

**ASSESSMENT OF NEET AMONG YOUTH IN RWANDA -A SOCIOECONOMIC
APPROACH**

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Abstract

This research is about people who are not employed, not in education, or in Training (NEET) in Rwanda since the beginning of the year 2024. This research hinges on the fact that most of the NEETs are clustered in youth. It also hinges on the fact that NEET people are associated with a lot of socioeconomic problems, including lack of income, joblessness, psychological issues due to the stress of being unemployed and other related problems. Therefore, this research aims to depict the issues of NEET people in Rwanda and their living situation and how they can be helped to get rid of this socioeconomic livelihood. In our research, we used both quantitative and qualitative research and fieldwork. In quantitative analysis, we used regression analysis and interpretation of data and their visualization through Python. Around 360 sample size was taken from both secondary school and university graduates in Rwanda who have no jobs nor are in education or training - NEET. We provided an online questionnaire and an administered interview guide. We used both qualitative and quantitative methods (Q2). In qualitative methods, we used snowball sampling, and we administered a questionnaire on the situation of NEET and the interpretation of their living condition as observed in the population, while in quantitative, we used Python – a machine learning system, to visualise data through graphs. In this paper, we highlight that the issues of NEET in Rwanda are very serious and need quick solutions, among which is improving the chances of getting jobs for young people. There is a challenge of having a job, and the labour market is minimal. Second, there should be opportunities to enable people to create jobs, including offering them capital incentives for their projects, increasing the chance of paid internships so that

they both get experience and money to invest for their own after that period and including NEET people in family and community businesses. The high period of being NEET was identified at 2 years among clusters in Rwanda, and NEET people exist in both rural and urban places with some chances of getting what to do in urban places. The research finds that there is less NEET in rural areas compared to the city but with many years of staying in that condition – 2 years and above.

Keywords: NEET not Employed- not in Education- not in Training (NEET), Rwanda, Youth Economy, Youtheneering, Africa, Graduating Students.

1.0 Introduction

The case of graduates who are not in education, employment, or training (also known as NEET) is increasing day by day all over the world. Therefore, it is a new type of socioeconomic problem that is shaping the coming complex poverty.

The international definition of the youth population is “persons aged 15-24 years old.” To cover countries where entry into the labour market occurs later, the ILO extends the definition to include young adults aged 25-29 years old for specific purposes. In Rwanda, youth is defined as persons aged between 16 and 30 years old, National Youth Council, 2021). According to LFS 2022, the number of youth who were neither employed nor educated or trained was 1,217,890, which corresponds to about 35.6 per cent of the youth population. The same report shows that the NEET rate is higher among young women (41.0 per cent) than among young men (29.9 per cent). NSTR (2022).

The problem of NEET is a socioeconomic subject for all countries, especially developing countries. The 8th SDG is about Employment, decent work for all, and social protection, which means that one of the objectives of this SDG is to reduce the number of NEETs among the youth.

Despite the efforts made to improve the quality and number of graduates in Africa, the number of NEET youth graduates who are not in education, employment, or training is still rapidly increasing. Globally, in 2020, more than one in five (22.4 per cent) young people aged 15–24 were neither in employment nor education (NEET). The NEET rate (22.4 per cent) of 2020 increased from the 21.7 per cent rate of 2015, ILO (2019).

The problem of NEET is a socioeconomic subject for all countries, especially developing countries, and this situation led to the adoption of the NEET rate as an indicator of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 8.6 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ILO (2019).

The purpose of this paper is to identify the problem of NEET among Rwandans and see the way of overcoming this socioeconomic challenge as a model for all of Africa. The findings could help

to guide and influence programs and initiatives to reduce the NEET situation, such as tackling youth unemployment. The paper uses both qualitative and quantitative data to visualise the situation of NEET in Rwanda through space – urban versus rural, level of education, and access to job opportunities, compared to age and gender clusters. Buheji (2019b)

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Defining NEET for this Paper

According to OECD (2024), NEET presents the share of young people who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) as a percentage of the total number of young people in the corresponding age group by gender. Besides, Eurostat, the ILO, and certain other organizations define the NEET rate as “the percentage of the population of a given age group and sex who is not employed and not involved in further education or training”.

NEET concept refers to persons meeting two conditions: (i) they are not employed (i.e. are unemployed or inactive). RDB (2020) reports that knowing the level of unemployment in the country helps to know the extent to which youth find it difficult to find jobs or start their own business in the economy. The general average of youth unemployment, according to different sources, including the National Institute of Statistics, was about 20 per cent in 2023. The second condition of being in the NEET category is that (ii) they have not been receiving any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Buheji (2019b)

The term NEET was first used in the UK and then spread in developed countries such as the USA and Japan, Buheji (2019a). Public Health England and UCL Institute of Health Equity (2014) said that NEET was first coined in 1996 and that since that time it has been the focus of much national and local attention. England NEET target focuses on the group aged 16 – 18, although the term can be used for the larger group aged 16-24. The international definition of the youth population is those aged 15-24 years old.” To cover countries where entry into the labour market occurs later, the ILO extends the definition to include young adults aged 25-29 years old for specific purposes.

