human capital and encourages innovation to be a tool that alleviates specific economic and social problems faced by youth.

Idam (2014:2) distinguishes entrepreneurship from self-employment by emphasising that its focus is on identifying opportunities and fostering innovation in uncertain circumstances, with the aim of generating value and employment. Idam (2014:2), Chigunta (2017:5) and Al-Fattal (2024:1) collectively emphasise that entrepreneurship goes beyond income generation. Idam (2014:2) primarily focuses on the entrepreneurial process, while Chigunta (2017:5) prioritises development outcomes.

Nevertheless, youth entrepreneurial activity is still relatively low in South Africa, even with the acknowledgement of the importance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to the economy. According to Mbuya *et al.* (2016:3), SMEs represent nearly 90% of businesses and contribute more than half of gross domestic product (GDP). South Africa is ranked the lowest in terms of youth entrepreneurial intentions in relation to the rest of the African continent, with only 12.8% of South African youth indicating intentions versus a figure of more than 50% of Ugandans (Mbuya *et al.*, 2016:2).

2.2.4. Indicators and measurements of youth entrepreneurial development

There seems to be a continued effort by government and development organisations to evaluate the success of support initiatives meant to empower young entrepreneurs; thus, measuring the growth of youth entrepreneurship has taken on greater significance (OECD 2017:3). Process, outcome, and impact indicators are frequently used in measurement frameworks. These comprise qualitative evaluations like shifts in Entrepreneurial mindset, confidence, and perceived business readiness, as well as quantitative measures like the number of start-ups established, business survival rates, and revenue generated (PEDAL Consulting, 2021:29). Measuring entrepreneurship is crucial for comprehending entrepreneurial activities in developing nations (Hill *et al.*, 2022:43).

Different evaluation stages (ex-ante, mid-term, and ex-post) use these indicators to determine whether implemented interventions achieved their intended goals (PEDAL Consulting, 2021:10). Entrepreneurship development projects are frequently evaluated using criteria such as impact, sustainability, efficacy, efficiency, and relevance to entrepreneurial competencies. Self-assessment questionnaires, business model canvas, focus groups, and interviews are some of the tools used to collect information on socioeconomic impact, entrepreneurial skills, and personal development (PEDAL Consulting, 2021:25–30).

In addition, impact indicators evaluate long-term outcomes, such as determining whether youth participants established profitable businesses or achieved financial independence, whereas outcome indicators gauge how a programme enhances Entrepreneurial competencies (OECD 2017:19). An impact metric measures the proportion of participants who started and maintained a business for more than a year, whereas an outcome metric measures an increase in the number of business plans developed (Ismail, 2018:9).

The Youth Entrepreneurship Framework highlights the significance of using ecosystem diagnostics and policy audits in assessing entrepreneurial development (Youth Business International & Global Entrepreneurship Network, 2023). Measuring financial accessibility, exposure to entrepreneurial education, inclusiveness of support services, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem's capacity to address the requirements of young people, particularly those from underrepresented groups. These multidimensional measurement techniques guarantee that evaluations are comprehensive, context-specific and consider social outcomes such as self-efficacy and the extent of community impact in addition to economic outputs (Mensah-Williams & Derera, 2023:2).

The evaluation of youth entrepreneurial development has become an urgent challenge for educators, policymakers, and researchers who are attempting to respond to youth unemployment and support inclusive economic growth. While the literature illustrates that there is no single, agreed-upon method to measure youth entrepreneurial development (Swaramarinda *et al.*, 2022:144). Scholars propose a series of complementary indicators from conventional business performance measures to psychological, behavioural, and competency measures that are needed for complete entrepreneurial development (Mensah-Williams & Derera, 2023:12).

2.2.4.1. Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)

Entrepreneurial intention (EI) has become one of the most used measures of youth entrepreneurial development because it reflects a young person's conscious mental state and commitment to pursuing entrepreneurship in the future. Swaramarinda *et al.* (2022:144) contend that EI has been researched; however, many of the available measures are for adult populations and do not reflect the experiences of younger populations. They further note that many past studies have utilised a single-variable measure, but present thinking endorses a multi-dimensional measure to lessen conceptual and methodological gaps. Scholars originally highlight the importance of assessing entrepreneurial development competencies, knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), in addition to discursively reviewing intentions.

García *et al.* (2025:3) proposed and validated a model of EI measurement that blends psychological, educational, and social components. Using this framework, the authors developed a scale that encompasses entrepreneurial self-efficacy, personal attitudes, perceived behavioural control, entrepreneurship education, social support, and perceived opportunities. The findings suggest that the dimensions provide a more accurate understanding of how university students develop intentions to become entrepreneurs compared to single-factor EI approaches (García *et al.*, 2025:2).

Zickafoose *et al.* (2023:2-3) used the Delphi method on a group of experts as part of a larger study across Latin America and the Caribbean to identify the most significant knowledge, skills and abilities for youth agricultural entrepreneurial development. Their Delphi study found that business planning, budgeting, marketing, opportunity recognition and problem solving are critical entrepreneurial development competencies in preparing youth to launch and sustain enterprises (Zickafoose *et al.*, 2023:13).

As stated by Ho *et al.* (2018:2–4), entrepreneurship education programmes provide another measure of youth entrepreneurial development. Ho *et al.* (2018:2–4) assessed the impact of a

structured entrepreneurship education programme on secondary school students in Singapore, with a focus on two measurable outcomes: entrepreneurial alertness (i.e., the capacity to recognise and evaluate new opportunities) and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (confidence in an individual's ability to perform an entrepreneurial task).

These studies show a transition in the literature from output-based measurements to multidimensional development approaches. The measurement of youth entrepreneurial development involves a combination of intention indicators (Swaramarinda *et al.*, 2022:154), competency and knowledge skill and ability (Zickafoose *et al.*, 2023:1), and training measures including alertness and self-efficacy (Ho *et al.*, 2018:4). This approach allows educators, programme managers and policy makers to track not just whether youth are establishing businesses, but also whether they are developing the mentality, competencies, and confidence to become successful entrepreneurs.

2.3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF MENTORSHIP, SUPPORT SERVICES, AND ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION (TRAINING) TO YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

This section examines how mentoring, support services, and entrepreneurial education and training help young people succeed as entrepreneurs. It discussed the ways in which these important parts help young people become better entrepreneurs by boosting their confidence and decision-making skills and making it more likely that they will be able to start and run successful businesses.

2.3.1. Entrepreneurial education/training

Entrepreneurial training element in Youth Entrepreneurial Development Programmes is an essential foundation for empowering participants to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed to start and maintain a business venture (Ho *et al.*, 2018:1). The entrepreneurial training consists of both the "hard" or technical competences such as business planning, financial literacy, marketing and the "soft" or non-technical skills required for entrepreneurial success which include creativity, opportunity recognition and resilience (Ho *et al.*, 2018:6).

While support systems are a priority area, education and entrepreneurial training are still fundamental. Bux and Van Vuuren (2019:1) demonstrate that entrepreneurship education improves self-efficacy among South African youths, with self-efficacy serving as an indicator of entrepreneurial intention. This suggests that entrepreneurship may be perceived as a cultivable attitude rather than a personality trait. However, it is crucial to consider the important findings of Nabi *et al.* (2017:285), who, in their systematic literature review, indicate that although active

entrepreneurs show higher entrepreneurial self-efficacy than their inactive peers, merely enhancing entrepreneurial self-efficacy does not necessarily translate to entrepreneurial efforts, especially in environments with systemic challenges. So there appears to be common recognition that education and training in the form of skills training is a necessary but not sufficient condition in isolation from the wider enabling ecosystems (Makhwedzha, 2019:26).

2.3.2. Mentorship

Mentoring in Youth Entrepreneurial Development programmes is a long-term, support-based association between an older, successful entrepreneur (business professional) and a younger, less-experienced entrepreneur (Yani *et al.*, 2024:337). A mentor provides the mentee with assistance, including guidance, advisory support, role modelling, emotional support, network and market access, as well as financing (Yani *et al.*, 2024:338). This type of mentoring is a complement to formal training for young entrepreneurs and includes elements such as long-term support for their careers, ventures, personal development, self-reflection, and feedback loops (Yani *et al.*, 2024:338). Mentorship can help young entrepreneurs navigate through uncertainty, identify new opportunities and avoid common mistakes, furthermore to build their confidence and increase their rate at which they grow their ventures (Yani *et al.*, 2024:337).

Mentorship is different to traditional training because of its relationship-based and ongoing nature, and not a one-time event. It also depends on the needs of the mentee versus a generic approach. Mentorship is critical for youth entrepreneurs who lack business experience, social capital, and networks (Mtandawire, 2022:77).

Masha *et al.* (2022:48) identified mentorship as an important support system in developing young entrepreneurs. The study also suggests that mentorship provides young entrepreneurs with the ongoing support needed for successful entrepreneurial development. Masha *et al.* (2022:48) and Celume and Korda (2021:230) found that while training was necessary for young entrepreneurs to develop a business model, it would be insufficient to foster long-term entrepreneurial sustainability by itself. Furthermore, both studies indicated that structural and psychosocial support systems are essential for the continued support of young entrepreneurs; however, Masha *et al.* indicated that mentorship was an even more important variable when predicting successful entrepreneurial outcomes (Masha *et al.*, 2022:48).

2.3.3. Support services

Support services are defined as various additional services to training or competency development that assist young entrepreneurs in developing and sustaining viable business

ventures (Borison & Parakhina, 2022:1649). This may include business counselling, accelerator and incubator programmes, as well as the enhancement of market linkages between customers and suppliers. Furthermore, creating networking opportunities, enabling access to capital, facilitating contact with capital sources, supporting community-based groups for young entrepreneurs, such as peers or alumni and providing continuous technical assistance (Borison & Parakhina, 2022:1649-1650).

Youth entrepreneurs also require additional support due to the barriers they face in gaining access to markets, developing professional networks, accessing capital, and managing their business growth (van Niekerk *et al.*, 2024:2). The likelihood of success in terms of the venture's ability to survive over time, growth, and creation of jobs increases in programmes that include both support services and competency development, (Serpente *et al.*, 2025: 2413).

According to a study by van Niekerk *et al.* (2024:1), support factors for successful start-ups and support structures such as mentors, business partners, networks, and role models increase the success rate of newly created businesses by youth. Within the NARYSEC programme, these services influence the success of the transition of young people from training to being active in participatory business. On the other hand, poor access to support mechanisms, such as funding or market linkages, has emerged as the main hindrance inhibiting the long-term effectiveness of the programme in relation to youth entrepreneurship (Makhwedzha, 2019:111).

This was evident in a review of entrepreneurial support organisations (ESOs) that found key services that enable youth to move from intent to actual entrepreneurial performance were incubation, business modelling, networking, and follow-up support (Serpente *et al.*, 2025:2413). Overall, support services serve as a bridge between skills and training and the success of a business venture, helping youth to integrate into a functioning entrepreneurial ecosystem instead of being left isolated after the training event (Borison & Parakhina, 2022:1648). Celume and Korda (2021:230) note that youth entrepreneurship programmes struggle to have an ongoing impact without holistic support that considers the health, educational context, and livelihoods of young people. They point out that this type of support beyond business training is essential if an initiative is to make a difference.

2.3.4. National Rural Youth Service Corps

The National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) programme was implemented in September 2010 by the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development to provide rural youth with the

skills needed to be employable, through formal training, civic education and leadership development to create a better economic future for rural communities (DLRRD, 2022).

Participants of the programme are unemployed rural ward residents between the ages of 18 and 35 and are required to have at least passed grade 9 schooling and agree to remain in full-time training for two years or less, depending on the duration of the participant's course of study. Training under the NARYSEC programme includes a wide range of vocational skills, character development and participation in community development projects (DLRRD, 2022). Since the inception of the programme, over 22,000 youth across the country have received training that develops the necessary skills to find employment in agriculture, construction and engineering sectors (Government of South Africa, 2025).

According to GCIS (2018), case studies illustrated the sustainable business creation of NARYSEC graduates' enterprise development, Kamvaletu Tunnel Farming Cooperative. The business grows different vegetables in tunnels and employs 6 permanent and 24 seasonal staff members by 2018, with major retail clients including Pick n Pay, Checkers, SPAR and Shoprite. In addition to highlighting some other alumni's post-NARYSEC learnership establishment of a construction business, a carpentry business, an events management business, etc, therefore, demonstrating at least to some extent the programme's ability to translate its training & post-training support into real-world entrepreneurial results for its participants.

2.4. YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Youth entrepreneurial development programmes are designed interventions which help young people to develop the necessary skills, resources, and support for starting and running a business. Youth entrepreneurship programmes began all over the world during the 1980s and 1990s when governments and international development agencies realised that formal employment markets would not be able to absorb a growing youth demographic (Chigunta, 2017:3; Abdullahi *et al.*, 2023:17). The aim of these programmes was to promote self-employment, reduce youth unemployment, and stimulate innovation-led economic growth. These programmes encompass training, mentorship, financial assistance, and policy congruence; they work in a variety of ways depending on the context of implementation (NYDA, 2020:7). In South Africa, Youth entrepreneurial development programmes are an important response to youth unemployment, which remains one of the highest in the world (Lekutle *et al.*, 2023:570). These initiatives aim to enable youth to equip themselves with the skills, resources, and support to establish and operate businesses.

Youth unemployment and limited engagement in entrepreneurial endeavours continue to be a challenge in numerous developing economies, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Fox & Kaul, 2017:11). In response, governments have increasingly implemented state-led youth development and entrepreneurship programmes aimed at enhancing employability, promoting self-employment, and facilitating economic inclusion among young people (Fox & Kaul, 2017:13). There is a growing agreement among policymakers that developing entrepreneurship can be a good way to deal with structural unemployment and social and economic inequality in developing countries. Nigeria and Kenya were chosen as illustrative examples because their socio-economic conditions are similar, such as high youth unemployment rates, lack of skills, and dependence on government-led initiatives to boost youth employment and entrepreneurship (McKenzie, 2017:2279).

An outline of entrepreneurial development programmes is provided in the following section. Each initiative is described, along with its goals, requirements, and desired programme outcomes. The focus will be on entrepreneurial development programmes that exist in South Africa as a base from which to understand how youth development is addressed through locally developed entrepreneurial programmes. Then, the focus will be on select programmes in other developing countries, particularly in Nigeria and Kenya, to allow for comparisons between programmes and to identify similarities/differences at the regional level regarding the design and effects of these programmes.

- National Rural Youth Service Corps

The National Rural Youth Service Corps is a programme which provides the opportunity for rural youth to receive accredited training from TVET Colleges, character development training provided by the Department of Defence, and enterprise support to help develop their skills to create opportunities that will create growth in the rural economy. NARYSEC will not only improve the youth's employment prospects, but will also encourage entrepreneurial spirit, specifically in agriculture and similar industry fields.

- National Youth Development Agency

The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) is a government agency providing mentoring, training and grants to young entrepreneurs. The NYDA's Business Development Service Voucher Programme allows for non-financial assistance such as developing a business plan, creating a marketing plan and learning how to do accounting or bookkeeping, which assists the youth to operate their businesses to become formalised and strengthened (NYDA, 2024).

- Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency

SEFA, SEDA, and now the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SE-DFA) have received national attention, as they were formed through the merging of SEDA, SEFA, and the Cooperative Banks Development Agency. They have started to offer integrated support services, including microfinance support and incubation, with a special focus on young and marginalised Entrepreneurs (SEDFA, 2024).

The findings call attention to reassessing youth entrepreneurship experiences in different developing contexts, such as Abdullahi *et al.* (2023:17), and considering the extent to which youth empowerment programmes encourage entrepreneurship and self-employment, which generates jobs and encourages economic expansion. Most of the similar research on agricultural entrepreneurship in the Free State encouraged job growth and created opportunities for positive developmental change to reduce youth poverty. If NARYSEC can apply ideas that have been profitable in nearby areas, it is reasonable to suspect that they can address the needs of the Free State's rural youth population.

- Youth Enterprise Development Fund

Primarily, Kenya's Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) can be used as a benchmark in supporting young entrepreneurs with funding and training. Examples of this are shown by Sikenyi (2017:130), who notes that YEDF has provided low-interest loans, entrepreneurial training and business development services to young people.

Literature shows that although YEDF had several successful outcomes for young entrepreneurs, such as capacity building, linkages/marketing (Wachira & Mutundu, 2021:60) and financial assistance (both statistically significant), there are also many major shortcomings. These include a very limited programmatic framework, poor support systems (for example, mentoring and networking opportunities) and exclusion of both rural youth and youth living in urban slums (Sikenyi, 2017:130). Additionally, literature indicates that some of the money allocated to the fund has been poorly managed and that there is a lack of transparency (Sikenyi, 2017:130).

- Youth Enterprise With Innovation In Nigeria programme

YouWiN, an entrepreneurship programme for youths in Nigeria, was launched by the Nigerian Government in 2011 as a major youth entrepreneurship initiative. The objective of the YouWiN! is to create jobs for youths through the provision of financial support to youth-led enterprises that are developed from competitive business plans. The success of the YouWiN! The programme was predicated upon the conviction that entrepreneurship can be a tool to achieve sustainable

development through job creation. The YouWiN! The programme was jointly implemented with various Ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Communications Technology, Ministry of Youth Development, Ministry of Women Affairs, and the Private Sector, along with donor organisations (Eluwa & Odigwe, 2019:4).

