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Employment Equity Realisation: Assessing the Bridges and Barriers in the eThekwini Municipality of South Africa

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Abstract

The increasing pressures on the South African government to re-strategize its employment equity policy and ensure people of different races and gender are appropriately represented in employment opportunities are still without barriers. This study interrogates the bridges and barriers to the realisation of employment equity in the eThekwini municipality of South Africa. Remarking on the discourse of employment equity, sparse research attention has been given to the bridges and barriers of employment equity, specifically in the context of the eThekwini municipality of South Africa. To address this gap, the study assesses employment equity programmes that propel employment equity and the challenges constricting the realisation of employment equity in the eThekwini municipality. A total of 15 senior managers were purposively recruited and the semi-structured interview type employed to elicit qualitative data. The data were analysed for the identification of themes with the NVivo (v.12) qualitative software and the various themes analysed with the content qualitative analytical tool. Inclusive initiatives, sufficient budget and women empowerment were shown as important employment equity programmes employed in the municipality. Difficulty in recruiting and retaining scare skills, lack of clarity and commitment to employment equity policy and political leadership and corruption were revealed as constraints to employment equity targets. The study concludes on the need for a more proactive effort on the part of the South African Department of Labour in monitoring and evaluating compliance to employment equity targets with commitment to scarce skills identification and continuous awareness to encourage more women and designated groups into the employment equity folds.

Keywords: Employment, Equity, Discrimination, Municipality, Government, Public Organisation

1. Introduction

The Republic of South Africa like other developing nations is still puzzled with the challenge of employment equity across the tiers of public and private establishments including employment discrimination against persons of different racial groups, women and people living with disabilities (PWD's (Golele & Rachidi, 2017; Dima, 2016). The birth of the new democratic South Africa in 1994 ushered in a new milestone in ensuring the conundrums of inequality in terms of access to employment opportunities are addressed with the legislation of the Employment Equity Act No 55 in 1998-EEA. However, little evidential reports are available to gauge the progress of this legislation as more persons are now discriminated against on the ground of racial differences and disabilities

(Geldenhuys, 2020). Given that the realisation of employment equity is not entirely shouldered on the national government, a significant degree of responsibility is expected from other tiers of government and private establishments in provoking modalities in line with the provisions of the EEA for the promotion of employment equity among designated groups and women (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999).

The increasing level of disappointing roles exude by leaders of public organisations in South Africa in addressing the scourge of employment inequality has further stretched discrimination in employment quotas at the local level of governance (Van der Heever, Van der Merwe & Crowley, 2019). For instance, policy makers of local government have now assumed the responsibility of "who get what" through political manipulation while ignoring the ethos and principle of employment equity (Radebe, 2019). The concern of employment equity is explained by how employment is appropriately distributed among people of different race, gender and religion. Realising this objective has been constricted by a number of issues including the lack of commitment to the implementation of employment equity policy, leadership and political pressure, and communication and cultural challenges (Jongens, 2016). Others are the challenge of identifying scarce skills, ineffective human resource and talent management among others (Sharma, 2016). Research evidence has shown that the large majority of issues in employment equity in South Africa have been explored through racial discriminatory lens with little attention to age, gender and disabilities (Breetzke & Hedding, 2016). For instance, one of the gender discriminatory practice in the cannon of employment equity discourse is the preference for male in selective sectors of the South African economy (Dima, 2016). Thus, the concept of employment equity must be extended to the inclusive growth of the individual person, PWD's, gender and the country by extension. The argument for this paper is the position that specific sectors of the South African labour market is dominated by the male gender (Breetzke & Hedding, 2016). Thus, the need to initiate appropriate employment equity policy by relevant stakeholders is fundamental to the realisation of employment equity by ensuring equal representation of both gender in diverse sectors of the labour market.

Among other municipalities in South Africa, the eThekwini municipality is still being faced with the growing rife of employment discrimination. For instance, the eThekwini Employment Equity Framework released in 2014 aim to purse and attain employment equity by the year 2018. The framework reports show that people with disabilities have been grossly affected by employment discriminatory practices with 0.5 percent representation in contrast to the 2 percent target (eThekwini Employment Equity Plan, 2018). In terms of racial, the reports reveal an over-representation of male, especially among the Indian workforce in senior management, professional qualified, skilled occupation and top management levels of the eThekwini municipality than any racial group (eThekwini Employment Equity Plan, 2018). Although, while it cannot be entirely invalidated that the municipality has some progress, there are still employment equity gaps that should roused the concerns of stakeholders, especially in areas of women equal representation and PWD's (Oosthuizen, Tonelli & Mayer, 2019). These issues form the nub of this study. The eThekwini municipality is carefully chosen as the research context for this study. This justification is premised on its metropolitan composition with the highest concentration of people amongst other municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal province (South Africa Statistics, 2018). This study assume justification for the eThekwini municipality with its capacity to employ a large number of workforce from different racial divides.