2.2 Risk Factors that Increasing NEET among Youth

There exist myths and realities that back the barriers and challenges of youth employment. Schmid (2021) highlights some of them. (1) Youth do not work hard. These drive many employers to be sceptical while hiring youth and perceive them as they lack experience, drive and reliability. However, it was scientifically proven that youth are quick, motivated, adaptable learners who bring good ideas and long-term commitment to their work. (2) Youth lack entrepreneurial skills. In developing lower-income nations, the labour market is limited, and the job creation is not moving fast enough to absorb the growing workforce, especially the young graduates of secondary school or university. The people in the NEET category then mostly come from poor families, even studying through scholarships, and it is hard for them to have capital for business startups. Besides, fostering youth entrepreneurship and self-employment is important for economic growth and

human dignity. (3) the myth that traditional education and training programs are enough to ensure youth will get a job, while they are not really since it is a complex issue which requires multi-level partnerships of different stakeholders in the field of development. (4) the myth that youth cannot lead drives a lot of stakeholders to underestimate gender, youth and other kinds of empowerment, participation and decision-making. (5) the myth that youth contributions to policy and programs are not necessary, which drives to marginalization in decision-making, budget management and allocation. However, once youth are empowered, they can contribute to community wealth, resilience and innovation. Buheji (2018).

2.3 Overcoming Intergenerational Gap through Overcoming NEET

Buheji and Ahmed (2019, p. 68) mention that there is an intergenerational gap that needs to be solved for youth engagement and employment. One way they suggested is to involve youth in community activities and family projects. This helps them to be motivated and engaged, and they can easily access local job opportunities. This also helps the youth to be psychologically fit for employment and entrepreneurship. They gain security and business expertise instead of sitting in their home redundant. For Buheji and Ahmed (2019), in the inspiration economy project, what they call mountaineering, it is necessary to engage youth through poverty elimination projects, societal change programs, organic farming projects, and the bringing of low-privileged community children to formal education (p. 69).

The generations should share wisdom in all sectors and know-how that triggers working from different angles and perspectives—in all socioeconomic sectors, including building families and economic sectors and innovating from their generational predecessors (Buheji and Ahmed, 2019, p.70). A generation that does not allow youth engagement cannot eventually stop or decrease the situation of youth in NEET livelihood.

2.4 Other Factors Inflating NEET Issues

Factors like limited experience, skills mismatch, and a competitive job market contribute to this NEET issue Mukundabantu (2024). Similarly, RDB (2023) in proposing the policy actions for the unemployment of upper secondary school and graduates, highlight that the NEET situation is caused by a lack of market relevance skills, limited capacity of the private sector to absorb a large number of graduates, Limited access to labour market information, lack of ownership of employment interventions by local government entities, limited labour mobility and inward-looking graduates, education not responding or changing with global changes, no expansionary monetary and fiscal policies. Buheji (2019b)

Rahmani and Groot (2023) reviewed different publications and searched different risk factors that contributed to the NEET situation and grouped those factors into 8 groups, which are individual characteristics, education and school, work; health; addiction; social, family, and the environment – socioeconomic situation of the community, contribute to NEET. For the authors, factors like

aspirations and expectations, self-esteem, autonomy, self-confidence, skills, age, etc, are grouped into individual characteristics. In the school and education categories, there are dropout, truancy or absenteeism, problems learning, school performance, qualification and school conditions, and field study.

For Rahmani and Groot (2003), the work characteristics that drive to NEET are a country's unemployment history, lower salary, work history and experience, career planning and aspiration, and job training. The health characteristics that drive to NEET include poor health, disability, mental problems, depression, illness, and sexual debut. For them, addiction characteristics grouped drinking behaviour, cannabis use, drug addiction, and soft drugs.

The environmental or socioeconomic condition of the community, besides the characteristics of groups that are enhanced by economic and social inequalities, inadequate infrastructure, economic hardship, poverty, welfare receipt, social exclusion and deprivation, are seen to be related to the issue of NEET. Regarding social characteristics, NEET has been found to enhance neighbourhood deprivation, criminal offences, and charges. NEET is also found for the family characteristic group; the following factors were mentioned: living with a single parent, unstable families, workless parent/family, teenage parenthood, and poor and non-entrepreneurial family background. In the case of inequality and generalized poverty, even the Public Health England and UCL Institute of Health Equity (2014) confirm that this was the main other factor that drove persons into being in the NEET category. Other factors, as mentioned earlier, are quality of education and health, where the research finds that disabled people are at risk of being in the NEET category than others.

