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Key Enablers and Barriers Influencing the Sustainability of Youth-Owned Ventures

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Abstract:

Youth entrepreneurship in South Africa plays a critical role in addressing unemployment, promoting innovation, and advancing sustainable development. This study investigates the key enablers and barriers influencing the sustainability of youth-owned ventures within a higher education context, focusing on the Durban University of Technology (DUT). A mixed-methods approach was adopted within a pragmatic paradigm using a sequential exploratory design. Qualitative interviews were conducted to identify dominant themes, which informed the development of a quantitative questionnaire administered to 253 student entrepreneurs selected through simple random sampling at a 95% confidence level. The findings reveal that access to finance, mentorship, business support services, and networking opportunities are the primary enablers of entrepreneurial sustainability. Conversely, inadequate funding, limited market access, crime, and insufficient entrepreneurial skills constitute major barriers. The study highlights the need for targeted financial support mechanisms, structured mentorship programmes, and stronger institutional ecosystems to enhance the long-term sustainability of youth-owned ventures. The findings contribute to youth entrepreneurship scholarship and inform institutional and policy interventions aimed at fostering sustainable entrepreneurial development.

Keywords:

Youth Entrepreneurship, Enablers, Barriers, Sustainability, Higher Education

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Introduction

Youth unemployment remains a persistent socioeconomic challenge in South Africa, necessitating sustainable entrepreneurial solutions. Youth entrepreneurship has increasingly been recognized as a key pathway for job creation, innovation, and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty reduction and economic development. Within the higher education sector, institutions such as the Durban University of Technology (DUT) play a pivotal role in cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets, skills, and behaviors among students to enhance their economic participation and resilience. Entrepreneurship is widely regarded as a critical driver of global economic growth, and investing in youth-led ventures is essential for fostering inclusive and sustainable development. However, measuring entrepreneurial mindsets and non-cognitive skills among youth remains challenging, despite their importance in addressing unemployment and promoting self-employment. South Africa's growing reliance on youth entrepreneurs to alleviate poverty further underscores the importance of nurturing entrepreneurial capacity through education and institutional support.ring entrepreneurial capacity through education and institutional support (Madondo & Tinonetsana, 2024).

Despite their recognised potential, youth owned businesses in South Africa face numerous obstacles that hinder their growth, sustainability, and long term impact. Research indicates that although youth owned ventures play a crucial role in job creation, many fail to expand or survive beyond the first few years of operation (Chigudu, 2025). Although the South African government has implemented a wide range of policies and programmes at national, provincial, and municipal levels to support youth entrepreneurship, young entrepreneurs continue to encounter challenges such as inadequate funding, limited market access, crime, corruption, and insufficient business support structures (Zainol & Rahim, 2025). These constraints not only affect the viability of youth owned enterprises but also limit the ability of youth entrepreneurs to contribute meaningfully to the economy.

This study aims to investigate the main enablers and barriers affecting the sustainability of youth business ventures in this context, with a focus on student entrepreneurs at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). It offers the much-needed directionality of youth entrepreneurship within the university setting, where access to resources, support, and developmental opportunities differs from other settings.

The study further investigates the impact of institutional support mechanisms such as entrepreneurship programmes, incubation hubs, mentorship, and academic resources) on external constraints (funding constraints, market access, and regulatory constraints). These are all seen not as linear, but as interdependent, and working together to affect entrepreneurial outcomes. In the absence of empirical research on the extent of the sustainability of university-based interventions, this study adds value by:

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Evaluating the effects of university entrepreneurship support services on sustainable business; and,

Determining and articulating discrepancies between the actual needs of a business and the support that is offered by institutions; and

Determining factors that influence the sustainability of entrepreneurs including institutional, financial, environmental, and individual factors.

To achieve this aim, the paper addresses the following research question:

Primary Research Question

• What are the key enablers and barriers that influence the sustainability of youth owned ventures at the Durban University of Technology?

Sub questions

1. What institutional support mechanisms are available to youth entrepreneurs at DUT, and how effective are they?

2. What financial, market related, and skills related challenges do youth entrepreneurs encounter?

3. Which factors most strongly influence the long term sustainability and growth of youth owned ventures?

4. How can DUT enhance its entrepreneurial ecosystem to better support student entrepreneurs?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework that informs the study. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature, which contextualises the research problem and supports the development of the research questions. The methodology section outlines the mixed methods approach used to collect and analyse data. The subsequent section presents the findings of the study, followed by a discussion that interprets the results in relation to the literature. The paper concludes with key insights, recommendations for strengthening institutional support for youth entrepreneurship, and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory, which emphasises an important paradigm for understanding the factors that promote entrepreneurial activity (Carlsen & Bruggemann, 2022). Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Theory explains how the surrounding environment shapes entrepreneurial behavior and venture development. The theory argues that entrepreneurship is driven not only by individual motivation but also by external conditions such as finance, institutions, infrastructure,

education, policy support, and social networks. In this study, the theory is used to examine how these ecosystem conditions influence youth entrepreneurship. Spigel (2022) posits the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a dynamic and interconnected system consisting of several players and elements. These components work together to provide a favorable climate for entrepreneurship. The essential elements of this ecosystem are financial accessibility, educational opportunities, governmental regulations, infrastructure, cultural perspectives, and social networks that contribute to social capital (Koseoglu & Arici, 2025).

