



Employee's Perception of The Employment Equity Act and its Relevance to Organisational Performance at a South African Research Institution

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Abstract: This study examined employees' perception of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) at a research institution in South Africa to ascertain its importance to organisational performance and possible implication. The study was carried out following a qualitative approach to answer research questions from a social-constructionism paradigm. The study used semi-structured individual interviews to collect data from purposefully sampled participants ranging from senior to entry-level employees. The data was analysed thematically through ATLAS.ti. The study finds that the EEA is understood as an economic, social, and political factor in the organisation and from each position it offers different implications to performance. Concluding that employees understand the EEA as a socio-economic factor given that it promotes their inclusion in social and economic activities and initiatives. Politically, the EEA factors in reducing inequality and promoting equity in the workplace thus offering organisations a management strategy that aligns with the SDGs, NDP and the EEA. The direct and indirect impact of the EEA is reduced injustice within the workplace, increased diversity and inclusion, and reduced discrimination. Future research on this area of work may generate impactful results by examining a different sector than research and education.

Keywords: diversity; discrimination; inequality; inclusion; justice

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1. Introduction

Institutions in South Africa are persuaded by policies, researchers, and labour unions to produce a demographically diverse workforce. In the South African context, this quest is influenced by the apartheid era that promoted the neglect of people of colour in the mainstream economy. The democratic government of the country, since 1994, has made numerous calls for the inclusion of every member of society towards socio-economic development activities and related facets. The call for inclusion gained governmental support through the Employment Equity Act (EEA) No.55 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998), accommodating disadvantaged people, and promoting equity within the workforce and workplace.

The EEA, according to Du Toit and Potgieter (2015), Lee (2016), and Ebrahim (2018), is a government legislation aimed at achieving social representation of diverse marginalised groups amongst employees and eliminating unfair discrimination to access the workplaces and other socioeconomic activities. In addressing inequality and exclusion in South Africa, the 2030 National Development Plan (NDP) (Republic of South Africa, 2013) speaks on prioritising access to opportunities towards disadvantaged people, i.e., access to quality education and economic opportunities (employment or entrepreneurship opportunities). These policies in South Africa are yet to yield the desired results, as many sectors of the economy statistically provide an underrepresentation of people of colour (Reus-Smit, 2017; Grissom, 2018; Roberson, 2019; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Furthermore, it argued that employment equity legislation, including affirmative action principles, contributes to the development of workforce diversity (Miller, 1998; Barak, 2000, 2017; Riccucci, 2002; Rangarajan & Black, 2007; Broadnax, 2010; Sabharwal, 2014). It draws close to understanding that this study will simultaneously use EEA or inclusion to discuss its influence on organisational performance and employee perspectives. In the same breath as discussing the EEA, we offer a discussion of diversity.

Concerning diversity management studies both internationally (Grissom, 2018; Hossain et al., 2019; Juang & Schachner, 2020) and locally (Ledimo, 2015; Vito & Sethi, 2020; Schudson & Gelman, 2020), addressing EEA involves age, race, gender without an explicit focus on the influence these have on organisational objectives or performance. Essentially, these studies cited above make no specific reference to the diversity-organisational performance nexus. This study therefore seeks to understand (1) how the implementation of EEA is influenced by employee perception and (2) how EEA contributes to the organisation's objectives and

performance. Therefore, the study asks how employees perceive EEA and to what extent EEA is relevant to the objectives of an organisation.

This paper makes a unique contribution from the point of view of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). EDI-related research continues to attract attention in the academic and research communities. Diversity is the term used to describe the inclusion of individuals with varying identities, viewpoints, and backgrounds. The recognition that some people lack resources due to historically systemic disparities is what the concept of equity deals with. In equity discourse, there is a call for specific solutions to correct the wrongs of the past. The concept of inclusion suggests that those who have experienced these historically systemic disparities should have equal access to opportunities and resources.