2.5 Other Socioeconomic Impacts of NEET Situation

One of the consequences of the NEET situation is that it drives people to poverty and stress, which can develop into mental health issues. Economically, it can weaken the capacity to compete for future jobs as the person lacks incentives to go further for societal personal contribution Plant et al. (2009) and Kyriakopoulou (2021). Consequently, the NEET situation is an issue for individuals, families, and nations. NEET situation impacts on the untapped potential of youth who could contribute otherwise to National Development through work. RDB (2020), Buheji and Buheji (2020).

In terms of mental health, the NEET situation affects psychological life. These include bad relationships with others, drug and substance abuse, and involvement in criminal activities. Kyriakopoulou (2021). There is also psychological distress: feelings of loneliness, powerlessness, restlessness, anxiety, and depression.

The NEET group is at risk of social exclusion and, therefore can revolt or be in criminal gangs. The economic school of thought highlight that there are issues that can drive unemployed young

persons into rebel movements or criminal activities – the conflict trap and poverty trap (Collier 2007). They are easily driven to crime as if they do not lose anything else. For the Collier, empowering people to participate in economic activities increases the community and nation to have peace in a real sense. Studies show conflict and peacebuilding can also have another impact on the NEET situation, as it affects the risks of inequality and structural violence.

2.6 Strategies Developed to Address NEET Situation

Community development stakeholders and governments have been trying to increase the chance to engage with youth and other categories of people for their employment. In Europe, for instance, the government set strategies to give enough information and prepare young graduates for new market opportunities. There exists collaboration with employers, communication and sharing information on who is in NEET and what they need to be employed was one of the strategies developed. Buheji (2020).

For instance, the collaboration with Public Health England and the UCL Institute of Health Equity (2014) provides what can be done to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET, and they proposed that an early mechanism be taken for the youth at the age of 16.

Tracking people, their history, and agency information helps to orient them into careers. In the University of Rwanda, every campus has a career guidance office. There have also been incentives to increase the network between students and industry and between the university or IPRC and industry.

The government also offers small loans for beginners through BDF. Entrepreneurship training is also available at the college and university levels. In some other universities, like Koblenz in Germany, there are institutions nearby that grant funds for student projects once they graduate.

In Europe, support has been offered to NEET using financial incentives, flexible and personalized programs, small group sizes, one-to-one support, and helping young people manage transitions (Mascherini, 2023).

RDB (2020) developed the policy actions clustered into 6 groups: (1) Employability Skills Development. Some of these policy actions are initiating skills and innovation competitions and awards among TVET Schools and High Learning Institutions, streamlining paid Internship for six months after the students has graduated, apprenticeship and industrial attachment partnerships with formal companies and providing incentives to companies that are willing to host and employ part of the interns, and enhancing strategic partnership with private sector companies in the implementation of Work Place (2) Learning (Rapid Response Training, Industrial based training, apprenticeship, and internship). (3) Access to Capital and Markets and some policy actions are to ensure that policies, programs, and strategies aimed at boosting businesses and job creation are implemented accordingly and timely reviewed to maintain labour market relevancy; Promote

creativity and innovation culture, especially among youth and support talented youth to realise their potentials as a way to promote massive and decent jobs. (4) improving hands-on skills and supporting traditional apprenticeship, working with SMEs, garages and workshops, and (5) improving access to finance through Umurenge (sector level) SACCOs and encouraging local savings through *ibimina* tontine.

In addition to the above, access to NEET information has been one of the RDB policy actions aiming at knowing the increase in the number of locally produced and published labour market research/studies that guide training programs and that are relevant to the socio-economic development of Rwanda. It is in the framework of the last point that the Socioeconomic Institute for Advanced Studies did research on NEET in Rwanda to firstly contribute to access to information, especially on the situation of NEET people in Rwanda and the opportunities that are at their disposal to overcome that situation.

3.0 Research Methodology

In this research, the researchers used quantitative and qualitative research methods. The former was used to analyze data, especially from our sample size of 360 NEET respondents. The researchers also used Python modelling for computer-based analysis. The latter used interpretation of cases, as mentioned, including interviews and responses from questionnaires.

Qualitative methods help to understand experiences, meanings, contexts, and perceptions, while quantitative methods help to collect and analyze quantitative data. For this survey, we sampled different stakeholders, such as young graduates in the NEET category living in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of Rwanda.

