



Mitigating youth unemployment through government initiatives: The case of Buffalo City, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

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Entrepreneurship serves as a vehicle for inclusive growth and economic development, thereby reducing poverty and mitigating the high unemployment rate in South Africa, where youth unemployment remains among the highest globally. The South African government has adopted encouraging entrepreneurship as a strategic measure to curb the high youth unemployment rate. In support of this strategic mechanism, the government provided tax incentives, financial support, and infrastructure to promote youth entrepreneurship. The study has followed a quantitative research approach. Purposive sampling was used to select 132 youth entrepreneurs within the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) in the Eastern Cape. This study evaluates the effectiveness of these government-led initiatives. The study found that youth entrepreneurship success is strongly supported by tax incentives, financial support, infrastructure, and a conducive business environment. The findings also revealed that the success of youth entrepreneurship ventures contributes to basic infrastructure and helps mitigate the high youth unemployment rate. The success of entrepreneurship further encourages new ventures and reduces youth unemployment even more. Overall, the results also suggested that not all of these government incentives lead to direct employment without the entrepreneurs' success.

Contribution/Originality: This research study contributes to the existing literature by expanding the application of resource dependence and institutional theory to the success of entrepreneurship. This study is one of the very few that have assessed government incentives and their indirect contribution to reducing the high unemployment rate.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of South Africa's biggest challenges is its high unemployment rate. High unemployment continues to negatively affect the societal life of the majority and economic growth. The unemployment rate among South African youth far exceeds the global average, especially in the Eastern Cape, a province known for its economic disadvantage. The lack of job opportunities and high levels of poverty in the provinces further perpetuate youth unemployment. The Department of Statistics has recently released data, which demonstrated that youth unemployment in South Africa is sitting at 66.5%, signaling the need for immediate solutions to this persistent problem (Geza, Ngidi, Slotow, & Mabhaudhi, 2022).

To address this staggering youth unemployment, the South African government established a comprehensive policy framework. This framework is meant to promote entrepreneurship and improve employment opportunities for

South African youth. This has led to the introduction of tax incentives, financial support, infrastructure provisions, and the promotion of entrepreneurial activities to equip South African youth entrepreneurs to start their own business ventures (Litheko, 2021; Ndlovu, Radebe, Mlambo, & Nkonde, 2024). However, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of these government mechanisms, given that youth unemployment continues to rise, and to confirm whether they are significantly alleviating it. There is consensus in the literature that entrepreneurial activities generate employment opportunities and economic inclusion; however, limited research demonstrates how government mechanisms are improving youth entrepreneurship (Musariwa & Tinonetsana, 2023).

Various studies have taken a slightly different view, which seeks to indicate that, above and beyond government initiatives, entrepreneurs must be financially literate to be able to better manage their entrepreneurial funds, to improve the prospects of success rate (Munyuki & Jonah, 2022). Furthermore, the relationship between broader economic conditions in the Eastern Cape and youth entrepreneurial government support requires examining whether this support leads to successful entrepreneurial ventures that significantly improve youth employment.

There is a long-standing agreement in the literature that entrepreneurs play a critical role in the stimulation of economic growth and employment opportunities, especially in provinces marked by high youth unemployment, like the Eastern Cape (Mutanda, Lekhanya, & Moyo, 2018). Despite government initiatives to equip entrepreneurial establishments, the relationship between already-supported entrepreneurs and improved employment in the province remains insufficiently explored, as a result of limited comprehensive research focusing on government initiatives and youth-unemployment challenges (Ndebele, Ndlovu, Mlambo, & Thusi, 2022).

This gap also exists within the BCMM. Youth unemployment has far-reaching implications for the municipality. Against this background, the extent of the government's support for entrepreneurial ventures is examined to determine whether this support leads to successful entrepreneurs, thereby improving youth employment in the province.

This study seeks to close a gap in the literature on the relationship between the success of government-supported entrepreneurs and employment alleviation by providing empirical evidence from the BCMM. To also apply and advance resource dependency and institutional theories to better understand how government support translates into successful entrepreneurs, thereby creating more youth employment opportunities. Lastly, the results of this study provide policymakers and government authorities with practical insights into the effectiveness of government mechanisms in supporting entrepreneurship. Overall, the study offers an informed, evidence-based approach to mitigating youth unemployment in South Africa.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been reportedly supported by the South African government since 1994, and have played a role in improving economic growth (Urban, 2021). To this end, various acts and policies have been passed by the South African government to equip and support entrepreneurs (Aliamutu & Mkhize, 2024).

The SMEs are known for their crucial role in job creation and inclusive economic growth (Tiwasing et al., 2023; Vijai et al., 2023; Yáñez-Valdés, Guerrero, Barros-Celume, & Ibáñez, 2023). The South African government's initiative to promote entrepreneurship is also worth noting. However, employment opportunities for youth remain extremely limited, despite these sound initiatives. Previous scholars have argued that the current South African youth supposedly have numerous job opportunities compared to the past generation; however, various challenges they are confronted with diminish these opportunities (Mlatsheni, 2021).