The realization of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is a fundamental component of democracy, which extends human rights and social responsibility. The research institute consulted for this study represents a social infrastructure that existed before South Africa's independence. Such institutions are said to represent apartheid ideals. Understanding how EEA (a post-apartheid law) is perceived by employees becomes crucial within the context of performance management in a research institution. After all, research institutions play an important role in driving innovation, creativity, and development. This critical importance is emboldened by the works of Omar and Inaba (2020), Pawlak and Koodziejczak (2020), Zarei, Karami and Keshavarz (2020) and many others who emphasize the need for knowledge production on how to decode social, economic, political, and technological constraints. In this way, the SDGs #5, 8, and 10 of the United Nations are strengthened.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The EEA

The discussion of EEA is often found in the literature discussing inclusion and diversity. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between diversity/inclusion and EEA. The introduction of EEA in 1998 exposed the South African workforce to affirmative action, addressing inequality in the workplace through policy practices within private and public organisations. On the other hand, the diversification of the workforce in Europe and America took shape from the 1960s to the 1970s (Ernst &

Young, 2010). South Africa still battles with the diversity and inclusion of marginalised groups, which is proven by the recently amended EEA no.4 of 2022.

The introduction of EEA no. 55 of 1998 was done with the following purpose: “to achieve equity in the workplace by (a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and (h) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce” (Government Gazette, 1998, p. 12) (Republic of South Africa, 1998). In essence, this act advocates for the inclusion of designated groups equally in the workplace by offering equal opportunities and treatment in employment. Further, it stipulates the need to ensure this is done across all levels within the workforce, i.e., senior management, entry-level, and intermediate positions. Simplified across all sectors and in all organisations, each level across the units should include and represent a diverse society that reasonably represents the country.

On the other hand, the amended policy speaks to reaching a numerical target for representations of the designated groups and reporting to the Ministry office annually. As stated in the amended policy as follows: “the Minister may, after consulting the relevant sectors and with the advice of the Commission, ensure the equitable representation of suitable qualified people from designated groups at all occupational levels in the workforce, by notice in the Gazette, set numerical targets for any national economic sector identified”, further, “the numerical goals set by an employer must comply with any sectoral target in terms of Section 15 of the act that applies to that employer”. In essence, the practice of EEA is a statistical representation of diverse groups in the workforce. This is also supported by the work of Robbin et al. (2016), Reus-Smit (2017), Grissom (2018), Roberson (2019) and Yadav and Lenka (2020). This study will further examine whether the case study employees have this perspective.

2.2. Inclusion

In the last three decades, the South African government has advocated for inclusion to overcome the effects of apartheid on the workplace. The inclusion movement gained momentum due to the EEA, the SDGs, and the NDP’s measures through affirmative action across the public and private sectors. Although inclusion has gained momentum, concerns grow about marginalised groups and immigrants as

they need to count on legislation compliance. Essentially, EEA and inclusion are legal compliance practices that exclude immigrants. However, Douglas et al. (2017) considers effective recruitment for optimum organisational performance as “the ability to recruit from the entire available pool is critical to ensure continued excellence and maximise talent”. Therefore, the insinuation of inclusion of marginalised groups should be expanded to a global candidacy pool to outsource suitable candidates. The existence of the EEA forces organisations to have a fair distribution of opportunities across all diverse societies, including immigrants, marginalised groups, and individuals previously disadvantaged through apartheid and other oppressive systems (Grissom, 2018; Juang & Schachner, 2020). These questions the inclusion of immigration in the organisational workforce as meeting EEA requirements.

Concerning the above explanation of diversity, this study seeks to understand how employees perceive it and its contribution to organisational objectives. Shore et al. (2011), and Lozano and Escrich (2017) address inclusion as the integration of minority or marginalised groups into formal and informal organisational structures and their perception of the workplace and workgroup climate regarding their assimilation into existing personnel. Thus, for this study, the researcher defines inclusion as an ethical compliance process an organisation adheres to in providing equal access to employment, education, and other economic activities for marginalised groups, i.e., people of colour and women. Thus, how EEA is perceived is also examined through the inclusion literature.

