

Assessing the Role of China's Investment on Youth Empowerment in South Africa

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Abstract

China is indeed the biggest investor in South Africa but it is very important to understand the effects that its investment has on the youth of South Africa. This study aims to analyse whether China's investment empowers the youth of South Africa through entrepreneurial skills, access to advanced technology, and provisions of scholarships. The findings of the study reveal that there is a level of inconsistency when it comes to China empowering the youth of South Africa. The study, therefore, recommends that the government of South Africa should work together with China to empower its youth and be consistent in doing so to contribute to their development as individuals.

Keywords: China, South Africa, youth empowerment, investment, entrepreneurship

Introduction

China's relationship with South Africa is beneficial for both countries because they both help each other to achieve certain goals in their countries. However, the youth of South Africa is neglected by this relationship. They are neglected because they still face challenges that both of these countries haven't solved. Challenges such as unemployment, limited access to quality education, financial instability and uncertainty about the future. China and South Africa tried to implement strategies on how they can empower the youth of South Africa but this year marks 25 years of their relationship but the youth is still facing challenges that existed even way before this relationship started and nothing effective has been done. Both these countries are working well in other aspects but the South African youth is not benefiting from the relationship that South Africa has with China.

According to Alden and Wu (2014), the relationship between China and South Africa dates back to the late 19th century. Due to the fortune seeker that was drawn to the diamonds and gold discovery, the migrants of China decided to settle in the colonies of the British and the Republics of the Boer, (Alden and Wu, 2014). As part of the Allied effort against the Axis powers, China and South Africa decided to cooperate during the time of World War two, (Monyae and Banda, 2018). These two countries were sourced by two major developments after the end of the war, (Monyae and Banda, 2018). There was growth in defence contracts, investment, and trade, (Monyae and Banda, 2018). In terms of infrastructural projects, South Africa played its role in Africa, especially in East Africa, Southern Africa, and other regions in Africa, (Monyae and Banda, 2018). However, it benefits a lot from the relationship it has with China, both economically and politically on the International stage, (Monyae and Banda, 2018). In 2017, Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) reached USD 15.2 billion in South Africa, which makes South Africa the second-largest Chinese FDI recipient in Sub-Saharan after Nigeria, (Torrens, 2018).

According to April and Shelton (2014), four pillars that rest based on South Africa's relationship with China. These pillars are; the global issues approach that China and South Africa share, the contribution of China to defeat colonization that happened in the rest of Africa specifically South African apartheid, China's support to the development efforts of Africa, and corresponding with the foreign policy commitment of South Africa to the agenda of Africa, (April and Shelton, 2014). In the

formation of these four pillars, a fundamental role has been played by trade relations, (April and Shelton, 2014). In 2009, China became South Africa's largest trading partner, for example, US\$141,1 billion amounted to the total trade between China and South Africa, (April and Shelton, 2014).

\$5,46 billion was invested to Standard Bank of South Africa and this investment was made by the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China in 2007, (April and Shelton, 2014). Concerning railways, clean energy, and power transmissions, South Africa and China signed a series of memorandums of understanding about investment in 2010, (April and Shelton, 2014). In 2010, South Africa's third largest cell phone operator, Cell C, and the China Development Bank concluded a \$303,6 million loan agreement, (April and Shelton, 2014).

This paper will argue whether China's investment empowers the youth in South Africa. While there is little knowledge of this study, the author set out to fill in the gap of knowledge to help determine whether China's investment has a positive and sustainable effect on the youth of South Africa.

China's investment on the provision of entrepreneurial skills to the youth of South Africa

Training and skill development program was placed for South African business leaders and government officials by China, (SA News, 2015). The South African National School of Government and the Chinese Academy of Governance have agreed on this program, (SA News, 2015). There was an extension of the terms of the Memorandum of agreement that was made by China and South Africa on the management of the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) between the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) as well as the Department of Public Enterprises, (SA News, 2015). The aim was to unlock private sector investment and enhance the capacity of the state to position State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to drive industrialization between China and South Africa, (SA News, 2015).