The literature is replete with studies on employment equity in South Africa including subjective experiences of employment equity in South Africa (Oosthuizen, Tonelli & Mayer, 2019); cultural diversity model for corporate South Africa (Dima, 2016); the challenges of achieving gender equity in a government department in South Africa (Golele & Rachidi, 2017) nurses' views on promotion and the influence of race, class and gender relation to EEA (van der Heever, van der Merwe & Crowley, 2019). However, in the cannon of employment equity studies, hardly has any study been conducted with a focus on understanding employment equity goals/programmes and factors affecting the realization of employment equity in the eThekwini municipality. This position conveys the

uniqueness and originality of this paper. In part, the paper hopes to understand the bridges and barriers to the realisation of employment equity. In specific, the aim is to interrogate the different goals and programmes employed towards the realisation of employment equity and the range of barriers limiting the actualisation of these objectives.

The main contribution of the paper is the examination of the eThekwini place in the campaign for employment equity within the context of available programmes and how these programmes have been limited in specific ways. It is undeniable the fact that available scholarship concerning the narrative of employment equity in the broad context of the eThekwini municipality is still under-researched, especially in relation to the themes raised in this paper. By interrogating these objectives, it is probable to provide a more nuanced perspective and understanding of employment equity as it pertains to South Africa. In view of this, the analysis takes the locus that the eThekwini's story conveys its importance and this is distinctively relevant for shaping the empirical understanding of employment equity in the KwaZulu-Natal province and by South Africa by extension. The different methodological approaches were expounded to address the questions raised in the paper.

After a brief conceptualisation of employment equity, the paper shifts to operationalise employment equity programmes. The study then turned to review the constraints to employment equity realisation. The different methodological approaches were expounded to address the questions raised in the paper. In specific, the qualitative research approach with the semi-structure interview type were employed to elicit data. The NVivo (v.12) qualitative software were further employed to make sense of the data with the emergence of different themes and sub-themes. The results reveal a range of employment equity programmes in place for the realisation of employment equity and a mixed of political, organisational and cultural issues limiting the attainment of employment equity. The study recommends that the South African Department of Labour become more effective with the responsibilities of monitoring and evaluating the activities and compliance of municipalities to employment equity targets. This recommendation becomes important in line with manger's lack of commitment to employment equity policies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Employment equity conceptualised

The conceptual explanation of employment equity is a much wider concept that do not only capture the argument for the increase in the number of equal representations, but more to ensure the promotion and retention of designated groups through appropriate organizational culture (Mayer, 2017). Employment equity explains the provision of an enabling environment that allows all individual unrestricted will and opportunities for the maximization of their potentials. Equal employment opportunities will become realisable when all existing gaps between and among people are appropriately conveyed to a level where they can be given equal competitive opportunities without any form of discrimination (Rangarajan, 2014). Bakhshi, Kumar and Rani (2009, p. 32) conceptualize employment equity as the intention of an organisation to ensuring workable mechanism are in place for the realisation of equity at all levels of the organisation. In other words, any affirmative action policy towards the realization of employment equity must be explicitly spelt out in clear terms as a resolve for equal opportunities for all, irrespective of age, sex, religion and gender.

Radebe (2019, p.19) defined employment equity as a means through which people are treated equally and free from all forms of employment obstructions that could restrict them from relishing any opportunities in terms of selection, training and promotion in a workplace. Making sense from this position, the goal of ensuring equity in the context of employment connotes that jobs should not only be restricted to designate groups with the exclusion of other qualified candidates with respect to age, gender, race and race. For Dima (2016, p.23) employment equity is the eradication of structural barriers and the advancement of work atmosphere that support and promote diversity management.

For instance, the application of diversity management policies in the recruitment and selection policy of any organisation is a lever for the eradication of employment discrimination on all grounds.

Syed and Pio (2010) conceives employment equity as the establishment of specific objectives in employment and selection process to be robustly followed for equity in the workplace, including the promotion of equal and fair treatment of persons in an employment relationship, and the need for the implementation of affirmative action as a redress to any form of discrimination. Based on this, this paper employs a working definition of employment equity as a transformational process designed for the realisation of fair and equal opportunities for all. For emphasis, this description relates to both existing and prospective workforce, especially the designated groups marginalized by structural and racial arrangement in the context of South African workforce.