The data was collected using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI), which is a face-to-face data collection method in which the interviewer uses a tablet, mobile phone, or a computer and administers a questionnaire where the respondent is allowed to write down answers to the main three questions.

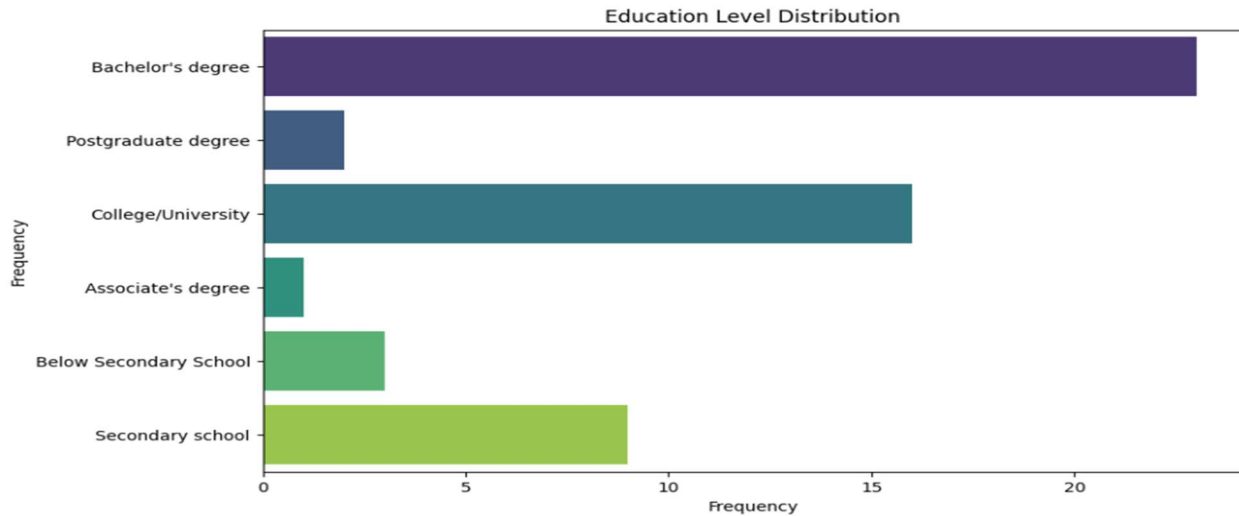
Data have been analyzed using Python. In that framework, we have been able to visualize data in graphs and learn about the situation of NEET people in Rwanda, the variability of issues that determine their socioeconomic situation, and ways to overcome it.

The research is diachronic in nature. It analyses variables of NEET in a given single period. Therefore, we consider the period of data collection and interpretation in 2024 despite the fact that the institute started the process of NEET research in Rwanda in 2023. The following is the report of findings, which contains a detailed analysis of factors affecting NEET duration and situation, including statistical tests, regression analysis, and visualizations.

4.0 Findings

The gender distribution among respondents shows that males were more willing to respond to our questionnaire than females. Figure (1) shows that the majority of the respondents held Bachelor's degrees.

Figure (1) Illustrate Level of Education of the Survey Respondents



While the NEET people in Rwanda were asked about the main challenges they face, Figure (2) shows that the majority believe that most of the time, they do not see the available jobs to apply for in their home area. Others also show they lack experience or have failed to get transportation tickets to go and compete for job offers wherever it is. The Figure also shows that jobs are not available in the area where NEET people live. The other issue is that they lack experience and sometimes qualifications for the required job. Very few views mentioned the lack of opportunity and discrimination. This shows that it is not as high in Rwanda as in many developing nations. The main issue is just the availability of jobs in the market, and the solution would be to increase the demand for and supply of the labour market.