Empirical research by Eluwa and Odigwe (2019), conducted in five States in Southeastern Nigeria, indicated that 91.2% of respondents believed the YouWiN! The programme has made a significant contribution to the creation of jobs; there were no significant gender differences between respondents in terms of this belief (Eluwa & Odigwe, 2019:14). In addition to providing evidence of the programme's successful impact on youth employability and business sustainability.

- Kwazi Kwa Vijana

Kenya's youth empowerment programme was established with the goals of generating youth employment and equipping them with skills to improve their employment prospects. In 2009, Kazi Kwa Vijana (KKV) was founded with the intention of creating jobs. In 2010, 6.6 billion Kenyan shillings were authorised for the project (Ali *et al.*, 2025:3).

When it comes to the success of developing youth entrepreneurship, research indicates that programmes are required to be more than just a collection of training modules. They must be developed with a variety of essential qualities to produce meaningful results. First, all quality programmes use an experiential and practical approach to delivering entrepreneurial skills by providing opportunities for hands-on experience, business plan competitions, mentorship and true enterprise experience rather than simply relying on lectures in a classroom (de Sousa *et al.*, 2022: 6).

Second, quality programmes create a strong ecosystem for entrepreneurs by providing youth with access to financial resources, markets, professional networking and other forms of institutional support. This is because youth entrepreneurs are not typically successful when they operate within weak or underdeveloped ecosystems (Psilos & Galloway, 2018:4-5).

Third, quality programmes are designed specifically for the youth population as opposed to generic programmes developed for adults. Programmes that are developed for youth must be designed in a manner that addresses their needs, such as the level of entrepreneurial skill they possess, the amount of risk they are willing to take on, and the environmental context they are operating in (Olugbola, 2017:24).

Fourth, quality programmes focus on creating entrepreneurial mindsets and psychosocial competencies in young people, such as self-efficacy, resilience, opportunity recognition, tolerance of risk and innovation orientation (UNICEF/ILO, 2019:18).

Fifth, quality programmes incorporate evaluation and monitoring into their design and delivery. This means that programmes monitor the impact of the programme and not just the immediate outcome of the training delivered to participants, make changes to the design of the programme based on participant feedback, and continually assess the effectiveness of the programme using data (Liu, 2023:12). Therefore, when reviewing literature about the NARYSEC Programme to determine if this programme has incorporated some of the qualities mentioned above (i.e. experiential design, linkage to ecosystems, youth tailoring, development of mindsets/competencies, robust monitoring), you will have the ability to critically analyse the potential of the programme to create long-term entrepreneurial outcomes for the participants.

Table 1 offers an overview of selected youth entrepreneurship initiatives that have been developed and implemented in South Africa and other developing countries to demonstrate how they have been engaged by various organisations. The table outlines the expected outcomes and design of the various programmes and illustrates some of the common features that were included, such as training, mentorship, funding and enterprise.

Table 1: Youth entrepreneurial development programmes in South Africa

Programme Name	Country	Description and Purpose of programme	Prerequisites of programme	Success factors of programme /
National Rural Youth Service Corp	South Africa	To support and empower rural youth through providing them accredited training and entrepreneurial opportunities that develops their economic capacity which in turn creates job opportunities in rural areas (DLRRD 2022).	Unemployed South African youth between the age of 18 and 35 years and are living in rural areas. participants must have obtained grade 10 and willing to participate in a programme on a full-time basis.	National rural youth service corps has provided training to more than 22,000 youth nationally, providing them with skills in various fields including agriculture,

				construction and engineering
National Youth Development Agency	South Africa	The programme is mandated to provide coordination and implementation of youth development that includes funding, entrepreneurship, training and mentoring for youth to encourage economic participation by youth (NYDA, 2024).	Must be 18-35 years old, must submit an active business idea or existing enterprise, must adhere to the NYDA application process.	Has helped many youths to formalise businesses, but only small-scale and sustainability issues have been experienced.
Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency	South Africa	SE-DFA provides business development services to small businesses such as incubation and training and specifically targets youth entrepreneurs (SEDFA, 2024).	All South Africans can apply for this fund; however, priority will be given to young people; you must be either operating your own business or planning to start one; it would be helpful if you registered your business first	the support of 2,200 youth enterprises was achieved using incubators; business formalisation has been increased; youth participation in value chains has been expanded.

Source: DLRRD (2022); NYDA (2024); SEDFA (2024).

Table 2 below offers an overview of selected youth entrepreneurship initiatives that have been developed and implemented in South Africa and other developing countries. The table outlines the expected outcomes and design of the various programmes and illustrates some of the common features that were included, such as training, mentorship, funding and enterprise.

Table 2: Youth entrepreneurial development programmes in Nigeria and Kenya

Programme Name	Country	Description and Purpose of programme	Prerequisites of programme	Success factors of programme /
Youth Enterprise With Innovation In Nigeria programme	Nigeria	YouWin's purpose is to assist youth entrepreneurs with funding and mentorship by hosting business plan competitions to generate employment and promote innovation (Eluwa & Odigwe, 2019:4)	Youth aged 18 to 40 from Nigeria; applicant must present business proposal and have an Internet connection and be able to read/write.	funding of 26,000 youth-led ventures has been realised; a 47% increase in job creation through entrepreneurship has occurred; RCT evaluations have monitored these outcomes
Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF)	Kenya	YEDF provides youth entrepreneurs with funding and assistance in the form of training and providing access to markets to either start new businesses or grow existing ones thereby reducing unemployment (Sikenyi, 2017:130).	Young people aged 18-35 years of age from Kenya (may include groups); need to provide either business plan or proposal; applicant meets loan requirements.	Has enabled thousands to access funding, but repayment problems and mismanaged in some cases.

Kazi Kwa Vijana (Jobs for Youth)	Kenya	Kazi Kwa-Vijana is an example of a public works programme to provide youth with short term employment in the form of infrastructure and environmental projects with limited focus on supporting entrepreneurial endeavours (Ali <i>et al.</i> , 2025:3).	Young people aged 18-35 years of age from Kenya (must be unemployed); applicant should have basic physical fitness and minimal formal schooling.	Created short term jobs but did not develop long term entrepreneurs.
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Source: Ali *et al.* (2025 :3); Eluwa and Odigwe (2019:4); Sikenyi (2017).

A cross-country comparison of local programmes such as NARYSEC, NYDA, and SEDA to their counterparts in other African countries, e.g., Nigeria's YouWiN, Kenya's YEDF, and Kazi Kwa Vijana, will allow for an enriched critical analysis of youth's entrepreneurial development in South Africa. The cross-country comparison has several objectives. It will allow for a cross-country comparison of youth entrepreneurial development in countries that have similar socio-economic conditions (i.e., high levels of youth unemployment, limited access to finance, and structural inequality), which may provide comparable benchmarks for the development of youth entrepreneurial development in South Africa (Valerio *et al.*, 2014:5).

The cross-country comparison of peer programmes on the continent will enable the identification of effective models (for example, the use of grants by YouWiN! in conjunction with business plan competitions and independent evaluation) and common pitfalls in programme design and implementation (for example, the lack of strong ecosystems supporting entrepreneurship and the limited scalability of programmes such as KKV and YEDF) identified in previous studies (Sikenyi, 2017:128). The cross-country comparison of the approaches taken in South Africa to address youth unemployment through entrepreneurship will provide a basis to compare South Africa's

approach to those of its peers on the continent and will identify whether South Africa's approach is aligned with, or deviates from, regional policy norms.

Overall, the application of a cross-national analytical lens will enhance the scope and richness of the literature review and provide a robust analytical framework to assess the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of South Africa's youth development policies.

2.5. POLICIES INFLUENCING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Youth development during the early years after apartheid (1996–2010) was initially based on the South African Constitution (1996) that ensured youth would have an equal chance to be educated and enjoy their basic human rights of dignity and equality. In addition, the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 created a foundation for vocational training and skills-based development in South Africa. As stated within the act, it is intended "to promote self-employment" among the youth (Section 2, Republic of South Africa, 1998). Entrepreneurship, however, was still not the focus of youth development initiatives at this time.

Between 2010 and 2015, there was a move towards a phase of institutionalisation and formal recognition of youth entrepreneurship in South Africa. The establishment of the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) via the NYDA Act No. 54 of 2008 resulted in the creation of a statutory agency that was given responsibility for the implementation of and coordination of youth development programmes such as entrepreneurship training, funding and mentorship (Republic of South Africa, 2008). This transition represented a movement away from broad youth policies towards targeted economic development policies.

This momentum gained traction in 2012 with the launch of the National Development Plan (NDP), which positioned entrepreneurship as a strategic solution to address both youth unemployment and economic inequalities. The NDP identified that youth entrepreneurs require better access to funding, a broader network of support for their start-ups, and an education system that includes entrepreneurship (Republic of South Africa, 2012:34–35).

The National Development Plan resulted in the creation of more targeted policies as well as the development of the Youth Enterprise Development Strategy (YEDS). This initiative was developed by the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), with the aim of developing a coherent and scalable approach to supporting young people who are entrepreneurs. DSBD (2014:7) pointed out that the main problems that make it hard for young people to start their own

businesses in South Africa are that programs don't work well together, new businesses can't get into the market, and there isn't enough mentoring or coaching.

Following 2015, there was an increase in focus on youth entrepreneurship policy. This resulted in a broader and deeper youth entrepreneurship policy over time. The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2020-2030, which places focus on economic growth and entrepreneurship, included the allocation of additional funding and resources for youth owned businesses, and the provision of mentorship and incubation services; specifically in rural and township environments (NYDA, 2020:20). In addition, the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030 will adopt a demand-led approach to youth training and includes entrepreneurship as a key outcome (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019:11).

The new NARYSEC Policy in 2022 reflects how youth entrepreneurship development has become a local implementation, with an outcomes-based intervention. The NARYSEC policy supports the NDP and NSDP at a national level, and utilises a multi-stakeholder model, where all stakeholders are involved, and include, but are not limited to, community institutions, municipalities, and the private sector (DLRRD, 2022: 12-13). It should be noted that the district development model (DDM) and national rural development framework (NRDF) provide for the integration of entrepreneurship for rural youth, both geographically and contextually.

South Africa rolled out several policy frameworks designed to promote youth Entrepreneurship, including the Youth Employment Accord (2013) and the Youth Enterprise Development Strategy (YEDS) 2012-2022, both designed to promote job creation and enterprise development among young people. There have also been specific targeted interventions introduced through these policies, including mentorship, business incubation, entrepreneurship awards, and procurement opportunities (Mbuya *et al.*, 2016:5). It is important to take more steps toward policy coordination. There are several examples of departments working across purposes, which creates challenges in delivering on necessary policies and practices.

The Youth entrepreneurship framework (2023) outlines an integrated and evidence-based approach that aligns Youth entrepreneurship policies with the priorities/nature of existing policies focused on social equity, sustainability, and inclusion. The Ministry of Entrepreneurship of Botswana provides an example of a mediation and integration of a youth-focused strategic plan with implementation.

Mkwanazi (2024:46) critically evaluates South Africa's entrepreneurial policies, namely the National Youth Policy (NYP) and national development plan (NDP), which took a top-down, structural approach, limiting young people's and students' agency in entrepreneurship development. The findings show that these policies often rank entrepreneurship as a solution to youth unemployment and socioeconomic exclusion, which frequently portrays youth as passive recipients rather than actors in their economic participation.

The analysis highlights the extent to which higher education (HE) institutions have been utilised as instruments to facilitate these policies, promoting entrepreneurial skills in ways that prioritise social inclusion and individual agency but risk delving into commodified education and reinforcing social inequalities (Mkwanazi 2024:52). The outcomes lead to a call for greater examination of the relationship between policy, structural constraints, and youth agency while encouraging policies and practices that allow youth to act effectively as participants in their economic futures, not just instruments of a state-sponsored economic growth scheme.

The section below provides a discussion on statutory laws and state policy frameworks that inform youth entrepreneurial development in South Africa.

Table 3: Policies influencing youth entrepreneurial development

Year	Policy/Legislation	Purpose
1996	The National Small Business Act (Act No. 102 of 1996)	established the institutional architecture for SMEs by providing for the establishment of the National Small Business Council and the Ntsika Enterprise Promotion Agency, and mandating organs of state to promote small business" (National Small Business Act 102 of 1996).
1996	Constitution of the Republic of South Africa	The policy aligns with constitutional principles such as equality, human dignity, and socio-economic rights including education and skills development.
1998	Skills Development Act 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998)	regulates the national skills development system. It establishes SETAs, the National Skills Fund, learnerships, and a levy-grant scheme (Skills Development Act 97 of 1998).
1999	Skills Development Levies Act No. 9 of 1999	provides for the imposition of a skills development levy (SDL), and the SDL Act raises funds to pay for

		training schemes (Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999).
2003– 2013	The Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act No. 53 of 2003	incorporates Enterprise & Supplier Development (ESD) obligations and preferential procurement arrangements, making market access available for Black-owned SMMEs and businesses” (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003).
2008	National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)	Merged legacy youth institutions and established NYDA to coordinate youth development, including entrepreneurship support, training, grants and vouchers (National Youth Development Agency Act 54 of 2008).
2010	Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP):	Provided the rural development policy framework under which NARYSEC (founded in 2010) was established to build youth capacity to promote rural livelihoods/enterprise. (DLRRD, 2022).
2013	Youth Enterprise Development Strategy	Focused on youth-specific entrepreneurship and jobs compacts, focused on training, mentorship and incubation, with access to finance and procurement opportunities for youth (DSBD, 2014).
2015/2021	National Youth Policy	Multi-sector policy that sets priorities for youth participation in the economy, entrepreneurship, skills and enabling ecosystems, under NYP 2030 has more explicit accountability and M&E language (DWYPD, 2021:34).
2024	National Small Enterprise Amendment Act & establishment of SE-DFA	Merged finance and non-finance under one roof to signal a systems approach to enterprise development (SEDFA, 2024).

Source: Author’s own compilation from multiple sources

2.5.1 Critical success factors of youth entrepreneurial development programmes

The entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Free State must also include the roles of local government and interactions with the private sector. Literature suggests that having multi-stakeholder engagement from different sectors strengthens outcomes of entrepreneurial programmes (Adelakun *et al.*, 2019:13). Therefore, the NARYSEC programme will benefit from collaboratively

engaging with local businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies, as they will provide a systemic interconnected ecosystem to succeed with the NARYSEC programme.

Youth entrepreneurship programmes cannot operate in isolation. The literature has suggested that financial support with capacity-building initiatives is vital to maintain youth commitment to entrepreneurship development in historically low-capacity fields such as agriculture in the Free State (Adeyanju *et al.*, 2021:1697). This interdependence indicates that these could be enacted with combinations in the NARYSEC framework for a more sustainable impact by developing an entrepreneurial culture beyond the formal programme period.

The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) and Kazi Kwa Vijana (jobs for youth) initiatives were implemented by the Kenyan government to encourage youth employment and empowerment. These initiatives aimed to transform youth into entrepreneurs. Established in 2006, the YEDF aims to provide affordable loans to young people (18–35) to grow their businesses (Sikenyi, 2017:130). The YEDF is structured as a microfinance initiative that offers loans through intermediaries, such as banks and savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs), to support youth-owned businesses (Sikenyi, 2017:128).

Kenya's Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) bears notable similarities to South Africa's National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) in terms of its policy intention to promote youth entrepreneurship and self-employment as a mechanism to address unemployment. Both programmes target youth between the ages of 18–35 and aim to shift young people from being job seekers to job creators through entrepreneurial development initiatives. In Nigeria, Ogamba (2019:267) critically examined the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN) programme. This initiative provided training, mentoring, and grants to youth entrepreneurs. The programme successfully bridged financial access gaps, encouraged female participation, and fostered sectoral diversification in agriculture, ICT, and manufacturing. These efforts were aligned with the UNDP's Youth Strategy goals for inclusive and sustainable youth empowerment.

This research supports the assertion that local government/community should act as custodians in promoting young entrepreneurship by investing in and implementing local economic development initiatives to foster an entrepreneurial spirit (Ndebele *et al.*, 2022:18). The NARYSEC programme could develop a partnership with local government to manage barriers to systemic access and foster an entrepreneurial environment while simultaneously raising awareness of resources.

A study by Mkwanazi (2024:46) examines how South African policy frameworks have relied on entrepreneurship to drive economic development. Mkwanazi's (2024:58) investigation of higher education institutions revealed they had acted primarily as state mechanisms to implement entrepreneurship measures, primarily in response to institutional compliance with government regulations. The research discussed the overuse of entrepreneurship as a universal remedy for unemployment and poverty with no consideration for the systemic issues that impair entrepreneurial growth.

Ndebele *et al.* (2022:17) provide an investigation of local government and youth entrepreneurship. A qualitative approach was used throughout the literature review. They contend that local government, since it is the closest government to the people, can encourage entrepreneurship through avenues such as training, building infrastructure, and providing funding or financial support. The study demonstrates that youth unemployment is still at a very high and troubling level, which is stalling inclusive development. They argued that local government can support youth entrepreneurship through capacitating and supporting youth-based programming. Their study further illustrates that there are certain internal barriers that limit the ability of local government institutions to support programmes such as corruption, wasteful expenditure, and inexperienced and unqualified staff. These limitations restrict local government institutions from delivering consistent and effective policies that could help young entrepreneurs. Therefore, the study concludes that unless the internal issue is resolved, initiatives to strengthen youth entrepreneurship will not be effective.