2.2 *Employment equity programmes*

The need to appropriate and implement policy programmes are fundamental for the attainment of employment equity in any organisation. For instance, the importance of change management policy programme have shown significance in the areas of management accountability, consistent review of employment policies and targeting the recruitment of designated persons (Herman, 2017). Basson (2017) argued for the continuous and regular consultation between management and relevant stakeholders and emphasis on setting targets and clear monitoring and evaluation of change management policies for effective employment equity outcomes. Mayer (2017) identified the significance of training and development as an important component of change management programme required for the realisation of employment equity. The core of this argument is the likely increase in human capacity development of the designated groups who can better be positioned and compete for equal employment opportunities (Mayer, 2017).

Other change management programmes include the importance of effective human resources practices for the effective realisation of employment equity. For Oosthuizen & Meyer (2019), line mangers accountability, internal recruitment practices that support objective employment equity, recruitment related to the designated groups, objective and non-discriminatory recruitment exercise through fair and unbiased advertisement and a clear focus on training and development are crucial human resource change programmes that can promote employment equity on all fronts. This argument advances the role of the organisation in ensuring compliance are monitored for a possible employment equity (Porter & Heppelmann, 2015). In other words, a working change management programme must pay appropriate consideration to the environment and culture where people work for a fair employment equity outcome (Steyn & Cilliers, 2016).

The significance of diversity management in employment equity cannot be overstretched. Diversity management connotes the integration of persons from different race, ethnic group, age or gender into a fused workforce (Mosomi, 2019). According to Steyn and Cilliers (2016, p.17), the first step in the management of diversity includes the creation of awareness and value in the workplace with the mandate to ensure people understand the inherent differences between them as a working group. With this, the goal of equality between and among employees, irrespective of age, gender, race and ethnicity will be appropriately conveyed into the mainstream of the organisation. In addition, the goal is the need to create a supportive work environment where opportunities exist for all irrespective of their differences and are all allowed equal opportunities to contribute towards the attainment of strategic and competitive advantage of the organisation (Popescu et al. 2014). Ali, Burns and Grant (2013) argument reflect on the understanding of individual differences based on social interactions rooted in the values and assumptions, which could otherwise affect relationships with respect to how people are motivated, communicate and plan.

Rangarajan (2014) argue that effective employment equity outcome is predicated on evidential management change, leadership commitment and accountability. Managers are expected to display great leadership commitment by setting the desired example of honesty required for the realisation of employment equity (Rangarajan, 2014). Diversity management programmes are tailored to assist non-

designated groups feel some level of ease by eradicating their anxieties and building their confidence skills (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Popescu et al. (2014) in their writings advocates for the inclusion of affirmative action that will ensure the management of diversity in the Public Service workforce. In the context of the eThekwini municipality, appropriate management of diversity in the areas of women empowerment and inclusive strategy by integrating the array of individuals from diverse race, religion, ethnicity and age are well integrated into the mainstream of the organisation is an explicit indication of becoming employment equity compliance.

According to Andrews et al. (2007, p.190) the importance of monitoring and evaluation of employment equity programmes also relate to ensuring significant human resource functions are adequately monitored and enforced for compliance to employment equity laws. Again, one wonders if the South African government have been robustly identifying with the monitoring and evaluation of human resources practices for the swift realisation of employment equity (Ali, Burns & Grant, 2013). D'Netto and Sohal (1999) earlier thesis propose that achieving employment equity in terms of stimulating equal opportunities across gender, race and ethnicity shoulders government monitoring and evaluation efforts. Conclusively, the importance of monitoring and evaluation programmes should be considered for the overall aim of assisting people to eliminate their fears by embracing available support required for overcoming employment discrimination.

2.3 *Employment equity barriers*

Employment equity barriers are distinct and peculiar to different cultural, social and economic situations. For instance, the economic and cultural conditions of South Africa will affect employment equity realisation differently from Nigeria as a result of the differences in culture and labour market economics. In the broad canon of employment equity literature, communication constraints, labour market flexibility and leadership and political interference have been more sighted (Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, 2017). Communication depicts the fulcrum of all human existence and the survival of an organisation. The poor understanding and usage by managers represent challenges to the implementation of employment equity (Muller, 2009). Basson's (2017) study highlights the lack of compliance and clear understanding of communicating to employment equity policies by South African organisations. The poor utility of communication tool for prompt awareness on the part of the government has further hindered organisations the opportunity to be conversant with the values and policies of employment equity (Mosomi, 2019). Andrews's et al. (2007) thesis explains the lack of necessary skills in communicating employment equity policies across different cultures and value system by line managers.