On the other hand, labour market statistics show that the majority of South African youth struggle to enter the corporate world. The global economy is also facing a series of issues, including a recession, a sharp decline in consumption, and rapid declines in national economies, all of which contribute to high unemployment (Vatavu, Dogaru, Moldovan, & Lobont, 2022). In addition to the literature indicating that entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving economic growth (Decker & Haltiwanger, 2023), South African youth are actively exploring ways to

mitigate the socio-economic issues they face (Zikhali & Matsiliza, 2024). Youth worldwide are actively leveraging opportunities to establish their own businesses to address unemployment challenges, thereby contributing to broader economic development (Ndebele et al., 2022).

Various studies evaluating the role of entrepreneurship in enhancing employment opportunities and inclusive economic growth have been conducted worldwide. There is, however, an existing gap in the literature regarding the BCMM's government support for encouraging and equipping youth entrepreneurship and reducing unemployment.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Tax Incentives for Infant Business Establishments

Governments, in general, have introduced various tax incentives to support entrepreneurial activities, especially the establishment of new business ventures. To support entrepreneurial startup initiatives, the South African government has provided incentives such as a tax holiday, rural location benefits, an investment allowance, export subsidies, and business subsidies. These incentives play a crucial role in helping new business ventures remain operational during the critical early stages. Additional incentives that include charging minimum taxes and providing tax rebates are implemented to alleviate the standard of living and promote redistribution of South Africa's economic wealth (Lin & Lin, 2023).

To ensure that entrepreneurs are contributing towards economic growth, the government allows and encourages entrepreneurs to reinvest their profits by a way of expanding their business through an investment allowance (Rudenko, Pohrishchuk, Moskvichova, & Hryhoruk, 2023). The government further helps new businesses to enter the international market with export incentives, which enhance their competitiveness as well as their foreign exchange earnings (Zhang & Wu, 2023). This assistance helps new businesses to cover their production cost, allowing them to redirect additional resources towards expanding their business to ensure growth, which is essential for sustainability (Rudenko et al., 2023). There is widespread agreement in the literature that these incentives are beneficial to infant business ventures, helping ensure they remain afloat and viable.

Therefore, the policymakers need to ensure effective utilisation of these government incentives and establish accountability mechanisms to eliminate any chances of misuse, which can undermine their intended benefit (Hashmi, Voinea, Ooms, & Caniels, 2022).

3.2. Financial Support for Infant Businesses

Financial support is crucial for infant businesses; limited access to funding hampers their operations and growth opportunities. To mitigate this, various government funding departments and institutions were established with the sole mandate of improving new businesses' access to financial support. Such financial support includes various subsidies, loan guarantees, and the facilitation of equity financing. The purpose of these innovations is to improve accessibility to credit facilities for qualifying but untrusted businesses, to limit inherent risks that are faced by lenders, in agreement with the importance of expanding credit availability for entrepreneurs through government support (Gaglio, Kraemer-Mbula, & Lorenz, 2022).

The government support, such as subsidizing entrepreneurs and new business ventures, plays a crucial role in reducing their operational expenditure and the debt-repayment burden (Asah & Hove-Sibanda, 2025). Another important component of financial support is reduced-interest loans, which assist entrepreneurs in having minimum loan installments, allowing them to grow their business (Ogajiuba, Eggink, & Olamide, 2023). There is also an equity-financing model, facilitated by the government, to improve entrepreneurs' access to long-term capital and reduce the pressure of immediate loan repayment obligations. These government-backed financial instruments are a vital financing approach, noting that entrepreneurs frequently experience a high rejection rate from lenders (Sanga & Aziakpono, 2025).

It is noted that these government incentives may create dependence among entrepreneurs; therefore, the government has also implemented stringent compliance and accountability controls to prevent entrepreneurs from relying on government support. These mechanisms further prevent the misuse of government financial support. To further ensure proper financial management, an oversight committee oversees the use of these benefits for the intended purpose (Sun, Wang, Huang, & Li, 2024). To ensure the establishment of a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem, these government incentives must be closely monitored.

3.3. Sensitisation of Entrepreneurs

The South African government supports capacity-building for entrepreneurial operations to move beyond financial benefits alone; this includes improving their skills through numerous sensitisation programmes. The government support is vital for establishing business sustainability, as such trainings, workshops, and seminars are conducted to equip entrepreneurs with managerial, financial, and operational proficiencies (Iwu et al., 2021). Moreover, the workshops are conducted frequently to provide entrepreneurs with essential information concerning legislative compliance, business sustainability, and digitalisation of business processes, which is paramount in the rapidly changing business environment (Ndebele et al., 2022). These training programmes cultivate traditional business skills and promote innovation by introducing entrepreneurs to emerging markets and technological advancements, thereby supporting business growth and resilience (Ndebele et al., 2022).

