

## **WORLD EDUCATION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (WERA) CONFERENCE**

### **ABSTRACT**

**TITLE:** Bridging Educational Ideologies and Functional Learning for Sustainable Development: Implications for Learners' Career Development in South Africa

#### **Research overview**

This study explores the integration of educational ideologies and functional learning within the framework of education for sustainable development to enhance learners' career development in South Africa. Using a qualitative research technique, the study highlights the importance of preparing learners for viable career options in a developing global economy.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to examine how learners' career development and the necessary skills for sustainable futures in South Africa can be enhanced by connecting educational ideologies and functional learning in education for sustainable development. This study presents career development as an essential educational result that promotes both national socioeconomic sustainability and individual empowerment.

Globally, education systems are under increasing pressure to provide learners with the values, information, and abilities needed to successfully negotiate challenging and unpredictable job markets. Youthful population encounter major challenges to work in many developing countries, including South Africa. These hindrances include mismatched skill sets, restricted access to career counselling, and socioeconomic disparities that influence educational and job options. These difficulties underscore the necessity of educational systems that incorporate practical learning experiences that enhance life skills, decision-making capacities, and career preparedness in addition to academic knowledge.

Integrating ideologies with practical variety of techniques are used in education for sustainable development in learning environments, with the main goal being to mainstream sustainability issues in a setting that is more welcoming and interactive. Learners need to get used to critically evaluating the material they have been taught, and they need to be assisted with learner-led re-visioning exercises. In cross-disciplinary practical change projects, it is crucial to gradually transition to networked learning (O'Donoghue, Taylor & Venter, 2015). According to Leicht, Heiss, and Byun (2018), this may result in the empowering of learners with knowledge, skills,

values, and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society. Education for Sustainable Development is therefore frequently seen as an action competence approach aiming at empowering learners to take action to tackle with complex issues related to sustainable development (Sinakou et al., 2019)

The South African educational system still has little conceptual coherence between educational ideologies, functional learning, and sustainable development, despite the growing acknowledgement of the value of career development in education. It is also important to comprehend how functional education can be effectively applied to help learners transition from school to higher education and the workforce. Therefore, by investigating how the alignment of educational philosophy and real-world learning experiences might improve learners' career development and long-term socioeconomic engagement, this study aims to add to the continuing conversation on sustainable education.

## **Research methods**

This study adopts a qualitative research design informed by an interpretivist paradigm. Using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling techniques, a qualitative case study research methodology was used to select eighteen Grade 12 learners from six Gauteng township secondary schools. Data was gathered through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, which were then subjected to a thematic analysis.

An interview guide was used to direct the interview, and this strategy also allows for questioning and clarification during the interviews. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were audio recorded with interviewees' permission. Interviews were audio recorded with the interviewee's permission. The interviews were conducted in English and employed open-ended questions.

Data analysis was done using a thematic approach, data was coded and classified to generate themes. The field notes and transcriptions of the audio recordings served as the basis for the analysis, which was guided by the research question. To maintain participant confidentiality, responses were represented by pseudonyms, such as participant 1, participant 2 and so on. In addition, the participants were given the opportunity to confirm the transcriptions in order to ensure the validity and reliability of this study.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university ethics committee and the Department of Education. Participants were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and that all information identifying them would be kept confidential.

## **Results and discussion**

The findings of the study indicate how vital it is for secondary school learners to have a greater understanding of sustainability ideas and to be prepared for the workforce through integrated educational approaches. Because of their career identification and preference, personality, psychological identity, and career interests, learners were influenced to pursue diverse career paths after graduating from secondary school. Furthermore, the study indicates that pursuing one's career interests entails finding a job that makes use of one's skills and is in line with the individual's beliefs and preferences. Functional learning experiences, particularly those embedded within the social, career development, and educational skills necessary to provide learners with the needed skills, are widely recognised as foundational for employability and lifelong learning in the twenty-first century. The Department of Basic Education should prioritise best practices for curriculum development, instructional methodologies, and policy proposals that can help South Africa produce a workforce that is skilled, flexible, and socially conscious.

**Keywords:** functional learning, sustainable development, career development, Grade 12 learners, South Africa.