

# Enhancing Employee Performance in the Water Sector in South Africa: The Role of Training and Skill Development Programmes

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## ABSTRACT

Training and development are regarded as essential tools for any organisation to achieve its goals. It is widely acknowledged that many institutions invest in their employees' development to enhance their performance and improve productivity. Nevertheless, many institutions in South Africa, including the water sector, regard training and staff development as needless expenditure and often do little to augment their employees' knowledge and skills resulting in lower outputs and a dissatisfied population. Based on these challenges, this paper employed the purposive sampling technique to draw a sample of 100 out of a total of 300 employees from the water sector in four provinces to analyse whether training and development is relevant in enhancing employees' performance in the water sector. The findings revealed that training and development is not a priority in the sector, and that there are no strategic planning or policy guidelines for staff development. It was further found that training programmes in the sector is bedevilled with both systemic and structural challenges. This paper, therefore, recommends an integrative approach to the training of employees and carefully thought-out programmes that identify employees' weaknesses and introduce strategies that will enable the employees to enhance their skills and expertise at a minimum cost.

**Keywords:** Training, Development, Performance, Public Sector Employees, Water Department

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Training has become an integral component of most organisations globally, as training has been identified as a tool for performance enhancement among the workforce and is crucial to human resource development due to its significant contribution to the success of many organisations. Khan et al., (2016) opined that training is an intentional intervention that is designed to promote job performance. Training is connected with acquiring skills to improve productivity and achieve organisational goals and objectives. Training can also be seen as capacitating personnel to give their best (Egessa et al., 2014). To attract and sustain competent human resources in an organisation, the leadership of organisations focuses on employee training (Salau et al., 2015). Development, on the other hand, is the process through which organisations endow their staff or workers, with ingenuity, techniques, skills, competencies and knowledge to the level that they can have reliable and substantial gain and to operate any task required by the organisation (Abdus, 2016). Development is also regarded as any learning endeavour aimed towards future

demands instead of current desires, which is more concerned with professional development than current performance (Masada, 2015). Salau et al. (2014) indicate that in development, employees are empowered with expertise and know-how to develop a theoretical framework and routine operations of the organisation. Performance, by definition, is a systematic and uninterrupted procedure of enhancing an organisation's output by expanding the capabilities and capacities of individuals and groups within an organisation (Aina et al., 2020). Performance can also be defined as design and structure, consisting of interlacing components to achieve a goal and to develop an individual or a group for organisational growth (Devarajan et al., 2019).

Therefore, training and development is a steady and continual performance process, not an event (Kearney, 2015). Training and development are procedures of obtaining distinct aptitude and techniques by employees to achieve the predetermined goals and objectives for the betterment of organisations (Salah et al., 2013). Supporting the same argument, Kim et al., (2014) highlight that training and development reshape behaviour, cognitive skills or attitudes to attain effective performance in an organisation. Mafika (2015) disclosed that training and development are two perspectives, namely the institutional point of view on one hand and the employee's point of view on the other hand. While from the institutional point of view, training promotes organisational operations and organisational advancement, while employee perspective training is vital for both skills development and career advancement. In the same vein, Huselid (2015) also disclosed that training programmes serve as a channel to promote the desired service performance goals in the public-sector environment.

Post-independence in 1994, numerous studies and reports have analysed the impact of training and development on employees' performance in South Africa's public sector, including the water sector. Munzhedzi

(2017), Mafini (2015), Cloete et al., (2016)), Mdhlalose (2020) and Karia et al., (2017) all recognised the importance of training and development on the public sector employees. Nevertheless, despite the acknowledgment of training on performance many scholars concurred that there are luke-warm attitudes to training programmes in South Africa's public institutions including the water sector. Cloete et al., (2016) opined that the lack of effective training and development among employees, especially in the water sector has impacted negatively on the provision of water provision to the population. This is supported by Rabie et al., (2016) that despite the relevance of training and development on the performance of employees in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, achievement orientation, performance and resource management training programmes in most water institutions in South Africa, are haphazard, unplanned, unsystematic and poorly coordinated.

The training programmes are also not compulsory for career progression in the sector (Mohlomi et al., 2019) and Egessa (2014) pointed out that less than 3% of employees in the entire water sector have engaged in any form of training programmes post-1994. Interestingly, those who have participated in the programmes are mostly those in senior management and leadership positions. Cloete et al., (2016) disclosed that more than 65% of the entire employees in the water sector, from junior to senior management positions are either professionally unqualified, underqualified, or both. This argument was supported by Kamara et al., (2017) that the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) the body responsible for water resources in South Africa lacked any clear human resource development strategy or training and development policies. Additionally, Mpofo et al., (2014) opined that even where training programmes exist, there are gaps between the staff's operational needs and existing training courses making the programmes irrelevant and not fit for purpose in the sector. Tshukudu et al., (2015) further argue

that while the DWS and other water institutions spend colossal amounts of resources on employees through short courses, in-service and full qualification programmes, there is no corresponding impact on performance and productivity, and the overall functionality on service provisions are far below expectation. These are manifested in numerous communities' unrests across the country due to lack of water provision. In light of these, the sector is bedevilled with compounding systemic and structural challenges due to inadequate qualified and professional staff resulting to corruption, maladministration, poor oversight and underspending of budgets. Based on these constraints, many scholars, policymakers and researchers engaging in these complex issues have proposed different training strategies and models to improve employees' productivities. For example, [Weru et al. \(2013\)](#) investigated into the relationship between training and development on performance of state-owned corporations, [Mzimela et al. \(2017\)](#) explored employees training and development practices in tourism and leisure sector in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, [Mohlomi et al. \(2019\)](#) looked into training and development in the public sector generally in South Africa. While these studies and many other researchers analysed the impacts of training and development on employees' performance and concluded that there is a strong connection between training and performance, nevertheless, few works of literature exist interrogating the connectivity of trained and professional workforce to efficient and effective water provision in South Africa. Grounded on these gaps and limited works of literature, this paper explored the significance of training in the water sector under the following objectives (i) the relationship between training and development on employees' performance and productivity (ii) systemic and structural constraints to training and development of employees and (iii) strategies to improve training and development programmes of employees. The remainder of the paper is

divided into five sections. Sections 2 examined the literature review under the theories, legislative instruments and barriers to training and development, the third section explored the methodology of the study while section four outlines the empirical evidence and analysis of the research and finally, section five and six present the discussions and recommendations of the study respectively.