An expressed interest in expanding and establishing existing operations in South Africa was undertaken when each of the companies of the former Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, met, they even provided training opportunities to the youth of South Africans in China, (SA News, 2015). An opportunity was provided for the former Deputy President, Cyril Ramaphosa, and his delegation was to examine lessons on how South Africa can promote economic development and industrialization through the Chinese model of state-owned enterprises, (SA News, 2015).

The dynamic discussions on youth entrepreneurship and innovation were held on the 1st of July 2018 at Zhejiang Normal University, (University of Johannesburg news, 2018). Such a Forum was uniquely hosted by the Zhejiang Normal University because it was the first University to have a formal African studies program in China, it has held a rich exchange program with many students from African Universities before, (University of Johannesburg news, 2018). This Forum went on to discuss the China-South Africa College Students Entrepreneurship Education Alliance pre-launch. Experience sharing of the new makers from China and South Africa as well as China-South African cooperation and Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship were discussed the following day of the Forum by a packed agenda composed of keynote speeches, over 22 presentations as well as various VIP speeches, (University of Johannesburg, 2018).

The Professor of the Zhejiang Normal University, Zheng Mengzhaung, was part of the VIP speeches that were made, (University of Johannesburg news, 2018). Professor Edwin Bbenkele also spoke on Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development, and various points were made about the need for students to be entrepreneurs so that they can solve real-world problems while also focusing on their profession, (University of Johannesburg News, 2018). He also highlighted the importance of Chinese and South African youth entrepreneurs cooperating, (University of Johannesburg, 2018).

The contribution of China to entrepreneurial skills among youth in South Africa

China is one of the best places where one can start a business, and this statement was made by a 23-year-old South African, Ramalamula Desire, (Xinhua, 2021). Desire was an International Student who studied at Hunan Agricultural University (HUNAN) as a computer science student and she is also a co-founder of Changsha Jiarong Agriculture and Technology Co.Ltd., (Xinhua, 2021).

There was a China-Africa Youth Innovation Entrepreneurship Forum that Desire was invited to on the 26th of September 2021 which was held in Changsha from the 26th to the 29th of September 2021, (Xinhua, 2021). The theme of this Forum was activity in the second China-Africa Trade and Economic Expo, (Xinhua, 2021). Desire was encouraged by her sister to go study at Hunan Agricultural University, (Xinhua, 2021). Xu Hongzhai had a company in China that had a vision to help students to study abroad and the company also conducted entrepreneurial training for students, (Xinhua, 2021). Desire's interest in starting businesses grew since she came to Hunan in 2018, (Xinhua, 2021). Desire's hard work moved Xu Hongzhai, and they both established a branch in South Africa of Xu's company in 2019 December, (Xinhua, 2021). The main aim of this business was to open Chinese enterprises to import the raw material and necessities from Africa, (Xinhua, 2021). This was how the China-Africa Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum contributed to Desire's entrepreneurial skills and her career.

The impact of China's investment on technological advancement for the Youth of South Africa.

Below are technological industries that have received substantial investment from China to advance technology among the youth of South Africa

Huawei Innovation Centre

The Huawei Innovation Centre was opened in Woodmead on the 13th of July 2023 by the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, (IT-Online, 2023). The wider African continent and South Africa will be enabled to leapfrog into the Fourth Industrial Revolution due to such Innovation Centres along with the adoption of a range of cutting-edge technologies developed by companies such as Huawei, (IT-Online, 2023). The Innovation Centre serves to encourage and foster Joint Innovation with SMMEs in the ICT space, Huawei's South African partners as well as app developers, (IT-Online, 2023). It also showcases the most innovative and latest digital technologies of Huawei and solutions such as Artificial Intelligence, 5G, and Cloud, (IT-Online, 2023). However, this is not a South African company, meaning that China gets to benefit more because it is a Chinese company in South Africa. There aren't many technological industries in South Africa and this is something that South Africa should consider implementing so that its youth can be empowered knowing that the industries are proudly South African. This is a partnership, no country should benefit more than the other, therefore, if South Africa wants to benefit mutually with China, it should consider opening its own technological industries to uplift its economy.