2.3. Diversity

Developing equality in the workplace has propelled many organisations to adhere to legislation (EEA), respond to national plans and objectives of employment equity, and reduce unfair discrimination in the workplace. This venture led to diversity ‘understood as a human capital-based government mechanism based on the usefulness of outsider perspectives and interests’ (Brummer & Strine, 2022). On the other hand, diversity is a swarm of similarities and differences, offering a statistical proportionality of employees in a workplace (Robbin et al., 2016; Brummer & Strine, 2022). Therefore, an adequate implementation of EEA in an organisation can be defined as a statistical representation of all demographic details differentiating employees across different organisational units. Arguably, a diverse company should surpass a specified number of individuals from the marginalised groups on its total

employee count. Although the journey of diversity has been dynamic, Table 1 below offers different views that can explain the existence of different perspectives on EEA and diversity not discussed in this study.

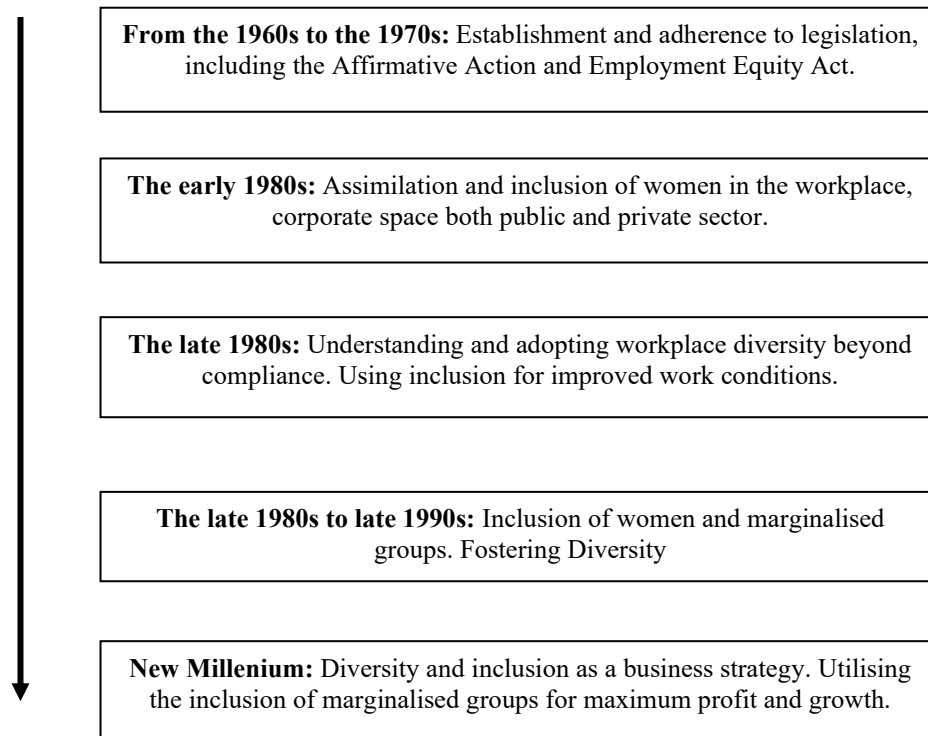


Figure 1. Evolution of Workplace Legislation Adoption

Source: Based on “the new global mindset: drawing innovation through diversity” (Ernst & Young, 2010)

Figure 1 shows the evolution of diversity globally. However, as the above table depicts, over six decades of development towards equal employment opportunity and fair representation of the minority or marginalised in the workplace, the perspective turned into a business strategy. This aligns with Vertovec’s (2012) view of diversity as a business strategy that enhances creativity and innovation, identification of opportunities and ways to influence customer perception of the company. Furthermore, as the table depicts, nowadays the conversation shifts to diversity and inclusion, focusing on business growth and profitability through diversity and inclusion of diverse employees.