These efforts have been reported in the literature to yield positive results, especially for youth entrepreneurs. For instance, Iwu et al. (2021) affirm that these government initiatives are improving entrepreneurial knowledge and resilience. Furthermore, the programmes provide useful information to entrepreneurs who do not know how to access business opportunities and ensure inclusivity (Ndebele et al., 2022).

The attainment of inclusivity depends on the accessibility of these initiatives, which in turn determines their effectiveness. In the same vein, these initiatives extend to entrepreneurs from rural areas. Mvunabandi, Nomlala, and Gadzikwa (2023) posit that improving the standard of living in rural areas through entrepreneurship is important. This government support must also reach entrepreneurs in rural areas to achieve inclusivity. Equitable access to information is vital for the overall growth of entrepreneurial businesses.

3.4. Provision of Basic Infrastructure

The provision of basic infrastructure, such as a sufficient supply of drinkable water, roads, communication networks, and electricity, is crucial for economic activities. Despite many government improvements, rural areas still lack basic infrastructure, making it difficult to sustain businesses. There are other shortcomings, which include poor-to-absent network connectivity and minimal access to information and resources that are vital for entrepreneurial sustainability and growth (Kuete & Asongu, 2023).

Road access, reliable connectivity, supply of drinkable water, and electricity are amongst the important infrastructure needed to improve the supply chain, enabling entrepreneurs to easily access markets to grow their customer base and business (Ogujiuba et al., 2023). A stable electricity supply helps ensure the continuity of production, enabling entrepreneurs to meet their supply demands; an electricity cut-off negatively impacts business operations. Such load-shedding has become the biggest impediment to the smooth operations of the business, resulting in exorbitant operational expenditures that are threatening long-term viability (Mbaleki, Elegbeleye, Esan, & Rabotapi, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced businesses to conduct their daily business transactions using digital systems, increasing the need for connectivity (Fubah & Moos, 2022). This has made a well-functioning communication system crucial in the digital economy.

Access to drinkable water is another crucial component of basic infrastructure. This infrastructure is critical for entrepreneurs who are in the agriculture and Agri-processing space. The lack of a reliable water supply has led many

companies to close operations, while the remaining ones are struggling to stay afloat (Ogujiuba et al., 2023). The closure of businesses worsens the already unpleasant unemployment rate in South Africa (Nyahuna, Doorasamy, & Baldavoo, 2023). There is a need for the government to address this lack of basic infrastructure to ensure entrepreneurial growth and enable SMEs to capitalise on emerging market opportunities (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022).

Perhaps, to address these issues, a collaboration between businesses and the government should be established to develop strong policies and coordinate views among affected parties. This collaboration must provide an amicable solution to the challenges of infrastructure to ensure fair access to public services that grow businesses (Akinola, Olukanmi, Wang, & Marwala, 2024). The means to maintain these infrastructures must be ventilated to ensure sustainable enterprise growth (Mbaleki et al., 2023).

3.5. Provision of a Conducive Environment

The South African government provides rented office spaces for upcoming entrepreneurs. It also assists with interest rates, inflation, and exchange rates, as indicated in the sections above. These are part of efforts to create a conducive business environment. The literature has noted that interest rates, inflation, and exchange rates are macroeconomic factors that negatively affect business opportunities. To assist entrepreneurs in this regard, the government has provided various incentives, as discussed in the preceding sections, to ensure access to formal credit facilities. Government incentives are meant to help address interest rate fluctuations, reduce borrowing costs, and encourage entrepreneurs to start new businesses. These incentives result in low inflation, which makes it easy for entrepreneurs to maximise their profits (Kumar, Shahbaz, & Idris, 2023). The reduced exchange cost improves the competitiveness of entrepreneurs, allowing them to create their mark in international markets, thus boosting their resilience (Kumar et al., 2023).

There is, however, another important factor, the “political climate,” that affects business continuity. Attracting investors and gaining their trust depends on a country's political stability and good governance, which in turn attracts long-term investment. Uncertainties stemming from political instability make investors skeptical about investing, which negatively affects businesses and leads to a high unemployment rate. This discouragement creates a less conducive business environment. Political stability creates a conducive environment in which investors can more easily invest in new entrepreneurial ventures and existing businesses. Political stability also creates stable regulatory conditions, improving investors' belief in the country's economic growth. Moreover, entrepreneurs need access to technology to leverage emerging technologies such as e-commerce, expand their market reach, and sustain economic growth (Zhao & Li, 2021).

The entrepreneurial business growth also depends on a supportive social context. Other factors that enhance entrepreneurship are cultural acceptance of entrepreneurial activities, a demand for entrepreneurs' goods and services, and favorable demographic trends. The South African government needs to abolish structural inequalities and policies that create uncertainty among entrepreneurs about the country's potential. Macroeconomic and socio-political factors are crucial to understand and mitigate to create a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

3.6. Entrepreneurship and Reduction of Unemployment

Entrepreneurship has generally been accepted as a creator of employment opportunities, notwithstanding the high unemployment rate among semi-skilled and skilled graduates, the majority of whom are youth. The input suppliers and services provided by entrepreneurial activities create both direct and indirect jobs. This is an example of how entrepreneurship can help in creating more employment opportunities and stabilising the country's economy (Nthangeni & Lebambo, 2024).