## **2.1 Theoretical frameworks underpinning training and development**

The thrust of this paper is rooted in different theoretical principles underpinning training and development. [Swanso et al., \(2013\)](#) highlights that theories are connected with the determinations of clarifying, forecasting, and comprehending an event or an occurrence. A theoretical framework is therefore a conceptualised arrangement that embraces or collaborates the research theory ([Maxwell, 2013](#)). It presents and clarifies the philosophies and communicates, or exposes the existence of a problem. [Shafiq et al., \(2017\)](#) indicate that theoretical framework serves as a manual to the research and regulates variables to be assessed and their numerical connections. [Kraiger et al., \(2008\)](#) further highlight that a theoretical framework manifests the bearing that will be espoused by the investigator in carrying out the research. This paper explored some theories related to employees' training and development on employees' performance in the public sector. The subsequent sections expound some of theories guiding this research.

### **2.1.1 Theory of reinforcement**

This theory was first proposed by Burrhus Frederic Skinner, an economist philosopher in 1938. The reinforcement theory proposes that you can change someone's behaviour by using reinforcement, punishment and extinction. Rewards are used to reinforce behaviour you want and punishments are used to prevent what you do not want. Extinction is a means to stop someone from performing a learned behaviour ([Stangor et al., 2014](#)). The theory stresses on the learning

behaviour of a person and highlights that behaviour, which is attached with positive outcomes or results of the organisation be promoted. This theory therefore suggests that training and development programmes be designed with the organisational objectives and positive outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

According to Stewart et al., (2019) there are several methods available in human resource practices which can be associated with training and development programmes and require conceptualisation and application of this theory in the form of rewards such as bonuses, salary increases, promotion and awarding of certificates after training programmes, and which are associated with the training and development activities. In the view of Bruno et al., (2017) these incentives certainly create conducive and positive outcomes among employees. This theory was considered in this study to determine if these practices can encourage or motivate employees in the water sector to engage in training and development programmes.

### **2.1.2 Theory of experiential learning**

Experiential and cognitive types of learning types of learning are differentiated by experiential theory of learning presented by C Rogers in 1969. Rogers distinguished two types of learning: cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant). The former corresponds to academic knowledge such as learning vocabulary or multiplication tables and the latter refers to applied knowledge such as learning through practical activities. The key to the distinction is that experiential learning addresses the needs and wants of the learner. Jenkins et al., (2017) disclosed that wants and needs of employees are addressed by experiential learning. Experience results in maturity and increases the learning power along with knowledge. Due to the personal involvement, the learners (employees) are able to conduct a self-evaluation test, which allow for understand the effect of learning. For the purpose of this paper this theory was

used to examine upper-level perceptions of learning in a leadership training.

### **2.1.3 Constructivist Learning theory**

Constructivism underscores the significance of the vigorous participation of learners (employees) in constructing knowledge for themselves and building innovative concepts or thoughts, based on current knowledge and experience (Coetzee et al., 2019). Constructivism is recognised as an exclusive learning theory in itself. Behaviourism and cognitivism both back the training of scrutinising an action and breaking it down into manageable chunks, establishing objectives and measuring performance based on those objectives (Coetzee et al., 2019). Smith et al., (2005) argue that all humans can build knowledge in their minds through a process of discovery and problem-solving to the extent that this process can take place naturally without structured learning and teaching. Individual programs drawing from constructivist and constructionist methods have garnered attention for their noteworthy successes in learning outcomes, especially schooling interventions focused on at-risk children where approaches centred on hands-on-academic-study and skill immersion and life-environment mitigation. Impressive successes against formidable odds have been achieved. Students emerge with a deepened ability to grasp content knowledge, synthesize and solve problems (Gunduz et al., 2014).

Constructivist-based workplace learning and development address the demands of the real world. It's well-established that effective workplace teamwork depends on team members aligning to a shared mental model (Edmondson, 2003). With these applications in mind the conceptual framework of the study integrated the three theories of staff development. The concepts are training, development and performance management as a fundamental theory on the function of training and development of staff empowerment. The theory encapsulates training techniques such as facilitation and instruction. Development technique is



regarded as a positional sequence and includes conferences and workshops with colloquy as teaching methods. In the structure, performance management is the knowledge, innovation, job fulfilment, professional development and achievement inclination. London et al., (2021) disclosed that, “training and development systems are the methods and techniques adopted to achieve the goal of employees’ development, and are often regarded as the policy for training and development”. The policy dictates the training and development needs, the vision and the goals, and the method of attaining the two concepts. These concepts can, therefore, be regarded as fundamental strategies to improve the competencies of employees, which then translates into the overall growth of the organisation.

#### 2.1.4 Adult Learning Theory

Although, all the above-mentioned theories explicitly analysed the connections between training and development on employees’

performance, for the purpose of this paper adult learning theory was used as the foundation on which the theories, debates and analysis were built on. Adult learning theory is developed on the assumption that as people matures, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experiences that become an increasing resource for learning. This assumption is supported by Gouthro (2019) namely that adult learners possess different qualities and needs than younger learners. Primarily, adult learners carry a whole lot of worth of experience suggesting that adult learners already hold rich reserves of knowledge and skills. Their willingness to learn is hugely influenced by a goal, like acquiring new skills for career advancement or overcoming a weakness. They are matured, tasked-oriented and are comfortable learning at their pace instead of being controlled and directed by an instructor (Muneja, 2015). The conceptual structure of adult learning theory is depicted in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1 Theoretical Framework of adult learning theory  
Source: ASTD Training and Development Handbook

Generally, the applicability of this theory is such that employees are directly involved in the planning and developmental stages, conduct assessment, survey and interviews to determine the type of training and topics they need as well as the training method that suit them most. Instead of presenting of new knowledge or skills through modules in classrooms or lecturer rooms presentation are mostly hands-on activities (Muneja, 2015). For the purpose of this paper, adult learning theory was used to explore the function of training and upgrading employees in

carrying out their duties. It explored the impact of training and development as an interrelated and integrated concept that is pursued by the human resource division in most institutions, including the water sector. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the paper is based on human resource development. The theory depicts training and development on three assumptions. Firstly, training and development are based on the study and theories obtained from several developmental disciplines. Secondly, training and development are interested in

enhancing the performance of employees within a distinct working environment. Finally, training and development tap into theories of transformation and how it affects an organisation. The change affects the workforce within an institution since training is mostly concerned with the upgrading of the workforce in an institution (Halawi et al., 2018). Jahanzeb et al., (2013), also view human resource development theory as a base for upgrading employees and a means of comprehending the models of development within an institution and the environment.

## **2.2 Legislative instruments on training and development in the water sector of South Africa**

The South Africa Constitution post-independence stressed a development-oriented, transparent, responsive, qualified, professional and ethical public sector employees (Curristine et al., 2007). Additionally, Section 195(1) of the Constitution highlights that public institutions, including the water sector, must be developmental driven in both personal and professional development. Curristine et al., (2007) opined that for public institutions to attain high level of growth their workforce must be adequately qualified and skilled to undertake their laid down responsibilities.