It is hoped that this Innovation Centre will create jobs and it will launch new local ICT enterprises, (IT-Online, 2023). It is also hoped that this Centre will bring about support for South African national development goals as well as new business processes that will stimulate growth in the economy of South Africa, (IT-Online, 2023). The role of ICT technologies in helping various industries to embark on digital transformation has been acknowledged by President Ramaphosa, (IT-Online, 2023). This Centre is a signal of confidence in Huawei for the potential of the South African economy, (IT-Online, 2023).

This Innovation Centre according to the expressed hope of the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, is that it would focus on skills and knowledge transfer, cultivating local digital talent through its LEAP program, SMME development, Tech4all-DigiSchool Projects as well as ICT academic, (IT-Online, 2023). The launch of this Centre in South Africa according to the Chinese Ambassador, HE Chen Xiadong, shows that Chinese private business players and sectors are ready to embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution and to stand by South Africa's side to accelerate the application of 5G, (IT-Online, 2023).

China-South Africa Science Park

The China-South Africa Science Park Cooperation was launched in Pretoria on the 24th of April by the Vice Premier of China, Liu Yangdon, and the Minister of Science and Technology, Naledi Pandor, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). The three-day mechanism expected to create opportunities for China and South Africa, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). It was co-hosted by a high-level Chinese delegation that arrived in South Africa for both countries to benefit from sharing of economic, social, and cultural capital across civil society, business, government, and academia, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). Mutual understanding between the peoples of China and South Africa was what the two countries were hoping this mechanism would achieve, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017).

They also hoped for this mechanism to enhance people-to-people cooperation and exchange in areas of technology, women and youth, tourism, sports, health, communication, education, and culture, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). Government collaboration and University-Industry was supported worldwide by Science Parks to promote economic and technological developments as well as advance knowledge, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017).

South Africa has identified short-term opportunities that offered significant opportunities for China to expand its innovation and Research and Development (R&D) activities in South Africa in parallel to advancing a partnership in long-term high-technology industrial development, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). This was to strengthen existing Research and Development (R&D) facilities and to develop new ones as well as strengthen existing Universities and infrastructure, several private sector Research and Development (R&D) efforts, and Science councils, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). The establishment of Joint Research Centres and the establishment of a Young Scientist Exchange Program were two other cooperation agreements that China and South Africa signed, (Department of Science and Innovation, 2017). This resulted to an exchange of young scientist from China and South Africa and implementations of innovative projects, (Dlamini, 2024).

The Information and Communication Technology

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in China trained one thousand young South Africans until the year 2021 under Huawei's investment, (African News Agency, 2016). An agreement was signed by the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services as well as the Chinese electronics company, Huawei, which covered Joint innovation on Information and Communication Technology (ICT), capacity building, and ICT talent training in Johannesburg, (Africa News Agency, 2016). The cooperation on capacity building according to the former Minister of Home Affairs of South Africa, Siyabonga Cwele, was aimed at sharing technical assistance, information, experience, and expertise among different structures that are operating in the telecommunication field, (African News Agency, 2016).

New technology would be compromised in other areas of training such as the next generation network construction, big data network construction, satellite navigation, and cloud computing,

(African News Agency, 2016). According to Cwele, this was expected to enhance the strategies of government to lower the cost of communication, to implement programs, and to roll out broadband, (African News Agency, 2016). The youth who participated in training that took place in China were encouraged by Cwele to use the opportunity given wisely, (African News Agency, 2016). They were also encouraged to use the opportunity to find solutions to develop the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in South Africa and view the opportunity as a window into the future, (African News Agency, 2016). The challenging part about this opportunity is that there were only 10 students who attended this training and that was not enough number because there are many young people in South Africa who would love an opportunity like this and besides that there are many South African young people who are not familiar with the technological industry and this opportunity could've been beneficial to them. It is unfair that only 10 students were given this opportunity and others were left behind.