Figure (2) Type Employment Challenges Faced by the Rwandan NEET Youth

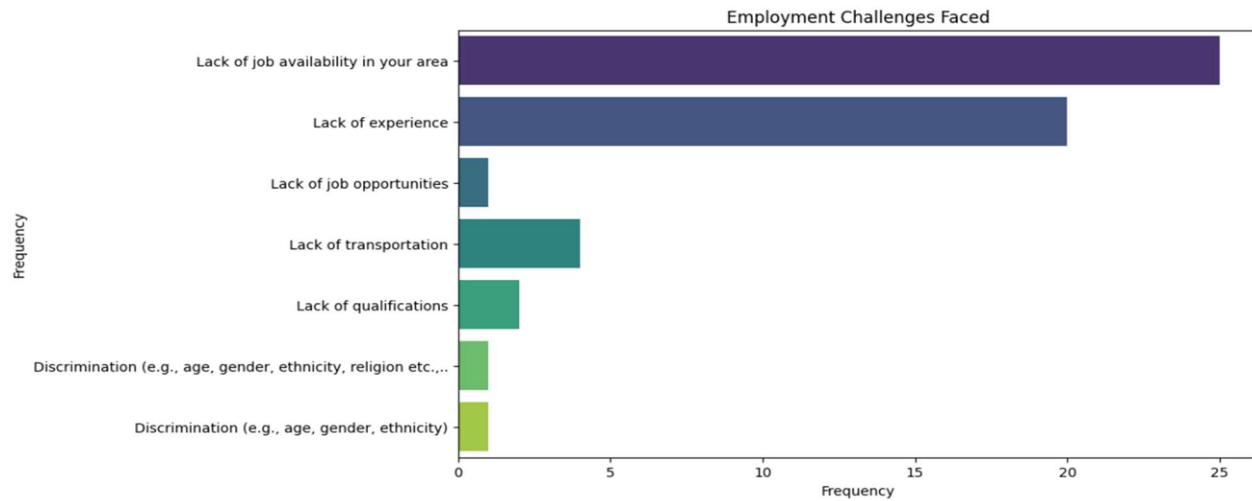
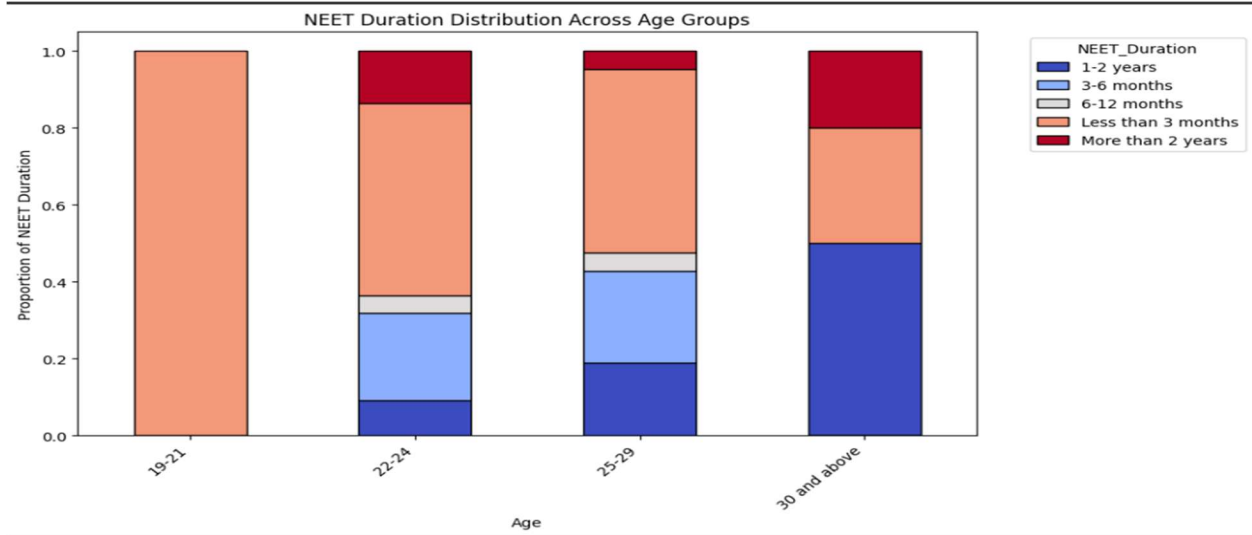