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service Act of 1995 states that "government must ensure that all public servants, from the most senior to the lowest employee, require skills and competencies obtained through recognised and accredited institutions and must recognise on-going and on-the-job training as an integral part of their professional development (Singh, 2016: 137 and Hlwempu, 2020). Senior and middle management training must be linked to the processes and policies defined by the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). These policies underscored the need for training and development programmes to be flexible to maximise workers' access to in-service training; this includes access to adult basic education (Nyamukachi, 2005). The legislative framework provides guidelines of

activities and a set of regulations to decide what needs to be learned, under what conditions, and how specific requirements and phenomena must be handled (Armstrong et al., 2008). The legislative framework in the water sector is set up to provide services that include: marketing, financing, administering and personal development. The human resource (HR) sections of the DWS stipulate legislative frameworks regarding training and development of staff, which is based on service delivery, recruitment, selection, salary, administration, and other components of water provision (Gualtieri, 2007).

The regulation instruments (staff development policies) are either officially presented in handbooks or informally within the institutions of the water sector. According to Charalambous et al., (2016) the training and development sections within human resource divisions play strategic roles in the facilitation, consultation and coordination all training and development interventions through facilitated learning in the organisations. The White Paper on Public Service Training and Education (1997) highlights that the training and development division within the department is responsible for the following: "promoting, executing, supervising and assessing every learning programme outlined in the policy structure which involve: counselling and giving directions to stakeholders in the education, training and development programmes; growth and enactment of the workplace expertise plans, establishment and maintenance of a database with all the vital information of the employees, training and developing of members of the staff; custodianship of the training and developing policies; supervising and reporting; budgeting and disbursement on training and development; liaising and collaborating with all appropriate associations" Attwell et al., (2016: 134).

The South African government promotes training and development distinctively enunciated in the legislation in three phrases as being the "Skills Development Act" (SDA) of 1998, the "Skills Development

Levies Act" (SDLA) of 1999 and the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA) of 1995. These legislations established innovative funding strategies, programmes, and organisations that are structured to grow employees' capacities and warrant the supply of standard schooling and training in the country. All these segments of regulations and ramifications have contributed substantially to skills development (Mello et al., 2014 and UNCTD, 2013). Also, the legislation policies have, in many ways, influenced human resource development and have contributed to skills development, improved competencies and knowledge of employees (Kraiger et al., 2015).

### **2.3 Types of training and development programmes in the public sector of South Africa**

The programme of training and development assists the employees to adapt to rapid transformation and modifications in job necessities and keeps them abreast with the innovative technology and training approaches (Mpofu et al., 2014). Many scholars including Cloete et al., (2016) are of the view that there are different forms of training programmes globally. However, Kelley et al., (2017), Jehanzeb et al., (2013), Truitt et al., (2011) highlight that there are two recognised training and development methodologies accessible to public sector employees: on-the-job and off-the-job training. Andrew et al., (2008) disclosed that the choice of any of training strategies depends on the organisation's vision and objectives and the individual circumstances such as, "who", or "what" and "why", of the training and development programmes. Salau et al., (2014: 29) opined that on-the-job training is also known as direct instruction and oldest forms of training of public sector employees. In the view of Salau et al., (2014) on-the job training is based on interpersonal engagements where somebody who knows the job shows another person how best to perform it. According to Rouiller et al., (2006), the trainer's on-the-job training

requires direct instruction and specialised knowledge from the trainee. The employees learn as they produce or carry out the tasks at hand. This type of training is conducted either by the employees' immediate supervisor at work or by an expert from another section. Warithaka et al., (2017) described on-the-job training as upgrading of employees' skills and expertise while the employees are essentially employed and executing their tasks. This training strategy aims to enhance the employees who have inadequate academic qualifications and educational background to perform effectively. Kumari et al., (2018) alluded that this training program is directly link to employees' job specification and is primarily informal. It is most effective because it is a learning by experience and is less expensive. Trainees are highly motivated and free from artificial classroom situations (Kumari et al., 2018). Specifically, on-the-job training is seen as training within the organisation. Trevor et al., (2009) and Torrington et al., (2015) mentioned the three primary training methods of on-the-job as being as orientation, job instruction, job rotation and coaching. However, the on-the-job training program is not systematically organised and often poorly conducted.

"Off-the-training" on the other hand, is a training strategy undertaken at a site, away from the actual workplace for a particular period (Nassazi, 2013). In these training programs, the worker is not on the usual job premises but is taught how to do the task in an identical situation using an archetype that would be used in the job environment (Salau et al., 2014). The reason behind imparting training at a place other than the job location is to provide a stress-free environment for the employees to concentrate only on learning. Study material is supplied to the trainees for complete theoretical knowledge. The trainees are free to express their views and opinions during the training session. Moreover, they can explore new and innovative ideas (Salah 2016). However, Nassazi (2013) disclosed that "off-the-training" programmes are expensive as they

involve selecting the places for training, arrangement of facilities for the employees and the hiring of an expert to impart training. [Weru et al., \(2013\)](#) mentioned the “off-the-training” methods as lecture courses and seminars, workshops and conferences and role-playing.

#### **2.4 Barriers to employee training and development in the water sector of South Africa**

Different studies have identified significant constraints limiting water sector employees' development. [Swanepoel et al., \(2014\)](#) disclosed that one of the many reasons why training fails in public institutions is a lack of systematically developed training policies. [Mohlomi et al., \(2019\)](#) believe that it is critical to relate the needs identified into measurable objectives and guide the training strategies. Appropriate training methods must be selected, and suitable materials developed to translate into knowledge and skills identified in the objectives. Most importantly, the government's directive is a single and critical component that leads to adequate training and development in the organisation. [Omotayo \(2009\)](#) indicates that enforcing effective collaboration between training and strategic planning is a critical challenge facing management in recent times. [Aina et al., \(2020\)](#) indicate that leadership of most water sector institutions do not attach strategic organisational goals to their training and development priorities in most instances. [Lacerenza et al., \(2017\)](#) associate these failures to poor planning on the part of leadership both at provincial and national levels. It is, therefore, crucial that a strategic training plan is developed to achieve effectiveness in training. [Ridoutt et al., \(2002\)](#) and [Owusu-Acheaw \(2017\)](#) further alluded that lack of or inadequate resources remain a significant constraint contributing and restricting employees from participating in training and development activities. In the public sector in South Africa, each department is expected to provide training for its employees. Unfortunately, it is often unsystematic,

uncoordinated, ‘window dressing’ and dominated by political influence and corruption. In most situations, training programmes are poorly patronised by employees and often lack long term goals and objectives ([Owusu-Acheaw, 2017](#)). The absence of funding, qualified personnel and support from both the public and private corporations further hinders employees from registering and participating in training programmes to upgrade and enhance their knowledge, competencies, and professional development. Consequently, the challenge of skills shortage and mismatching persists to the detriment of service provision. This development has led to the problem of poor performance and skills required to provide quality service to the population. In the end, the goals and the vision of the National Development Plan (NDP) of professional public servants will remain a pipedream ([Mohlomi et al., 2019](#)).