Huawei's first South African Academy was established in 2015 and it was in partnership with Tshwane University of Technology, which later added the University of Witwatersrand, and the University of Johannesburg, (Khathi, 2020). They were in partnership with these institutions to take part of in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) talent ecosystem that included more than 1,000 colleges and Universities worldwide, (Khathi, 2020).

Few technological industries mentioned are owned by South Africa. Instead, the industries that were mentioned are Chinese owned, but located in South Africa. How is this going to help the economy of South Africa when a majority of technological industries in South Africa are owned by China? It is easier for China to invest in these industries because they belong to them, meaning that they have nothing to lose. The fact that South Africa needs to advance its technology should not be overlooked but it should rather establish technological industries that China can invest in. This is not a way of developing the country. This another reason why foreign countries develop while developing countries stay the same. The foreign countries aim not to uplift developing countries but rather develop their own countries through taking advantage of developing countries because they view them as vulnerable.

Measures taken to expose the youth in South Africa to technological industries

Free online and onsite training in 5G and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies was launched by Huawei South Africa in partnership with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), (Mzekandaba, 2019). This training targeted 6000 South Africans who are either ICT postgraduate practitioners or students, (Mzekandaba, 2019). Seeds for the Future was another training program that Huawei implemented which was initiated in South Africa, (Mzekandaba, 2019). South African students are the fourth group of this program to depart on a learning trip to China, (Mzekandaba, 2019). This program is run by Huawei South Africa which is in partnership with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), (Mzekandaba, 2019). To participate in a study trip to China, 10 University students were selected from various institutions across South Africa, (Mzekandaba, 2019). Seeds for the Future's objective according to Huawei, was to promote knowledge transfer in the telecom industry, cultivate ICT talent, and broaden digital access, (Mzekandaba, 2019). Huawei finalized talent development strategy for 4IR-SA in addition to its Seed for the Future program and free 5G training courses were launched at the University of Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Wits, and there were plans made to take it to other institutions, (Mzekandaba, 2019).

This opportunity was limited because it only accommodated those who studied Information and Communication Technology. How are other young people going to be exposed to the technological industry if they are limited to take part of such opportunities because of the type of field of study

they choose? It is going to be difficult for young people to learn more about the industry because they are limited to such opportunities. Technology is taking over the world and most things require one to understand how technology works. There are a lot of websites and apps that students and young people need to familiarize themselves with but because there is a lack of knowledge on how they work, it ends up being a problem for them to adapt. Take for example Chatgpt, this app was introduced to students but there are still students who are unable to use the app.

There are apps like Mendeley, an app that helps students with referencing their work or assignments but most students are not familiar with the app. This is the reason why such opportunities should accommodate the majority of young people in South Africa because there's a lot that students and young people need to learn about this industry due to the world that we live in currently. Unfortunately, the general youth of South Africa is neglected because you have to be a university student to be exposed to technological industries, which is unfair. After all, there are a lot of youth in South Africa who are unable to be in Universities due to some circumstances such as; not being able to afford tuition fees and not qualifying to be accepted at Universities. Therefore they should also be given the chance to learn more and be exposed to the technological industry.

A 4IR and 5G training platform with an accredited certification were delivered for 5000 ICT professionals and students in South Africa, (Mzekandaba, 2019). This training was initiated by Huawei in partnership with the Department of Communication and Digital Technologies (DCDT), (Mzekandaba, 2019). On their on-site program, they aimed to further train 1000 students, (Mzekandaba, 2019). According to the CEO of Huawei, Ren Zhengfei, it is the duty of the government, ICT players, the private sector, and academics, to ensure that all the opportunities that connectivity brings benefit all South Africans, (Mzekandaba, 2019).