The available communication channels within an organisation are expected to be functional for organisational development (Horwitz & Jain, 2011). This means a well-structured communication channel with strong monitoring measure is envisaged to engender a barrier-free implementation of employment equity. Therefore, the understanding of effective communication principle represents a fundamental component in the realisation of any workplace employment equity policy (Mayer, Oosthuizen, Tonelli & Surtee, 2018). The importance of continuing communication channeled through different media outlets and other level of consultations in the organisation can be employed to provoke effective employment equity implementation processes (Breetzke & Hedding, 2016). The nature and function of the South African labour market has continued to convey advantage to the white minority than the black majority (Sharma, 2016). For instance, the aftermath of the 1994 legislations with the agenda to empowering the black disadvantaged is still yet to engender positive outlook in terms of equal labour market participation (Geldenhuys, 2020). In addition, the fallout of the apartheid era has conveyed a labour market with scarce skills among black South Africans as a result of the apartheid injustice such as denial of access to education and human capacity development (Popescu et al. 2014). The basic assumption of a competitive labour market represent a typical workforce with equal and comparable skills who can compete effectively for jobs in the external labour markets (Porter & Heppelmann, 2015). In contrast, the South African case reveal a

departure from a perfect competitive labour market as available human capital skills are largely focused in some sections of the population than others (Geldenhuys, 2020).

The South African labour legislation has provoked a somewhat disruption in the functionality of the labour market (Geldenhuys, 2020). For instance, the present labour legislation can be seen as shielding equity candidate while exuding constraints to others (Dingindawo et al. 2016). While the flexibility of the labour market has continued to decrease the number of traditional employment with a sharp decline in employers' lability to employees, the literature has shown that the large number of non-standard jobs are occupied by black South Africans as a result of competitive education and scare skills demands (Geldenhuys, 2020). This analysis clearly portrays the flourish of employment inequality in the South African labour market. The importance of leading and taking responsibilities represent an important indicator to the realisation of employment equity. The act of delegating authority and commands that are likely to engender employment equity targets are the strategic responsibilities of line managers in the organisation. Studies have shown that the lack of understanding the importance of strategic usefulness in the attainment of employment equity goals (Breetzke & Hedding, 2016; Woermann, 2016). Similarly, lack of management commitment through effective leadership has remain a challenge to the realisation of employment equity in the public sector (Sharma, 2016).

Woermann (2016) explains the incessant level of corruption among public officials as barriers to employment equity targets. For instance, corruption in the context of employment equity budgets and the politicization of recruitment and selection process and interference (Sharma, 2016). The snag of corruption has become a culture in the public sectors of Africa countries and the failure to constitute an appropriate measure for its check will continue to frustrate employment equity goals and employment discrimination based on race, gender and ethnic group will continue unceasing.

3. Methodology and Methods

The study adopts the interpretive research philosophy and relies on the qualitative data to understand the research problem. The interpretive philosophical approach affords the opportunity to understand varying opinions, perceptions and worldviews about a research phenomenon (Quinlan, 2011). In this study, opinions, perceptions and views were uncovered to understand employment equity programmes and a constellation of factors constricting it progress. With scarcity of empirical discussions on employment equity in the eThekwini municipality, the paper adopts the exploratory research design to advance the limit of this knowledge by exploring the narrative from a nuanced perspective (Sekeran & Bougie, 2016). The qualitative research methods wherein interviews were conducted becomes justified as the data collection approach. The population of study comprised of a total of 15 senior managers selected from the sub-units of the corporate and human resource cluster including the human resource, occupational and health, organsational and change management and the eThekwini academy units. This sample is appropriate to unravel a deep qualitative answers to a research problem (Kumar, 2012). The senior managers were recruited purposively with the intention of eliciting data from respondents who meets the study criteria. For instance, it was ensured that only senior managers who are conversant with the discourse of employment equity participate in the study. This criterion was achieved by first having a preliminary interaction with the identified managers who had initially shown interest to participate in the study. Afterwards, few mangers with robust knowledge on the themes of the study were finally recruited as the sample population. The study adopts the semi-structure interview to retrieve qualitative data from recruited samples. The semi-structure interview type is justified to allow for the unraveling of supplementary questions and to engender clarity in cases where ambiguity is observed (Shields & Rangarajan, 2013).

An interview guide was adopted in ensuring appropriateness in the questions inquired and responses supplied as the interview unfolds (Sekeran & Bougie, 2016). The interviews were conducted on one-on-one basis and all data were recorded with a recording device in addition to note taking where the quality of the interview becomes an issue to transcribe. The data employed in this paper

forms part of the thesis submitted for the award of the degree of Masters of Commerce, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa with protocol reference number HSSREC/00000863/2019 and data were collected throughout February, 2020 before the announcement of the national lockdown in March, 2020 as a measure to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in South Africa.