Although there are various dimensions of diversity, this study draws on diversity as part of the EEA discussion. In doing so, the following benefits of implementing

diversity are found through the implementation of EEA. Implementing diversity reduces the loss of talented people, increases creativity, system flexibility and problem solving, reduces absenteeism, increases productivity, and increases efficiency and quality human capital (Cox, 1991; Jabbour et al., 2011; Meeussen et al., 2014; Frijns et al., 2014; Manoharan & Singal, 2017). Amongst the literature encouraging EEA implementation, these benefits are often discussed.

2.4. Equality

In theorising the issues of discrimination and injustice, this study reflects on how Iris Marion Young (2007) developed this theoretical framework of structural injustice, noting that it occurs “when social processes put large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities”. For this study, we note the occurrence of structural injustice through apartheid, discrimination in the workplace and exclusion of marginalised groups in the workplace to address the above injustices, the EEA was developed and further amended to continuously improve the inclusion process, equality in access to education, and socioeconomic activities, i.e., employment.

In addition, employment in the organisation is completed for many reasons ‘in pursuit of their goals and interests while adhering to rules and norms’ (Young, 2007). Thus, organizations work directly towards their objectives, and EEA implementation may interfere. Therefore, the study aims to understand how employees understand its implications for organisational goals. Demeterio (2014) defines structural injustices as “justice and injustice founded on the presence or absence of domination and oppression in a social structure or social structural processes that may assist, or hinder a given social group’s exercise of its capacities and attainment of its possibilities”. Concerning the organisation’s desire to function effectively towards its objectives, “developing a functional structure requires compliance with the legislature, labour relations, and external forces influencing organisational activities” (Elia et al., 2019). Simply put, structural injustices align with developing a functional structure if it is done considering equal opportunities and the inclusion of all citizens.

Inclusion from a structural injustice lens argues for individuals’ access to economic and social opportunities by eliminating barriers and systems of exclusion. Organisations can balance structural injustice through employee acquisition and retention processes (Bourne et al., 2012; Ojochona et al., 2022). This study focuses

on the perception of employees of applying EEA in an organization that is research-oriented and requires specific academic backgrounds and skills, providing an overview of what the organisation includes and excludes potential employees based on educational qualifications.

Furthermore, informing the researcher that ‘structural injustice is related to deprivation of access to opportunities’ (Young, 2007), perhaps specialised organisations can refer to specific sections of the EEA to understand the principles based on their sector. As reported on Moneyweb.co.za (25 May 2024), the Department of Home Affairs was not allowed to deport a skills-critical Czech Republic executive, emphasising that to mitigate employee acquisition outside marginalised groups, the candidate should have skills that marginalised groups do not possess. This allows organizations to align with their development plans, improving productivity, profit gain, and a diversified competitive edge.

The literature on diversity, EEA and inclusion focuses on implementation as an organisational decision, the progression, and practices as a decision of top management, and Human Resource Management practices that are affected and influenced by external factors (Flory et al., 2017; Ng et al., 2020; McCallaghan et al., 2020; Ojochona et al., 2022). Implementing a justice structure must accommodate organisational development and innovation as a priority, especially in scarce-skill organisations. Thus, structural justice or EEA should maintain organisational objectives and promote equal representation of a global society in an organisation. Compliance with the EEA and other constitutional acts promoting equity and justice should become a prerequisite for an organisation. This study inquires with a research institution to understand its approach to employees’ perception of EEA while observing its implications on organisational objectives.

3. Methodology

The study was carried out using a qualitative research approach that adopted a paradigm of social constructionism that recognises “the development of meaning through lived experiences in different social settings” (Gergen, 2015; Schudson & Gelman, 2023). The study utilised a research institution in South Africa as a case of analysis conveniently sampled based on the following reasons:

- The organisation existed before, during, and post-apartheid, emphasising it holds rich data on diverse employee structures influenced by the legislation of each operational period.
- The organisation is a government parastatal; therefore, compliance with legislation is essential for operational purposes in a democratic society where the constitution binds institutions
- The organisation works on a Key Performance Indicators system, ensuring that employees focus on the organisational objectives.
- The organisation has a heterogeneous workforce.