According to Khathi (2020), numerous ICT training initiatives have been established by Huawei, to create meaningful employment, furthering the development of the ICT industry in South Africa as well as uplifting the youth of South Africa. Participants such as Leutsoa Moteka and Moses Munyai tried to earn a place in South Africa's nascent Fourth Industrial Revolution by using the initiatives provided to them, (Khathi, 2020). To take chances given to them and letting no opportunity pass by, has always been Tebatso Munyai's philosophy, (Khathi, 2020). Tebatso was one of the students selected to travel to China between 2016 and 2019, and his philosophy has served him well in becoming a successful Huawei Seed for the Future applicant, (Khathi, 2020). He spent two weeks in training at the most advanced laboratories of Huawei, (Khathi, 2020). He was able to learn more about China's ICT technology, Chinese culture, and how China has harnessed and embraced its ICT technology to build the world, starting with safe-city features among others, mobile payments, smart transport systems as well as connected bicycles, (Khathi, 2020).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is boasted locally due to these initiatives, (Khathi, 2020). These initiatives created jobs for the unemployed people of today and prepared workers for the jobs of the future, (Khathi, 2020). The Huawei team was impressed by the enthusiasm and character of Tebatso, (Khathi, 2020). The Huawei team seeks to promote such individuals as they grow to become professionals of a high caliber of the future, and they are prepared to fast-track and transform South Africa's place in a huge competitive industry, (Khathi, 2020).

The Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training (MICTSETA) is in partnership with Huawei to run an internship that recruits one hundred students annually and the students get recruited by Huawei and its channel partners, after 8-12 months of training, (Khathi, 2020). There are programs implemented by China for the youth of South Africa to advance technology among them, however, these programs are limited to young people who are not doing Information and Communication Technology studies. This is a disadvantage to young people who are

not part of this field because it limits their knowledge about this industry. The technological industry is important because the world is currently revolving around the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where technology is at its peak. Therefore, limiting young people to an important aspect of the world affects them and the economy that they live in. How is the economy going to improve if its people don't have the knowledge about technology and how it works? the economy of South Africa will not grow if its youth is left behind and if they are not equipped with how technology works. Young people are the future of each country, therefore, if they don't know what is happening around the world, they won't be able to lead and develop their own countries.

Scholarships for the Youth of South Africa.

Between 2017 and 2018, scholarships were awarded to 24 South Africans by the People's Republic of China to pursue their studies for undergraduate and postgraduate at China's top Universities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). An agreement was signed by the Chinese and South African governments on the cooperation of higher training and education field, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). The offer of scholarships by the Chinese government was part of the agreement that both countries signed, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). The scholarship provided by the Chinese government covers basic living allowance, tuition fees, medical insurance as well as accommodation, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). Providing support for the students including contribution to living costs, orientation, and international flights, and facilitating the application and the process of nomination for the scholarship was the responsibility of the Department of Higher Education and Training, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). One has to be in the field of Maritime studies, Economics management, Biotechnology, Agricultural economics, Engineering, and Mathematics to qualify for this scholarship, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019).

The number of South African students studying in China is more than all African countries students according to the Chinese records, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). This scholarship limited other students in other fields besides Maritime studies, Economics, Mathematics, Biotechnology, agricultural economics, and engineering. Most students need scholarships to study abroad to learn more about the education systems and the Chinese culture. Many students would have benefited a lot from this scholarship if they were not limited to this opportunity.

One of the oldest international scholarship programs that the Department has collaborated on over the years has been the Chinese-DHET scholarship, (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). Each year China provides 30 full scholarships under the Chinese government scholarship program for South African University students to study in China, (Maromo, 2022). According to April and Shelton (2014), to increase the number of scholarships offered to the students of South Africa, the China-Africa Development Fund was utilized by China and South Africa in 2007.