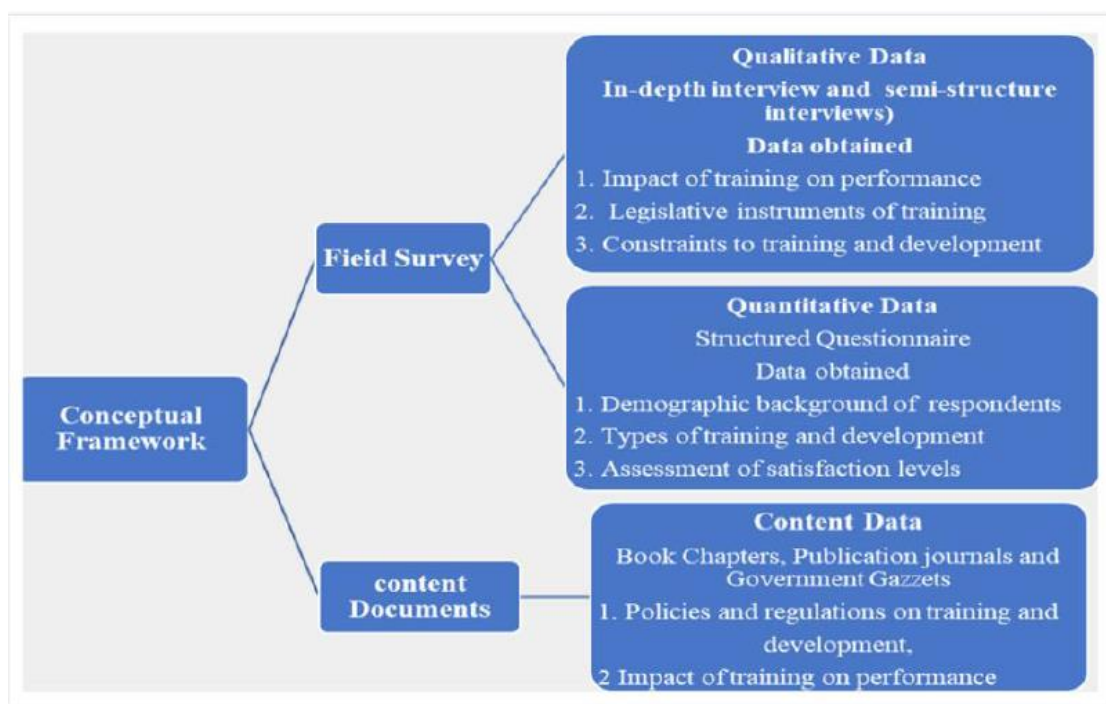
### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The survey for this paper was conducted in four provinces of South Africa; Eastern Cape, Free State, Western Cape, and Gauteng. These provinces were selected due to the high number of employees absorbed in the water sector and persistent challenges of supplying water to the population. Based on our desired to explore the real-world impact on the topic under discussion, the study employed the concurrent mixed method to explore the impact of training and development on employees' performance in the water sector. [Creswell \(2003\)](#) defined mixed method as a research that involves collecting, analysing, interpreting and discussion of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the underlying phenomenon. This method was considered relevant for this paper because it draws on the positivist and interpretive approaches. The mixed-method approach harnesses the strength of both qualitative and quantitative strategies while compensating for their weaknesses. Consistent with the pragmatic concept which underpins the mixed strategy, data were



collected through questionnaires, interviews, and secondary data in the form of journals and government gazettes on policies of training from water institutions within four provinces. The population used for the study were employees explicitly selected from water institutions with different job descriptions. A total of ninety respondents were randomly selected to answer quantitative questionnaires, while ten participants were purposively and convenient sampled from a list of employees within the rank of managers, supervisors, and other senior levels within the water industry for face-to-face semi-structured interviews as the qualitative aspect of the study. The choice of these respondents was based on their in-depth knowledge of training and development policies and their involvement in training programmes. The quantitative component of this paper centred around the demographic characteristics of the respondents and types of training and development programmes. In contrast, the qualitative data in the form of in-depth and semi-structured interviews were employed to solicit information on the training and development systems, the impact of training and development on staff performance,

concept and legislative instruments guiding training and development in the public sector. The qualitative component was also used to identify training and employee development constraints to training and development practices. The primary data were complemented by secondary data primarily from literature reviews such as research papers, textbooks, academic journals and government booklets, minutes as well as the DWS policies and brochures on training. The secondary data The qualitative and quantitative data were analysed concurrently. Using descriptive statistics, data collected from the questionnaire were analysed and presented in tables and graphs. The SPSS Windows Version 21 was used to capture, analyse, and produce frequency tables and diagrams that ensures quick interpretations of the data obtained. For data from the interviews, thematic content analysis was used. Prior to this, data from the focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and then analysed through "pattern-matching logic", which compares an empirically based pattern with predicted outcomes. A conceptual framework of the methodology is depicted in Figure 2



**Figure 2** A conceptual framework of the study methodology  
Source: Based on fieldwork materials (2022)

#### 4. Empirical Evidence and Analysis

The findings of this paper is presented in three complementary sections based on the structure of the study these include: demographic characteristics of respondents, perspective of training and development on employees' performance and constraints to training and development programmes.

##### 4.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, educational background, and years of experience of the respondents were deemed relevant for this study due to their intrinsic link to the training and development programmes of employees and the fact that, the employees in the water sector are becoming increasingly diverse was the impetus for the analysis of demographic features in this paper.

##### 4.1.1 Age of respondents

The age of respondents was considered relevant in this paper because it was used to identify and analyse whether the organisation has a mixed composition of staff that is significant to affect the training and development programmes. Respondents were asked to indicate their age as stated in the questionnaire provided.

The study result showed among those who responded to the survey, the majority of the respondents 40 out of 90, representing 44%, were aged 37- 47, with 20 translating to 22% were within the ages of 26-36, 58 and above was represented by 9%, with 18-25 age group accounting for only 8%. A careful analysis of the age distribution of the respondents suggests that the majority of employees in the water sector are within age groups that can be trained and developed to become efficient, capable, independent thinkers and technologically inclined to render quality and professional services to the population of South Africa.