Previous scholars have affirmed that government-supported incentives foster a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, thereby significantly reducing unemployment and promoting inclusive economic growth. Some studies suggest that structural support and educational frameworks are crucial for improving entrepreneurial innovation

among youth by equipping them with simulation-based learning experiences that enhance graduate employability (Chilenga, Dhlwayo, & Chebo, 2022; Nchu, Tengeh, & Cronjé, 2023). A study by Ramsuraj (2024) criticises the majority of South African entrepreneurs for continuing to focus on steady growth or survivalist ventures rather than high-impact businesses capable of fostering substantial economic transformation.

Lastly, all fundamental challenges that impede entrepreneurial sustainability and growth must be addressed to fully harness entrepreneurs' potential. Entrepreneurs must also be equipped with the essentials that would ensure they are successful in their business venture (Ngundu & Ngalawa, 2023). Various scholars argue that entrepreneurship must be incorporated into the education curriculum to expand the nation's entrepreneurial capacity and create more job opportunities. Therefore, to minimise unemployment, entrepreneurship in education should be used in South Africa (Maheshwari, Kha, & Arokiasamy, 2023).

Overall, the above-mentioned government incentives are considered critical mechanisms that enable youth entrepreneurship. The statistical analysis was conducted using a significance test, in which the researchers formulated a null hypothesis and attempted to reject it. Thus, the following hypotheses have been developed.

1. No significant relationship exists between the provision of tax incentives to entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship success.
2. No significant association exists between the provision of financial support to entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship success.
3. No significant relationship exists between the provision of basic infrastructure and youth entrepreneurship success.
4. No significant relationship exists between the sensitisation of entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship success.
5. No significant relationship exists between the provision of a conducive environment for entrepreneurs and the success of youth entrepreneurship.
6. No significant relationship exists between youth entrepreneurship success and a reduction in unemployment.
7. No significant relationship exists between the provision of tax incentives to entrepreneurs and a reduction in unemployment.
8. No significant relationship exists between the provision of basic infrastructure and a reduction in unemployment.
9. No significant relationship exists between the sensitisation of entrepreneurs and a reduction in unemployment.
10. No significant relationship exists between the provision of a conducive environment and a reduction in unemployment.
11. Youth entrepreneurship success does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between government policy initiatives and reductions in unemployment.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Method

This research was positivist. Positivism seeks to establish universal standards of human behaviour using quantitative methods (Acharya, 2024). Thus, it is comparable to objectivism, which holds that reality exists outside the researcher and must be studied scientifically (Khatri, 2023).

This research evaluated a hypothesis using a positivist approach, which employs logic, mathematical equations, and statistical analysis to conclude. This paradigm provided explanations and predictive models for measurable findings, thereby enabling generalisation (Nyabuto & Wabwoba, 2024). For generalisation, quantitative research needs large samples and is deductive (Fouché & Roestenburg, 2024). Positivist research can be duplicated without personal stories (Nyabuto & Wabwoba, 2024).

4.2. Tool for Data Collection

A dependable research tool is essential (Pietersen & Maree, 2025). Since quantitative research requires large samples for generalisation, we developed a structured questionnaire to collect extensive, precise, quantitative data (Bhangu, Provost, & Caduff, 2023) on this study's topic across large geographical areas in a time-efficient and cost-effective manner. The questionnaire was administered electronically and collected from respondents via the same medium. The responses were subsequently coded and analysed. The following section discusses the participants' self-administered questionnaire.

The questionnaire was pretested with 40 respondents, and their responses were used to assess the instrument's validity through convergent and divergent techniques. The pilot test results were used to evaluate common method variance, validity, and reliability. The collinearity diagnostic test for common method variance showed that all tolerance values were above 0.8 and all variance inflation factors (VIFs) were below 1.6, indicating that the instrument is free from common method variance (Table 1).

Table 1. Collinearity Diagnostics.

Variables	Collinearity	Diagnostics
	Tolerance	VIF
Constant		
Tax Incentive (taxinc)	0.658	1.519
Financial Support (finsup)	0.769	1.300
Provision of Basic Infrastructure (pbi)	0.642	1.558
Sensitisation of Entrepreneurs (soentr)	0.704	1.420
Provision of Conducive Environment (pcenv)	0.711	1.407

Next, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the data, and the factor loadings were used to compute the average variance extracted (AVE), which indicates convergent validity. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value and the Bartlett test's asymptotic significance probability value show that factor analysis is appropriate (Table 2).

Table 2. Tests for Sampling Adequacy and Sphericity.

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.67
Bartlett's Test for Approximate Chi-Square	2.246E3
Sphericity Degree of freedom	385
Significance	0.000

The convergent validity test results indicate that all AVEs exceed 0.5, the benchmark for convergent validity, consistent with Inegbedion (2024) and Cheung, Cooper-Thomas, Lau, and Wang (2024) (Table 3).