Sitharam and Hoque (2016:277) have taken a more complete perspective to investigate both internal and external factors affecting SME performance in KwaZulu-Natal. Their quantitative study identified competition, managerial incompetence, restricted access to finance, and technological deficiencies as the major obstacles to SME performance in KwaZulu-Natal. The results showed there was a statistically significant relationship between competition and performance, with 100% of respondents who identified declining business performance saying competition was a major issue. Their research also highlighted the negative effects of crime, corruption, and regulatory constraints.

While these studies emphasise structural issues, their emphasis differs. Mkwanazi (2024) provides a macro-policy evaluation and notes systemic disjuncture or disconnects between policy intent and implementation. Mkwanazi (2024) does not offer any evidence, hence requires referencing other literature to strengthen the critique. Ndebele *et al.* (2022:20) emphasise a local policy level and provide a micro-level focus on youth entrepreneurship and local government

inefficiencies. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) presented a macro-level analysis of operational and environmental problems that affect SMEs. Individual lenses offer layers of understanding of the different systemic levels of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in South Africa.

Mkwanazi's study is critical of reliance on policy but does not put forward any suggestions for reforming policy or empirical data from entrepreneurs themselves. Ndebele *et al.*'s study has merit for focusing on a community but may lack generalisability beyond the specific municipalities studied. Sitharam and Hoque (2016) deployed rigorous methodology, but their research is dated and does not encapsulate the new realities SMEs may face post-pandemic.

There is a shared view across the studies that policy, practice, and support remain poorly connected. Without interventions that address specific contextual needs and align national intentions with actual implementation, South Africa's entrepreneurial potential is likely to remain limited. Future approaches should centre on participatory policy discussions and youth-driven innovation hubs, while ensuring that SMEs and emerging entrepreneurs receive support in technology adoption and financial inclusion. Entrepreneurship should be understood as an inclusive process that recognises the varied challenges across demographic, geographic, and economic settings.

2.5.2. Factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of youth entrepreneurial development interventions

Despite progress, several limitations hinder the full potential of youth entrepreneurship initiatives. In South Africa, entrepreneurship education is not uniformly implemented, and its integration at the high school level remains inconsistent. Moreover, while Entrepreneurship Education boosts self-efficacy, the translation into actual business start-up rates remains underwhelming (Bux & Van Vuuren, 2019:1).

2.5.2.1 Youth entrepreneurial development research and practice

There are several gaps in youth entrepreneurial development research and practice. It is emphasised that many longitudinal studies need to be conducted to assess the sustained impact of entrepreneurship education (EE) on actual business placement and viability. While self-efficacy is acknowledged as a variable leading to entrepreneurship intent, little is understood about how to facilitate self-efficacy and entrepreneurship intent amidst economic uncertainty and structural barriers (Bux & Van Vuuren, 2019: 8).

2.5.2.2. Youth entrepreneurial development financial barriers

Financing continues to be a challenge for youth entrepreneurs. Togun et al. (2023) demonstrate that financial literacy mediates the relationship between financial inclusion and SME performance. In other words, even if funding is available, entrepreneurs need to be literate to manage it. In South Africa, the recent merger of Seda, Sefa, and CBDA into the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (Sedfa) (Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency, 2024) is an institutional means of combining financial support and developmental support. Financial reform can potentially include access to capital for NARYSEC graduates in the future if it includes literacy training and mentorship.

2.5.3. Summary

Comparative evidence indicates that youth entrepreneurship programmes have common elements, training, mentorship, finance, and institutional support, and certain elements are not going to end up being particularly effective depending on how the programme is structured and implemented. For example, Nigeria's YouWiN programme was successful in bridging the gap between finance and mentorship (Ogamba, 2019); Kenya's Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) had access to loans but was not sustainable (Sikenyi, 2017:135); South Africa's National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC) are the main interventions but are both struggling with scale and full integration into the regional (i.e., African) entrepreneurial ecosystem (Ryk, 2020:19). As a result, it is fair to suggest that for NARYSEC to deliver on its long-term objectives, it needs to adopt a holistic, multi-faceted approach that brings together financial literacy, psychosocial development aspects and multi-stakeholder involvement.

2.6. CONCLUSION

The chapter reviewed literature on youth entrepreneurial development, youth entrepreneurial development programmes, mentorship, training, and support services and reviewed the role of these components in entrepreneurial outcomes for youth entrepreneurship and the impact these components have in terms of education, financial support, psychosocial systems, and enabling ecosystems. The chapter synthesised evidence from the literature and demonstrated that while skills training is a significant factor for programmes that aim to promote successful entrepreneurship outcomes, long-term entrepreneurial success is significantly more likely to occur when skills training is combined with mentorship, financial literacy, networks and institutional support. The second research objective, "to explore the influence of mentorship, training, and support services in fostering youth entrepreneurship", aligns with this evidence.

Finally, the chapter examined literature specifically related to the NARYSEC programme and relevant policy frameworks, focusing on how NARYSEC fits within South Africa's broader ecosystem for youth development and support for entrepreneurs, as well as its alignment with national policy instruments like the Youth Enterprise Development Strategy and National Youth Policy. The literature engagement and critique highlight both the potential and challenges in terms of NARYSEC as a state-led youth empowerment and rural economic transformation initiative. The subsequent chapter elaborates on the methodological framework employed in the current study.

The next chapter outlined the approach used by this study for its research methodology. In addition to describing the research paradigm, the research design, the sampling strategy, the data collection tools and techniques, and the procedures for data analysis, it is in this chapter that the researcher discusses the steps taken to establish the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, as well as the ethical considerations guiding this study. It is on this methodological base that this study can then examine how the NARYSEC programme enhances youth entrepreneurial activity within the province of the Free State.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 presented an overview on the pertinent literature about youth entrepreneurship development and entrepreneurial development programmes. Youth entrepreneurial development was defined, and the different measurements and various measures and indicators that researchers and organisations use. The role of mentorship, training, and support services in these developmental programmes was explored. Furthermore, an examination of how mentorship, training and support services role that these components play in entrepreneurial outcomes and their impact in terms of education, financial support, and psychosocial systems.

Chapter 3 is a detailed account of the methods used to explore the impact of the NARYSEC program as it pertains to youth entrepreneurial development within the context of the Free State province of South Africa. The chapter is a comprehensive explanation of the research design and methodology, philosophical underpinnings, methodological choices, theoretical framework, research strategy, time frame, sample selection, data analysis methodology, ethical considerations for the study, data collection methodologies, measures utilised for the study, and measures taken to ensure the validity of the study. Furthermore, the chapter ensures the study's validity and credibility.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the methodology and framework employed to ascertain responses to research enquiries (Botha, 2017:68). Creswell and Creswell (2018:352) define a research design as an organised set of processes for gathering, analysing, and making sense of data. Qualitative research enables an in-depth analysis of the subjective experiences, decision-making and motivation factors influencing individuals within a specific business (Mahmud *et al.*, 2022:125). A qualitative research design was employed for this research to explore the impact of the NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, South Africa. According to Schoch (2020:248), exploratory research is particularly effective when aiming to understand participants' experiences in real-world settings.

This design was deemed appropriate as It facilitated the researcher in acquiring a more profound understanding of the NARYSEC programme's training, mentoring, and support interventions and how it is perceived by the youth participants in the Free State province.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Mushra and Alok (2017:17), methodology is a planned way to solve a study problem. A study's methodology is a broad term that includes all the theoretical underpinnings, justifications, and systems of methodologies employed in the research. It includes not only the methods themselves (such as surveys and interviews), but also the reasons for their application, the connection between the methods and the underlying research philosophy, the methods for gathering and evaluating data, and the measures taken to ensure the study's rigour. Saunders *et al.* (2023:178) assert that methodology relates to the logic of how the research is being carried out, why certain methods were selected and how those methods relate to the overall research goals. The Research Onion model, developed by Saunders *et al.* (2023:131), was used in this study. The model outlines a comprehensive approach that includes research philosophy, approach, strategy, methodological choice, temporal horizon, and techniques or procedures.

3.4. RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

The research philosophy is characterised as a collection of assumptions and perspectives concerning the progression of knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:131). The initial phase of a research process entails establishing the philosophical viewpoint through a research paradigm. In his seminal work, Kuhn (1962:42) describes a paradigm as a collection of related assumptions regarding the world, collectively embraced by the scientific community, which provide a conceptual framework for the systematic investigation of reality (Ragab & Arisha, 2018:2). Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51) further describe a paradigm as a theoretical framework and a fundamental belief system that is characterised by its assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, and axiology. In essence, it is a matter of understanding and looking at the truth of the world. Three philosophies exist that are rooted in different research methods, namely, the positivist, pragmatic and constructivist research paradigms. Each paradigm shapes how individuals perceive knowledge and reality, serving as the basis for all research grounded in philosophical principles (Kuhn, 2015:3).

Positivism and interpretivism are two commonly used paradigms in scientific research and analysis. Interpretive researchers are of the view that in-depth thought is the only way to truly understand anything (Rahi 2017:1). As stated by Bryman *et al.* (2015:20), an interpretative paradigm relies on comprehending the subject through individuals' experiences and perspectives rather than the researcher's interpretation of the issue. This study adopted an interpretative paradigm, as it was deemed suitable and allowed for a deep exploration of participants' lived experiences.

3.5. APPROACH TO THEORY DEVELOPMENT

An important question when planning a research project is the extent to which answering the research questions involves testing or theory building. This outcome is displayed as two distinct approaches to reasoning: deductive and inductive (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:154). An inductive method is a methodical process whereby theory is developed depending on the observations the researcher makes during their activities (Rahi, 2017:2). It is a procedure by which one deduces or derives ideas and hypotheses about a given item or variable. This means stressing the observation of stated events by looking at and exploring how human subjects view meanings and participate in relevant activities (Rahi, 2017:2) A deductive approach is when you start out with a theory from the literature and develop a method of collecting data in order to test whether this theory is accurate (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:155) This study employed an inductive approach aimed at exploring the impact of NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province.

3.6. METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE

According to Saunders *et al.* (2023:185), methodological choice is a decision made by the researcher as to whether to collect and analyse data using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods in a study. In social sciences and business research, three primary methodological approaches are commonly recognised as follows:

Quantitative research examines the relationship between variables, often tested on a specific type of a measurement (i.e., instrument) on the contrary qualitative research examines the meaning groups or individuals attribute to human or social issues, utilising an action or process of inductive analysis or interpretation (Mohajan, 2018:1). Mixed methods research combines the qualitative as well as quantitative formats of collection of data, using designs and philosophical assumptions simply offers a broader knowledge of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:51)

The qualitative method emphasises depth and perceptions rather than statistical representation (Cypress, 2015:20). Qualitative approach was followed in this study as it enabled the researcher to investigate the rationale behind participants' perspectives on youth entrepreneurial development and which is difficult to do so in quantitative studies that mainly focus on collecting and analysing extensive numeric data statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:174).

3.7. TIME HORIZON

Time horizons indicated how long a study would take (Setia, 2016:261). Bryman (2016:42) asserted that there were two kinds of time horizon systems in research, namely cross-sectional

and longitudinal designs. The difference between these designs lies in the frequency of data collection. Cross-sectional research involved collecting data at one moment in time, whereas longitudinal research involved collecting data several times over a given period, usually at fixed intervals (Thomas & Zubkov, 2023:104). This study employed a cross-sectional time horizon, as data were collected at a single point in time.

3.8. TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.8.1. Target population

Martínez-Mesa *et al.* (2016:326) define a target population as the total group of people from which a researcher aims to extract insights. It encompasses the entire cohort of subjects whose traits are vital to the researcher. The study population for this study consisted of existing NARYSEC youth for the years 2023 and 2024, between the ages of 18 and 35 years, who resided in Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa, Thabo Mofutsanyane, Xhariep district and Mangaung Metro municipality in the Free State. The overall population comprises 75 youth members who completed their training in 2023 and 2024 in the Free State.

3.8.2. Sampling

Sampling is a method that researchers use to intentionally select a smaller sample of people or objects from a larger population as part of observation or experimentation consistent with their aims (Sharma, 2017:749). Researchers use sampling because it is impractical to look at all individuals within the entire population as it relates to their research (Sharma, 2017:749).

3.8.2.1. Sampling technique

Sampling technique is a method used by researchers to choose a portion of the population that reflects the entire population to conduct research (Makwana *et al.*, 2023:764). Two types of sampling exist, namely, probability sampling methods and non-probability sampling methods. Probability sampling methods require the use of random selection, which means every member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:1). This style of sampling allows the sample to reflect the population, and for the researcher to generalise the study results to the population.

Non-probability sampling methods, conversely, do not assume every individual has a chance of being represented, which may introduce bias into the sampling process (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:2). This sampling research strategy includes convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. Researchers might choose to use non-probability sampling when performing exploratory research or when time and resource constraints might eliminate the

possibility of using a probability sampling strategy (Morton *et al.*, 2015:83). Bryman *et al.* (2015:207) define purposive sampling as purposefully selecting individuals who are relevant to the study question. Also referred to as judgmental sampling, Purposeful sampling is typically used when working with small samples, such as case study research, and when you wish to identify situations that are informative. Purposive sampling is not statistically representative of the intended target population (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:322).

In this study, purposive sampling was adopted. The directed approach of purposive sampling ensured that individuals with specific characteristics or behaviours related to one of the research variables were included. As a form of non-probability sampling, purposive sampling does not utilise random selection methods, as the researcher intends to obtain perspectives from people who have attributes or experiences that can provide relevant information to the proposed study (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:4).

3.8.2.2. Sampling size

Creswell and Creswell (2018:248) refer to sample size as the number of people in the sample and the steps that were taken to get that number of people. The sample for this study was youth, aged between 18 and 35 years, who participated in the NARYSEC entrepreneurship initiative in the Free State province. Researchers employ sampling techniques to select a subset of participants or items from the population because it is typically impossible to investigate the full population (Khan *et al.*, 2023:1). The targeted sample size was 15 participants. In qualitative research, particularly for semi-structured interviews, the sample size is an important consideration to identify data saturation, where new data does not reveal any new themes or insights (Moser & Korstjens, 2018:11).

According to Vasileiou *et al.* (2018: 2), the sample sizes used in qualitative research are generally much smaller and purposefully selected compared to quantitative research samples, which are typically larger and randomly selected. This is the basis upon which the current study collected a relatively small and targeted sample of youth participants. To allow sufficient depth of inquiry and the potential to reach a total sample size of 15 youth participants were selected. The use of this range of sample sizes is also consistent with accepted standards of qualitative research that suggest smaller, homogenous samples may be used when the focus is on gaining insight into how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences and processes, rather than attempting to establish statistically generalisable results (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:157).

The use of a relatively small sample size in the current study has precedence in empirical literature related to the study of youth entrepreneurship. For instance, Mgweba *et al.* (2024:1) reported that they had used 20 semi-structured interviews in a qualitative examination of youth employment in South African municipalities, thereby providing evidence that sample sizes within the 10-20 range can be considered methodologically suitable for in-depth qualitative investigations. Additionally, Elvis Madondo (2025:195) demonstrated that a similar sample size could provide useful insights through his use of 12 youth participants in examining entrepreneurial cognition; therefore, this study's use of a sample size of 15 youth participants supports the notion that qualitative samples of approximately 12 to 22 dozen participants can yield valuable insights regarding participants' lived experiences with the NARYSEC entrepreneurial development programme. Therefore, this study has employed a sample size that is methodologically robust but still sufficient to support meaningful data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3.8.2.3. Data saturation

The study by Wutich *et al.* (2024:3) produced a comprehensive, integral review of empirical literature on sample size and saturation, as well as five types of saturation used for qualitative studies and practical sample size estimates. According to Wutich *et al.* (2024:4), the most referenced type of saturation is data or theme saturation. Theme saturation involves identifying most themes in a body of data. Empirical studies suggest that theme saturation can be achieved in about 9 interviews (mean: 12–13), provided interviews are completed with good probing in an in-person format. However, to reach meaning saturation (i.e., capturing the variance and nuance within specified themes), generally, 15-24 people will be interviewed. This depth is needed for clear descriptions of identified themes and is significant to thematic and interpretive analysis, where it is important to understand an individual theme's complexity.

3.8.2.4. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria are explained as the essential qualities of the target group that researchers will utilise to address the study issue. Criteria for inclusion often encompass demographic, clinical, and geographical criteria (Patino & Ferreira, 2018:84).

The inclusion criteria for the participants included:

- Male and female youth between the ages of 18 and 35 years
- Youth who received agriculture-related training under the NARYSEC programme
- Youth who have existing businesses following the exit from the NARYSEC programme
- Youth residing in Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana district
- Youth who successfully completed and exited the programme between 2023 and 2024

Exclusion criteria are qualities of possible participants who meet the inclusion requirements but have additional characteristics that could make the study less successful or increase the likelihood of unfavourable outcomes for these people (Patino & Ferreira, 2018:84).