The study purposely sampled 30 participants to provide their perception of EEA; the selection included ten senior / top management, ten intermediate employees, and ten entry-level employees. Although diversity demographics were noted, they were not considered in the selection of participants. The selection criteria were influenced by the wide variety of employees, levels of employment, and ethical requirements of the EEA that must be applied at all levels of employment. According to research ethical considerations, the names of the participants and the institution used are omitted.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

No.	Classification	Frequencies	Percentage %
1.	Gender		
	Male	7	25
	Female	21	75
2.	Race		
	African (black, Indian & Coloured)	25	89.28
	White	3	10.71
3.	Age		
	21 to 30 years old	12	42.86
	31 - 40 years old	9	32.14
	41 - 50 years old	3	10.71
	More than 50 years old	4	14.29
4.	Tenure		
	Up to 5 years	17	60.71
	6 - 15 years	11	39.28

5.	Job Level		
	Entry level	8	28.57
	Intermediate	10	33.3
	Senior	10	33.3

The table above describes the demographic characteristics of the participants. The study had a majority of female participants who constituted 75%. On ethnicity, the study accessed a homogeneous sample in the organisation with at least 89% of the participants as the marginalised group, i.e., Coloured, Indian, and Black. On the other hand, most of the participants were young and older employees toward retirement age, contributing only 14% of the sample. Regarding employee tenure, only 39% of the participants had more than 6 years of work experience. Lastly, the sampling process equally divided participants across different employment levels, that is, entry-level, intermediate, and senior.

Once participants were identified, data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews, and only 28 of the selected participants contributed to the data collection. Furthermore, the data was thematically analysed through ATLAS.ti, which aids in autocoding. The thematic process followed is the autocoding of ATLAS.ti, which consists of the following steps: (1) create a project; (2) add document(s); (3) organise the documents; (4) identify and select text for further interest through comments and memos; (5) compare data segments selected; (6) query the data concerning research questions; (7) conceptualise data by building network and codes; and lastly (8) compile a report based on memos created from networks of the data (Frieze, 2022). This is the process the study followed to analyse the data and provide the following findings.

4. Results

This paper explored the views of employees on EEA, including its relevance to organisational objectives. This study discussed the EEA, diversity, inclusion, and most importantly, its relationship. It further examined different scholarly perspectives on EEA and organisational objectives or mandates, i.e., performance, profitability, and effectiveness.

Firstly, the study questioned the employee's understanding of the Employment Equity Act. This question was formulated to assess the perspectives of participants about the EEA. A qualitative research approach values 'the different views and perceptions of the study participants' (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). This question

allowed us to explore the various meanings held by participants about employment equity. Table 3 below shows essential quotations from respondents for question 1.

Table 2. Participants' Responses to Research Question 1: How Do You Understand the Employment Equity Act?

	The sample quotation for thematic codes
1	EEA concerns employability, considering race, and trying to balance and sort out the inequality that occurred in the past, where fewer black people had higher positions or even any positions at all. Therefore, it considers employment based on race or even positions based on race.
2	It ensures that everyone has equal opportunities in the workplace, regardless of sex, gender, race, or culture.
3	EEA promotes equity in the workplace and ensures that as employees we receive equal attention. The law or acts protect us as employees from unfair treatment or discrimination in the workplace.
4	Equity means balancing the number of people employed, for example, in black, and including race, gender, qualifications, and equity.
5	This means a company should make its employment decisions reasonably and not discriminate based on race or gender. Ethnicity, religion, or any other differentiating thing, I guess
6	It's an Act that ensures that employers follow the proper employment or recruitment processes by giving equal opportunity to qualified individuals for vacant positions regardless of their gender, disability status, age, race, and other unfair employment practices.
7	It regulates equity in the labour force, equity in terms of gender, equity in terms of race, and any other inequalities.
8	It's the law that promotes equality in a work environment. It helps employers create employment equity within the workplace and ensures that all employees receive equal opportunities and are treated fairly by their employers.
9	it's that when an organisation tries to achieve equality in the workplace, I think on race and gender, and also, I think, in this day and age of sexual terms, we have a fair representation of people from different social categories and groups.
10	The guiding framework for ensuring that we employ or employers recruit and employ with a sense of understanding the transformation agenda in South Africa and with those transformation aspirations and how they should be represented at the workplace. So, that includes recognition of whether you call it previously disadvantaged or currently disadvantaged living with people living with disabilities.
11	We are reaching a consensus on not excluding anyone and not stepping on anyone's rights by the employer. Regardless, it also looks at how you are served within your job or by your employer, regardless of your race, sex, and age.
12	My rights as an employee are to ensure the quality of the workplace, and that is what I understand.

