

Longitudinal Descriptive Results from the Siyakha Youth Assets for Employability Study: Effects of Technical Skills Training on Employment Outcomes

SUMMARY

In this brief, we examine the effects of youth employability programs (YEPs) on participants' labor market outcomes. We assess how the level of technical skills training offered by YEPs is associated with post-program employment and employability. The data show no association between greater levels of technical skills training and post-program employment rates, though there is a modest increase in average wages associated with more technical skills training.



About Siyakha Youth Assets

Siyakha Youth Assets was a longitudinal, cluster-randomized study implemented in South Africa between 2015 and 2019. Siyakha's primary research objective was to examine the causal impacts of youth employment and financial inclusion programs on financial capabilities, employability, and longer-term employment effects for South African youth. The study was conducted by the Global Social Development Innovations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Centre for Social Development in Africa at the University of Johannesburg, in partnership with eight organizations providing youth employability programs in South Africa.

The full baseline and endline reports for the Siyakha Youth Assets for Employability study are available at gsdi.unc.edu.



This brief is part of a series of research briefs on longitudinal descriptive findings from the Siyakha Youth Assets for Employability Study. Siyakha was supported by the Ford Foundation, the Jobs Fund (South Africa Siyasebenza), the South African National Youth Development Agency, and the University of Johannesburg.

Background

The Siyakha study comprised both randomized and non-randomized evaluations of workforce and financial literacy training programs offered to South African youth. The study sought to test the effects of these programs on participants' employment and financial wellbeing outcomes. Data were collected at four points in time, including prior to program participation and at a two-year follow-up after program completion (Wave 4).

This brief examines the effects of technical skills training on youths' employment and employability outcomes. Technical skills can include computer and software literacy, numeracy, and industry-specific skills education. These skills can be important both for meeting eligibility criteria for positions and for succeeding in the workplace.

Our primary measures of employment and employability include rates of current employment and take-home pay. Other outcomes of interest include job search preparedness—for example, presence of an up-to-date curriculum vita and cover letter; persistence in applying and interviewing for jobs; and expectations around compensation. Changes in participants' employment characteristics between baseline and Wave 4 reflect lasting effects that may be a result of program participation; as such, these pre-post changes are the focus of this brief.

Findings

Technical Skills

The level of technical skills training offered by YEPs does not appear to be associated with youths' post-program employment outcomes. Participants of programs with a core emphasis on technical skills training were, at Wave 4, no more likely to be employed than their counterparts in programs with only a moderate focus on technical skills (see Figure 1).

Programs focused on technical skills did not have higher employment rates at follow-up.

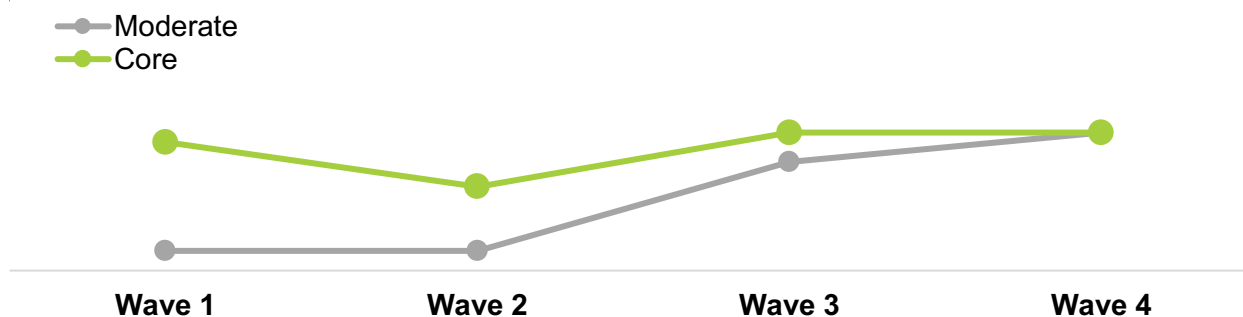


Figure 1. Proportion of participants employed by level of technical skills training over time.

Participants of programs with a core emphasis on technical skills training were earning modestly more on average at follow-up (see Figure 2), suggesting that technical skills training may allow participants to secure higher-quality jobs.

Programs focused on technical skills had higher wages at follow-up.

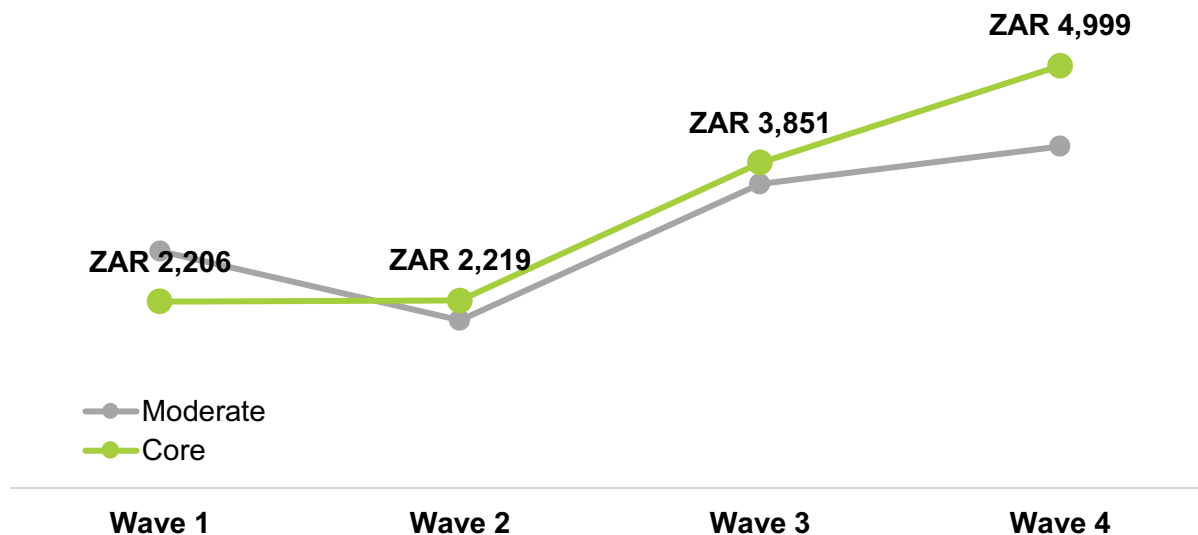


Figure 2. Mean wage by level of technical skills training over time.

Discussion

Preliminary results across other employment-related outcomes show no consistent differences between participants of programs with differing emphases on technical skills, although participants of programs with a core focus on technical skills were slightly more likely to have a formal job contract—another indicated of job quality—than were their counterparts.

The content of this brief was prepared by William Curran-Groome and Rainier Masa.
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