The exclusion criteria were:

- Youth who participated in the NARYSEC programme from other provinces, and the exclusion of two districts in the Free State province, which are Xhariep and Mangaung municipalities.
- Youth members who did not complete the NARYSEC programme in 2023 and 2024
- Youth who have completed the NARYSEC programme but have not attempted to start a business
- Youth who have transitioned into formal employment since the completion of the programme.
- Youth who were not trained in agriculture-related training (during or prior to entry into the programme)
- Youth who established enterprises prior to participation in the NARYSEC programme will be excluded.

These criteria ensured the study remained focused on the entrepreneurship outcomes of the programme.

3.9. RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Upon receiving ethical approval from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), recruitment for this project began. The participants were invited to partake in the study via e-mail correspondence. In addition to inviting participants to the study, the invitation also outlined the purpose of the study and assured the participants that their responses would remain confidential, and it included an informed consent form. This methodology was selected because it allowed the researcher to efficiently communicate with the potential participants and provided a clear communication channel to track their responses. Reminder and follow-up messages were sent to participants weekly to increase the participation rate.

Lam *et al.* (2015:178) found that many studies used combinations of active recruitment (i.e., recruiting all participants by direct invitation and engaging their communities). In a similar fashion, engaging community organisations that potential participants trust has been shown to be useful, especially for groups that are harder to reach (Sha *et al.*, 2017:4).

3.10. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection entails an organised way of getting accurate information from people who are taking part in a study (Cooper & Chindler, 2014:84). The objective of qualitative data collection is to collect information for research and analysis, encompassing thematic analysis. The primary method employed to gather qualitative data for this research was a qualitative approach, which involved virtual semi-structured interviews with NARYSEC participants.

3.10.1. Data Collection tool

A data collection tool is a tool employed to gather, quantify, and analyse data relevant to the research domain (Moro *et al.*, 2019:312). Semi-structured interviews differ in their level of structure, utilising one or more topics. Some interviews have a set of questions that the interviewer follows, while others are more open. In these cases, the interviewer can change the sequence of the questions and ask new ones based on the research circumstance (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:443).

Semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data for this study. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher compiles an interview schedule ahead of time that relates to the study. According to Saunders *et al.* (2023:470), the different types of interview questions that a researcher can use in collecting qualitative data, namely,

- i. open-ended questions,
- ii. probing questions, and
- iii. closed questions

With open-ended questions, Participants are able to characterise and explain a scenario or event. An open-ended inquiry can be used to uncover attitudes or gather information by encouraging the interviewee to give a thorough and insightful response (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:470). Probing questions are used to elicit past responses that are relevant to the research issue. Although sometimes written as open questions, they request a specific focus or direction, often repeating parts of the participants' own comments (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:470). Closed questions may be used as introduction questions when you begin questioning about a particular interview theme, to collect specific information, or to confirm a fact or perspective. In this study, open-ended questions were employed to enable participants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in their own language, which is crucial for qualitative research.

The interview guide consists of 12 open-ended questions under separate themes, which include participants' background information, entrepreneurial knowledge and skills development,

business start-up and growth, perceptions and impact, as well as recommendations to improve the programme. The questions were drawn from an existing study conducted by Ryk (2020:127-128) and were aimed at exploring the lived experiences of each participant during and after participation in the NARYSEC programme. Interviews were conducted via the online MS Teams platform, and it took 35 and 45 minutes to conduct the interview with each participant. Consent was requested from each participant prior to the recording of each interview.

3.11. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a systematic process that uses statistical tools to condense, show, explain, and analyse data. For this qualitative study, data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach, which is well-suited for exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of participants. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2016:297), involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. This method was employed because of its flexibility and its ability to provide rich, detailed, and nuanced insights into participants' narratives regarding their entrepreneurial journeys within the NARYSEC programme. The software employed for data analysis in this study was ATLAS.ti.

The following six steps suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006:16-23) in analysing qualitative data were followed as guidance.

- **Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data**

This stage entails becoming fully immersed in the data by reading and rereading textual data such as interview transcripts, watching video data, or listening to audio recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006:16).

- **Phase 2: Creating the initial codes**

The second phase commences the methodical examination of the data by means of coding. The fundamental units of analysis are codes. Data features that may be pertinent to the study issue are identified and labelled by codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006:18).

- **Phase 3: Searching for themes**

During this step, your analysis begins to become clear as you transition from codes to themes. A theme comprises a significant aspect of the data concerning the research topic and signifies a degree of structured response or meaning within the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006:19).

- **Phase 4: Examining the themes**

This phase entails an ongoing procedure in which the emerging themes are evaluated against the coded data and the complete data set. This phase mostly concerns quality assessment (Braun & Clarke, 2006:20).

- **Phase 5: Identifying and characterising themes**

In identifying your themes, it is essential to describe the different and unique features of each topic. A useful criterion for this is the ability to summarise the essence of each theme in a few words (Braun & Clarke, 2006:22).

- **Phase 6: Creating the report**

The last phase of analysis involves the creation of a report, such as a journal article or dissertation; nevertheless, it is not a phase that commences just at the conclusion (Braun & Clarke, 2006:23).

3.12. TRUSTWORTHINESS

3.12.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research refers to the validity and relevance of the methods used, as well as the accuracy with which the research findings represent the data collected (Noble & Smith, 2015:2). In qualitative research, trustworthiness demonstrates faith in the data to produce a high-quality study (Connelly, 2016:435). Trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research are crucial in making sure that the findings and the representations of the findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This study has embraced several strategies to establish trustworthiness and credibility based on the criteria described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and operationalised in recent methodological literature (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:4). A combination of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability methods was used to establish credibility for this research (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3).

3.12.2 Credibility

Credibility checks the study's internal validity to make sure the results correctly reflect the experiences, perceptions, and points of view of the people who took part. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations. There are several strategies that were used to ensure credibility. For this study, credibility was achieved by triangulation. Triangulation refers to using several studies or sources in the research process to gain a comprehensive grasp of the study's subject or phenomena (Vavuniya *et al.*, 2023:106). Triangulation has been applied by comparing data collected from verbatim transcripts of the interviews, audio recordings of the interviews, and field notes taken during the interview sessions. The use of multiple methods

enabled me to verify that the participants experienced and interpreted their experiences similarly, thereby reducing the risk of depending on one method of data collection alone, which could have resulted in an inaccurate picture of the participants' experience.

This improved the trustworthiness of the results from the thematic analysis because it ensured participants' validation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:314). Credibility ensures the findings are representative of the participants' lived experiences (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3).

Time was spent with participants and in the research site so that rapport could be built with participants, and the emergence of deeper insights was enabled. This also allowed a more understanding of nuances, and the authenticity of the findings was enhanced (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:315).

Specified the researcher's bias in the study. This self-reflection generates a narrative that is both open and transparent, which is likely to resonate with the audience. This flexibility has already been identified as a fundamental attribute of qualitative research. Good qualitative research includes the researchers' perspective on the ways that their background, including their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin, influences how they interpret the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:315).

To further strengthen trustworthiness, the researcher used member-checking by giving the participants the research results to make sure that their perspectives were accurately and honestly represented. This method makes things more open and makes sure that the researcher's views are recognised and handled properly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:315). The study process was well-documented, and the choices made about methods and how they were used were explained and explored in detail, including how the data was collected and analysed.

3.12.3 Confirmability

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:290), confirmability refers to the researcher providing enough information about the study setting and research methodology to allow readers to assess whether the results may be relevant to their own situation. Maintaining awareness of potential bias and taking proactive measures to prevent influencing the results improves confirmability.

The document laid out a detailed method for verifying the identity of participants and a promise to uphold ethical standards throughout the research process. This method made sure that the results were a true reflection of the participants' views and experiences, without any bias from the

researcher. The researcher improved the study's objectivity and impartiality by the steps that were taken to keep the subjects' identities anonymous.

3.12.4 Transferability

Lincoln and Cuba (1985:290) define transferability as the degree to which qualitative research findings can be generalised to diverse environments or populations. This pertains to the extent to which the findings can be applied to diverse environments or circumstances. A description was employed within this research to provide an outline of the features of the sample within the NARYSEC programme. The detailed accounts of how the data collection processes occurred, the creation of the interview schedule and the participants' experiences were explained in detail. This will allow for the possibility of being assessed by other researchers as to whether the findings from this study may apply to youth entrepreneurship initiatives operating in similar rural or semi-rural areas within South Africa.

3.12.5 Dependability

Dependability relates to the researcher explaining how the findings were derived to build trust in the process and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). Dependability pertains to the evaluation conducted by participants concerning the credibility of the study's findings, interpretations, and recommendations; this evaluation is grounded in the data supplied by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). The methodological decisions of the research, shaped by the comprehensive and flexible characteristics of thematic analysis and inductive reasoning, provided a foundation for reliability in this study. The researcher underscored the study's reliability by illustrating the methodical data collection and analysis process, emphasising its consistency and replicability.

3.13. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research are a set of principles that guide the research practice (de Chesnay, 2015:101). When conducting a research study, ethics are absolutely vital.

This study implemented the following ethical considerations and actions to ensure compliance:

3.13.1. Permission to conduct research study

Permission was sought from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), and ethical clearance was granted prior to conducting the fieldwork.

The researcher received formal permission to gain access to secondary data and to conduct the study from the gatekeeper to ensure that the study followed institutional and organisational

procedures for approval. The NARYSEC programme is a programme under the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development; thus, the Director of Free State Province, who is responsible for the programme's administrative management in the province, was contacted for permission. A formal written request outlining the study purpose, objectives and ethical considerations was sent to the Director.

After review and approval, formal permission was granted to provide access to participants who were involved in the NARYSEC programme in the Free State. This authorisation provided assurance that the research study conformed to the institutional protocols and that participants' rights and interests were protected during the data collection process. The permission letter from the Director was included as part of the ethical documents that made up the research study.

3.13.2. Process of obtaining informed consent

Informed consent represents a thorough process that necessitates the clear communication of pertinent information to participants. As noted by Kadam (2017:108), it is crucial to articulate the study's nature, associated risks, potential benefits, and alternatives to participation, thereby enabling participants to make informed decisions. The procedure for acquiring informed consent is an essential aspect of ethical practice, designed to protect the rights and well-being of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:169). This procedure guarantees that individuals comprehend the nature, risks, and advantages of the research prior to consenting to participate, thereby honouring their autonomy and capacity for decision-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:169).

Lune and Berg (2017:46) describe informed consent as the voluntary agreement of individuals to take part in a study, made with full awareness and understanding, and without any form of coercion, deception, pressure, or improper influence. Participants were asked to complete and sign an informed consent form before taking part in the study. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the study and sought permission to conduct the research from the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development. A cover letter was provided to the participants outlining the study's goals and objectives, as well as the contact persons should they have any further questions. Informed consent is a crucial element of adherence to Section 37 of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) 4 of 2013, which mandates a voluntary, specific, and informed expression of consent prior to the commencement of research (Adams *et al.*, 2021:4).

Informed consent letters were written and sent to participants prior to the interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that their participation was optional. Participants were advised that they are not obligated to respond to any questions they find uncomfortable and that their participation would not provide any benefits, damage, or compensation, and that they may withdraw from the study at any point. All participants in this study have signed consent forms.

3.13.3. Anonymity

Anonymity refers to safeguarding participants' identities to guarantee that responses are not associated with their personal information (Alderson & Morrow, 2020:10). All information that was acquired from the participants was kept confidential, and participation was anonymous. The researcher ensured anonymity by anonymising data; all identifying information, such as names, geographical locations and email addresses, was removed from both the data and the final report for publication. The participants' personal information was replaced with pseudonyms for anonymity purposes and has been substituted with unique codes; this ensures data cannot be traced back to the specific individuals.

3.13.4. Confidentiality

Data collected was treated as confidential and was not shared with any third parties that are not actively involved in the study process. The research data is stored safely in a locked cabinet and in password-protected files. After the research study is over, the data will be destroyed within five years.

Personal information about participants and their direct contributions to the research study was not made public. The research adheres to the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI Act), which mandates: when and how one chooses to share information (consent is required); the type and extent of information a person chooses to share; and transparency and accountability for how the information is used. The collected data was only used for research purposes.

The participant's rights to privacy, secrecy, and anonymity were explained to them by the researcher, who made sure they knew they could withdraw from the study at any moment if they believed their rights were being violated. Participants got an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality prior to the interview, and the researcher did not utilise any participant identities in the findings. A form requesting informed consent was distributed, protecting this privacy and

anonymity. To guarantee the confidentiality of the participants, the final report did not contain the participants' personally identifiable information.

All participants were made aware at the commencement of the interviews that their identities, personal information and responses to the questions posed to them would remain anonymous throughout the entire study. To further protect the anonymity of each participant, each was assigned a code, and this was used throughout the study instead of the participant's name.

All the audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms and ATLAS.ti files generated during the study were kept on a laptop computer that is only accessed by the researcher. A backup of all the files was also kept on an external hard drive to prevent loss or accidental deletion. None of the data was loaded onto a cloud storage system, nor were they sent via email or other electronic means to anyone outside of the secure devices. As per the ethical requirements of the NWU, all the data collected were stored for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study. The retention period provides sufficient time for the principal investigator to verify the findings of the study, for the study to undergo academic audit, or for the data to be referenced in the future if necessary. Following the expiration of the five-year retention period, all the data collected was destroyed in a permanent and secure fashion. The digital files (audio recordings, transcripts and analytical documents) were deleted from all the storage devices.

Participants were provided with the opportunity to receive a summary of the study findings upon request, as the study was conducted as part of the NARYSEC programme. A summary of the key findings of the study may be distributed to the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLRRD) to assist with development and policy improvements. However, only non-identifiable, aggregated findings were disseminated to the Department. The Department was not given access to the original data, the transcripts of the interviews, or any identifiable information of participants.

3.14. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research methodology employed to explore the impact of the NARYSEC programme on entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, which included chosen research design is qualitative, qualitative research enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences of NARYSEC youth, the population and sampling procedures was discussed, as well as the data collection procedures, the research philosophy, the reliability and trustworthiness of the research tool, and ethical issues. The

research study's findings and outcomes were presented in Chapter 4. It seeks to do a thorough analysis of the data, offering insightful conclusions drawn from the qualitative investigation.

In addition, the chapter described how the semi-structured interview guide was developed and implemented and what steps were taken to collect the data and how the researcher ensured the ethical integrity of the study by obtaining participants' informed consent; ensuring all data collected was kept confidential; and implementing safe and secure data management practices. In order to establish trustworthiness, the researcher employed several rigorous approaches to demonstrate that the findings were credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable. These methods included the use of member checking, thick description, audit trail documentation, and reflective journaling. The methodology employed within this chapter enabled an ethically based platform to produce high-quality and reliable qualitative evidence.

Chapter 4 will describe the results of the study and provide a detailed thematic analysis of the interview data, with examples of quotes from the participants to describe their experiences and the themes identified as a result of the coding process and relate those themes to the purpose of the study, along with existing literature related to the development of entrepreneurship amongst young people.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology that guided this study. It provided a detailed discussion of the qualitative and exploratory approach used to explore the impact of the NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, South Africa. The chapter described the interpretivist paradigm that informed the study, the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool, and the application of Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework on thematic analysis was employed for the data analysis to code and interpret the data collected from participants who completed the NARYSEC programme during the financial years 2023 and 2024.

Building on this methodological foundation, Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted with eleven graduates across Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana districts of the Free State. The main purpose of this chapter was to analyse and interpret the participants' views and experiences in relation to the study's objectives. In particular, the chapter addresses the following research objectives. Firstly, to explore the lived experiences of NARYSEC participants on their perceived efficacy of the programme after completing the programme in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills. Secondly, to determine challenges encountered by NARYSEC participants in starting and sustaining their own businesses. Lastly, to recommend how the NARYSEC programme's implementation can be enhanced to effectively facilitate youth entrepreneurial development.

The 6 key themes identified from the data include: (1) youth perceptions of the quality of entrepreneurial training obtained; (2) youth experiences with the provision of mentoring and support services (3) youth perceptions on their entrepreneurial confidence and intentions, (4) barriers to accessing resources for youth entrepreneurs, and (5) recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of the NARYSEC programme. Each theme is analysed in detail, with findings interpreted in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter 2.

By linking participants' insights with the reviewed literature, this chapter not only highlights the practical realities of entrepreneurial development but also provides a nuanced understanding of the contextual and structural factors shaping these outcomes. The discussion that follows provides a thematic presentation of the findings, supported by participant narratives, to illuminate the factors that continue to influence entrepreneurial readiness and sustainability.

4.2. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The study employed virtual semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection to explore the impact of the NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province, South Africa. This method was chosen for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe for deeper explanations while maintaining alignment with the study's research objectives.

An interview guide was developed based on the study's main themes and research questions. The guide comprised three sections. The first section captured participants' demographic and background information, including their age, highest qualification, and employment status. The second section focused on their understanding of youth entrepreneurial development. The third section focused on their influence of mentorship, training and support services. The final section explored their lived experiences and perceived efficacy. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to share their experiences and perceptions in their own words.

All interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams, in line with institutional ethical requirements, and each session lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The researcher began each interview by explaining the purpose of the study, reaffirming confidentiality, and encouraging open and honest discussion. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and authenticity of responses (Creswell & Poth, 2016: 128–129). The transcripts formed the basis for the thematic analysis presented in the subsequent section, where codes and themes were systematically developed using the six-phase framework of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006:16-23; 2012:5-11) and managed with ATLAS.ti. Software to ensure analytical rigour and consistency.

4.3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS APPLICATION

Data analysis is a systematic process that uses tools to condense, show, explain, and analyse data(source). In this study, a thematic inductive data analysis approach was used, which is well-suited to explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2016:297), is the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns or themes within qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used because it is flexible and could provide rich, detailed and nuanced insights into participants' narratives regarding their entrepreneurial experiences during their involvement in the NARYSEC programme.

The final interview transcripts were imported into an ATLAS.ti project as the primary documentation; each participant was given a pseudonym (i.e., P1-P11) for protection from their identity being exposed. Protecting the anonymity and privacy of all participants was an important ethical consideration in the research. To ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, a number of protective measures were taken in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) 4 of 2013. All data collected from the participants, including audio recordings, transcripts and consent documents, were safely kept in secure password-protected files and could be accessed by the researcher alone. The researcher confirmed that he would use personal information only for his academic work and would always maintain the privacy of participants during the research process. Compliance with POPIA not only protected participants' rights but also enhanced the credibility and ethical rigour of the research.

The following six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006:16-23) in analysing qualitative data were followed as guidance:

4.3.1. Familiarisation of data

Familiarisation of data entailed arranging and preparing the data ready for analysis. This includes transcribing interviews, scanning through content thereafter classifying and arranging the data based on various sources (Braun & Clarke 2012:5). Conducted interviews of participants were recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams to capture all spoken words, pauses and expressions of meaning in addition to the participants' original voice and phrasing. Each recording was transcribed and downloaded to a Word document to allow the researcher to remain near the data and discover any emerging patterns. All recordings were transcribed immediately after the data collection to provide the best possible chance of maintaining accuracy and contextual understanding. The researcher familiarised themselves with the participants' tone, emphasis and context by listening to each participant's interview recording multiple times. Eleven interview transcriptions were read multiple times to achieve a comprehensive sense of participants' experiences.

Following the initial transcription of each recording, the data were cleaned to eliminate filler words (e.g. "um", "you know", "like", etc.) and repeated phrases that contributed little to no meaning. Any non-verbal expressions (e.g. laughter, pauses) were noted in brackets where necessary to facilitate interpretation. Each transcript was reviewed at least two additional times for accuracy through the method of reviewing the transcripts while listening to the original recordings. The cleaned transcripts were exported to ATLAS.ti version 23, a qualitative data analysis software

programme. This step is based on Braun and Clarke's idea that you need to be deeply involved with the data to do good theme analysis. (Braun & Clarke, 2012:5).

4.3.2. Finding themes

This stage involved coding of all the data collected using ATLAS.ti "open AI coding" feature. The researcher read the transcripts in detail, line by line and systematically coded the relevant sections of the text with data-driven codes to capture the essence of each segment within the participants' own words (e.g., "*limited business support*", "*the skills I acquired from NARYSEC*", "*the financial constraints*", "*a lack of mentorship*" and "*I think it had a positive effect on my community*").

"*Skills and exposure*" and "*self-sufficiency and community contribution*" codes were grouped under motivation for joining the NARYSEC programme theme. Whilst "*mentor check-ins*" and "*support ended too soon*" codes were clustered under the mentorship and support theme. In addition, new codes were developed inductively as new concepts arose during the coding process and without forcing the data to fit into preconceived or predetermined categories. The codes that were deemed worthy of additional definition or clarification, the research team wrote a short definition or comment for each code in the "Code Manager" column in ATLAS.ti to provide clarity on what the researchers intended when they used each specific code.

Codes developed for the first round of coding were then categorised by similarity in meaning using ATLAS.ti software to identify thematic groups based on the coding for patterns among participants. The project was an iterative process with the themes being continually modified and refined during the development of visual maps in ATLAS.ti as the relationship between codes became apparent. The use of inductive coding to guide coding in this stage followed the guidance provided by (Braun & Clarke, 2012:6).

4.3.3. Generating codes

Transcripts were uploaded onto ATLAS.ti, where they were coded line-by-line from the participants' responses and moved sequentially through all transcripts, labelling relevant portions of text using ATLAS.ti software. Statements made by the participants and beliefs or meanings expressed were both coded. The coding process involved an iterative and interpretative process; new codes were developed, modified, and sometimes combined when common patterns among participants became evident. Codes such as "education interrupted (financial barriers)," "mentorship check-ins & accountability," and "access to land/sites" are total codes developed by ATLAS.ti, which identified thirty-eight codes.

4.3.4. Grouping codes to themes

Grouping codes to themes entails the creation of themes for analysis using the coding process. By grouping codes into themes, the researcher collected all the information pertinent to each possible subject (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:194).

In using ATLAS.ti to begin the grouping process, the researcher reviewed all the codes generated during the initial open coding in the Code Manager. Each code was evaluated for conceptual similarity, overlap, and relationship. Similar codes expressing related ideas were grouped into code groups. Codes such as "education disrupted (financial constraints)," "no prior formal business," "rural unemployment context," and "motivation: agriculture interest" were categorised under the theme "Background and Motivation." Similarly, phrases such as "insufficient funding," "inadequate mentoring," and "limited market access" were categorised under the theme of "Implementation, Challenges, and Constraints."

4.3.5. Reviewing themes

Developed the themes into a narrative form that provided an explanation for all of the themes and linked them to the research questions using participant quotes. The themes were examined in further detail during this step, and themes that were related to one another were identified (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:195). The AI coding function on ATLAS.ti undertook a thorough coding process, yielding more than 38 unique codes. The themes were cross-checked against all the data to ensure coherence and internal consistency. Overlapping or weak themes were either merged or refined. For instance, "leadership skills" and "confidence growth" were combined under the theme of the entrepreneurship perspective and indicators.

In moving from the first to the third step according to Braun and Clarke (2012:5-8) thematic analysis process to the fourth stage, the researcher went back to the preliminary themes on ATLAS.ti and reviewed them again, to help assure that the preliminary themes were both conceptual and analytical, and to identify if they reflected the content of the data. The quotes for each code within each preliminary theme were revisited. The researcher thoughtfully reviewed the quote(s) for each code to see if the quote(s) represented a general idea or experience. This was to determine if the themes were working in concert with one another to create an engaging story regarding the real-world experiences of NARYSEC graduates. Themes were evaluated against the study's objectives (e.g., did the themes address (1) participants' perceptions of the programme regarding the perceived efficacy and (2) the obstacles faced by entrepreneurs when initiating and continuing their business ventures?). Upon confirming that all themes were supported by sufficient data, the researcher returned to the raw transcripts to check for any

important ideas or perspectives that may have been missed. This step was critical for the credibility of the study.

4.3.6. Defining and naming themes

In this step in qualitative research, the outcomes or findings were interpreted. The researcher interpreted the findings gleaned from the themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:197). Final themes were clearly defined to capture their essence. Each theme was supported with illustrative quotations. The six finalised themes as depicted in Figure 3 below. After generating themes and sub-themes, the researcher checked the clarity of their names by making sure that each one clearly explained what the theme was about.

4.3.7. Creating the report

The final stage involved going from working analytically with the data in ATLAS.ti to putting that into a report of the results and discussion as described in this Chapter. The researcher used ATLAS.ti export options to create reports of all the coded quotes, themes and supporting quotes for each theme. The researcher then copied these exports into Microsoft Word and organised them according to the organisation of the chapter (for example: themes associated with Research Objective 1, followed by themes associated with Research Objective 2).

4.4. DATA CODING

Coding is the process of giving each piece of data in a data item, such as a document or transcript, a code that represents something or explains the meaning (Saunders *et al.*, 2023:666). Coding sorts out data into groups that have related meanings. The types of coding that are widely used in qualitative research include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:312). Open coding is where data is split into discrete parts, which are examined and compared for similarities and differences. Axial coding follows open coding and is the stage whereby the data which were split apart in open coding are put back together. Selective coding further determines and develops the categories surrounding the central themes, which answer the core research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:312).

For the purposes of this study, an open coding strategy was adopted to keep the analysis grounded in data and relevant to the aims of the study. Analysis followed the six-stage thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) and was conducted using the ATLAS.ti software to provide an orderly system of coding, memo writing and theme development.

Initially, 48 codes were identified through coding. Following a second round of analysis, 38 codes remain. These were categorised into 6 themes, as illustrated in Figure 5

4.5. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The section will document the qualitative research findings based on the data collected via semi-structured interviews with NARYSEC members in the Free State province. The first part of the interview guide was about getting basic demographic information from the participants. The purpose of these questions was to give some background information about the participants who took part in the study, such as their age, gender, level of education, training experience, and current economic or business situation. It is important to know the demographic profile of the participants because it helps us understand their backgrounds and helps us understand the results that follow in this chapter.

4.5.1. Age grouping of participants

Table 3 below illustrates the age representation of participants.

Table 4: Age grouping of participants

Age category (in years)	Number of participants	Percentage %
18-25	5	43%
26-30	4	33%
31-35	2	25%
Total:	11	100%

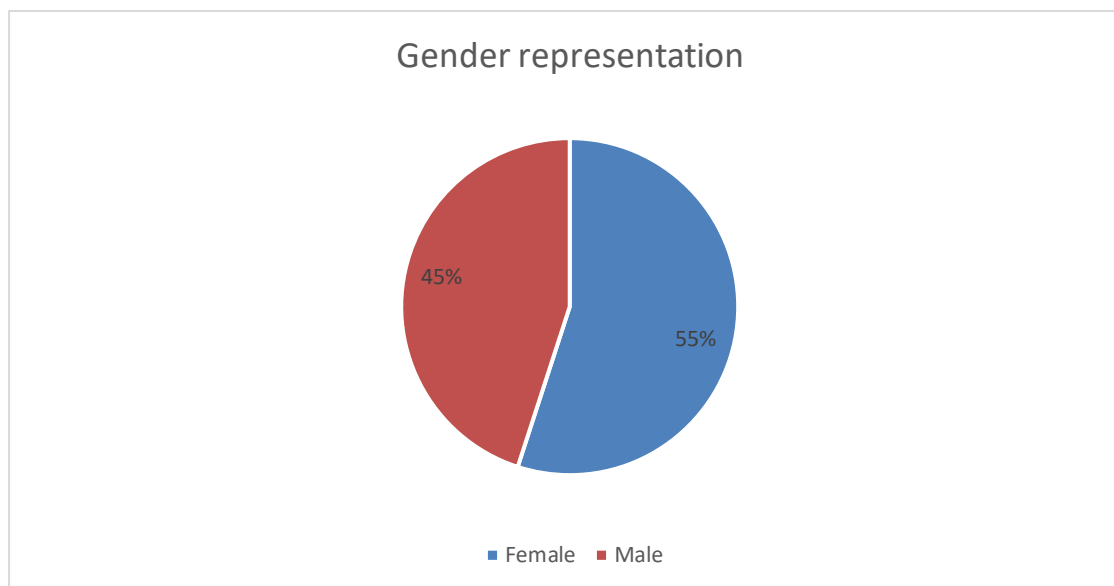
Source: Compiled by researcher

The youth involved in the study were aged between 18 and 35 years, as required for NARYSEC recruitment (DALRRD:2022). The largest group of participants (43%) were aged 18-25, the second largest group (33%) were aged 26-30, and the smallest group (25%) were aged 31-32. The participants' ages reflect that the programme is youth-focused and targets unemployed rural youth at the beginning of their economic life cycle, when they are likely to be most active economically (Mbuya *et al.*, 2016:2).

4.5.2. Gender representation

The figure below illustrates the gender spread of the participants.

Figure 1: Gender representation



Gender is another important demographic factor for determining whether youth development programmes like NARYSEC are reaching a diverse population or not. Of the eleven students who were interviewed during this study, six of them (or 55%) were females, and five of them (or forty-five percent) were males. As a result, there was a slightly greater percentage of females participating in NARYSEC, in line with the National Recruitment policy of NARYSEC, where an active effort has been made to recruit young females to help support the efforts of promoting gender equality through rural empowerment projects (DLRRD, 2022).

4.5.3. Municipal districts

The table below illustrates the district representation of the participants.

Table 5 District

District Municipality	Number of participants	Percentage%
Fezile dabi	3	28%
Lejweleputswa	4	36%
Thabo Mofutsanyana	4	36%
Total:	11	100%

Source: Compiled by researcher

Three districts (Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana) were selected as participants for this research, as they reflect some of the core districts that implemented the NARYSEC programme within a range of rural to peri-urban settings across the Free State

Province, with a similar high level of youth unemployment, as each area is characterised by the same or similar socio-economic challenges.

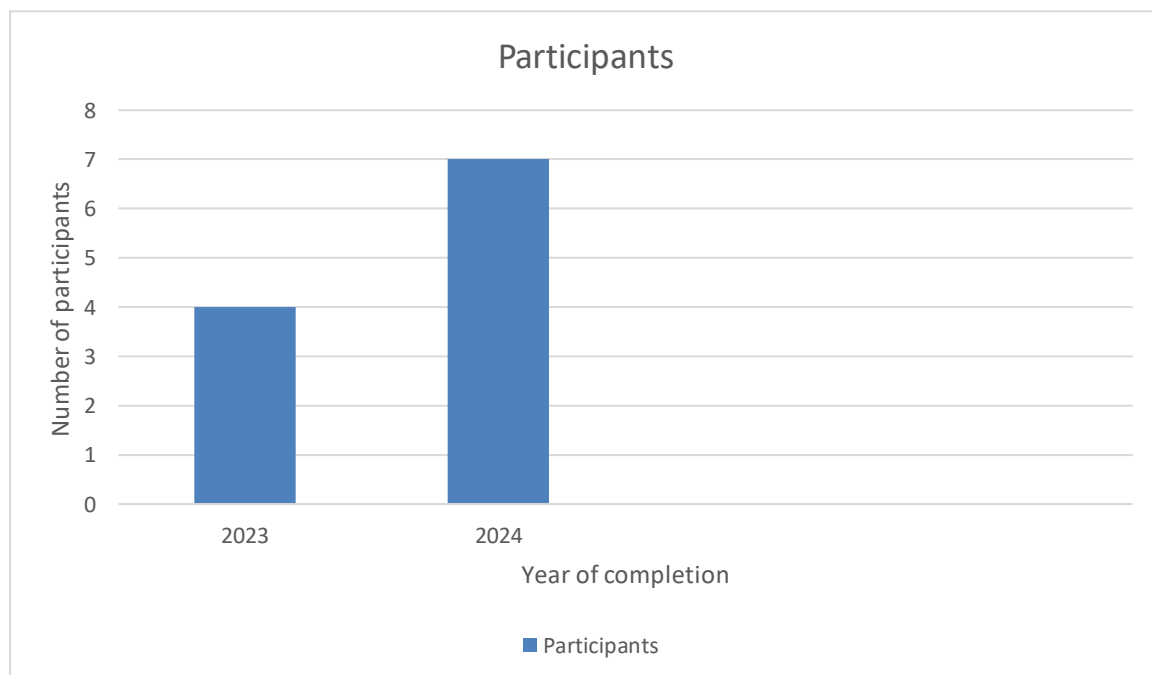
The inclusion of participant representations from different districts in this study allows the results to be transferred to other areas within the province. It shows the NARYSEC programme's presence does not solely rely on one area of the province but instead has a large provincial presence as it provides support to regional growth and skill equity.

Interviews were carried out with a total of eleven participants across the study districts: three from Fezile Dabi, four from Lejweleputswa, and four from Thabo Mofutsanyana. A slightly greater proportion of interviewees from Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana may have been due to this district's historical youth participation in agricultural projects and formal development programmes (Henning *et al.*, 2022:3).

4.5.4. Completion dates of participants

The figure below depicts the completion dates of participants

Figure 2: Completion dates of participants



The NARYSEC programme has been developed as a disciplined youth development process that includes vocational skills and entrepreneurial education, in addition to its educational components. Participants were required to meet certain behavioural, academic, and practical standards to successfully complete the programme while receiving a stipend from the department

for the duration of their participation in the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development (DLRRD, 2022)

Participants in the NARYSEC programme are expected to consistently attend classes and adhere to the programme's disciplined code of conduct throughout the programme duration, emphasising punctuality, teamwork, discipline, and values that were established during the initial National Youth Leadership Programme (NYLDP) first phase. Participants are also registered for National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels 2–4 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes and have successfully completed coursework and practical training in the agriculture area of study. Upon completion of these experiences, participants take part in an Entrepreneurship Readiness Assessment, assessing their ability to prepare a business plan, perform market analysis, and manage finances, through partnerships between NARYSEC and organisations such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA).

4.5.5. Educational level

Table 5 below indicates the educational level of participants.

Table 6: Educational level of participants

Qualifications	Number of participants	NQF level
National certificate: Crop production	2	NQF L2
National certificate: Poultry production	3	NQF L3
National certificate: Plant production	4	NQF L4
National certificate: Mixed farming	2	NQF L2

Source: Compiled by researcher

The table shows that most of the participants studied plant production, followed by poultry production, then mixed farming and crop production. Participants completed a qualification that was recognised by a TVET college or SETA for work purposes; most were at levels NQF Level 2–4, such as mixed farming, crop production, poultry production, and plant production. Both theory and hands-on experience were provided in these programmes so students could utilise their agricultural knowledge in various ways, including community projects, cooperatives and small-scale farms.