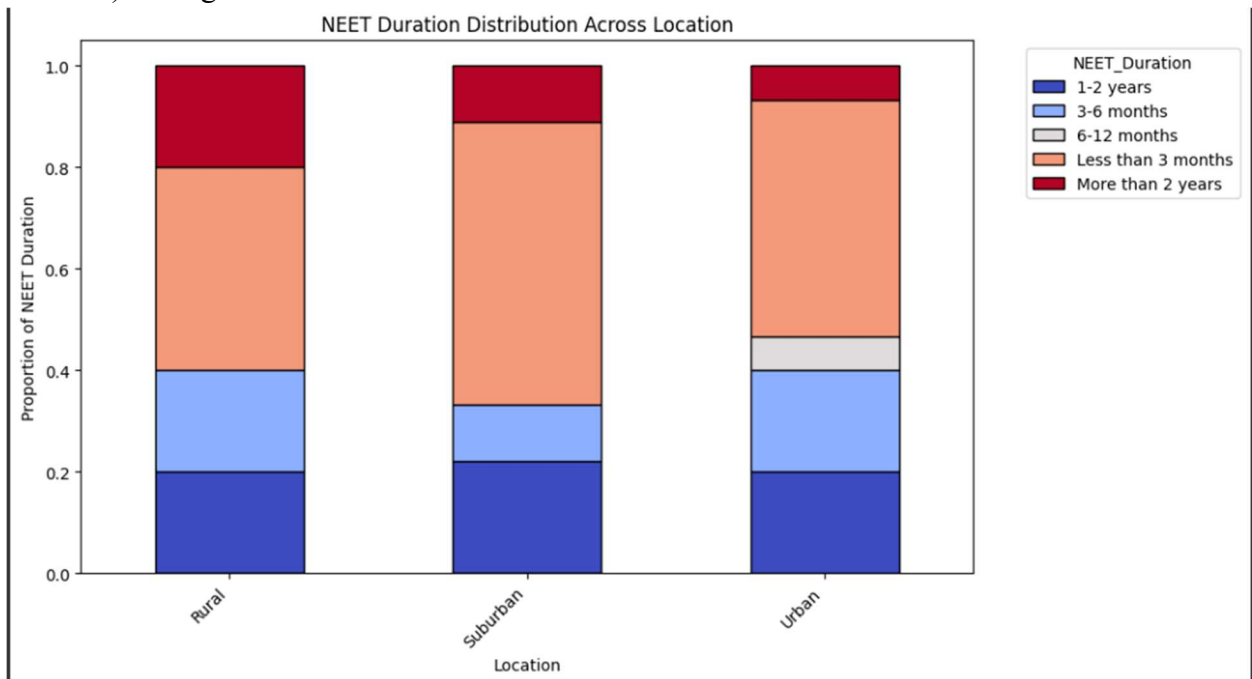
Figure (3) shows the variety of NEET problems among the Rwandan youth. For example, people aged between 19 and 21 years old who have NEET problems and have a short time period of NEET of less than three months. This is because most of them are young graduates of secondary and vocational education and are quickly absorbed by universities and institutions that employ them as quickly as possible. NEET problem of a long time, like one year and 2 years and above at the age of 22 to 24, where we find people that are in the NEET category for a variety of more than six months, one year and above. At the age of 25 to 29, we see the case of NEET, with a duration period of 1 to 2 years and even a few cases of over 2 years. The situation becomes dangerous at 30 and above, where we see cases of NEET duration of 1 to 2 years and even for the period of more than 2 years. At this stage, 30 and above, people have finished schooling, and they are in need of serious work and training. In addition to that, this is the period when people need to spend more for themselves and their families to live despite being in the NEET category.

Figure (3) The Depth of the NEET among Rwandan Youth depending on Years After Graduation



Then Figure (4) shows that finding a job in Rwanda is difficult in all areas, particularly in rural areas. There are more opportunities to find jobs in the city and suburban areas. However, the capacity to get out from NEET people in Rwanda remains mainly in the city rather than in rural areas to some extent. Besides, as shown below, the Elbow number of clusters was 2, reflecting the duration of NEET among clusters of youth in Rwanda.

Figure (4) Shows the Distribution of the NEET problem in relevant living areas (Urban, Rural and Suburbs) among Rwandan Youth



Figures (5) and (6) show that the critical range of NEET in Rwanda is from half a year (5 months) and 1 to 2 years and above. We consider that this is still manageable, but for the case of 2 years

and above, there is a need for quick actions to help these people in that category – of 1 and a half, two years, three years and above who are in the NEET category. Special action and government intervention are needed by development stakeholders.

Figure (5) shows that, according to this survey sample, the majority of Rwandan NEET youth are in the urban area.



Figure (6) Shows the length of time of Rwandan NEET.