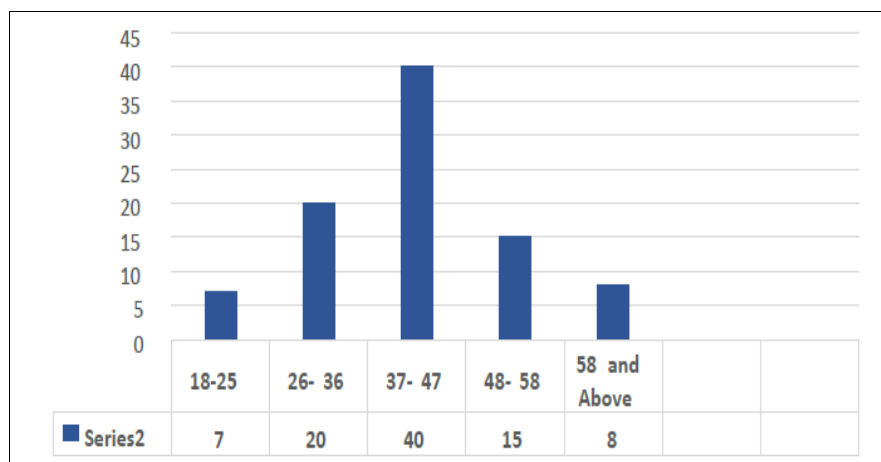


Figure 1 Age categories of respondents  
Source: Field study 2020

##### 4.1.3 Gender classification of respondents

Gender is a critical element to reflect when analysing staff progress and development issues. Espi et al. (2019) argued that in various parts around the world, especially in Africa, including South Africa, the level at which females remain inferior and lesser to males is enormous. This phenomenon is

often enforced by religion and cultural practices. These practices remain an unadorned hindrance to women's career growth, especially in the water sector. Based on this assumption, this study sampled the views of both groups for analysis. Table 1 depicts the gender classification of the participants.

**Table 1 Gender classification of respondents**

Employment categorisation	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Senior Administrators /Managers	6	2	8
Junior Administrators / Managers	8	5	13
Permanent employees	15	12	27
Temporal employees	25	17	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field study 2020

Answers to Table 1 revealed that the majority of participants surveyed were men, as this depicts the general employment trend in South Africa. Out of 90 participants surveyed for this study, 54 of them, representing 60%, were men, while 36, representing 40%, were women. This breakdown reveals gender inequality in the water sector in terms of employment. Concerning senior positions, the data shows out of eight managers, only two translating to 25%, are women, most of the women in the sector were in junior positions and are on a temporary contract. The employment pattern and distribution in the water sector is male dominated.

An in-depth interview with a senior manager in the DWS in King William’s Town mentioned that:

... *“females are three times less likely to be employed in the water sector in South Africa due to structural and systematic challenges such as cultural norms, history and prejudice towards women in general in the country. For instance, some of the respondents mentioned childbearing, family responsibilities, lack of technical know-how, less qualification and other social factors as demotivated factors of employing females”*

...

These findings suggest that there is lack of support, as people transition between roles and positions, impacts on decision making, and women in particular are less likely to apply for promotion particularly if is outside their own area of expertise or department. It is therefore, suggested that to achieve gender equity, it has to be underpinned by a greater openness to real flexibility across grades in the department. This could be done by restructuring positions not as ‘empty places’ but as sets of tasks and functions that that

could be configured differently across different members of staff.

#### 4.1.3 Educational levels of respondents

The educational levels of respondents were considered a critical component in this study. In general, an individual’s educational background will determine how he or she performs on a task and, importantly, how an individual applies new knowledge or skill to solve complex challenges. In light of these assumptions, respondents were asked to indicate their highest educational achievements. As shown in Figure 2, the majority of the respondents, 42, representing 47%, had Matric certificates, 24 of them representing 27% had diploma qualifications, 15 of the respondents translating to 17%, had a Junior Degree, while 9 of the respondents representing 10% possessed different levels of postgraduate certificates. Nevertheless, from the open discussions with some of the participants, it was revealed that some of the employees are furthering their education through part-time studies. This is an indication that the employees are ready to enhance their competencies, knowledge, skills, and expertise within their respective disciplines. A director in HR division in the DWS in Free State who was engaged in an interview mentioned that:

...” *educational qualifications have a significant bearing on job performance as employees with higher educational qualification tend to be responsive in receiving instructions, commit less mistakes, doing new tasks and easily adopt new technologies which increases their ability innovate and improve performance”* ...

These findings sit well with the observation by Cloete et al., (2016) that the lack of

qualified staff and personnel is significant limitations in almost all the public sector employees, including the water sector in South Africa. According to Cloete et al., (2016), unqualified and underqualified employees in the South African water sector are widespread and are significant obstacles to water provision in South Africa. It is

therefore proposed that in the continuous search for better understanding of and solving challenges in the water sector, there is the need to intensify training and development of employees in order to address the challenges of water security both nationally and globally.

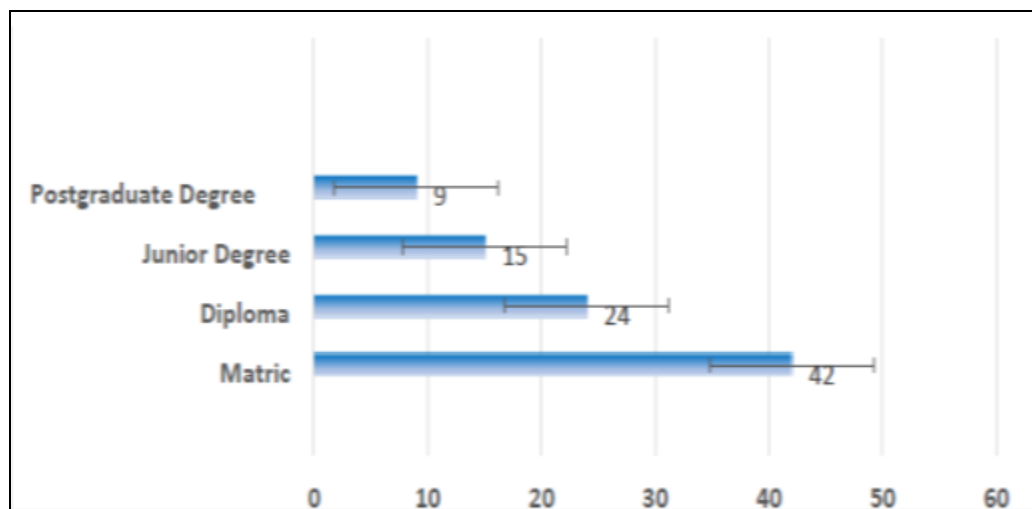


Figure 2 Educational levels of respondents  
Source: Field survey 2020

#### 4.1.4 Years of experience by the respondents

Years of experience of respondents were deemed relevant because it affects the day-to-day operations in the water sector. Experience is assumed to enhance the level of skills and competencies within a specific task which, in turn, improves their

effectiveness and efficiency. Many researchers are of the view that there is a close correlation between employees' experience and job performance. In line with these assumptions, respondents were asked to indicate their years of experience in the water sector. Table 4.2 depicts the categorisation of respondents in terms of years of experience in the sector.