Driven by worldwide recessions and slow development, the economic downturn in South Africa has produced a notable job gap (Valensisi, 2020). Literature indicates that a widespread culture of entrepreneurship among youth may be a crucial tactic for addressing societal challenges, yet many face deterrents that restrict their ability to start and maintain successful businesses (Anning-Dorson, 2021). According to Enaifoghe and Vezi-Magigaba (2022), entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a vital engine for job creation, economic growth, and poverty alleviation, particularly in developing nations like South Africa. Despite its potential, the country continues to exhibit lower levels of entrepreneurial activities compared to its counterparts in the Global South (Jena, 2020). Entrepreneurs often encounter bureaucratic hurdles, with corrupt practices hindering their access to resources and support programmes designed to stimulate business development (Ogunyemi & Ishola, 2024). By generating job opportunities, providing income, and inspiring local economic development, youth-owned ventures have the potential to elevate communities and contribute to the overall well-being of the population. In South Asia, limited access to capital has long been a major barrier for entrepreneurs, and recent studies indicate that this challenge persists (Mehjabeen & Khan, 2024). However, Chowdhury (2025) point out that the increase in youth unemployment appears to be extensive in African countries. For instance Haruna and Haliru (2025) argue that youth unemployment escalates in Nigeria. Furthermore, a study by Masha and Mdeni (2025) observed that South Africa suffers the same trend.

There has been an ongoing initiative by the South African Government towards the establishment of various programs and activities that could help build entrepreneurial capacities in the country. Among such entities are the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Banking Association of South Africa (BASA), Department of Small Business Development (DSBD), as well as its subsidiaries like SEFA (Small Enterprise Finance Agency) and SEDA (Nyawo, 2025). In today's economic environment, entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic growth, employment creation, poverty eradication, and human betterment. Economic development and entrepreneurship have a lot in common when it comes to their objectives and goals (Beyeme, 2025).

Hossain (2025) point out that youth entrepreneurship is a complex area that calls for personal qualities like creative thinking, initiative, openness to new ideas, intuition, and a readiness to act. Essentially, entrepreneurship hinges on an individual's ability to be flexible and use their personal drive to turn

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innovative ideas into reality (N Reiss, 2026). Roorda (2025) defines sustainable entrepreneurship as finding, creating, and utilizing opportunities that come with economic, psychological, social, and environmental consequences. Its goal is to foster sustainable development, creating value for economic prosperity, social cohesion, and environmental protection. Sustainability itself, covering economic, social, and environmental aims, brings both challenges and opportunities for various groups within society (Jitmaneeroj, 2026). Researchers have noted that students who are entrepreneurs perform two roles: academic and business. This is a two-way street that can lead to conflicting needs for time, energy, and resources. Research on working students shows that time management and self-regulation skills are crucial for managing multiple responsibilities and that these skills are positively related to academic achievement (Tecson, Torion, Rigos, Torres, Abergas, & Alivio, 2025). But a workload that is too high, both due to work and entrepreneurship, can cause stress, poor academic results, and lower productivity (Francis, Rashid, Taasim, Muktar, & Hassan, 2025; Dine & Kaoud, 2023).

From the perspective of entrepreneurship, the university has a special role to play in influencing students' behaviour in the face of competing demands. Entrepreneurial ecosystems within universities have been found to boost entrepreneurial intentions and innovations (Villegas-Mateos & Amann, 2025). However, such supports frequently do not address the inflexibility of academic requirements and therefore cannot be used to help students successfully maintain and develop their businesses while still at university.

Recent studies also indicate that it is necessary to increase the emphasis of entrepreneurship education within the context of flexible learning models that combine academic and entrepreneurial learning (Huang, Yuan, Sun, & Li, 2025). This means that universities must promote experiential learning, project-based assessment, and interdisciplinary learning that enables students to relate business activities to academic products. The misalignment results in a gap between what is expected academically and what is needed to run a business, which places a limiting burden on the sustainability of these ventures.

Role of Youth Entrepreneurs in Economic Development

In the current world, due to heightened competition, states are engaging in economic activities that guarantee sustained economic growth and the creation of job opportunities (Anwar & Shah, 2021). The role of youth entrepreneurs is vital in job creation as well as skill development among unskilled labor. It shows how vital youth are in economic matters (Higgins Desbiolles, 2020). For growth, poverty reduction, and tackling issues related to inequality, some strategies can be employed. For instance, entrepreneurship development, enterprise development, entrepreneurship training, and others (Ruggerio, 2021). The issue of youth entrepreneurship cannot be overlooked due to its significance in innovation, economic growth, job creation, poverty reduction, and empowerment. Entrepreneurship is

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essential in economic development since it is important in many areas of economic development (Uduji et al., 2021).