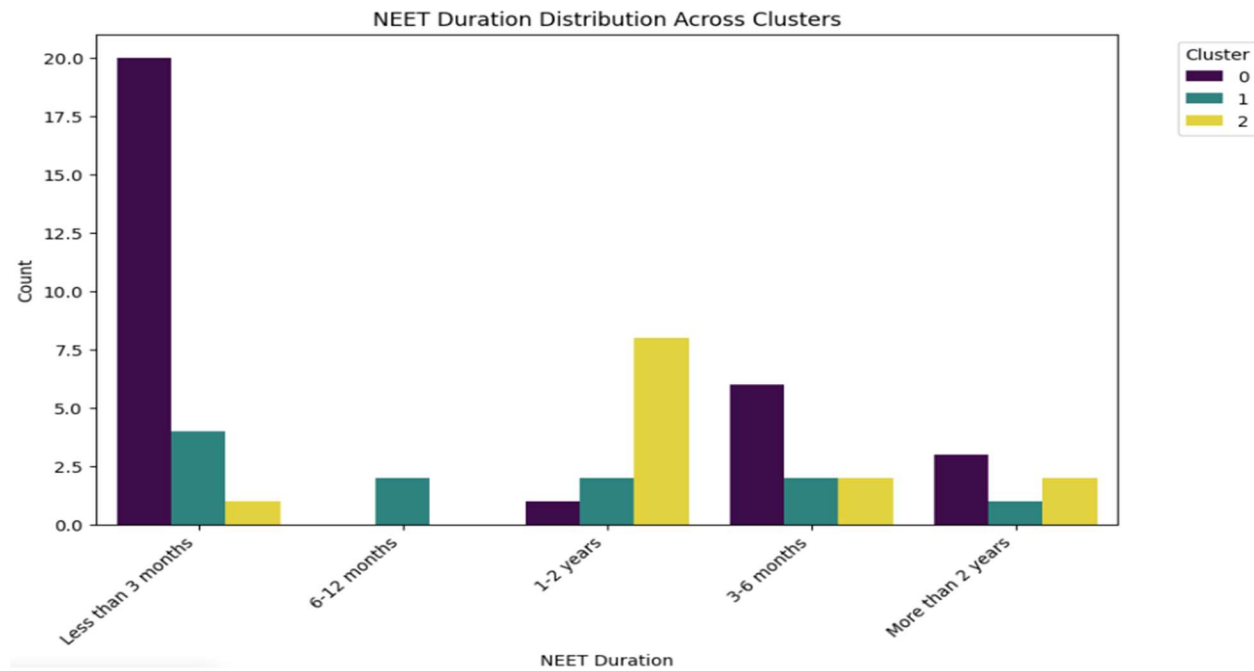


Figure (7) shows that the NEET category is highly clustered into the age of 22 to 24, 25 to 29 and eventually 30 and above. More emphasis should be put for the youth from 22 to 30 and above (31 to 35). Special policy and action need to be taken for the benefit of these category of age.