On analysis, the transcripts interviews were first transcribed into text and thereafter the text were subjected to analysis with the NVivo (v.12) qualitative software employed to identify relevant themes and sub-themes. Following this, a range of themes and sub-themes speaking to the research objectives were presented through the NVivo analysis. The identified themes were analysed with the qualitative content analysis to make sense of the different themes and sub-themes respectively. On ethics, all respondents were initially informed about the aim of the study and appropriate consent notes were distributed to facilitate their voluntary participation in the study. In addition to this, it was ensured that the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were completely protected in a manner that their names or other vital information about them were not revealed in both the interview and reports of findings.

4. Data Analyses and Interpretation

Figure 1: Word cloud showing the frequency of sub-themes in the analysis

4.1 *Employment equity programmes and goals*

This objective seeks to understand the importance of employment equity programmes and goals towards the actualization of employment equity targets. Three distinct themes emerged including inclusive initiatives, sufficient budget and the goal of women empowerment. These themes are discussed in the paragraphs below:

Figure 2: Employment equity programmes and goals
Source: Emerged from data analysis

4.1.1 Inclusive initiatives

The need for a continuous reconciliation exercise in an attempt to heal the previous injustices cannot be over-emphasized as a tool for the realisation of employment equity in South Africa. This narrative supports the goal of inclusive initiatives of integrating people across different racial divide, gender, age and ethnic affiliation into the mainstream of an organisation. The majority of the managers explain the importance of inclusive initiatives as a critical human resources functions that can engender positive outcome in terms of balancing the injustices and discrimination in the South African labour market. Adopting inclusive initiative can also be understood through the lens of creating a supportive work environment where people of different racial and ethnic background can effectively co-exist without discrimination and prejudice in the organisation.

The need to address the challenges of PWD's form another component of inclusive initiative in ensuring employment equity targets are realised. The majority of the respondents argued that PWD's have continued to suffer employment inequality and injustices. For instance, PWDs are hardly integrated into the mainstream of the organisation based on selective prejudice and the nature and structure of many organisations have continued to limit the functions and ability of many PWD's. One of the respondents narrate as follows:

> *"There are several inclusive initiatives in this organisation set out for the realisation of employment equity including but not limited to the PWD's. The inclusive programme of PWD's comprised of activities that ensure PWD's are appropriately included and carried along in the operations and activities of the organisation towards employment equity targets. Recently, the eThekwini municipality won an award on the inclusive programmes of increase in the number of PWD's employed by the municipality. So I think our inclusive goal is actively initiated in the municipality in ensuring everybody is brought-on board regardless of their race, gender and physical challenges"*

Results revealed the inclusive programme of identification and management of female talents. This idea is to encourage and increase the number of female workforce who have long been discriminated against owing to cultural and social constraints. The majority of the respondents argued that females are employed and inducted into the organisation from scare-skills disciplined such as Engineering at the completion of their university degrees. The goal is to fill the much dominated scare-skill jobs that have long been occupied by the male gender for employment equity to thrive. One of the managers recount the procedure of identifying talents for employment equity targets.

> *"We ensure inclusiveness by ensuring that our employment processes are driven by identifying where we have under-subscribe employees from different race and gender. We have in the past had a programme in the Built Environment unit of the municipality which is male dominated. But I can tell you that is changing now as we are now identifying female engineers who are still studying to make sure that we are building a succession plan as one of our goals of achieving employment equity"*

4.1.2 The goal of sufficient budget

The importance of sufficient budget remains one of the most crucial goal of attaining employment equity within the structure of an organisation. The identification and recruitment of persons from designated groups and the realisation of affirmation action in terms of women representation in an organization is unconnected from employing adequate resource and budget for its materialisation. For majority of the respondents, the challenge of budget has continued to hinder the possibility of reaching out to a wide spectrum of people for recruitment and integration into the organisation for employment equity goal, especially the designated groups. The fallout is the low identification of succession that could address areas of shortfalls and under-subscribed people from different racial background and gender. For instance, the argument cements government lack of attention to issues

of employment equity through appropriate financial budget such that recruitment and selection exercise can be conducted promptly and extended to people in the designated group and others considered as victims of employment discrimination. One of the respondents shared an insight on the importance of budget to employment equity targets.

"One of our goals is the need to increase our financial capacity by way of having sufficient budget. We need robust budget to be able to run employment equity progammes effectively. We are not really doing great as expected in this area of the programme I must confess. Most times we need to scream before budget are released by equity managers to be able to pursue employment equity programmes. I think we need to fix this part as soon as possible in other to ensure that budgets are promptly approved to carry on with the goal of actualising employment equity goals"

Other issues raised also relate to having sufficient budget that can guarantee a conducive workplace environment for all categories of the working people, especially the PWD's. This narration according to the majority of respondents is necessary for an inclusive workforce where all the working people are informed and given opportunity to contribute towards the goal of employment equity targets.