This synthesis explores how entrepreneurship establishes itself as a crucial driver of economic development through job creation, innovation, wealth generation, and social impact. The formation of new business units, both small and large- scale, creates numerous job opportunities and contributes to effective resource mobilisation, bringing new products and services to market. This activity fosters economic growth, leading to an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) and per capita income. Entrepreneurs contribute to the improvement of living standards by embracing innovative production methods and offering a wide variety of goods and services at lower costs, thus enhancing the overall standard of living. Furthermore, Ramsuraj (2023) observed that the growth of entrepreneurs is important in addressing the country's socio-economic challenges through employment creation.

Key enablers influencing the sustainability of youth-owned ventures

The results showed that lack of access to finance, mentorship, inadequate business support services, and networking opportunities are paramount for entrepreneurial success. South African SMEs face obstacles including limited funding, high operational costs, and intense competition (Makhanya & Thulani, 2024). However, a concentrated focus on the most impactful factors, namely funding, mentorship, and educational support, has the potential to enhance entrepreneurial outcomes among youth-owned ventures substantially. For instance, a study by Ding and Elahi (2025) highlights that access to financial resources directly impacts entrepreneurial success, emphasizing that youth often face important barriers in obtaining funding. The research demonstrates that financial support is a pivotal determinant, aligning with this study's findings that funding availability is crucial for sustainable entrepreneurial initiatives. Furthermore, a study by Osman (2025) illustrates the importance of mentorship in the success of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Their research found that entrepreneurs with access to mentorship and guidance tend to exhibit higher levels of business success and sustainability. This finding echoes the responses collected in this study, suggesting that mentorship is an indispensable factor that influences youth-owned ventures, facilitating their growth and adaptation within the entrepreneurial landscape.

The second component reflects that high loadings for networking opportunities and partnerships within the entrepreneurial ecosystem are crucial for advancing sustainable youth-owned ventures. This suggests that building robust networks and receiving relevant educational training are essential for youth entrepreneurs to thrive. The emphasis on networking echoes with findings from the study by Rampaul (2025), which highlights that entrepreneurial networks facilitate knowledge exchange and resource sharing, importantly impacting the entrepreneurial journey. Furthermore, the importance of mentorship aligns with research by Kilonzo and Iwara (2025), which reveals that mentorship programmes positively

influence entrepreneurial outcomes. Their findings indicate that mentorship not only provides guidance but also improves the confidence of youth entrepreneurs, enabling them to navigate the complexities of starting and managing a business. This correlation supports the notion that access to expert guidance is vital for the success of youth-owned ventures.

Finally, entrepreneurial skills such as innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability underpin organisational success (Muhammad Awaluddin, 2026). Cultivating these abilities strengthens business agility and long-term viability. The identification of funding, mentorship, and networking as critical determinants provides a basis for further exploration into how these elements can be enhanced to support youth-owned ventures in their endeavours.

Barriers influencing the sustainability of youth-owned ventures

Despite the critical role that youth entrepreneurs play in driving economic growth and job creation in South Africa, youth entrepreneurs encounter numerous challenges that hinder their development and sustainability. These challenges, if not addressed, hinder the potential of youth entrepreneurs to contribute effectively to the economy.

Lack of Adequate Finance

Paulus and Hermanto (2022) state that there are information irregularities from excessive credit checks, which restrict creditors from making informed decisions when considering financing a business. All businesses need finance for their growth and innovations to create jobs, especially youth-owned enterprises. An overwhelming challenge most entrepreneurs face is inadequate access to finance, which has been significantly associated with the high failure rate of ventures owned and operated by youths in South Africa. Businesses rely on access to finance throughout their growth, which lets them invest in new technologies, hire skilled workers, and expand operations. Still, most South Africans run into major hurdles when seeking financial support. Banks and lenders tend to favor companies with established track records, leaving startups and early-stage ventures to struggle for the funding they need (Yahaya & Nadarajah, 2023). Youth business owners in South Africa face challenges such as insufficient funding, rising business costs, and intense market competition (Makhanya & Thulani, 2024).