Table 2 Years of experience of respondents

Years of work in the sector	Total number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
1 – 5 years	15	17
6 – 10 years	25	28
11 – 15 years	20	22
16 – 20 years	18	20
20+	12	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field survey 2020

The results in Table 4.2 indicate that 15 of the respondents representing 17%, have worked in the water sector between 1 to 5 years, 25 of them representing 28%, have been employees in the sector between 6 to 10 years, while 20 of the respondents representing 22% have worked continuously in the sector between 11 to 15 years, 20%

representing 18 employees, have worked in industry between 16 to 20 years, while 12 of the respondents, translating to 13% indicated that they have over 20 years of working experience in the water sector. Analysing the trend of experience gives a keen observation that the experience levels of the majority of the staff members extend beyond ten years.



The breakdown suggests that the water sector has a high level of staff retention. It further suggests that the sector has a blend of different levels of experienced personnel.

#### 4.2.1 Perspectives of training and development on employees' performance

The impact of training programmes on employees' performance was analysed to ascertain respondents' views of their impact on their job performance. Respondents were asked to indicate whether training and development programmes impact their work performance. Figure 2 reveals the answers of respondents.

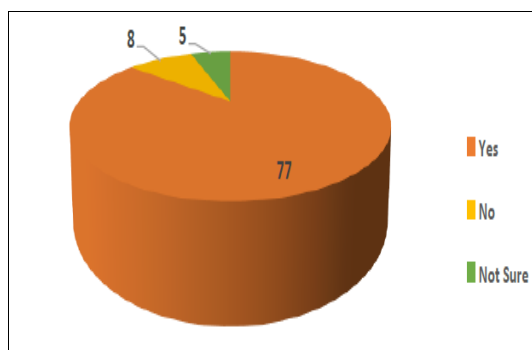


Figure 2 Perspective of the impact of training programmes among respondents  
Source: Field survey 2020

Analysis from Figure 2 revealed that out of 90 respondents surveyed, 77 of them, representing 85%, agreed that training and development programmes have a significant impact on their job performance, eight of participants translating to 9% however, believed that the programmes have no impact on their performance, while 6% representing five respondents are not certain whether training programmes have any bearing on their job performance. An employee in Regional Office in Western Cape DWS who was engaged in an interview stated that:

...” employees with access to training and development programmes have advantage than colleagues without access to training opportunities. The investment in training that the department makes shows employees they are valued. Training creates supportive workplace based on the sense that providing the necessary training equipped employees with overall knowledge who can take over from one another when needed or work as a team or independently” ...

These findings confirmed the views of Elnaga et al. (2013) that training programmes, if effectively implemented and resourced, can have a significant positive impact on the performance of employees at any level and in every sector. As indicated in many scholarly works of literature training and development is key to sustaining organisational growth and success as it promotes employee responsibility, production, satisfaction and retention as well as boosting workplace engagements.

#### 4.2.2. Significance of training and development on employees' performance

The fundamental goal of this paper was to understand the impact of training and development programmes within the water sector in South Africa. Therefore, the direct impact of training and development programmes on employees was analysed in detail. Respondents were asked to indicate the components where they have been impacted by the training programmes and the level at which they have been impacted. Table 3 shows the respondents positions regarding this matter within the sector.

Table 3 Significance of training and development on performance

Opinions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Enhance productivity and performance	0	5	10	35	40	90
Onboard optimisation	3	12	30	25	20	90
Employee retention	2	10	20	40	18	90
Formalised and structure knowledge share	3	13	15	34	25	90
Customer satisfaction	2	10	24	29	25	90
Employee engagement	2	12	24	30	22	90
Internal weakness	5	13	15	33	24	90
Track employee skills	1	10	13	33	33	90

Source: Field survey 2020

The breakdown in Table 3 suggests that the overwhelming majority of the respondents either "agreed or strongly agreed" that training and development are relevant to employees' performance; a significant number of respondents were also neutral to training programmes. This group of respondents was not certain whether the current training programmes have any bearing on staff performance. Nevertheless, a small number of the respondents either "disagreed or strongly disagreed" that there was no correlation between training and employees' performance. Generally, it was found that 84% of respondents agreed that they could perform effectively in their respective specialisation after receiving the training they need compared to 16% who disclosed that their performance turned worsened after the training programmes. An open discussion with an employee in the private water company who is based in Johannesburg disclosed that:

... "the training I received helped me do my work, especially time management and making priorities. I now know that it is more important to spend time on more productive things at work. I have to admit that the time invested in this training was worth it because what I learnt was very practical"...

Another employee in the provincial DWS based in Johannesburg who was engaged in an interview opined that:

".... the soft skills obtained to the training assisted to effectively communicate, solve problems, collaborate and become a more organised person. These attributes are critical and fundamental for the success of

any organisation including the water sector as they evolve on social, economic and technical components".

Nevertheless, a middle level manager in DWS alluded in an open discussion that:

..."the current training and development programmes lack integration collaboration between performance management system, strategic planning, human resource management processes, organisational culture and structure and other major organisational systems and processes."...

These observations confirmed the views of Owusu-Acheaw (2017) that training and development are foundations on which employees' performance can be improved. Nevertheless, absence of synergy between employee's needs and training accessible, lack of recognition for training, lack of user-friendly training procedures and lack of human resources management and effective strategies to impact knowledge and skills will render training programmes a mere formality and not good for purposes.

#### **4.3 Constraints to training and development of employees in the water sector**

This paper analysed the structural and systematic challenges hindering the training and development of employees in the water sector. Questions and interviews were designed to capture the respondents' views on this matter. Figure 3 shows the findings and perspectives of respondents regarding the barriers to employees training and development.