The focus on agriculture, from the many vocational fields offered through the NARYSEC Programme reflects a choice based on research identifying the low participation rates of young

people in agriculture due to perceptions of it as unappealing and old-fashioned (Geza *et al.*, 2021:1). The participants in this study, however, indicated that prior experience with and interest in agriculture were the main influences on their application to this stream of the NARYSEC Programme, showing an increasing recognition of the potential of agriculture for entrepreneurship.

4.5.6. Business types

Table 7: Business types

Participants	Business classification	direct quotations
P1	Mixed farming	<i>'No formal business before NARYSEC, but I am currently doing mixed farming, I have a vegetable garden, and I am raising chickens to sell to the people in my neighbourhood. It's still a very small operation; however, it brings me a little money each week'</i>
P2	Piggery	<i>'I am operating a small piggery. I started with 3 pigs and will be expanding my operation as soon as I can get additional funding'</i>
P3	Poultry farming	<i>'I am involved in poultry farming. I started with a few chicks after I finished the programme, and I am currently working on learning how to take care of them so I can generate more income'</i>
P4	Poultry farming	<i>'Like everyone else, I am also involved in poultry. I began small, but I hope to begin to grow my business if I can get buyers and support for the chicken feed.'</i>
P5	Poultry farming	<i>'It isn't much of an operation right now, but I am proud that I am using the skills I acquired through NARYSEC. with the little im making, im planning to buy more chicks, grow them and sell as I have customers in the community'</i>
P6	Crop farming	<i>"I am in the crop farming business with the other participants. we plant corn and vegetables as they are available by season"</i>
P7	Plant production	<i>'We formed a small cooperative and started to focus on producing plants. We produce and sell in our local market.'</i>
P8	Poultry farming	<i>"I have been doing poultry full-time since I completed the training. It has been challenging, especially since the cost of feed is high, but at least I have the education and experience I gained from the training to help me succeed'</i>
P9	Plant production	<i>"I have focused on the production of plants.'</i>
P10	Plant production	<i>"I currently have a vegetable garden where i am producing vegetables and selling them whenever I have a harvest'.</i>

P11	Plant Production	<i>"I have a vegetable garden."</i>
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Source: Compiled by researcher

As shown in Table 6, most young people indicated they were involved in one of the following agriculture-related ventures: poultry, crop, plant, or mixed farming enterprises. The quotes provided below capture their venture(s) in their own words.

The prevalence of agricultural businesses among participants is similar to findings from Mapunda *et al.* (2022:70). They report that an increasing number of South African youth view small-scale agriculture as a feasible entry point into entrepreneurial endeavours if provided with adequate training and resources.

The abundance of poultry and plant production ventures among participant businesses reflects the lower barrier to entry associated with starting this type of business. As noted by Fatoki (2020:229), many youths prefer business ventures that require less money to begin and allow for quicker turnaround time and greater cash flow. These characteristics render poultry and vegetable farming as excellent choices for young entrepreneurs transitioning from entrepreneurial training to self-employment.

According to Botha & Middelburg (2023:94), both the local demand environment and the local context influence young people's business choices. Businesses related to food and/or food consumption continue to be more resilient in economically strained rural communities, thereby providing ongoing markets for products/services sold by youth. Additionally, Niekerk *et al.* (2024:7) emphasise that young rural people choose businesses based on their previous experience or knowledge base, the environmental context in which they live or work, and the availability of resources, they engage in a form of entrepreneurship where they use what they already know or possess to provide solutions to problems or satisfy the needs of others within their community.

4.6. RESPONSE RATE

The term "response rate" is used in research studies to refer to the proportion of those invited to participate in the research study who did participate (compared to all the people that were invited or expected to take part) and is based on the idea of "the proportion of actual participants, out of all the possible participants" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:187). High response rates are generally seen as an indicator of strong participant involvement in the study and are seen to enhance the

credibility and representativeness of the results, whereas low response rates are typically viewed with concern regarding potential biases and limitations to the generalisability of the results.

The researcher contacted and invited 15 participants. Out of the 15 invited participants, fifteen (15) from the NARYSEC Programme consented to take part in the study's semi-structured interviews. However, only eleven (11) participated in the online semi-structured interviews, with each participant lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. All participants were chosen purposefully based on their participation in the programme and their experience as entrepreneurs after leaving the programme. The response rate resulted in an approximate response rate of 73%. Given that the response rate achieved for this study was regarded as acceptable for a qualitative study, the response rate allowed sufficient depth and diversity of views to enable the achievement of the research objectives. The eleven (11) participants represented the three (3) districts in the Free State Province of South Africa, specifically Fezile Dabi District Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, and Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality; therefore, the results obtained for this study reflect the diversity of regional experiences and programme outcomes.

4.7. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

ATLAS.ti was utilised to create the Word Cloud. The Concepts function in ATLAS.ti was meant to find and extract noun phrases, list them, and rank them by how often they appear. I noted potential recurrent words, which were business, training, skills, support, and funding, were evident throughout the data and supported through the word cloud generated from ATLAS.ti. as shown in Figure 3. This created the Concepts Word Cloud, which is the basis for answering the study question.

Business, training, skills, support, and funding opportunities are all interdependent and very important variables for determining if entrepreneurial training results in a tangible business outcome and as research has shown that training develops competency; however, it is not uncommon for the trained individual to be unable to implement their business due to lack of support and access to funding (Bischoff *et al.*, 2020:369).

[illegible]

Figure 4: ATLAS.ti. Thematic analysis

The screenshot displays the ATLAS.ti software interface for a project titled "MINI DISSERTATION-MOJAPELE". The interface is organized into several main sections:

- Top Bar:** Contains standard Windows application icons and a "Live Chat" button.
- File Menu:** Includes options like File, Home, Search & Code, Analyze, Import & Export, Tools, and Help.
- Toolbars:**
 - Import/Export:** Icons for Twitter Import, Evernote, Reference Manager, Survey, Social Network Comments, Codebook, and Document Groups.
 - Analysis:** Icons for SPSS Export, Statistical Data, Codebook, and Document Groups.
- Explore Panel (Left):**
 - Search bar.
 - Tree view showing the project structure:
 - MINI DISSERTATION-MOJAPELE
 - Documents (11)
 - Codes (38)
 - Memos (0)
 - Networks (0)
 - Document Groups (0)
 - Code Groups (6)
 - Background & Motivations (6)
 - Entrepreneurship Perspectives & Indicators (4)
 - Implementation, Challenges & Constraints (4)
 - Mentorship & Support Structures (4)
 - Recommendations for Programme Implementation (4)
- Code Manager Panel (Middle):**
 - Search bar for "Search Code Groups".
 - Table of code groups:

Name	Count
Background & Motivations	6
Entrepreneurship Perspectives & Indicators	8
Implementation, Challenges & Constraints	7
Mentorship & Support Structures	4
Recommendations for Programme Implementation	7
Skills & Training Outcomes	6
- Concepts Panel (Right):**
 - Search bar for "Search Entities".
 - Section: "Show codes in group Implementation, Challenges & Constraints".
 - Table of codes:

Name	Grounded	Density	Groups
Business attempts & side...	0	0	[Implementation, Challenges & Constraints]
Financial management & r...	0	0	[Implementation, Challenges & Constraints]
Infrastructure/water/weath...	0	0	[Implementation, Challenges & Constraints]
Local relevance of practical...	0	0	[Implementation, Challenges & Constraints]
Mindset shift to entrepren...	0	0	[Implementation, Challenges & Constraints]
Use of planning & budgeti...	0	0	[Implementation, Challenges & Constraints]
 - Buttons: Diagram, Preview, Comment.
- Comment Panel (Bottom):**
 - Section: "Comment:".
 - Select an item to show its comment.
- Status Bar (Bottom):**
 - 38 codes, 7 filtered codes.
 - Windows taskbar with system clock (20:29, 01/10/2025) and language (ENG INTL).

As per figure 4 above, Initially, 48 codes were identified through coding using ATLAS.ti software. Following a second round of analysis, 38 codes remained. These were categorised into 6 themes as shown in figure 5. Each theme is further detailed below, accompanied by supporting quotations from the interview data.

Figure 5: Themes



Source: Researcher's own

Table 8: Themes and codes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Background and Motivation	• Disruption of education (due to lack of money) • No formal business experience • Unemployment in rural areas • Motivation through skills and exposure • Interest in agriculture as a motivator • Being self-sufficient and helping others in the community

2. Entrepreneurship Perspectives & Indicators	• Entrepreneurship means being independent and taking the lead. • Focus on creating jobs • Ability to strategise for business • Understanding money • Taking the lead and sticking with it • Growth in leadership and confidence • Making money / business growth • Getting involved in networking and mentoring
3. Skills & Training Outcomes	• Leadership and soft skills • Planning and marketing for businesses • Managing money • Sectoral practical training (poultry, plants, and agro processing) • Learning on your own and looking for knowledge
4. Mentorship & Support Structures	• Check-ins with your mentor and being accountable • The support ended too quickly. • Need for follow-up after the programme • There are no funds or investors.
5. Implementation, Challenges & Constraints	• Mindset change to that of an entrepreneur • Business attempts and side jobs • Planning and budgeting are useful. • Managing money and resources is hard. • Challenge of getting land and sites • Challenge with infrastructure, water, and weather
6. Recommendations for Programme Improvement	• Ongoing mentorship • Funding sources and seed money • Digital and tech skills Localised hands-on training • Making cooperatives and linking them to markets

	• Make facilitators more available and make group work better. • Better communication
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Source: Researcher's own

These six themes, as depicted in Table 7 above, were grouped into three sets, based on the two studies' objectives, which are to explore the lived experiences of NARYSEC participants on their perceived efficacy of the programme after completing the programme in enhancing their entrepreneurial skills. Secondly, to determine challenges encountered by NARYSEC participants in starting and sustaining their own businesses. Since the themes reflect the participants' "lived experience" and perceptions of how NARYSEC training helped develop their entrepreneurial endeavours. Themes 1 to 3 represent the participant's subjective experience and how the NARYSEC training affected their entrepreneurial journey, which reflects Research Objective 1. These themes represented codes related to personal motivation, the acquisition of business and practical skills, and the evolution of an entrepreneurial identity. In addition to appreciating the opportunity to learn about business management, leadership and agriculture, participants believed that these provided them the tools to become self-employed and economically independent.

The findings are consistent with the research objectives. Motivational factors were identified as one of the most important factors, as stated by Alipour *et al.* (2025). The author indicated that motivational factors such as goal orientation and self-efficacy have a significant impact on developing an entrepreneurial identity. The participants' ability to gain business and practical skills supported finding that a targeted training programme increased both the entrepreneurial orientation and self-efficacy among South African youth (Awotunde & Aregbeshola, 2025:3)

Research Objective 2 is reflected in Themes 4–6, which relate to the reality that exists for NARYSEC graduates after they have completed the programme. There were common challenges experienced by many of the NARYSEC graduates, including a lack of adequate mentoring, limited access to start-up funds, and challenges associated with the process of implementing the programme. The discussion among participants highlighted some of the ways that NARYSEC could improve the programme, including continuous mentoring support, stronger collaboration between stakeholders, and improving access to markets and start-up funding.

Mentoring is an important factor in developing the entrepreneurial confidence and direction necessary for the establishment and management of a new enterprise, and the participants

indicated that They did not obtain sufficient assistance in this matter. As stated by Nabi *et al.* (2019:13), mentoring has been shown to contribute to the formation of entrepreneurial identity and the development of resilience amongst aspiring entrepreneurs.

Accessibility to initial funding also presented a barrier to the participants' ability to apply their training to actual business ventures. In this regard, the finding regarding the lack of funding opportunities available to aspiring entrepreneurs in South Africa is consistent with the findings of Baloyi (2022:1-2).

Theme 1: Background and Motivation

Prior to the NARYSEC programme, all the participants had completed grade 12, while other participants did not engage in any employment activities; others had enrolled in TVET colleges but could not complete their post-metric studies due to financial reasons. Not one of the participants had a business or managed a business prior to their joining the NARYSEC programme. The common interest among the participants was their desire to foster self-sufficiency in themselves and progress in their communities.

"I'm from a small town... full of unemployment... I started piggery but got discouraged along the way." (P1)

"After completing high school, I completed a business studies course. I have had a keen interest in agriculture and animal production. Unfortunately, I did not have formal working experience per se, instead focused on practical work skills that would enable me to into agriculture." (P4)

"Before joining NARYSEC, I was helping my grandmother with her little vegetable garden. I didn't have a job, and I didn't go further after matric." (P11)

Many of them entered the programme with the hope that they would learn skills and obtain resources which would enable them to set up their own businesses, create employment and contribute to the economy. There was a feeling on the part of some of the participants that the programme was a pathway out of poverty and unemployment, especially in those rural areas where opportunities were limited.

The participants' socio-economic disadvantage was shown to be one of the primary factors motivating participation in the NARYSEC programme; in many cases, participants were unable to afford to continue with education and therefore were lacking in employment opportunities and had

no activities to engage in with their lives. These findings support the existing literature regarding how the pressures of socio-economic disadvantage can lead young people to engage in entrepreneurship either as an alternative to employment or as a survival mechanism.

Youth in developing countries are often driven toward entrepreneurship by necessity (OECD, 2017:26). The same is true for rural youth in South Africa, according to Lose (2023:69); these youth are motivated to pursue entrepreneurship primarily because they are faced with poverty and unemployment, resulting in an internal motivation to "do something" productive with their time.

The finding is consistent with Grigorescu (2016:792), who reported that low-income family students are motivated to pursue entrepreneurial education based on a combination of high levels of need for achievement and self-efficacy, especially when there is little opportunity for career advancement through traditional means.

"...to explore opportunities in agriculture."(P1)

"I had to drop out due to financial difficulties... began exploring entrepreneurship, informally buying stock and marketing products... to work toward financial independence." (P3)

"I saw it as an opportunity to gain skills, mentorship, and exposure." (P3)

"I felt it aligned with my vision of self-reliance and community contribution. The rate of unemployment is high, so I thought starting a business could help other youth in my community." (P2)

"Prior to engaging with the NARYSEC programme, I was not engaged with anything. I had completed primary agriculture programmes at a TVET College." (P6)

"I wanted to have a better life. I wanted to get into farming as I knew that was something that I grew up seeing in my community."(P10)

This theme reveals that economic vulnerability and skills development were central motivators, especially among participants from rural Free State towns.

Theme 2: Entrepreneurship perspectives & Indicators

Participants defined entrepreneurship as self-reliance, independence, and job creation rather than simply profit-making. They viewed entrepreneurs as problem-solvers and change agents within their communities. Indicators of entrepreneurial development—such as business planning,

financial literacy, leadership, and persistence were mentioned across several interviews. These findings align with the programme's goal of promoting youth self-sufficiency.

Most of the participants had little or no understanding of entrepreneurship before they entered the NARYSEC programme, which mostly related to informal trading or small business in the context of their community. Their understanding of entrepreneurship was also influenced by social perceptions, which correlate entrepreneurship with acquiring wealth, with risk, with risk-taking, and, while it is regarded as a last resort, they have, as it were, a plan B in case they can find no normal job. Mlotshwa & Murimbika, 2023:142, found that in South Africa, many entrepreneurs pursue businesses due to few job opportunities and/or a need to be financially independent, highlighting the backup aspect of the entrepreneurial path. However, this perception changed significantly through their participation in NARYSEC. Participants stated that through structured training, mentorship and practical involvement, they had a more nuanced and strategic understanding of entrepreneurship. The interviewees also identified financial management, with budgeting, pricing and reinvestment in products as an indicator of successful entrepreneurship.

"Entrepreneurship means independence, problem-solving, and creating opportunities for myself and my community." (P3)

"It's about giving back... and creating your own opportunities." (P7)

"Ability to run a business sustainably, financial literacy... growth in confidence, leadership." (P3)

"Develop and implement a business plan... budgeting is key." (P8)

"I think the measure of youth entrepreneurship development should not always be the number of businesses started, but how many are still standing after two or three years." (P11)

"I learned to draft a business plan and understand financial requirements." (P5)

"Another major indicator is if they can innovate or grow beyond simply survival-level enterprises." (P10)

Theme 3: Skills and training outcomes

Every participant discussed training as a major outcome of the programme. The most frequently cited skills included financial management, business planning, leadership, and practical agricultural skills that had changed their confidence, their career paths and their readiness to go into self-employment, as highlighted by respondents. The confidence and willingness to engage

in agri-entrepreneurial activities are enhanced through the type of agri-entrepreneurial training, including such components as business planning and financial management, that can be developed to improve the youth's intentions to pursue farming as a business venture and not just for survival (Nade & Malamsha, 2021:1).

This supports findings that participants viewed the acquisition of new skills from Training as a primary objective, and that these newly acquired skills also influenced their readiness to enter self-employment.