Financial barriers are often cited as a key impediment to the development of small businesses in South Africa (Tambandini, 2024). According to Bushe (2019), shortage of capital and low efficiency are two key reasons behind discontinuing business operations in South Africa. However, despite having inadequate capital, some entrepreneurial activities by youth face difficulties with proper financial management. Big companies have become insolvent due to poor financial management, insufficient knowledge of financial activities, and inadequate financial planning. It becomes essential for businesses to adopt an appropriate financial management approach to cope with the changes in the dynamic

business environment. As highlighted by Wansi and Burrell (2023), adequate financing helps the owners develop their ventures, making them larger and earning more income, and creating employment opportunities. Education plays a crucial role in enhancing both financial literacy and financial management skills (Dwyanti, 2024). The inability to manage finances may limit the availability of external funds and result in failure (Mashuri & Moko, 2024). Most entrepreneurs encounter numerous obstacles in accessing financial resources, thus limiting them from investing, innovating, and growing (Hidayat & Pok, 2025).

Limited Market Access

Limited market access represents one of the most significant barriers to the success of SMMEs in South Africa. Government restrictions on sourcing materials, the limited supply of raw materials, high taxes, and the strong competitive presence of large corporations may limit the potential for entrepreneurs to reach new customers and expand their customer base. Most notably, however, the entrepreneurial community tends to lack the necessary marketing knowledge and skills needed to find and enter new markets. In turn, these small business owners face a crowded marketplace where they are competing against many other firms Dsouza and Panakaje (2023), and therefore, are unable to develop effective relationships with future customers that will support their long-term growth and viability as a sustainable business model. Liquidity issues present another barrier to entry into the market that many new business ventures encounter. When faced with financial difficulties, a company's opportunity to capitalize on available market opportunities is severely restricted because it cannot afford to advertise itself or respond appropriately to changes in customer demand (Lu & Shaharudin, 2024).

A substantial proportion of youth perceive the market environment as weak, a view compounded by the lack of suitable commercial centres for marketing their products and insufficient training facilities to develop essential entrepreneurial skills (León Gómez & Jiménez López, 2024). This perception diminishes their willingness to engage in entrepreneurial activities, thereby limiting the creation of new enterprises and innovative ideas that could stimulate market revitalisation. Concurrently, established firms encounter challenges in expanding their market share and negotiating favourable terms with dealers, resulting in a highly competitive market structure that further complicates entry for new ventures. Newly established businesses often struggle to gain a foothold due to the absence of established networks, brand recognition, and trust advantages typically held by incumbent firms, particularly in sectors where reputation and relational capital are critical determinants of success (Basson & Omoruyi, 2025).

Crime and Corruption

High levels of crime and corruption significantly exacerbate the challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in South Africa. According to Naidoo (2024), crime and corruption undermine the entrepreneurial

environment, deterring potential investors and entrepreneurs from establishing and growing their businesses. The socio-economic conditions prevailing in the business environment within which young-owned businesses operate, where there are continuously high levels of unemployment and crime, make it more difficult for the firms to conduct business (Swanepoel, 2025). Lack of security creates an environment of fear among entrepreneurs and makes conducting business difficult, since they either leave their businesses or engage in informal business activities. In the South African case, crime is linked closely with unemployment. Dana and Salamzadeh (2025) highlight that crime is one of the greatest barriers facing small business development, especially among populations that face high levels of unemployment. Corruption is another problem that negatively affects the growth of youth-owned businesses in South Africa.

Contribution of youth-owned ventures to the South African economy

Economic growth, employment creation, and socio-economic development can be made possible through enterprises that are owned by youths. SMMEs play a vital role when dealing with the problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa (Koti & Modiba, 2022). This is because such enterprises are crucial in enhancing the GDP of the country while at the same time offering jobs. Entrepreneurship serves as a platform for youth to gain experience and make a positive contribution to the community. Since these businesses offer solutions in terms of creating jobs, generating income, and economic development, they are crucial in ensuring that the welfare of the community is taken care of. Youth entrepreneurship acts as an integral part of economic development since these enterprises contribute to economic development in a big way.

One way entrepreneurship can play a key role in the development process of rural areas is through the provision of practical solutions to issues related to rural-urban migration. A large number of youths move to urban areas in pursuit of better chances for earning livelihoods, leading to congestion in urban centers and straining their facilities (Lambebo, 2024). By setting up small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas, jobs will be created in such regions, thus minimizing the need to move outwards. According to Khlystova and Kalyuzhnova (2025), entrepreneurship creates an innovative environment that encourages diversification, especially among developing nations, and this is fundamental for development. Through entrepreneurship, the communities can be able to adapt to various market needs amid changing circumstances. Matsieli and Mutula (2025) point out that fostering SMMEs development is a key objective of the South African government as far as promoting inclusive growth for the economy.

Methods and Data

The study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm using a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, which allows the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches to achieve comprehensive

research objectives. The pragmatic approach embraces mixed methods, allowing the study to draw in-depth insights from both qualitative and quantitative realms. This integration mitigates biases associated with a singular method and aligns with the philosophy of pragmatism (Raju & Prabhu, 2019).

Data collection

The data were collected using structured interviews and a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire, divided into sections aligning with the study's objectives, covered basic personal information and aspects related to youth entrepreneurship and sustainable development. In addition to the structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather more comprehensive insights. The semi-structured interviews aimed to cover critical issues requiring further clarification and in-depth information.