Table 3. Validity.

Variables	Convergent Validity
taxinc	0.506
finsup	0.610
pbi	0.715
soentr	0.593
pcenv	0.682
yentr	0.702
riuemp	0.693

Consequently, the instrument is convergently valid. Next, the study assessed divergent validity by computing correlation coefficients and comparing them with the square roots of the AVEs on the leading diagonal of the

correlation matrix. The results show that all correlation coefficients in each column are below the corresponding AVE square root on the diagonal, thereby establishing divergent validity (Table 4).

Table 4. Divergent Validity.

Variables	taxinc	finsup	pbi	soentr	pcenv	yentr
taxinc	0.711					
finsup	0.579	0.781				
pbi	0.575	0.700	0.846			
soentr	0.596	0.565	0.646	0.770		
pcenv	0.580	0.515	0.464	0.571	0.826	
yentr	-0.342	0.419	0.367	0.263	-0.484	0.838

4.3. Test for Reliability

The study used the composite technique to assess the instrument's reliability. The results show that all composite reliability coefficients are at least 0.7, thus establishing that the instrument is internally consistent and reliable, consistent with Inegbedion (2024) and Wei et al. (2023) (Table 5).

Table 5. Composite Reliability.

taxinc	$\frac{1.54}{15.02}$	0.835
finsup	$\frac{9.716}{11.277}$	0.862
pbi	$\frac{11.056}{12.195}$	0.907
soentr	$\frac{9.425}{11.051}$	0.853
pcenv	$\frac{16.835}{18.424}$	0.914
yentr	$\frac{2.799}{3.394}$	0.825

4.4. Model Specifications

The study's model specifications are:

$$\text{Yentr} = f(\text{taxinc}, \text{finsup}, \text{pbi}, \text{soentr}, \text{pcenv}, \text{and } \text{yentr}) \quad (1)$$

$$\text{riuemp} = f(\text{yentr}, \text{taxinc}, \text{finsup}, \text{pbi}, \text{soentr}, \text{pcenv} \text{ and } \text{yentr}) \quad (2)$$

The mathematical specifications of equations (1) and (2) are as follows:

$$\text{Yentr} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{taxinc} + \beta_2 \text{finsup} + \beta_3 \text{pbi} + \beta_4 \text{soentr} + \beta_5 \text{pcenv} + e \quad (3)$$

$$\text{riuemp} = \theta_0 + \theta_1 \text{yentr} + \theta_2 \text{taxinc} + \theta_3 \text{finsup} + \theta_4 \text{pbi} + \theta_5 \text{soentr} + \theta_6 \text{pcenv} + e \quad (4)$$

Where:

Riuemp = Reduction in unemployment.

Yentr = Youth entrepreneurship.

Taxinc = Tax incentive.

Finsup = Financial support.

Pbi = Provision of basic infrastructure.

Soentr = Sensitisation of entrepreneurs.

Pcenv = Provision of a conducive environment.

β_0 = The fraction of the variation in youth entrepreneurship that is not influenced by local government entrepreneurship initiatives (taxinc, finsup, pbi, soentr, pcenv, and yentr).

β_i ($i = 1, 2, \dots, 5$) = The portion of the variation in youth entrepreneurship influenced by local government entrepreneurship initiatives (taxinc, finsup, pbi, soentr, pcenv, and yentr).

θ_0 = The fraction of the variation in reduction in unemployment not influenced by youth entrepreneurship and local government entrepreneurship initiatives (taxinc, finsup, pbi, soentr, pcenv, and yentr).

θ_1 = Portion of the changes in the reduction in unemployment attributable to youth entrepreneurship.

θ_i ($i = 2, 3 \dots 6$) = The portion of the variation in reduction in unemployment influenced by local government entrepreneurship initiatives (taxinc, finsup, pbi, soentr, pcenv, and yentr).

4.5. Sample and Population

Quantitative research may generalise study outcomes to other contexts due to huge sample sizes (Tiwasing et al., 2023). We sampled young entrepreneurs across diverse research areas to obtain data from all targeted demographic members (Chandra, 2020). A total of 132 business owners who had operated their businesses for the past two years were purposively sampled.

4.6. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using structural equation modelling. The study employed the mean and standard deviation to describe the data, while path-diagram analysis served to analyse the hypothesised associations between the variables. The path diagram technique was specifically chosen for its suitability for mediation analysis.