There are other Scholarships provided by the Chinese government that accommodated 32 South African students to travel to China to study for Doctors, Masters and Bachelors programs, (Cheng, 2018). Students were urged by Chinese Ambassador, Lin Songtian, to be champions for China-South Africa friendship during the send-off event that was held in Pretoria, (Cheng, 2018).

South Africa has a huge demand for skilled and professional personnel and also faces major opportunities in its economy, (Cheng, 2018). The Chinese Ambassador, Lin Songtian, hoped that the students will return to South Africa upon finishing their studies to serve their people and the country as well as contribute to the development of South Africa, (Cheng, 2018). Lin Songtian, added that an important part of the bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership has to be the people-to-people exchange, (Cheng, 2018). The one thing that continues to expand, prosper and enhance

the friendship and mutual understanding was the cooperation that China had with South Africa in science and technology, education, youth and women as well as culture, (Cheng, 2018).

More than R1 million was injected towards student funding at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) by the leading Chinese telecommunication company, (Wits University, 2019). The scholarship helped the students pursue their dreams with the donation that was made by a multinational telecommunication equipment solution company with headquarters in Shenzhen, China, and by the Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Limited (ZTE) South Africa, (Wits University, 2019). Fulfilling corporate social responsibility was part of the ZTE's obligation, (Wits University, 2019).

Support was offered by the Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Limited (ZTE) to various sectors such as skills development, education, technology, and health care, (Wits University, 2019). The key focus for Zhong Xing Telecommunication Equipment Company Limited (ZTE) according to Zhou is to empower young people by investing in them, (Wits University, 2019). The University of Witwatersrand (WITS) students have been sponsored by ZTE since 2017, (Wits University, 2019). ZTE had 15 students as beneficiaries of the funding, (Wits University, 2019). Nontsikelelo Harmse was one of the beneficiaries of the scholarship, she stated that she was honoured to be recognized among several other ICT students in the country and she was also honoured to be offered the scholarship, (Wits University, 2019).

There were about 53 recipients in 2015 who were awarded the scholarship from China to study in the Eastern nation, (SA News, 2015). The students at the pre-departure orientation at the University of South (UNISA) in Pretoria stated that they were very excited about this opportunity that was given to them, (SA News, 2015). Scholarships from China were received by the Department of Higher Education and Training, and these scholarships targeted the youth in South Africa to advance their agenda in skills development, (SA News, 2015).

A 24-year-old, Isasiphinkosi Mdingi, from the Eastern Cape, left for China on the second of September 2018, to pursue her Public Administration MA degree in Beijing, (Cheng, 2018). She stated that she used this opportunity to pursue women to play a meaningful role in the mainstream economy, (Cheng, 2018). The program continued to expose numerous opportunities to many young people according to Wendy Adams from the Higher Education and Training Department, (Cheng, 2019). Adams further added that the students should bring those skills back to South Africa since China is advanced in technology, (Cheng, 2018). She further added that other students who spoke about the business opportunities that they found in China due to the scholarships that they got, (Cheng, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper aimed to discuss whether China's investment in South Africa empowers the youth of South Africa. After thorough analysis, the findings of this study show that they do empower them, however, they are not consistent in doing so. The initiatives that were implemented were also limiting other young people because not even the majority of the youth of South Africa were part of the initiatives implemented by China. Out of the firms mentioned in this paper as contributing to youth empowerment, few are owned by South Africa, but the majority are Chinese firms located in South Africa. How is this going to help the economy of South Africa when majority of technological industries in South Africa are owned by China? It is easier for China to invest in these industries because they belong to them, meaning that they have nothing to lose. The fact that South Africa needs to advance its technology should not be overlooked but it should rather establish their own technological industries that China can invest in. South Africa should therefore establish more of

its technological industries to increase competitiveness and productivity and for its youth to be empowered knowing that the industries are proudly South African.

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