Research design

Given the nature of this study, it was imperative to adopt a sequential exploratory research design, as a questionnaire could be developed only after specific themes emerged through the qualitative method. The themes then paved the way for developing relevant questions for the quantitative study.

Triangulation in the Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Method Design

Triangulation was an integral component of this sequential exploratory mixed-method study, ensuring the credibility, depth, and robustness of the findings. In this study, triangulation was achieved through the deliberate integration of qualitative and quantitative strands to validate and enrich the interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Strategy

The target population for this study consisted of 786 youth entrepreneurs aged 18 to 35 at DUT. The sample size was determined considering the optimal size for generalizability, with a sample of 253 chosen based on Morgan's sample size table and the 95% confidence level. For this study, the probability sampling method was selected, using a simple random sampling method whereby computer-generated random numbers were used to select the sample. If any numbers were repeated, those numbers were not considered. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), simple random sampling provides the researcher with a sample that is inclusive of the population under investigation, assuming that there is limited missing data. Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (2017) explain that simple random sampling allows us to make generalisations from the sample to the population, as the observations selected for inclusion in the sample are chosen using probabilistic methods. Thus, this is advantageous because such generalisations are more likely to have external validity. Chi-square tests were applied to categorical variables such as gender, age group, and level of study. The results indicated no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that non-response bias was minimal. By

employing techniques such as Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test, the study establishes a solid foundation for understanding the perceptions and realities of youth entrepreneurship within this specific context. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is reported at 0.752, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The researcher personally delivered the questionnaire based on the recommendations by Boparai, Singh, and Kathuria (2018) that personally administered questionnaires should be given enough time to ensure high response rates. This resulted in a high response rate of 253 questionnaires being returned, all completed.

Data analysis

Nvivo 12-plus software facilitated qualitative data analysis, organising themes and sub-themes abstracted from interview responses, and Descriptive statistics, including frequency distribution tables, histograms, and pie charts, summarising and presenting information. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson's chi-squared test, examined relationships between demographic variables and sustainable development. The quantitative results, processed using SPSS Version 28, were presented through graphs and tables. The use of NVivo 12 Plus allowed the researcher to go deeper into their data and find insightful information (Walliman, 2021).

Ethical considerations

The Durban University of Technology-Institutional Research Ethics Committee provided ethical approval under IREC 140/21. All participants completed informed consent forms. Participants' contributions were voluntary. Ethical considerations are crucial for safeguarding participants and upholding research integrity. The study adhered to ethical guidelines by addressing potential harm, obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and maintaining confidentiality. Paper-based questionnaires completed forms were stored in a locked cabinet, accessible only to the research team (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009).

Reliability and Validity

In this study, particular attention was made to ensure that statistical validity was achieved. A pre-test or pilot study was conducted to identify and resolve potential problems that may affect the potency and efficacy of a quantitative questionnaire. This ensured that the study instrument was sufficiently robust and capable of addressing all inferential statistical requirements in relation to the identified study variables. The application of a mixed methods study design also increased the study's methodological robustness by allowing for triangulation and thereby combining qualitative and quantitative data to increase the depth and credibility of findings obtained in this study. In addition, reliability, which is a significant attribute in determining a study's consistency and replicability, was also explored in relation to validity.

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Results

The results revealed that access to finance, mentorship, and government policies are central sustainability enablers of youth entrepreneurs at the Durban University of Technology.

Enabler	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
The availability of funding and financial support is a key determinant of the success of sustainable development programmes in youth entrepreneurial ecosystems.	43,9%	41,1%	8,7%	2,8%	3,5%	100,0%
Access to mentorship and expert guidance importantly influences the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives for youth entrepreneurs.	19,8%	48,2%	17,4%	11,1%	3,5%	100,0%
Government policies and regulatory frameworks are important determinants in shaping the success of sustainable development programmes in youth entrepreneurial ecosystems.	48,2%	26,9%	12,6%	7,7%	4,6%	100,0%

Table 1: Enablers Influencing Entrepreneurial Sustainability.
The table reflects the quantitative findings pertaining to the enablers influencing entrepreneurial success among DUT youth entrepreneurs.

Based on the findings of the current paper, the availability of funding and financial support was identified as a key determinant for youth-led enterprise success, with the majority of the respondents (85%) showing high levels of agreement with the posed statement. These results affirm the importance of access to funding as an enabler of enterprise sustainability. This is because the availability of financial support enables youth entrepreneurs not only to launch their initiatives but also to contribute to the economic growth of South Africa. On the other hand, a small percentage (6.3%) of the study respondents shared different views regarding the influence of access to funding and financial support. For some entrepreneurs, success is not only reliant on access to funding but also on the entrepreneurial ability to understand government policies meant to support their development. Over and above the importance of funding, technological competency is a crucial element that entrepreneurs need to sustain

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their enterprises. It is therefore equally important to pay attention to the minority of respondents who disagree, as failure to resolve their discontent could contribute to failure rates among youth-led entrepreneurial endeavours. Such failure will directly impact their ability to contribute meaningfully to the economy and could further widen the existing socio-economic inequalities. The above assertion is consistent with the respondents' worries regarding how DUT student entrepreneurs are impacted by a lack of funding.