"I think we need to look at this goal from the perspective of the availability of a good budget where we can have befitting environment for people that work in this organisation. I think this is the employment equity in the real sense of it. It should not be that some people are comfortable at work while others are not. I am talking about people with disabilities here. So, we should be able to consider the plight of PWD's as part of employment equity goals through sufficient budget in order to have a conducive work environment for all, especially the PWD's"

4.1.3 Women empowerment

The impact of glass-ceiling effect on women has continued to affect the employment equity target on several ground. Aside the societal and roles expectations of women, other cultural challenges and beliefs system have greatly hindered women in achieving employment equity. The general perception that men possess exceptional qualities than women has further incapacitate the agenda of employment equity targets. This popular axiom has continued to deny women equal employment opportunities in specialized professions. Thus, the crusade for more women to be empowered and position for equal employment opportunities has continued to form part of public deliberations for a new paradigm on striking equal employment opportunities for men and women across industrial sectors. Arguably, empowering women cut across leadership development through short courses and human capital development for competitive advantage and opportunities to overcome the glass-ceiling effect. A respondent explains as follows:

"In our commitment to employment equity target, we have a programme where the aim is to empower women. It entails developing and empowering our female workforce so that they can overcome any barrier and discriminatory practices against them and attain their full potentials in the workforce. The goal is to ensure women are empowered and employable at managerial positions and by so doing be able to address the long employment discriminatory practice of glass-ceiling effect on the women workforce"

4.2 Challenges of employment equity targets

The focus of this objective is to understand the range of factors constraining the achievement of employment equity targets. Several factors were argued by the majority of the respondents including difficulty in recruiting and retaining scarce skills, lack of clarity and commitment to employment equity policy, pressure from political leadership and stereotypes in jobs placement. The majority of the respondents submit that the inability of the municipality, and by extension the South Africa labour market to achieve employment equity targets as stipulated by the provision of the EEA is

unconnected to the impact of these factors on employment equity policy. For instance, the high rate of designated groups under-represented in employment equity can be linked to difficulty in recruiting and retaining scarce skills from black community for employment equity target (Van der Heever, Van der Merwe & Crowley, 2019).
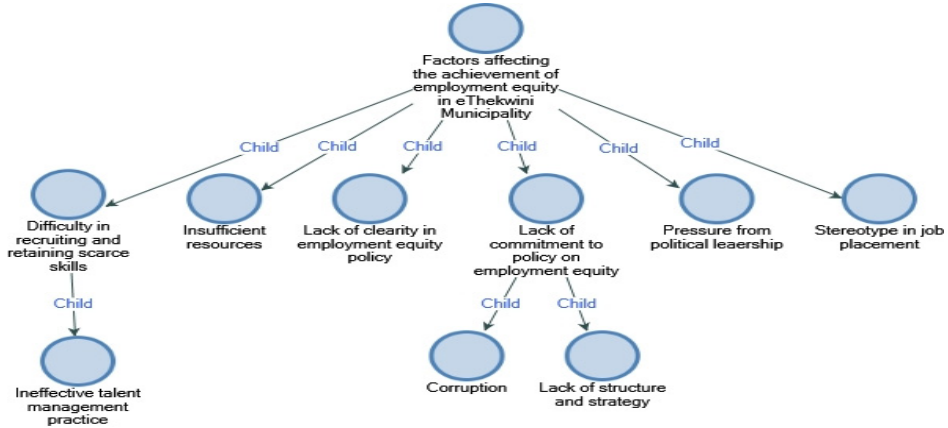
Figure 3: Factors constraining the realisation of employment equity
Source: Emerged from data analysis

4.2.1 Difficulty in recruiting and retaining scarce skills

The non-availability of scarce skills in the South African workforce has continued to rouse the attention of government and stakeholders. The South African workforce is no doubt lacking the requisite number of scarce skills graduates who can compete for employment equity in scarce job demands (Dima, 2016). This development has continued to be at the fore front of the department of higher education and training in ensuring South African higher institutions of learning encourage the training of scarce skills graduates, especially from the black community for employment equity purpose. However, the large majority of the respondents argued that employment equity target will continue to be constrained with the non-availability of scarce skills among the black population of South Africans for equity in employment distribution. A black manager in the eThekwini municipality recounted below:

"I am familiar with the challenge of recruiting people with scarce skill as a stumbling block to employment equity target like in Engineering. You will find out that we lack people from the black community in scarce skills. So if people from the black community who are supposed to be the beneficiary of employment equity are not adequately represented in some job positions, I do not think employment equity has been attained in any way. This challenge of scarce skill has been with us from the apartheid South Africa to the new democratic South Africa and we are daily confronted with it in the implementation of employment equity"

Another female manager explained:

"You will agree with me that female in this country are not adequately represented. You will see that there are few female black engineers around who can help fill some available engineering job positions. If these people are not around, the male gender will continue to dominate and we will continue with the circle of not attaining employment equity"

4.2.2 Lack of clarity and commitment to employment equity policy

The incidence of employment inequality has continued to increase on many fronts due to poor clarity on what need to be implemented and achieve in terms of equity in the workplace. The organisation aim of profit maximization has relegated the importance of employment equity with consequences for the designated members of the society. The data explains that clarity in policy articulation and implementation has remained a major barrier for the realisation of employment equity. The argument relates to the challenge of existing ambiguous employment equity policies on recruitment that has continued to deny specific groups of persons' employment opportunities in South Africa. A recruitment manager speaks as follows:

> "If you take a close look at the policy of employment equity in the eThekwini municipality, you will find out that the policy is not very clear. This is a big challenge affecting the implementation of the policy as far as I am concerned. This lack of clarity has continued to deny people equal employment representation opportunities across different racial, ethnic and gender groups"

In addition, the attitude and commitment of policy makers including managers and top leadership hierarchy of the eThekwini municipality has continued to provoke set back to the realisation of employment equity with little commitment shown to the implementation of employment equity targets. The argument further depict that victims of employment inequality continue to ascend due to managers lack of commitment to the effective implementation of employment equity policy. The necessity for a mind shift towards committing to the values of employment equity remained fundamental to a sustained diversified workforce.

> "I can tell you that the top management is not committed to employment equity. They have been lacking in the aspect of recruiting people to fill available job positions in other to meet up with employment equity target. In some unit in this organisation, you will find outright non-compliance and inconsistency to the values of employment equity and its implementation"

4.2.3 Political leadership and corruption

The responsibilities of government across the globe are connected to the provision of basic amenities and infrastructure for the fulfilments of citizens' wants and needs. These responsibilities are largely delivered by politicians elected into various political offices. However, politicians are not only fixed with the provision of these responsibilities as there have been increase incidences of interferences in employment distribution and opportunities. The arguments show great concerns in the increase at which politicians interfere in recruitment and selection exercises, thus hindering employment equity targets on many grounds. The situation explains the pressure to set outside specific jobs for political interest groups, while qualified candidates from the designated groups are denied employment opportunities. The challenge of political interference has seen the South African ruling political party demanding the reservation of jobs for favourite political gender. For instance, respondents confirmed the pressure from political leaders to appoint male political allies at the instance of jobs reserve for female candidates. This claim is further supported by one of the manger as follows:

> "I will say there are political interference because administrators who are in charge of implementing employment equity to the latter know better. So if they lack firmness and autonomy, definitely they will be controlled by politicians. For example, if a position is to be fill by a female and the politicians presented a male candidate and if we as administrators do not stand firm that the position by equity principle should be for a female, then we can easily be influenced by jettisoning employment equity targets"

For others, corruption has remained a serious problem to employment equity targets in the municipality. This position was argued through the frequency of financial misappropriation of

employment equity funds, especially funds set aside for the recruitment and selection of candidates to fill the employment equity gaps in the municipality. Accordingly, this has continued to show serious setback towards the realization of employment equity and designated group are continually denied employment opportunities as a result of prompt recruitment exercise in ensuring the equity gaps are addressed.

> *"There is too much corruption and fraud in the public sector and this is a huge distraction to employment equity targets. The funds set aside for employment equity programmes are frequently misappropriated by politicians and this is no doubt a challenge as to how targets can be achieved. As you are aware, politicians dictate the financial standing of the municipality and by virtue of this funds are either delayed or not release for us to do our jobs as employment equity administrators. So we have seen many instance where people had to be denied opportunities because of this attitude"*

5. Discussions of Findings

The focus for this study has been to interrogate a more nuanced understanding of employment equity beyond the themes of organizational change and justice to a more robust narratives of understanding of the bridges and barriers of employment equity. South Africa's model offers a rich empirical debates on employment equity in the context of the past injustices of the apartheid epoch. Employment equity policy has been used as a tool for the restitution of these injustices for the birth of a new democratic South Africa. Its strategic policy importance has helped to mount the country's focus on a part of building an inclusive South Africa devoid of racial and ethnic coloration.