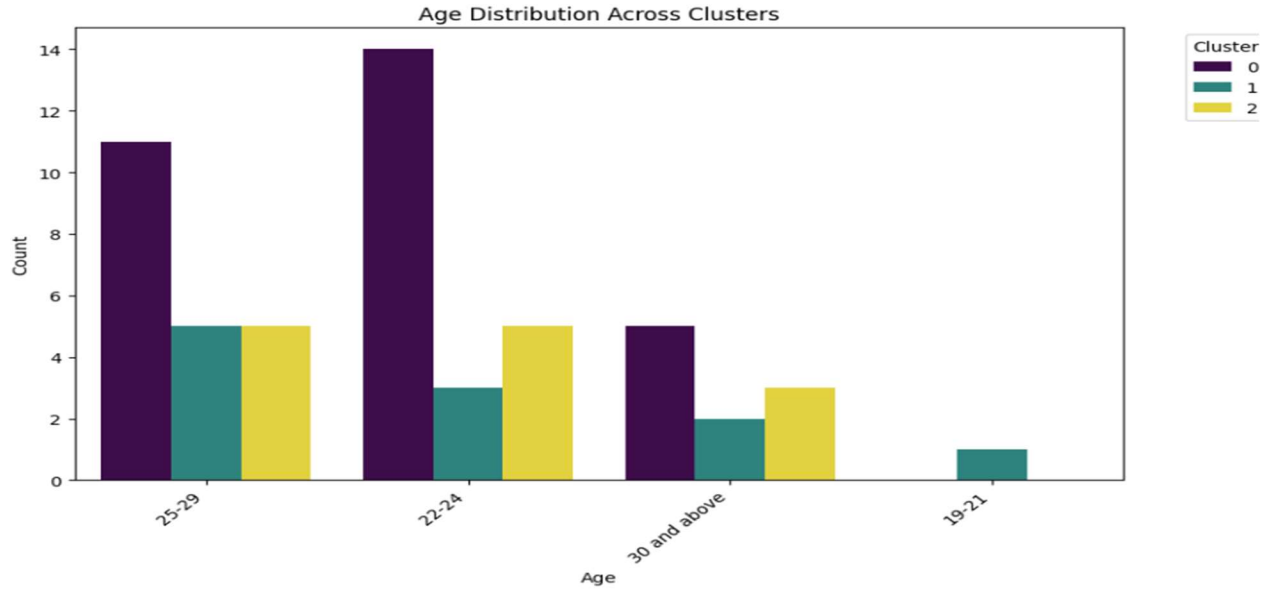


Figure (7) Shows the Age Distribution of Rwandan NEET

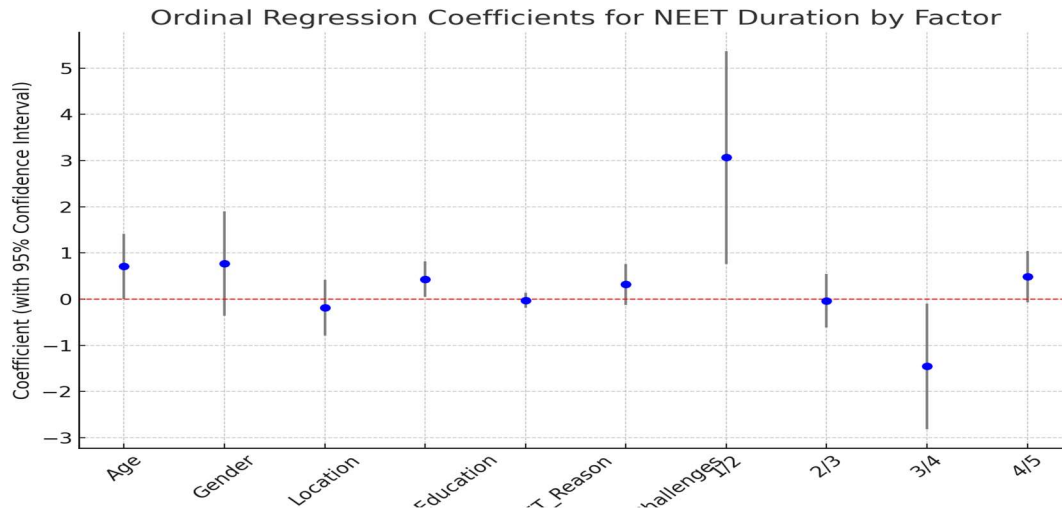
Based on the data from Figure (8), generally, both males and females are affected by the NEET situation in Rwanda. However, women show more capacity to overcome that than their male counterparts. Girls managed to decrease the status of remaining in the NEET category more effectively than boys, at least for a one- or two-years period.

Figure (8) Shows the gender of the Rwandan NEET youth.



Based on Chi-Square Statistics of 35.488 and a P value of 0.017, with 20 degrees of freedom, we find that the statistical data on the analysis of the impact of education and other factors on NEET duration is statistically significant. With the visualisation of the ordinal regression coefficient, we find the following illustrative graph in Figure (9).

Figure (9) Regression Analysis of the NEET factors



The graph above shows that, as highlighted above, the challenge of finding an available job in the area was the first-factor driving people to the NEET category. Other challenges were less significant. This means there is a scarcity of jobs in the Rwandan labour market. Other significant factors include age, education, and gender.

This quantitative research is supported by qualitative analysis, where it was clear that people in the NEET category has been increasing in both rural and urban areas in the country and that university graduates get job opportunities faster than secondary school graduates. It was clear that people stay long in the NEET category, about one year and above, and even beyond three years, and that is characterized by poverty and social misery. People mentioned that they do not have access to loans to start their entrepreneurial activities; they claim that they go to compete for jobs of like two positions while there are so many, like 100 or above. They claim that jobs are very scarce (aka karabuze), and some need guidance and orientation.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this research show that the number of NEET people among Rwandan youth has been increasing and exists in both rural and urban places. Some of them have been in the NEET category for over two years or more. The age group that is more affected is between 22 and 30, and there is a need to tackle this issue as being in the NEET category drives them into other socioeconomic malfunctions.

This research shows that most NEET people in Rwanda have problems finding jobs. Most of the respondents confirmed that they have had challenges finding job opportunities in their area. Moreover, the research highlights the problem of poverty within NEET, whereby some do not even get a transportation ticket to look for jobs.

Based on Buheji and Ahmed's research, there is a need to engage NEET young people in family activities, community projects, and businesses to include them in socioeconomic activities. This was also in line with RDB policy action to give them paid internships of at least six months and to empower traditional apprenticeships that can absorb a number of youths who are in the NEET category.

If we consider youth engagement in family businesses, most of the majority will be employed at the family and community levels. They will also get training and social capabilities to start up their new life. There is a need for systematic implementation of this agenda in what was called by SIAS founder – the *youthineering* or engaging the youth. Some good practices, such as rewarding families or individuals who employ a lot of young people in NEET, would be important. The government would not target enterprises or companies alone but also individual family businesses as they can also absorb these NEET persons. Other research, for instance, of the extent of the number of people who are employed in their family or community business, the income generation type they make, and their business and family relations after being employed by them would be paramount to future NEET studies in Rwanda and elsewhere.

Conclusively, the implication of this research is that it points out that there is the challenge of job scarcity in Rwanda's labour market, and this is the first among other factors, including age, gender and education, that drive people into the NEET category. Therefore, the researchers recommend trying to enlarge the labor market and job offers from local to urban areas, create jobs and induce family businesses that can accumulate a large number of graduates in Rwanda.

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