The second statement, which pertains to the influence of mentorship and expert guidance on the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives, garnered substantial support as well. Here, 19.8% strongly agreed, and 48.2% agreed, reflecting the critical role that mentorship plays in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes. On the other hand, the results reveal that a minority of the study respondents (14.6%) are not in agreement with the statement regarding the access to mentorship and expert guidance and its influences on the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives for youth entrepreneurs. Though mentorship could be deemed a pillar of entrepreneurship success, these findings suggest that not all youth entrepreneurs would have had the chance to be mentored or reap the benefits of an entrepreneurial experience. As a result, for entrepreneurs without adequate managerial competencies, this could have a negative impact on their strategic decision-making, leading to an enterprise operating under unsustainable business practices. This is because the absence of formal education and training frequently causes entrepreneurs to depend on intuition instead of established business concepts, which can be harmful eventually.

Finally, the review of findings on the influence of the level of government policies and regulatory frameworks as important determinants in shaping the success of sustainable development programmes in youth entrepreneurial ecosystems on youth-led enterprise success revealed that 48.2% of respondents strongly agreed, and 26.9 % agreed, indicating a recognition of the importance of government policies and regulatory frameworks in sustainable development efforts. In developed economies such as the United States and the United Kingdom, government-funded initiatives have made substantial progress in supporting youth entrepreneurship. These initiatives involve a mix of financial support, mentorship programs, and access to networking opportunities. However, a relatively small proportion of the study respondents disagreed (7.7% and 4.6%), which suggests that there remains a gap when it comes to the youth entrepreneur’s ability to attain local support. If these shortcomings are not resolved, youth-led enterprises will continue to face impediments such as limited funding and a lack of market acceptance, leading to missed opportunities in relation to their ability to create local job opportunities.

Sector	Frequency	Percentage

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Agriculture	40	15,81%
Manufacturing	27	10,67%
Construction	17	6,72%
Retailing, Motor trade, and Repair services	5	1,98%
Wholesale commercial agents and allied services	29	11,46%
Catering and Accommodation	41	16,21%
Transport, storage, and communication	57	22,53%
Finance and business services	21	8,30%
Community and Personal Services	16	6,32%
Total	**253**	**100,00%**

Table 2: Sector Analysis

The sectoral study of youth entrepreneurs at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) revealed that the Transport, Storage, and Communication sectors had the largest representation in the study, accounting for 57 responses representing 22.53% of the whole sample. This reflects the high level of interest that youth entrepreneurs have in this industry, which is likely to be due to the lower start-up barriers and higher demand in a metropolitan area such as Durban. The catering and accommodation industry is closely followed with 41 respondents (16.21%) showing that Durban is an attractive place to travel to, resulting in hotel business. Sectors like Agriculture (15.81%) and Wholesale Commercial Agents and Allied Services (11.46%) show high level of involvement. Agriculture (15.81%) and Wholesale Commercial Agents and Allied Services (11.46%) are such sectors showing a high level of involvement. This implies that youth consider that these sectors require significant amounts of capital and technical expertise, rendering them inaccessible even if they have opportunities in these sectors. Retailing, Motor Trade, and Repair Services reported the lowest percentage (1.98%), where market saturation or competition from older businesses may have been a factor.

The findings corroborate the empirical evidence found by Moon and Yin (2020) that youth entrepreneurs in underdeveloped countries are seeking industries with less entry barriers like transportation and communication. This is consistent with the high level of engagement in a number of areas highlighted at DUT. Imperiale, Fasiello and Adamo (2021) note that industries like Manufacturing and Construction call for large technical knowledge and capital expenditure, which perhaps helps to explain the low youth

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involvement in these sectors. In addition, there are documented challenges in other sectors such as agriculture, where participation of youth may be restricted due to age and other factors like land, technology, and resources, which are essential for economic survival in the sector. A trend is revealed where youth entrepreneurs move towards accessible sectors with low resource requirements and avoid investment-intensive sectors.

In the agricultural sector, 40 respondents (15.81%) were reasonably engaged, as agriculture contributes to South Africa's economy. Such a depiction suggests that certain youth entrepreneurs may think of agriculture as a viable option for them perhaps due to specific local factors or the support of agriculture projects in Durban. Research such as that of Christiaensen et al. (2021) indicates that poor profitability and the physical nature of the work can limit youth involvement in agriculture, which can affect youth entrepreneurs in agriculture. The present findings, however, do contradict this somewhat with the fact that there is a significant industry presence. The geographical aspects of Durban that make farming more lucrative for youth entering business may be the reason for this difference. This small participation in Finance and Business Services is also confirmed by the results obtained by Wurth, Stam and Spigel (2022) who emphasized the importance of having high levels of knowledge and financial resources, making youth often hard to enter this industry.