Most of the respondents had little or no business knowledge before going on to the course. They regarded this training as a set of skills which had given them a foundation of practical tools which they might use to prepare and plan, and possibly run, their own businesses. Some participants complemented NARYSEC's training with self-learning, using books and online resources to continue improving their business skills. This theme demonstrates that the programme successfully enhanced employability and entrepreneurial readiness literature indicates that education and training in entrepreneurship increase the individual's confidence, skills and increase their intentions to set up an enterprise or find a job (Strampe & Rambe, 2024:2).

"We covered financial management, marketing, and business planning." (P3)

"Training covered business planning and agriculture-related activities." (P5)

"The practical training was hands-on, and we had opportunities to apply what we learned, particularly at the farms." (P8)

"Self-learning—reading books, watching podcasts, and actively seeking information—has helped a lot." (P1)

Theme 4: Mentorship & support structures

Mentorship emerged as one of the most influential yet inconsistently implemented components of the NARYSEC programme. Participants reported that mentorship during NARYSEC training was initially structured and motivational, often including regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and encouragement from facilitators or appointed mentors. Nonetheless, they consistently drew attention to the fact that this support was withdrawn suddenly at the end of the training phase of the programme, so that they felt isolated and unsupported in the implementation phase of their respective enterprises.

"One of the mentors was supportive... checked in with us frequently.... kept me accountable." (P1)

“Support dropped too soon after the training... practicals were outside of my province.” (P3)

“There was no follow-up, no post-training check-ins... extremely disappointing.” (P9)

The support through mentorship, during the training programme, did create motivation, discipline, and self-confidence, but the lack of sustainable follow-up post-programme meant a loss of development focus long-term. Participants experienced being “left alone” in the post-training phase, especially when inherent obstacles such as lack of funding, access to land, and marketing opportunities were encountered.

This gap did indicate a strong suggestion for the need for structured mentorship post-training, such that the mentors continued to supply advisory support, networking and performance monitoring together with opportunity and outcome evaluation.

However, while this approach successfully builds confidence and accountability during the training period, the failure of the programme to promote mentorship nurtured post-graduation reduces the potential for sustainable youth entrepreneurship.

The findings suggest that institutionalising long-term mentorship partnerships, potentially in collaboration with entities such as SEDA, NYDA, and local municipalities, would enhance the post-exit success of youth enterprises.

Through mentorship, the confidence of individuals to take entrepreneurial action is increased as they are encouraged to continue pursuing their venture through adversity; develop their ability to recognise and capitalise on opportunities; and foster a level of resilience that together can support long-term success in entrepreneurship (Schmutzler *et al.* 2018:880).

Theme 5: Implementation and challenges

The theme Implementation and challenges captures the realities faced by NARYSEC graduates as they attempted to translate their training into functional enterprises. Implementation is defined as the extent to which participants can apply the skills, knowledge, and entrepreneurial mindset learned in the course in real life (Rudd *et al.*, 2008:21). However, participants found their expansion constrained by many environmental and structural barriers as well as financial constraints.

Most participants reported initial enthusiasm and a mindset shift following the programme, describing themselves as “self-starters” or “job creators.” Yet, many found it difficult to operationalise their ideas because of resource shortages and structural barriers.

“Boosted my confidence, discipline, and focus... I now see myself as a job creator.” (P3)

“I started a small business selling perfumes as a side hustle.” (P2)

“There was a lack of continued engagement and follow-up.” (P2)

“Faced water shortages at the garden.” (P4)

“Access to financial support, proper seed funding, and real-life exposure to the business environment are also critical.” (P9)

A recurring constraint was access to land and production sites—a fundamental requirement for agricultural and plant-production ventures. Several participants reported being forced to operate from backyards or small borrowed plots, which limited scalability. Numerous prospects for youth in agripreneurship exist; nevertheless, they are impeded by both external and internal constraints. The challenges encompass, among others, negative perceptions of the industry and insufficient access to resources and skills, including financing, land, infrastructure, networking, and mentorship. The process of setting up a business is challenging for entrepreneurs and frequently deters individuals from achieving success, particularly those without access to or ownership of resources (Henning *et al.*, 2022:2)

“Land access—many youths operate from backyards... formal access is difficult.” (P1)

“I’m still struggling to find land; we ended up planting at home, where space and water are not enough.” (P4)

Another challenge concerned the local relevance of practical training. Some practical components were conducted outside participants’ provinces, meaning that climatic and market conditions differed from their home environments. Consequently, when participants returned, they found it difficult to adapt the learned techniques to local realities.

“The training we did in another province didn’t match our conditions here; what works there doesn’t work in our soil and weather.” (P7)

Theme 6: Recommendations for programme improvement

Most participants provided feedback on how the NARYSEC programme needed to be improved to have a better impact on entrepreneurial development. Participants saw the programme as an opportunity valuable to them but expressed frustration with certain operational gaps. Their recommendations were as follows:

“Ongoing mentorship... platforms to present ideas to investors... start-up capital... include digital/tech-based training.” (P9)

“Improve access to funding and networking; digital marketing modules.” (P4)

“Increase facilitators and improve group work.” (P6)

“Keep practicals within home provinces; support co-ops; access to land/sites.” (P3)

“Connect the youth with successful businesses/cooperatives to farmers, this will help us get started and grow” (P11)

Access to start-up capital and resources was regularly flagged as an issue. Participants said they lacked the necessary funds and resources to start their companies or to make them successful, because, although they completed this course, they had not received any funding from any institution to put their training into effect. The research found that the training improved the "financial mental models" of the entrepreneurs; this improvement allowed them to better use their limited financial resources, make better plans with those resources, and to still start their businesses even if there was no outside financing available (Bischoff *et al.*, 2020:369).

Many participants felt that there was limited support in the form of mentoring once the training phase of the programme was over. The participants suggested that there could be some co-operation with local entrepreneurs to provide this continual service of mentoring. Nabi *et al.* (2019:13) assert that entrepreneurial growth is dependent on the ability to provide contextualized mentoring on an ongoing basis.

Table 8 below summarises participant recommendations from the empirical investigation.

Table 9: Recommendations

Participants	Recommendations as made by the research participants
P1	<i>"Land access- many youths use backyards or inherited plots: access to land is difficult".</i> <i>"Leadership training should be longer for at least a year at a military based base that is mostly safe; and skills development should happen there, base is conducive as you would have agriculturally based practices and that is more beneficial for the youth".</i>
P2	<i>"Continuous mentorships, seed funding, linkages to funding and capital sources, possibly digital/technology related of training".</i> <i>"Connect youth with sponsors".</i>
P3	<i>"Keep practical training in respective home province and recognising that local conditions are different".</i> <i>"Give extending mentorship follow ups post trainings".</i> <i>"Facilitate cooperative formation with access to land and sites and direct funding".</i> <i>"Strengthen local market linkage marketing".</i>
P4	<i>"Only thing I would strengthen was advanced marketing knowledge and strategies".</i> <i>"The support would be enriched if participants progressed into the programme with presence of entrepreneur to mentor participants through every step".</i> <i>"Long-term consistent one-on-one mentorship support is valuable".</i>
P5	<i>"You should improve follow ups and support post-programme".</i> <i>"Strengthen relationships with community structures, adequate support from facilitators/mentors during the facilitation in the programme, and post-support programme in implementing".</i>

P6	<i>"The programme must consider increased facilitators".</i>
P7	<i>"There could have been a greater effort to accomplish forming an effective group and all members actively engaged business".</i>
P8	<i>"They should consider the quality of the placements for practicals and consider whether the work location offers the learning capacity around skills required".</i>
P9	<i>"If they could continue to provide mentorship and connect some of the right people and continue to provide funding it could change lives".</i>
P10	<i>"Follow-up mentorship post-exit for two years, more comprehensive entrepreneurship training; guarantee access to resource – land and or funding; and programme putting graduates in touch with cooperatives or farmers who are established would assist in speeding up their growth".</i>
P11	<i>"I would say to continue with some mentorship for at least after exit".</i> <i>"Have entrepreneurship courses" .</i> <i>"Give them access to land and funding and connect the youth with successful businesses/cooperatives or farmers, this will help us get started and grow".</i>

Source: Compiled by researcher

4.9. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented and analysed the information the researcher gathered from the interviews, focusing on the lived experiences of NARYSEC youth graduates, in relation to how the Programme impacted upon their entrepreneurial development, and post-training outcomes. The reported findings addressed the research question and objectives. The chapter started off by outlining the characteristics of the study participants who were interviewed. Participants generally described NARYSEC as beneficial in instilling an entrepreneurial mindset, business planning capability, and sectoral skills, especially in agriculture. The NARYSEC programme delivered a

package of technical skills acquired through vocational qualifications, such as crop production, mixed farming, plant production and poultry production were practical job-relevant skills that NARYSEC participants could apply directly in their communities. Alongside these technical skills, participants identified discipline, communication, teamwork and leadership as being developed through the structured training and life-skills components of the programme. However, gaps remain around funding, land/site access, and mentorship.

Consistently throughout this study, participants reported that one of the most limiting factors to expanding their enterprises after completing the NARYSEC programme was the lack of access to capital (funding), an adequate market for their products, and/or the lack of adequate post-programme mentoring. These issues are the focus of the next chapter of this mini dissertation, which examines the relationship between the findings of this study and those of other researchers examining the topics of youth entrepreneurship.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four provided an overview of the experiences of National rural youth service corps graduates, and while many National rural youth service corps graduates were successful in transitioning to small business owners, many other graduates continue to experience ongoing barriers to achieving success as entrepreneurs.

This chapter provided a summary of and discussion of the major findings and recommendations for improvement based on the study "Exploring the impact of the National rural youth service corps programme on entrepreneurial development in the Free State." This study was designed to identify the lived experiences of National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates to assess how the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme impacted their entrepreneurial capability and assisted them in developing their businesses post-graduation.

In addition to providing a summary and discussion of the major findings and recommendations for improvement, this chapter also revisits the major findings from the thematic analysis, which was completed using ATLAS.ti software and link those findings to the research objectives and the literature previously reviewed. The chapter included practical recommendations for improving the design, planning and delivery of the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme to promote youth entrepreneurship.

5.2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Chapter 1 covered the objectives that were set for this study. Chapter 2 looked at what other authors have written about the youth entrepreneurial development. Chapters 3 and 4 discussed the qualitative methodology that was applied to this study. This section will discuss how the study's objectives were met, giving detailed examples from each chapter.

Chapter 1

The main objective of this chapter was to provide an outline of the study's background, define the problem with which the research study dealt, the research objectives and the significance of the study was explained. The chapter provided a base from which the rationale for studying the impact of the NARYSEC programme can be understood.

The issue of youth unemployment was discussed, and its persistence in rural regions of South Africa and further described how entrepreneurial opportunities could be an effective way to increase youth participation in the economy (Mohlaole & Malebana, 2021:2).

The chapter also presented several research objectives based on assessing participants' experiences, determining facilitating and hindering factors and exploring the impact of the programme in developing the readiness of participants to become entrepreneurs. Concepts such as skills development, training implementation and obstacles such as lack of support or access to land have been explained in both theoretical and practical models of entrepreneurial education.

Chapter 1 identified the research question, explained why the study is important and established a solid base from which to investigate how training, assistance and access to resources affect the entrepreneurial paths of NARYSEC participants.

Chapter 2

The aim of the literature review was to identify what influences youth entrepreneurial development and specifically, the elements of mentorship, training and support services as they relate to the youth entrepreneurial development process, especially as it is linked to the NARYSEC programme. The literature reviewed assisted in meeting the primary and secondary objectives of this Study.

- **Secondary objective 1**

To gain an understanding of youth entrepreneurial development and how it is measured.

The review identified that youth entrepreneurial development involves multiple dimensions, including economic and social factors. Many researchers have utilised indicators of youth's entrepreneurial development, such as entrepreneurial Intentions, self-efficacy, skills acquisition and actual business start-up activity (Mohlaole & Malebana, 2021:2) as evidence of youth entrepreneurial development. Literature also supports that entrepreneurial self-efficacy plays an important role in determining youth's willingness to start businesses and that successful development for youth goes beyond just training and includes access to markets, financial resources and networks.

While the literature illustrates that there is no single, agreed-upon method to measure youth entrepreneurial development (Swaramarinda *et al.*, 2022:144), scholars propose a series of complementary indicators from conventional business performance measures to psychological, behavioural, and competency measures that are needed for complete entrepreneurial development (Mensah-Williams & Derera, 2023:12).

The overall findings from the literature review indicate that, although many current programmes offer useful training, there are still significant gaps in their implementation, particularly in resource-constrained areas.

- **Secondary objective 2**

To explore the influence of mentorship, training, and support services within the NARYSEC programme, designed to foster youth entrepreneurship.

Results of research indicate that entrepreneurship is more likely to be successfully implemented by entrepreneurs who receive structured training combined with mentoring and/or access to business support (Bischoff *et al.*, 2020:370). Conversely, however, research indicated that, because of insufficient post-training support and funding sources for many publicly funded programmes, such as those located in rural areas of South Africa, there exists an enormous disconnect between acquiring new knowledge and developing a viable business (Wale *et al.*, 2023:47). Specifically, it was stated that mentoring can help build confidence and enhance strategic thinking for youth regarding their businesses (Ncube & Lekhanya, 2022:1).

Chapter 3

This chapter outlines how a qualitative investigation method was utilised to assess the effects of the NARYSEC programme to enhance youth entrepreneurial development in certain districts within Free State province. This chapter further describes the research design and methodology that guided the investigation. A qualitative research method and a research design were utilised to reflect the requirement to understand and report on the lived experiences and beliefs of programme participants.

A literature review was included in the study, which linked theory-based information with empirical data. Literature review was drawn from reliable scholarly sources, mainly from peer-reviewed journals and academic databases such as NWU Library, Google Scholar and EBSCOhost, as they formed the basis for developing a conceptual framework to understand the most significant themes, namely, skills required by entrepreneurs; evaluation of the effectiveness of training; access to support structures; and post-training challenges.

An interpretivist paradigm served as the foundation for the empirical study, as it aimed to capture the subjective realities of youth who participated in the NARYSEC programme. Semi-structured interviews were completed with eleven participants using a purposeful sampling technique that ensured a broad spectrum of viewpoints were represented based on their age, sex, geographical

location, and education level. The time horizon of the research was cross-sectional, as the data collection occurred at one point in time. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data and use of the ATLAS.ti software assisted in the coding and theme development processes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework was used as a guide to identify, analyse and report recurring patterns in the data.

The chapter concluded with a detailed description of the ethical concerns and measures taken to promote the trustworthiness of the study, specifically regarding the concepts of credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is concerned with providing the results of the research, which involved conducting qualitative interviews with 11 participants who attended the NARYSEC programme located throughout three different districts within the Free State (Fezile Dabi, Lejweleputswa and Thabo Mofutsanyana). The researcher used semi-structured one-on-one interviews with participants to gather data about their perceptions of the NARYSEC programme. The researcher developed an interview guide based on the primary objective of the study in order to provide a structure for participants to respond to the researcher's questions related to participants' lived experiences with respect to the training they received, their experiences in attempting to apply the training to entrepreneurial ventures, and their thoughts with respect to ways the NARYSEC programme can be improved.

Qualitative research was considered best suited for addressing the study's objectives, as it allowed the researcher to develop a deep understanding of how the NARYSEC training was perceived and applied by participants in their own entrepreneurial endeavours. As such, the researcher used a qualitative exploratory design to inform her use of a semi-structured interview guide, which contained three sections. The first section of the interview guide allowed the participant to provide demographic information, such as their age, education level, and experience in starting their own business. The second section asked the participant to describe their perceptions of the quality of the training provided by the NARYSEC programme, the skills they felt they learnt as a result of the training, and how relevant the skills they learnt were to their desire to start their own business. The third section of the interview guide requested that the participant identify the challenges he/she experienced after receiving the NARYSEC training, such as accessing funding, obtaining land to start a business, securing a mentor, and providing suggestions for improving the overall delivery of the NARYSEC programme.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Once the transcriptions were complete, the researcher analysed the data using ATLAS.ti. The coding process was informed by the objectives of the study identified in Chapter 1, and thematic analysis was conducted according to the framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006). Themes were developed based on common patterns across participants' responses and organised according to the three primary objectives of the study. The themes are presented in narrative form with verbatim quotes from the transcripts included to support and illustrate the findings.

The themes identified in this chapter represent the lived realities of the participants and will provide an opportunity for the reader to understand the effectiveness of the NARYSEC programme, the barriers faced by the youth post-training, and the recommendations made by the youth to improve the delivery of the NARYSEC programme to foster entrepreneurship among the youth.

5.3. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

National rural youth service corps's qualitative results illustrated a large part of how National rural youth service corps can help develop young people's entrepreneurial foundation and foster positive views on being self-employed. The participants' motivation was based on wanting to be financially independent, contribute to their communities, and expand their enterprises progressively. However, some challenges to developing successful entrepreneurial ventures were evident in the results; namely, poor linkage to markets, a lack of support from mentors after completion of the programme and financial restrictions. Several participants, however, showed determination and initiative by using the knowledge they gained through the National Rural Youth Service Corps to create new sources of income and improve their economic well-being. Therefore, these results illustrate the great potential of government-led youth empowerment programmes to combat unemployment and promote entrepreneurship, as well as their limitations.