5. STATISTICAL RESULTS/FINDINGS

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis indicates that the highest mean is 3.59 for the reduction in unemployment (riuemp), whereas the lowest is 3.398 for financial support. This result suggests that employees' perception of a reduction in unemployment attracted the highest level of agreement (see Table 6). The highest standard deviation is 0.734 for the sensitisation of entrepreneurs (soentr), whereas the lowest is 0.508 for the reduction in unemployment. These results demonstrate that a reduction in unemployment is perceived as the most reliable.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.
taxinc	3.59	0.665
finsup	3.398	0.574
pbi	3.564	0.584
soentr	3.435	0.734
pcenv	3.426	0.619
yentr	3.517	0.580
riuemp	3.591	0.508

5.2. Goodness of Fit Tests

The study employed equation-level, Wald, and likelihood-ratio statistics to assess goodness-of-fit. The likelihood-ratio test indicates that the fitted and predicted variances for youth entrepreneurship are 0.2366 and 0.073, yielding a residual value of 0.1637. The corresponding reductions in unemployment are 0.1844, 0.0780, and 0.1064 for the fitted, predicted, and residual values, respectively. These values resulted in an overall significance of 0.5581, indicating that 58.81% of the variation in the reduction in unemployment is attributable to changes in the explanatory variables (Table 7).

Table 7. Equation-level Goodness of Fit.

Variance						
Dep. Vars.	Fitted	Predicted	Residual	R-squared	mc	mc ²
Observed						
yentr	0.237	0.073	0.164	0.307	0.554	0.307
riuemp	0.184	0.078	0.106	0.423	0.650	0.423
Overall		0.588		RMSE =	0.335	

The relationship p-value for youth entrepreneurship and unemployment reduction is 60.6 ($p < 0.001$) and 100.36 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, and were calculated using Chi-square statistics and confirmed by the Wald test. The implication is that the variable coefficients are significantly different from zero, indicating that the model fits the data well (Table 8).

Table 8. Wald Test and Likelihood Ratio Test.

Test		Calculated Chi-Square	p-value
Wald Test	yentr	60.68	0.000
	riuemp	100.36	0.000
Fit Statistic			
Likelihood Ratio Test			
Model Vs Saturated		0.000	1.000
Baseline vs. Saturated		125.526	0.000

In addition, the likelihood-ratio test indicates that the computed chi-square and the associated p-value for the model versus saturated are 0.000 (1.00) and 125.526 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, for baseline versus saturated. The implication is that the model is identical to the saturated model, whereas the baseline differs significantly from it (Table 8). All the results suggest that the model is a good fit for the data.

The study also tested for heteroskedasticity using the Breusch–Pagan and White tests. The results show that the computed chi-square statistic and the associated p-values are 0.96 (0.327) for the Breusch–Pagan test and 24.4 (0.608) for the White test. The implication is that we cannot reject the null hypotheses of unrestricted heteroskedasticity in either test. In other words, the data are homoscedastic (constant variance) (Table 9).

Table 9. Breusch–Pagan and White Test for Heteroskedasticity.

Test	Calculated Chi-square	p-value
Breusch–Pagan	0.96	0.327
White	24.4	0.608

5.3. Inferential Statistics

The direct effects of the structural equation model on local government entrepreneurship initiatives and youth entrepreneurship indicate that the variables ‘tax incentives’ and ‘provision of a conducive environment’ have negative relationships with youth entrepreneurship. In contrast, ‘financial support’, ‘sensitisation of entrepreneurs’, and ‘provision of basic infrastructure’ have positive relationships with youth entrepreneurship. Although the negative relationship between tax incentives and youth entrepreneurship is statistically significant, the relationship between a conducive environment and youth entrepreneurship is not. The results indicate a statistically significant negative relationship: as tax incentives increase, youth entrepreneurial success decreases (or vice versa). This could mean that the government has not done much to promote entrepreneurship through tax incentives or the protection of infant industries. The positive associations between the sensitisation of entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship, as well as the provision of basic infrastructure and youth entrepreneurship, are statistically significant. In contrast, the association between financial support and youth entrepreneurship is not. The implication is that, although

government efforts to sensitise entrepreneurs and provide basic infrastructure have helped stimulate youth entrepreneurship, financial support has had little effect. This result suggests that the government is not providing sufficient financial support to youth entrepreneurs (Table 10).

Table 10. Direct effects.

	OIM Coef.	Std. Err.	z	p>	z	95% Conf. Interval
Structural						
yentr <-						
taxinc	0.146	0.063	2.34	0.019	-0.269	-0.024
finsup	0.052	0.081	0.63	0.526	-0.108	0.211
soentr	0.166	0.059	2.83	0.005	0.051	0.280
pbi	0.350	0.076	4.59	0.000	0.200	0.499
pcenv	-0.029	0.084	-0.35	0.727	-0.194	0.135
riuemp <-	0.182	0.069	2.64	0.008	0.467	0.316
taxinc	0.046	0.051	-0.89	0.374	0.055	0.146
finsup	0.044	0.066	0.67	0.500	0.084	0.173
soentr	0.082	0.049	1.68	0.092	-0.013	0.177
pbi	0.531	0.066	8.05	0.000	0.402	0.661
pcenv	0.042	0.068	0.62	0.535	-0.091	0.175

Table 11. Indirect effects.