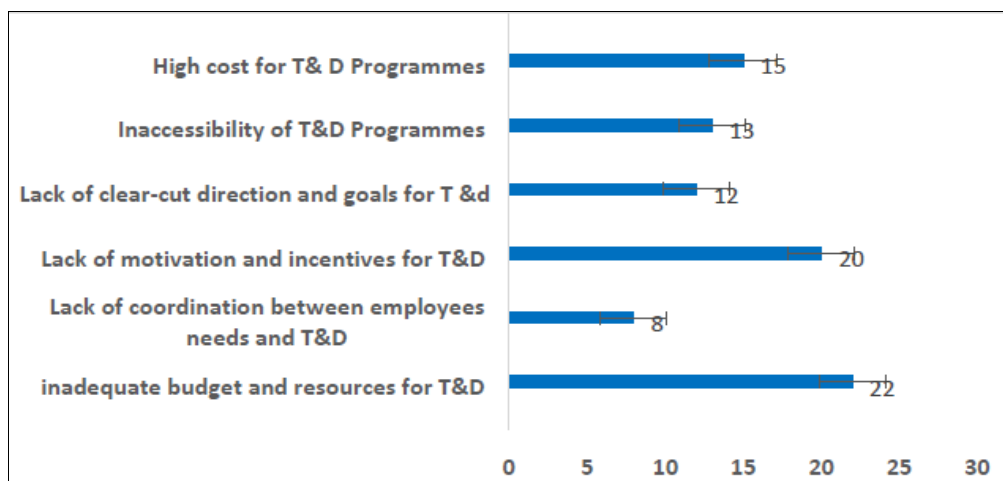


Figure 3 Impediments to training and development of employees.  
Source: Field survey 2020

Figure 3 shows that inadequate budget and resources towards training programmes were the greatest constraints; this was mentioned by 22 respondents representing 24% of the total surveyed. This was followed by a lack of motivation and incentives towards training and development. This constraint was mentioned by 20 of the respondents translating to 22%, high cost, inaccessibility of training and development programmes, and lack of clear-cut direction and goals to training and development was mentioned by 15, 13 and 12 respondents, respectively. The open discussions with some respondents and some scholarly literature revealed that the current approach of selecting trainees and structure of the training and development programmes are outdated and bureaucratic and as a result, many employees have little interest in upgrading their skills, nor do they care about the transference of acquired knowledge to the workplace. A senior manager in the Eastern Cape DWS stated in an interview that:

..." training and staff development are just acquisition of certificate, and career development rather than acquisition of skill and expertise that can be used to enhance performance. This is because there are significant impediments hindering training programmes. This interviewee mentioned high cost of training courses, lack of recognition by the leadership of water sector to employees with higher qualification, inadequate training centres lack of support from the department, lack of learning

materials such books, computers and internets and time constraints"...

This view was augmented by a private water consultant who is based in Pretoria. This interviewee disclosed that:

...." in-service training programmes offered to employees through the Department of Water and Sanitation initiatives and other training agencies are generic and not based on a thorough needs analysis of employees and do not build organisational capacity".

These results and findings confirmed the assertion of Aun Lee (2015) that training and development of employees in South Africa in general is in sharp contrast with Malaysia training policies and strategies. According to Aun Lee (2015), more than 200 institutions exist in Malaysia to train various levels water sector employees. Training and development are managed and coordinated by the Public Service Department, which is also responsible for managing recruitment, placement and transfer of employees (Renata, 2010). The National Institute for Public Administration (INTAN) offers vocational training in public administration, while "Razak School of Government", a private company established by the government, focuses on leadership development in the sector (Kanapathipillai et al., 2020). Zumrah (2014) disclosed that training and development programmes are mandatory to confirm probation and promotion purposes for all levels of employees. The relevant departments coordinate institution-specific training. All

training programmes are designed locally and delivered in collaboration with local and international higher education institutions, and where necessary, experts from the private sector and state-owned entities are invited to train on specific topics (Truitt, 2011). The government pays for training for government employees, and private sector people can attend some of the training programmes at their own cost. The government's training institutions are fully-fledged campuses with teaching and residential facilities, and some of the courses offered in these institutions are fully-fledged qualifications in the area of public administration (Sheeba et al., 2019). These are completely opposite to the South African situation where employees' training and development programmes are mandated to universities and technikons, which are just awarding certificates to theory courses with little or no regards to practicality of the programmes (Cloete et al., 2016)

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This paper dissected the relationship between training and development on employees' performance in the water sector of South Africa. It was argued “– and rightly so” - that employees are the greatest asset in in the water sector, and therefore investing in their training and development is key to sustaining the growth of the department. As shown in the empirical findings much of the analysis on demographic characteristics focused primarily on age, gender, educational background and the experience of respondents. What emerged in one of the findings is that men dominate in every department within the water sector from the junior to senior positions. The dominance of men in the sector is not isolation, but a reflection of the general working environment in South Africa where women are discriminated against various settings be it social or economic and job opportunities. As noted by Sinden (2017) that women in South Africa have for decades experienced discrimination in workplace because certain positions such as top and senior management

posts are predominantly reserve for men. Our findings established that in instances where women are employed, they mostly are offered positions at the lower levels such as secretaries or administrative positions. Another finding of our paper which is attested in Table 1 unearthed that, the majority employees temporary employed. Based on interactions with the respondents supported by works of literature such as van Eck (2017) and Altman et al. (2010) disclosed that the dominance of temporal employees in the sector is not by accident, but a calculated strategy by the sector to minimise costs because bonuses and allowances are not paid to temporary employees. Another characteristic that features predominantly in the demographic information of the participants is the age. Based on statistical evidence an overwhelming majority of employees are below the 50 years. This study strongly concurred that the dominance of young employees in the sector is strong indication that the workforce in the water sector can be trained and be developed to become more productive, efficient, independent thinkers and technically innovative to meet the standard of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. This view is supported by Kollman et al., (2019) that young employees have skills, enthusiasm and innovative ideas to bring to the workplace, helping the department to stay fresh and up to date. Our observation and opinion support the argument that young employees can help the sector to flourish, providing new skills and building workforce for the future. In terms of the educational levels of employees, the study established that the most of employees in the had only matric certificates and that only a small segment of the employees had post matric qualifications. Our findings unearthed that the low levels of qualifications among employees are based on the government's policy of given job opportunities to previously disadvantaged black population without making qualifications as the only criteria of selection. This finding is also attested by van Jaarsveldt (2018) that post-