As the paper demonstrated, employment equity targets are often pursued through strategic programmes including inclusive initiatives, sufficient budget and women empowerment. For instance, the goal of inclusive initiatives explain the strategic policy initiative adopted in ensuring people from all diverse of race, religion and ethnicity in South Africa are connected into one mainstream of organisational oneness despite their diversity. In other words, creating inclusiveness through a supportive work environment for PWD's and the identification and management of talents through tolerance and cohesion in a diversified workforce of race, gender and ethnic differences signpost an important pathway for the attainment of employment equity targets. These positions reflect some of the contentions shared in the literature on employment equity best practices (Mosomi, 2019; Van der Heever, Van der Merwe & Crowley, 2019).

The goal of sufficient budget for the recruitment and selection exercise of candidates from designated groups was also raised as a strategic programme employed for the drive and attainment of employment equity. Budget sufficiency becomes crucial to reach and extend the employment equity crusade to the far-reach rural designated dwellers who are more positioned for employment equity (Geldenhuys, 2020). Empowering women through leadership development, short course training and human capital development are important programmes through which the social and cultural discriminatory practices on women can be addressed for employment equity sake (Oosthuizen & Meyer, 2019).

Findings show three distinct factors constraining employment equity targets in the municipality including sparsity of scarce skills recruitment and retention from the South African labour market to fill employment equity gaps, poor clarity and commitment to the ethos and policy guidelines of employment equity and political leadership and corruption. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining scarce skills resonates well with the polarized apartheid South African labour market that is largely skilled to the advantage of the whites' minority. This polarization has further broadened the level of discrimination in the acquisition of scare skills in South African higher education of learning leaving the black majority with low scarce skills graduates. In effect, the South African labour market has become desolate of scare skill candidates from designated group to fill employment equity gaps (Dingindawo et al. 2016; Sharma, 2016). The challenge of clarity in terms of the understanding and application of employment equity legislations has further exude a barrier to employment equity

targets. For instance, evidence shows the limited knowledge and application of the EEA by equity managers, thus breeding further ground for discrimination and inequality for candidates from designated groups (Jogens, 2016).

Lastly, the finding narrates the consistency of political interference in the recruitment and selection exercise and pressure to consider specific candidate as politicians' reserve. The public sector organisations are politically charged and controlled by politicians such that it's running and activities are often politically-motivated. However, the increase in the level of these interferences have continued to dwindle public sector performance, justice and employment equity among people of different race, ethnic groups, religion and gender (Woermann, 2016).

6.   Conclusions and Recommendations

The discourse of employment equity has long remained a challenge in South Africa. In an attempt to address this injustice, the new democratic South Africa ushered in the EEA No. 55 of 1998. Sadly, there seem no serious interrogation on the implication and significance of this legislative policy towards addressing the problem of employment inequality in South Africa. It is important to state that any serious legislation must be applied and implemented to address the equity gaps in employment distribution among the different racial groups in South Africa. This is important as the array of issues constricting the realisation of employment goals are largely related to unambiguous and inappropriate application of policy frameworks. As with the case of South Africa, it can be concluded that inclusive policy and women empowerment are fundamental towards the realisation of employment equity goals. Therefore, the municipality must strategically align these important goals with her employment equity programmes for positive employment equity outcomes. While women are consciously affected with social and cultural dogmas, initiating an empowerment policy programme has the potent of driving employment equity target closer with a good number of women representation in employment. The study also argued that with the collection of barriers highlighted in this paper, there are serious consequences for the realisation of employment equity target in the eThekwini municipality.

The study reasoned for a more strategic policy evaluation effort as the most appropriate means to addressing employment equity challenges. This view suggests that employment policy and action should be robustly valued as a tool for resuscitating the principle of employment equalities. On this note, the study proposes varying conclusions on the roles and responsibilities of the eThekwini management and policy makers for a practical and sustained effort in achieving employment equity. While these roles are religiously pursued, it is hoped that the struggle of employment equity targets will engender positive outlook.

The study recommends that the South African Department of Labour become more effective with the responsibilities of monitoring and evaluating the activities and compliance of municipalities to employment equity targets. This recommendation becomes important in line with manger's lack of commitment to employment equity policies. It is important for politicians to separate employment equity targets from politics and other corrupt practices. Hence, the government through appropriate department must be willing to invoke legislative sanctions on adherent politicians frustrating employment equity realisation. The South African Department of Higher Education must come to terms with the significance of scarce skills education through continuous education and enlightenment. This recommendation becomes important as it will aid in addressing the sparsity of scare skills candidates from designated groups for employment equity purpose. Future studies can look at the research problem through quantitative approach and a comparative study of municipalities can give a broader overview of employment equity in the Kwazulu-Natal Province of South Africa.

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