	OIM Coef.	Std. Err.	z	p>	z	95% Conf. Interval
Structural						
Mediator						
yentr <-						
Independent	Variables:					
taxinc	0 (No path)					
finsup	0 (No path)					
soentr	0 (No path)					
pbi	0 (No path)					
pcenv	0 (No path)					
Predictor Variable	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect via Yentr (β)			Total Effect (β)	
Taxinc	0.027	0.000			0.0265	
Finsup	-0.009	0.000			-0.0094	
Soentr	0.032	0.000			0.0321	
Pbi	0.064	0.000			0.0635	
Pcenv	0.005	0.000			0.0053	

The indirect effects in the structural equation model for local government entrepreneurship initiatives and youth entrepreneurship show that the mediating variable (youth employment) and all the indicators of the independent variables (tax incentives, financial support, entrepreneur sensitisation, provision of basic infrastructure, and creation of a conducive environment) all have positive relationships with youth entrepreneurship. However, although the positive links between youth entrepreneurship and unemployment reduction, as well as the provision of tax incentives, are statistically significant, the other relationships are not. The implication is that youth entrepreneurship and the provision of basic infrastructure are statistically significant in reducing unemployment (Table 11). The positive relationships between local government authorities' provision of tax incentives and unemployment reduction, financial support and decreased unemployment, and entrepreneur sensitisation and unemployment reduction, as well as the creation of a conducive environment and lowering of unemployment, are not statistically significant. This result indicates that financial support, entrepreneur sensitisation, and the provision of a conducive environment are not statistically significant with entrepreneurial activities that reduce unemployment (Table 11).

These variables are latent constructs measured on a Likert scale. The relationship between unemployment reduction and government policy incentives was assessed, with success in youth entrepreneurship mediating the effect. The results show that providing tax incentives, raising awareness among entrepreneurs, offering basic infrastructure, and fostering a supportive environment are positively associated with reducing unemployment. In contrast, financial support is negatively associated with the decline in unemployment. However, although the positive relationships between raising entrepreneurial awareness and providing basic infrastructure are statistically significant in mediating the role of youth entrepreneurship in reducing unemployment, the effects of tax incentives and the creation of supportive environments are not statistically significant. Additionally, the negative relationship between financial support and unemployment reduction was not statistically significant (Table 11).

5.4. Interpretation of Findings

The study tested 11 hypotheses. The first five hypotheses examined the relationships between tax incentives and youth entrepreneurship success, financial support and youth entrepreneurship success, entrepreneur sensitisation and youth entrepreneurship success, the provision of basic infrastructure and youth entrepreneurship success, and the creation of a conducive environment and youth entrepreneurship success. The direct effects of the structural equation model show that hypotheses one, three, and four were statistically significant, whereas hypotheses two and five were not. Tax-incentive provisions, basic infrastructure, and entrepreneurship encouragement were positively related to entrepreneurial success, supporting hypotheses 1, 3, and 4. These results confirm that government support, as reflected in the variables mentioned, is practical and impactful. These findings are supported by institutional and resource-dependence theories.

To confirm whether the success of youth entrepreneurship is strongly related to unemployment reduction, null hypothesis 6 was tested. The significance of these variables was confirmed through a direct effects test in structural equation modeling (SEM). The hypothesis was accordingly rejected. These findings further confirm that a relationship exists between decreased unemployment and the success of youth entrepreneurship.

Hypotheses seven, eight, nine, ten, and eleven examined the relationship between tax incentives and unemployment reduction, financial support and unemployment reduction, entrepreneur sensitisation and unemployment reduction, the provision of basic infrastructure and unemployment reduction, and the creation of a conducive environment and unemployment reduction. The findings of this test indicated a correlation between hypotheses nine and ten, but no correlation between hypotheses seven, eight, and eleven. Uncorrelated hypotheses were rejected. These results from the hypothesis test can be interpreted as encouraging entrepreneurship by providing basic infrastructure, thereby directly reducing unemployment. The participants confirm that these factors correlate with reductions in unemployment. Thus, respondents agree that these factors are positively associated with lowering unemployment. In other words, the current government's efforts to sensitise entrepreneurs and provide basic infrastructure are noteworthy and seem to be effective in reducing the unemployment rate. These findings align with resource dependence and institutional theories.

Hypothesis 11 tested whether youth entrepreneurship success significantly mediates the relationship between government policy initiatives and reductions in unemployment. The results on the direct impact of these policies indicate that providing basic infrastructure is the only initiative statistically associated with lower unemployment. However, when youth entrepreneurship success is used as a mediator, the direct effects indicate that both the provision of basic infrastructure and the sensitisation of entrepreneurs are significantly associated with unemployment reduction. This result suggests that youth entrepreneurship success partially mediates the relationship between basic infrastructure and unemployment reduction and fully mediates the relationship between entrepreneur sensitisation and unemployment reduction. Therefore, the success of youth entrepreneurship plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between government policies and the decline in unemployment. Table 12 shows the accepted and rejected hypotheses.

Table 12. Accepted and Rejected Hypotheses.