independence in 1994, the government embarked on policies that seeks to empower the black and marginalised population economically. Our findings established that while this policy brought a huge number of the population into the job environment, it has created a huge shortage of skills such ICT specialists, engineers, artisans, human resources personnel and other supporting staff in the water sector. This view is also confirmed the views of [Rasool et al., \(2011\)](#) and Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority ([PSETA, 2017](#)) that South Africa is yet to equip its employees with skills needed for economic and employment growth and social development. Although the overall competitiveness has improved, the country is ranked at the bottom of a league of forty-seven countries for economic literacy, its education system, unemployment, skilled labour and the availability of information technology skills. Our paper further explores the impact of training and development on employees' performance, we established that there is a strong correlation between performance and training. This was demonstrated by the outcome of the survey in Figure 2 where a significant majority of the employees agreed that their performance improved tremendously due to training and upgrading programmes they had received. These findings confirmed that training and development have a positive and connection with employees' performance in the water sector. The findings of this paper established that the training and development courses received by the employees have increased their productivity, increased their retention levels, enhanced their relationships with customers resulting in higher rating of satisfactions among the population, built their confident in servicing employees and enhanced their creativity. Furthermore, it has enhanced their time management on problem-solving and has saved substantial amounts of money to the sector by minimising waste. These outcomes sit well with the views of [Armstrong et al., \(2008\)](#) that staff training and development

programmes contribute significantly to the fulfilment of organisational goals and objectives. As shown in Table 3, training bridges the gap on employees' present competence and present job requirements while improving the behaviour and performance of a person unceasingly. These results augmented the perspectives of [Vinesh \(2014\)](#) that training is strongly connected to employees' job performance, and in turn, organisational performance. Significantly, the findings proved that by investing in training programmes the water sector has potential to improve their financial standing that will result in efficient and effective services to the population. According to [Shaw \(2019\)](#) poor performance in the water sector in South Africa mostly occurred when employees don't know exactly what to do, how to perform their jobs or why they need to do certain things. Therefore, by training these constraints can be solved and improve performance. The outcomes also confirmed the views of [Shaw \(2019\)](#) that training plays a key role in employee's commitment, and it has the prospect of meeting expectations and needs of employees. The department and other water institutions are more likely to retain their employees who view training and development as relevant to their jobs and have a positive commitment to the department. Interestingly, our finding unearthed that training courses undertaking by some employees are merely to acquire certificates and qualification for recognitions and promotion into higher rankings and not necessary to acquire skills and knowledge to improve efficiencies in the water sector. This observation is confirmed by [Mpofu et al. \(2015\)](#) that majority of training programmes undertaken by students in higher institutions and as well as employees are just for academic purposes and not practical orientation which equips

In terms of constraints to training and development, the paper established that many factors impede the training processes of employees in the water sector. As shown in Figure 3, the most significant impediment was inadequate budget and resources

towards training and development programmes. As indicated in the literature, developing effective training programmes require time and resources and implementing the programmes necessitate funding, skills, political will and institutional capacity, including instructional designers and multimedia developers. Nevertheless, the results of the findings suggest that the water sector including the private institutions do not have these resources due to budget constraints. These are similar conclusions made by [Mndeme \(2011\)](#) that lack of resources in the form of investment in human resource development and financial constraints in the sector constrain training programmes in most government institutions including water sector post-independence in 1994. [Madame \(2011: 33\)](#) pointed out that sufficient resources such as time, money and human capital play a big role in promoting practical training of employees therefore lack of these resources hinder any meaningful training programmes. Lack of motivation and incentives were the second most challenging constraint facing training and development programmes in the sector. A significant number of participant alluded that there is lack of rewards in the form of promotion or financial compensation to staff that undertake training programmes. The lack of rewards has demoralised a significant number of employees from training courses. These outputs are supported by [Khan \(2012\)](#) that there is correlation between training and motivation. Motivation and incentives have a significant impact on training and development. [Rowold \(2007\)](#) indicated that individual attitudes and personality characteristics influence an employee's motivation to participate in training programmes. As pointed in the literature, numerous barriers stand as demotivation factors to training and development in the water sector in South Africa. [Hanaysha et al., \(2018\)](#) enumerated these demotivation factors in this order of priority: as time limitation, lack of the applicability of the training to the job situation and personal challenges such as collaboration with co-

workers, which affect employees' attitude to training programmes. Other impediment is linked to the sector's institutional or working environment such as workload and lack of recognition and reward for training negatively affect employees' morale to training programmes. [Mohamed \(2013\)](#) disclosed that there is no agreement on training needs and priorities, lack of commitment and shortage of funds which have limited the sustainability of the programmes. The high cost for training and development programmes, lack of clear-cut direction and goals, and lack of coordination between employees' needs and training and development programmes are other issues of major concern. [Thomson \(2012\)](#) pointed out that an environment that creates a harmonious relationship between employees, supervisors, line managers, human resource managers, trainers, and senior managers are prone to succeed in terms of productivity and efficient service provisions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this paper established that training and development is an essential facet of employees' development. It positively correlates both the employees' performance and the organisational outputs. It is undeniable fact that training and development have a significant impact in addressing employees' weaknesses, build consistency, ensure work satisfaction, increase productivity, enhance the quality of service and products, reduce costs, develop employees independence and minimise supervision. As pointed out in this paper, the water sector in South Africa has well-established policies and regulations that seek to invest in their employees' development; however, the processes involved are not being followed. The training and development programmes in the sector are hindered by deficiencies related to human capital, intellectual abilities and inadequate funding and budget constraints. Furthermore, the programmes are hindered by a lack of commitment and uncooperative attitudes on the part of leadership and the management of

the sector and whilst lower-level employees lack the commitment and manifest pessimistic attitudes towards training and development programmes. In light of these challenges this paper recommends that the leadership and management of the water sector should restructure the training and development programmes to integrate social and economic factors that enhance organisational performance. In addition, the leadership and management should put in strategies of assessment and evaluation of training and development programmes which must include: identifying training needs; strategically planning for training; establishing training objectives; designing the training programme, scheduling the training programme; presenting the programme; ensuring the transfer and implementation of the programme; maintaining the training; monitoring and evaluation of the training and development, learning from the training; and assessing the changes and improvement in performance attributable to the training and development programmes.

### Limitations and Study Forward

Even though, our study explored the impact of training on employees' performance and structural and systemic barriers to training and development in detail, it is not without some limitations. One of the main limitations of this paper is the small sample size. Due to the high cost involved in collecting data and time constraints, we could assemble a small sample for this study. While the sample size did not affect the study's outcomes, specific conclusions, such as the alternative models to training and development could not be ascertained. We recommend that future research explores the strategies and models in enhancing training and development programmes. This paper contributes towards (a) building a body of empirical evidence on employees' development and, by extension, the African continent and (b) broadening the previous works of literature and knowledge on policy implementation constraints on

training. These contributions are enhancing productivity of employees in the context of social and economic development globally.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors of this paper declared that there is no conflict of interest in writing this manuscript.

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