Discussion

The findings confirm prior studies indicating that finance and mentorship significantly shape youth venture sustainability.

Below are the qualitative findings from DUT youth entrepreneurs regarding the barriers influencing entrepreneurial success

When asked about the barriers that affect youth-led entrepreneurial initiatives, this is what they revealed.

The first respondent divulged that "For me, I would say it is the lack of access to government support and complicated application processes."

Based on the comments of the first respondent, it appears that a significant number of startups encounter difficulties in achieving success because they lack sufficient governmental assistance and are hindered by complex application processes. The individual's perspective indicates that although there are funding opportunities and support initiatives, the intricate rules, overwhelming documentation, and sluggish feedback often create obstacles for young entrepreneurs attempting to navigate the application process. Consequently, promising business concepts are often abandoned before they're brought to fruition. Most SMMEs led by youth have difficulties accessing government support due to the extensive paperwork and inaccessible information required. This results in poor uptake of the available programs. Literature elsewhere indicates that the bureaucracy involved in applying for

assistance further perpetuates the disparities in the entrepreneurship sector. According to the Adeosun and Shittu (2021), paperwork requirements, compliance costs, and lack of necessary information affect SMEs and youth-owned businesses the most, limiting their access to financial and advisory support from the government. In South Africa, for instance, Basson and Omoruyi (2025) discovered that young business owners usually abandon applications due to inadequate technical assistance and complicated compliance processes.

The second respondent indicated that "The challenges that I face as a young entrepreneur include operating in an environment with high crime rates."

According to survey respondents, the elevated crime rates in South Africa negatively affect businesses, including those operated by youth entrepreneurs. As a result, many aspiring entrepreneurs hesitate to start new ventures because they are fearful of theft, damage, and safety issues that could result in financial losses and personal harm. Consequently, young individuals often opt to seek stable employment rather than spend their limited savings to launch a business in an environment that feels insecure. If this is not resolved, the reluctance to launch new businesses will continue to hinder innovation and corporate growth, ultimately undermining the nation's objectives of generating employment and alleviating poverty. These findings are in line with previous studies indicating that a high rate of criminal activity is detrimental to the sustainability of youth enterprises, particularly in developing and transitional countries. Crime affects young entrepreneurs directly in the form of robbery and vandalism, but also indirectly through higher expenditure on securing their property and numerous disruptions. These factors impact their growth and survival adversely. According to Ojolo and Singh. (2024), crime deprives entrepreneurs of the situational elements required for carrying out any legitimate economic activities, resulting in reduced investment and undermining entrepreneurial confidence. In his study on South Africa, Mazorodze (2020) establishes the connection between the rate of unemployment among young people, crime rate, and the instability of small youth enterprises. Raimi (2025) stresses that crime and corruption undermine local business ecosystems by increasing uncertainty and lowering investor trust, ultimately constraining enterprise sustainability.

The third respondent highlighted that "The challenge that I am currently facing is the lack of access to funding and more importantly the incapacity to manage the little finances I get from sales efficiently."

The quantitative findings demonstrate that financial assistance is essential for maintaining the operations of businesses led by young individuals. Nevertheless, the current paper reveals that young entrepreneurs continue to struggle with securing funding to launch their businesses. This is further exacerbated by the fact that young entrepreneurs tend to struggle with financial literacy. This is evident in their inability to present effective business concepts, create budgets, and keep records, which can

make it hard for these business owners to satisfy the needs of banks or government funding programs. Consequently, their applications frequently get turned down due to an inability to demonstrate effective financial management, growth potential, or sustainability of the business. The lack of financial resources inhibits growth, and without a grasp of financial management, securing funding becomes challenging. As demonstrated in the existing literature, the availability of funds and mentorship plays an essential role in ensuring the sustainability of ventures established by youth. The findings from the research indicate that the lack of money is still regarded as one of the key factors influencing the development of businesses. Krylovskyi (2024) claims that the availability of funds allows investing in innovations, risk management, and competitiveness. Furthermore, Krylovskyi (2024) suggests that the lack of elements within the financing environment considerably hinders the sustainability of businesses, particularly those that are only beginning their operations. These findings are further supported by Omri and Almoshaigeh (2025), who emphasise that access to financial support enables youth entrepreneurs to scale their operations and engage in sustainable practices, ultimately contributing to economic growth. Novac (2026) also discovered that youth entrepreneurs' success is highly influenced by their ability to secure funding. Access to mentorship has been linked to improved business performance, as highlighted by a study conducted by Muhammad Awaluddin (2026), which found that mentorship not only enhances the skill set of youth entrepreneurs but also provides valuable industry insights that facilitate effective decision-making. Muhammad Awaluddin (2026) asserts that entrepreneurs must actively pursue the requisite skills across all functional domains of business to improve their chances of success. This is particularly relevant in competitive markets, where proficient management can differentiate successful firms from those that falter. The study findings align with those of Khoza (2026), who highlighted that government funding initiatives targeting youth entrepreneurship have gained attention for their potential to promote economic growth and alleviate unemployment.