Hypothesis no.	Null Hypothesis	Remark	Decision
1	There is no significant relationship between the provision of tax incentives to entrepreneurs and the success of youth entrepreneurship.	Significant	Reject
2	There is no significant association between providing financial support to entrepreneurs and the success of youth entrepreneurship.	Not Significant	Do not reject
3	There is no significant relationship between the provision of basic infrastructure and the success of youth entrepreneurship.	Significant	Reject
4	There is no significant relationship between the sensitisation of entrepreneurs and the success of youth entrepreneurship.	Significant	Reject
5	There is no significant relationship between providing a conducive environment for entrepreneurs and the success of youth entrepreneurship.	Not Significant	Do not reject
6	There is no significant relationship between youth entrepreneurship success and reductions in unemployment.	Significant	Reject
7	There is no significant relationship between providing tax incentives to entrepreneurs and reducing unemployment.	Not Significant	Do not reject
8	There is no significant association between the provision of basic infrastructure and a reduction in unemployment.	Significant	Reject
9	There is no significant relationship between the sensitisation of entrepreneurs and a reduction in unemployment.	Significant	Reject
10	There is no significant relationship between providing a conducive environment and reducing unemployment.	Not Significant	Do not reject
11	Youth entrepreneurship success does not significantly mediate the relationship between government policy initiatives and the reduction in unemployment.	Significant	Reject

6. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study adds to the existing literature about resource dependence and institutional theories. The resource-dependence theory holds that government support creates an environment that facilitates entrepreneurial success. Inclusive access to information about funding and basic infrastructure is crucial for entrepreneurial success. The resource-dependence and institutional theories are further supported by the statistically significant relationship between basic infrastructure and the sensitization of entrepreneurs, which affects entrepreneurs' success and reduces unemployment.

6.2. Policy Implications

The outcome of this study indicates that the government support incentives mentioned in the literature section play a significant role in improving youth entrepreneurial success. It is also worth noting that the association of unemployment reduction and this government support is not uniform.

These results suggest a policy intervention to provide clear guidance on adopting an integrated approach to effectively support youth entrepreneurship. While it is important to ensure a conducive business environment, more focus should be put on policies that promote sensitisation of entrepreneurs, teach them how to manage, how to be innovative, and understand the market. Entrepreneurial performance and sustainability should be enhanced through targeted, supported mechanisms, such as infrastructure investment. Policy implications of tax incentives for new businesses include attracting new investment, promoting growth and innovation, and creating more job opportunities. On the other hand, financial support offers entrepreneurs a fair chance to access crucial resources and overcome the challenges of starting a business. More youth entrepreneurs are encouraged to open their businesses through the sensitisation of entrepreneurship programs.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH

This study used only data collected from BCMM. Future studies could expand this population by including other municipalities to improve the generalisability of the findings. This study employed a quantitative research method; future research could consider triangulating quantitative and qualitative methods to better interrogate the findings. This study focused solely on government-supported incentives that help entrepreneurs start their businesses. Future research could examine private cash injections, such as investments and share sales, that boost youth entrepreneurship.

8. CONCLUSION

This study has assessed the effectiveness of government-supported incentives in mitigating high unemployment through entrepreneurship in BCMM. The study's findings affirm that the success of youth entrepreneurship is significantly enhanced by tax incentives, financial support, entrepreneur sensitisation, infrastructure provision, and a conducive business environment. Entrepreneurial success, driven by government support and other initiatives, creates more job opportunities. Notably, the relationship between basic infrastructure provision and unemployment reduction was partially mediated by the success of youth entrepreneurship. Whereas the relationship between unemployment reduction and entrepreneur sensitisation was fully mediated by entrepreneurial success. These findings affirm the importance of entrepreneurial success as a vehicle for translating policy interventions into employment creation.

The study provides important theoretical and practical insights for government authorities, development stakeholders, and policymakers who need sustainable solutions to mitigate youth unemployment. South Africa needs to establish viable, sustainable youth-owned businesses to translate policy support into significant employment opportunities. The study concludes that, to ensure effective implementation of government support, these initiatives must be integrated with strategies for establishing entrepreneurship, combining financial and infrastructural support with sensitisation programmes and strong capacity building.

The study concludes that entrepreneurship is a vehicle for achieving inclusive growth and economic development. Noting the role of entrepreneurship, which creates more employment opportunities and reduces the high unemployment rate. In doing so, entrepreneurship strives to achieve sustainable economic and social development in South Africa.

While the study makes a valuable contribution, it also has some inherent limitations. The study used a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to infer causality over time. The study's focus on youth entrepreneurship in BCMM limits the generalisability of its results to other age groups, regions, and provinces. Lastly, this study relied only on self-reported data, which could introduce response bias.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: We obtained ethical approval from the Walter Sisulu University Ethics Committee for this study, which issued an ethical clearance certificate (Certificate number: FMPAS/DPMG/2024/0085), dated 17 October 2024. Before data collection, all respondents gave informed consent. We informed respondents of their freedom to participate in the study and to withdraw without penalty. Research respondents' data were kept confidential, and we ensured their protection from harm.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent; that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted; and that any deviations from the planned study have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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