5.3.1. Skills and training outcomes

The research revealed that the National rural youth service corps programme had contributed to enabling the youth to be trained in the technical, entrepreneurial and other skills required for agriculture production. The training was found by participants to have increased their confidence, self-reliance and basic business knowledge and as such is evidence of the positive Impact from the programme.

5.3.2. Mentorship and support structures

The research found that the lack of continuous mentoring and support after the training resulted in very few of the participants being able to convert the skills they had learned during their time as trainees into viable businesses. Participants reported that when the formal training period ended, there were no meaningful follow-up support structures (such as business coaching or monitoring) for them to develop their new businesses. The lack of post-training mentorship impacted the participants' sense of continuation, motivation and accountability, and identified a significant gap in the programme's potential for the long-term development of an entrepreneurial culture.

5.3.3. Implementation challenges and constraints

The study found challenges in implementing this programme, specifically that communication was insufficient and logistics created difficulties for work placement. The inability to access productive resources (land, start-up funds and access to markets) limited the participants' capacity to start and sustain their businesses. This highlights the need for improved coordination among the DLRRD, municipalities, the Small Enterprise Development Agency, the Small Enterprise Finance Agency and the National Youth Development Agency.

5.3.4. Entrepreneurship perspectives and indicators

A few students demonstrated an entrepreneurial attitude and resilience; others regarded the programme as an interim job opportunity (i.e., to gain work experience) and not as a route to a long-term business. Differences in perceptions suggest that the programme should be strengthened with respect to its entrepreneurial focus by providing continued access to incubators for new businesses, mentorship, and entrepreneurial development systems.

5.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A number of limitations were found that could have affected the study's generalisability and scope.

- The study was geographically limited to three districts in the Free State, and this limitation may restrict the representation of various points of view from other provinces and districts.
- The use of qualitative methods, whilst rich in insight, may reflect participant subjectivities or the bias of social desire. Participants may have interpreted responses favourably to expectations, and the researcher's own lens of view may also have impacted the analysis and identification of themes/outcomes.
- The researcher engaged participants and beneficiaries of the NARYSEC programme, but less emphasis appears to have been given to stakeholders involved in the programme, such as partners in the private sector, community leaders, policy makers, etc. This lack of

inclusivity renders a less holistic understanding of the NARYSEC programme's stakeholder ecosystem and possible pathways of impact.

5.5 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

5.5.1 Practical Implications

The results of this research have numerous practical implications for Programme developers, training institutions, policymakers and participants of the NARYSEC programme.

The research demonstrated that NARYSEC could help young people become entrepreneurs, but the programme's effects could be even stronger if it were designed better. Policymakers should consider adding modules that focus on entrepreneurship, business support after training, and partnerships with organisations such as NYDA, SEDA and private-sector incubators to ensure that the results last beyond the programme and adding real-world projects, entrepreneurial simulations, and guidance from successful entrepreneurs could help participants become ready to start and run businesses well.

The study emphasised the necessity for programme designers and implementers to integrate the training with entrepreneurial competencies, including financial management, marketing, business planning and digital entrepreneurship. To keep track of long-term entrepreneurial outcomes such as business survival and growth, mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation should be made stronger.

The research emphasised the necessity for NARYSEC participants and beneficiaries to utilise the skills, networks, and discipline gained during the programme to explore entrepreneurial ventures. and indicated that participants who proactively pursue mentorship and external assistance are more inclined to convert training into successful entrepreneurial enterprises.

5.5.2. Theoretical Implications

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on youth empowerment, government-led intervention programmes, and entrepreneurial development.

The research supports the TPB construct of perceived behavioural control. Participants indicated that the development of skills including leadership, communication, problem-solving, and self-

discipline strengthened their confidence in their capacity to initiate and oversee entrepreneurial endeavours. The findings suggest that limited access to financial resources and post-programme support may hinder perceived behavioural control, despite the presence of entrepreneurial intentions. This highlights the significance of external enabling conditions in enhancing perceived behavioural control within the Theory of Planned Behaviour framework.

5.6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the research results, the following recommendations are provided for enhancing the NARYSEC programme's effectiveness:

5.6.1 Increase post-programme support through mentorship and advisory services.

The Department of Land Reform and Rural Development must establish a formal mentoring programme for all National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates. This will involve pairing National rural youth service corps graduates with successful entrepreneurs and professional mentors to assist in the development and refinement of business plans, access to markets and increased enterprise sustainability.

To enhance post-graduation outcomes of the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme, it is recommended that the establishment of formal mentoring networks be implemented. These networks will provide connections between successful entrepreneurs, small enterprise development and finance agencies and National Youth Development Agency and National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates. Additionally, post-training business clinics and peer-based learning opportunities will be available to maintain and further the motivation and long-term growth of the National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates' businesses.

There currently exists an absence of formal mentoring and support systems for National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates once they complete the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme, which results in many graduates facing challenges in maintaining their businesses. The primary challenges include registering the enterprises, obtaining financial assistance and gaining continuing guidance. The findings are in favour of Masha *et al.* (2022:48), who also highlight that mentoring is a key factor in the success of entrepreneurship.

5.6.2. Create access to finances and resources for new entrepreneurs.

It will be vital to engage in collaborative efforts with financial institutions and provincial development agencies to provide a systematic approach to providing finance to those graduates who have demonstrated viable business plans to improve upon post-programme sustainability.

The Department of Land Reform and Rural Development needs to grow its relationships with the mentioned entities, i.e., small enterprise development and finance agency, and the national youth development agency. Grants and loan applications should be made simpler to encourage youth entrepreneur participation and access to funding, land, and other required elements for enterprise growth.

The Department of Land Reform and Rural Development needs to incorporate financial literacy education into its post-training support programme through targeted workshops, training programmes, etc., so that graduates possess the knowledge they need to manage and maintain their businesses successfully.

5.6.3. Support Enterprise Growth through Business Incubation and Market linkages.

Each district should establish a regional business incubator to support National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates continuously and systematically. The incubators will act as development centres for National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates to refine their business plans, improve operational efficiencies and expand their customer base through new and competitive markets. They will also offer National rural youth service corps graduates one-on-one mentoring, technical assistance, access to shared resources (facilities and digital platforms) and other tools to develop innovative products and scalable businesses. This will facilitate the connection between the theoretical skills gained from the National Rural Youth Service Corps and practical application in the world of business. It will also promote entrepreneurial spirit and resilience among National Rural Youth Service Corps graduates.

It is also important to form partnerships with municipalities as well as private sector companies to create sustainable marketing connections for youth-run businesses. This partnership can facilitate purchasing contracts and procurement opportunities where emerging businesses can become part of local supply chains and municipal project workforces. As such, by integrating National rural youth service corps graduates into the existing local economy systems, they are creating sustainable, inclusive economic growth, strengthening community-based economies and contributing to youth unemployment and poverty reduction in the Free State Province.

5.6.4. Enhance Land Access Procedures for Graduates of the National Rural Youth Service Corps.

To provide a way to assist National rural youth service corps graduates looking to pursue an agribusiness venture, the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development should create a formalised framework to determine how best to allocate land to National rural youth service corps alumni for use in their agribusiness ventures. This framework should include a clearly outlined set of criteria and processes for allocating land to graduates; therefore, they may move from being trained to owning an actual business. The Department of Land Reform and Rural Development can accomplish this via current processes such as the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) or local municipal commonage programmes, so that the department can provide a plot of land that is suitable for production and enterprise development, while also providing the graduates with an opportunity to grow their enterprises.

In addition to creating a formalised framework for land allocation, the Department of Land Reform and Rural Development must work to increase its partnership efforts with the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR), local municipalities, and other relevant stakeholders to prioritise youth-led agricultural projects, as part of larger land reform initiatives. This will ensure that National rural youth service corps graduates are fully incorporated into national land reform programmes, leading to long-term food security and the empowerment of youth in rural areas of South Africa, as well as stimulating rural economies through sustainable agrarian transformations.

5.7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The outcome of the research has shown that several aspects require additional, academic-based investigation.

- **Longitudinal studies:** Future research should investigate the entrepreneurial journey of participants longitudinally to determine whether the NARYSEC training has long-term, sustainable effects. Longitudinal investigations will be able to measure how participants' enterprises grow, if their enterprises are viable in the longer term, and the strategies participants develop to adapt to changing business environments.
- **Broaden the geographical focus:** Further research is recommended to widen the geographical focus of the research to incorporate participants from other than the three districts located in Free State Province, in which the research was conducted. Broadening the focus will enable comparative analyses and facilitate the identification of differences within which the programme is implemented and experienced throughout South Africa.

- **A need for multi-stakeholder studies:** Given the structure of the barriers experienced by participants, such as land access, lack of mentors, and lack of funding. There is a need for multi-stakeholder studies, studies that include input from all stakeholders, including government officials, programme implementors, local municipality personnel, and private sector partners. Multi-stakeholder studies will furnish a more comprehensive knowledge of the institutional factors that affect entrepreneurial outcomes.
- **The use of a mixed methods approach:** Future research may use mixed methods to empirically demonstrate the relationships between the various components of entrepreneurial training and entrepreneurial outcomes. Using mixed methods will permit researchers to statistically generalise the results and to triangulate the findings with those generated using qualitative methodologies.

5.8. CONCLUSION

This research indicates that the NARYSEC programme has had a positive effect on enabling rural youth because of developing their skills and encouraging them to grow personally and as entrepreneurs. However, this research also found that graduates' entrepreneurial activity was limited by their inability to obtain necessary resources, including funding and mentorship to help convert their training into viable businesses. This is consistent with other research which demonstrated that successful youth entrepreneurship development requires an integration of training, funding, mentoring, and on-going business support (Chigunta, 2017:13). The findings of this study demonstrate that NARYSEC programme has contributed to the positive empowerment of youth and to reducing poverty in the Free State; however, for these effects to be sustainable over time, National rural youth service corps will need to continue to collaborate with stakeholders, improve resource distribution and implement targeted post-graduation interventions.

The current study is part of a developing body of literature examining youth entrepreneurship and rural development in South Africa. The findings in this study identify three areas that can be used to improve the National rural youth service corps programme: specifically in terms of mentoring, financing and relevance of curriculum. The study's findings suggest the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme has the potential to develop as a more holistic approach for empowering young people economically. Future studies can use the findings from this study to examine the long-term success of businesses supported through the National Rural Youth Service Corps programme and analyse differences in programme outcomes among provinces.

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ANNEXURE A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Exploring the impact of NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province

Introduction

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research project; the interview is expected to last approximately one hour. The purpose of this interview is to Explore your experiences and perceptions on youth entrepreneurial development. You are not obligated to respond to any questions you find uncomfortable. If you experience any discomfort or distress, please inform me so we can pause. You can stop the process and withdraw from the study at any point throughout our discussion.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

(Text in italics represents prompts that can be used if necessary to help participants answer Questions in full.)

Section A- Background information

1. Could you provide a brief description of your background prior to your participation in the NARYSEC programme?

Probes:

- What is your educational history?
- Were you engaged in any business or training prior to NARYSEC?
- What goals did you have at that time?

2. What inspired you to participate in the NARYSEC programme?

Probes:

- Did someone recommend it to you?
- Were you looking for specific opportunities

Section B- Understanding of Youth Entrepreneurial Development

3. What does entrepreneurship signify for you as a youth in South Africa today?

Probe:

- How important is it that young people start their own businesses?

4. What metrics or criteria should be utilised to assess young entrepreneurship development?

Probes:

- What signs or indicators show that a youth has developed entrepreneurial skills?
- Can you give examples from your own experience?

5. In what ways might young individuals be optimally supported in their entrepreneurial endeavours?

Probes:

- Which type of assistance—financial, mentoring, skill development, etc.—is most beneficial?
- What has worked well or not so well in your view?

Section C: Influence of Mentorship, Training, and Support Services

6. Could you elaborate on the training and mentoring you received through the NARYSEC programme?

Probes:

- What role did your mentors play, and who were they?
- What topics or skills were covered in the training sessions?

7. What role did such assistance play in your growth as an entrepreneur?

Probes:

- Did they assist you with business planning or startup?
- Did you ever put what you had learnt into practice?

8. Were there any aspects of the training or mentorship that stood out as especially helpful or unhelpful?

Probes:

- Could you give an example of a time that was especially disappointing or impactful?
- What improvements could be made to those aspects?

Section D: Lived Experiences and Perceived Efficacy

9. How has your experience in the NARYSEC programme influenced your entrepreneurial journey?

Probes:

- What did you notice about how you thought or acted?
- Did it make you feel more confident or motivated?

10. What specific business skills or information did you learn from the programme?

Probes:

- Were they technical skills such as budgeting, marketing etc or soft skills such as leadership)?
- how have you used these skills Since the programme?

11. Do you think the programme did a good job of getting you ready to start or run a business? Why or why not?

Probes:

- What parts of the programme were well covered, and what parts were not?
- Would you recommend the programme to other people ?

12. What recommendations would you make to improve NARYSEC programme?

ANNEXURE B: APPROVAL LETTER



agriculture, land reform
& rural development
Department
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

FREE STATE PROVINCIAL SHARED SERVICE CENTER, Cnr Charlotte Maxeke and Allwal Street, BLOEMFONTEIN 9300 Tel
(051) 400 4200 Cell: 0608851870 email

Dear Ms NM Mojapele

RE: Permission to Conduct Research within the Department

I acknowledge receipt of your request to conduct research and collect data from the Free State (FS) National Rural Service Corps (NARYSEC) participants and officials within FS NARYSEC if necessary, as part of your Master of Business Administration (MBA) studies with North west university. I am pleased to inform you that permission has been granted for you to proceed with your research, subject to the following conditions:

Before the research can commence, you must obtain formal clearance from the relevant Ethics Committee. A copy of the clearance certificate should be submitted to this office as part of the approval process

All information and data collected must be treated with the strictest confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. No sensitive or proprietary information may be disclosed without prior written consent.

Your research must comply with the department policies, including those related to data privacy and ethical standards.

We would appreciate receiving a summary of your research findings upon completion, as they may provide valuable insights relevant to the NARYSEC programme operations.

Should you require any further assistance or have specific requirements related to your research, please feel free to discuss them with me.

I wish you the best of luck in your MBA studies and look forward to learning about the outcomes of your research.

Kind regards,

HLOMPO MORUKA
FREE STATE DIRECTOR: NARYSEC
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM & RURAL DEVELOPMENT
DATE: 25/02/2025

Departement van Landelike Ontwikkeling en Grondhervorming - Umnyango Wazokufutshelwa Kwentindawo Zesemalibaye Ndinguzuko Kwezombaba - Muhesho wa Mvelidiso ya Mahayeni na Mbozbediso ya Mase - Nibweniso ya Nibweniso na Mafikolobaya na Antwako wa Mase - Lefapha la Thabolo la Mase le Ntshwafiso ya Mahayeni - Lefapha la Thabolo la Mahayeni na Mahayeni - Igama ye Thabolo ye Dinagengisa le Phelelelelelele ye Naga - Iiboko luPhuliso leemphandeli nidinguzuko kwentindawo - Umnyango wokuThuthulisa Indawo zesemalibaye nidinguzuko lwelwetha - Ubo Lefapha la Kwentindawo Zesemaphandeli Ndinguzuko Kuzombaba

ANNEXURE C: ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER



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Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>
Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-484
Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

4 August 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) on 4 August 2025, the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title:	Exploring the impact of NARYSEC programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the Free State province																																
Study leader/Supervisor (Principal investigator/Researcher):	Mrs J. Manyapelo	University no.:	20306040																														
Student:	Mrs N.M. Mojapele	University no.:	44379137																														
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N	W	U	-	0	0	7	7	5	-	2	5	-	A	4																			
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Status: S = Submission; R = Re-submission; P = Provisional authorisation; A = Authorisation																																	
Application type:	Single study - Postgraduate research		Risk level: Low/minimal risk																														
Commencement date:	8/4/25																																
Expiry date:	8/4/26																																
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.																																	

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

None.

ANNEXURE D: CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Title of the study: Exploring the impact of the National rural youth service corps programme on youth entrepreneurial development in the free state province

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore how the NARYSEC program has influenced youth entrepreneurship in the Free State Province. The study focuses on the lived experiences of young people like yourself who have taken part in the NARYSEC program. This study is part of a mini dissertation that will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration degree at [North West](#) University.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will voluntarily be interviewed for 40 minutes, and you will be asked if the interview may be recorded. The interview will include questions about your background, your lived experiences during the NARYSEC program, business activities you have engaged in since the completion of the program, as well as recommendations on improving the program.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. No names or identifying information will appear in any report or publication. Data will be stored securely and only accessed by the researcher.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

POPIA Compliance:

Information collected for this research will be reviewed for academic reasons, and outcomes will be published in the public domain.

The researcher will comply with all legal obligations in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 (POPIA) of 2013.

Consent:

Please read and sign below if you agree to participate in the interview.

- I comprehend the study's purpose and the expectations placed on me.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.
- I provide permission for the interview to be audio recorded (only for transcription purposes).

Participant's Name and Surname: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

ANNEXURE E: LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE

RUAN FOURIE

COPYEDITING CERTIFICATE

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL RURAL YOUTH SERVICE CORPS PROGRAMME ON ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

by NM Mojapele

Be it hereby certified that the abovementioned mini-dissertation has been copyedited and proofread for accuracy, clarity, and proper English usage.



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