Conclusion

The study identified the enabling factors and obstacles affecting the sustainability of ventures owned by youth in South Africa. Financial inclusivity, market inclusivity, mentorship, and networking emerged as some of the critical issues. The results indicate that access to financing emerges as the most critical variable in determining whether businesses become successful or not. It becomes evident that there are difficulties obtaining the necessary funding needed for businesses' establishment and expansion, which means that there is a need for institutions to increase their financing capacity.

Market inclusivity appears to be an important obstacle affecting businesses' scalability. Results show that the role played by business incubators, supplier development, and public procurement in facilitating businesses' competitiveness cannot be underestimated.

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Moreover, mentorship and networking emerged as critical aspects in fostering entrepreneurship competences and increasing opportunities. In particular, the role of institutional support through cooperation between academia and industries and innovation hubs cannot be understated.

More importantly, research shows that all these elements are linked and cannot be handled independently. There is a need for an integrated institution-based approach to foster sustainable ventures. The study contributes to the literature on how entrepreneurial capability and institutional structures interconnect to influence sustainable venture formation. The study recommends the introduction of university-led seed funding models, providing milestone-based financial support linked to incubation and mentorship. In addition, public–private financing partnerships are critical for expanding access to capital through blended funding and risk-sharing arrangements, thereby enhancing scalability and sustainability. Furthermore, aligning funding with curriculum-integrated experiential learning can bridge the gap between academic requirements and business outcomes.

Strengthening these vulnerable areas financial inclusion, market access, mentorship, and networking is vital for enhancing the long-term viability of youth-owned ventures in South Africa. Addressing these gaps will not only promote entrepreneurial sustainability but also contribute to broader national objectives, including economic growth, youth employment creation, and reduced reliance on government support systems. Collectively, these efforts hold the potential to position youth entrepreneurship as a transformative driver of socio economic development.

Future research

It would be beneficial for upcoming researchers to explore a comparative analysis of the success of the entrepreneurial workshops offered at DUT Innobiz. This analysis might assess if enterprises launched by youth involved in these programs are more successful and sustainable than those that did not receive assistance from Innobiz. Such a study would provide distinct insights into the relationship between institutional actions and business performance.

Additionally, future research could track youth-led enterprises over an extended period to observe their growth and transformation. This would assist researchers in grasping the significance of factors such as financial resources, mentorship, industry relationships, and community backing on the sustained success and development of these enterprises. In this manner, researchers are able to determine the factors that contribute to a business's resilience. They are able to offer recommendations to government officials, universities, and development agencies for improving their support systems. This will support youth entrepreneurs in fostering a constructive influence on societal and economic growth.

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Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the sustainability and long term success of youth owned ventures:

1. Strengthen Financial Literacy and Investment Readiness

It is recommended that DUT, in partnership with support agencies such as the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), implement structured training programmes focused on financial literacy, money management, and investment readiness. These programmes should equip youth entrepreneurs with the skills to identify funding opportunities, prepare funding applications, and manage business finances effectively. Strengthening financial capability will enhance entrepreneurs' confidence, improve financial planning practices, and increase their ability to build credibility with financial institutions and potential investors.

2. Establish Structured Mentorship Initiatives

DUT is encouraged to develop formal mentorship initiatives that connect youth entrepreneurs with experienced business mentors across different sectors. Incorporating online platforms will broaden accessibility and ensure wider participation, particularly for entrepreneurs who face geographical or mobility constraints. Structured mentorship will provide emerging business owners with industry specific knowledge, strategic insights, and guidance to avoid common start up pitfalls. In the long term, such mentorship support will enhance entrepreneurial capacity, foster innovation, and improve the scalability prospects of youth owned ventures.

3. Develop Community Based Business Support Incubators

The study recommends the establishment of community oriented business support incubators designed to offer shared resources, training, and business development support. These incubators should also facilitate networking opportunities and strengthen ties between youth owned ventures and local communities. Anchoring support programmes within communities will promote trust, improve access to local markets, and strengthen the social capital of youth owned businesses. This community embedded approach will ensure that youth entrepreneurs receive ongoing support during the early growth stages while contributing to local economic development.

4. Establish university-led seed funds

The study highlights the importance of university -led seed funds to provide milestone-based financial support for youth entrepreneurs, linked to incubation programmes, mentorship, and business development support.

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