13	To correct the wrongs of the past in terms of employment equity, make sure that all people, specifically people whom the apartheid government previously marginalised, have access to employment opportunities. Its employment equity is all about leveling the playing field; it is not about equality but equity. Owing to people who have previously been disadvantaged, will be prioritised.
14	I don't know, but I think the Employment Equity Act should give employees equal opportunities regardless of gender or race and should apply to those lands.
15	This means that all employees are treated equitably in a way that acknowledges the privileged and previously disadvantaged background or history.
16	when you employ people, you must be fair and not discriminate regardless of gender, race, or sexualorientation.
17	In 1994, during the first democratic election, policies were developed to raise the level of previously disadvantaged people or to force people in need of putting themselves in a position where opportunities were also available.
18	It should mean equal opportunity and fair opportunity. We can discuss those a bit more. That is my understanding.
19	It means transformation and inclusion on the job. The workplace becomes more diverse and inclusive. We make a conscious effort to ensure inclusivity and diversity in the workplace. So, typically, your previously marginalised groups would be black Africans, people who look like us, and women, and I am not sure whether it extends to people with disabilities.
20	Equality in the treatment of staff should exist in an organisation or company. So, I think about equality in the workplace.
21	The Employment Equity Act advocates for organisations and the labour market.
22	Protected employees against discrimination from employers
23	Balance the playing field in South Africa, which comes from a dispensation in which certainage groups, certain races, specific classes, and certain genders were treated superior to others.
24	It aims to provide equal opportunities in the workplace and eliminate unfair discrimination. Therefore, employers must implement affirmative actions and measures to address past imbalances.
25	As we know, addressing equity in the workplace is quite diverse. It may involve racial equity, gender equity, or other equity aspects in remuneration.
26	Specific targets are sort of part of the transformation and address the historical injustices because of apartheid and colonialism and whatnot. So, employees have specific racial and gender targets.
27	I need to learn about the Equity Act, which concerns workplace quality. When you speak about equity, I know that we all must be equal. So yeah, that is what I understand. We could talk about equity, but I didn't even know about the act.
28	So, we have to deal with discrimination and unfair discrimination that is embedded in our historical past.

The table above contains responses to the main research questions, and the following section of the discussion provides an analysis of them. Responses to the second

question of the study are provided in the table below. The table below shows the results of the research question to understand the relevance of the EEA to the objectives of the organization. Figure 3 of the discussion provides an analysis and discussion of the table below, while Figure 2 portrays and offers a discussion of Table 1 above.

Table 3. How Do You Find the EEA Relevant to the Organisation's Objectives?

	Sampled quotation for thematic codes
	Yeah, I have experienced the benefits of the EEA, because I have been put in places where I even feel like I don't think I should be in charge of this.
	It also has disadvantages because if a male and a female, both African, are interviewing for one post, I mean a female already has an advantage if she qualifies, and if she has the desired skills, she already has an advantage of getting the job even before they ask the questions.
	We fit into the national objectives or national goals, to say the least, so it does fit into that
	The EEA is like a regulator to make sure that people are treated equally or somewhat the same way.
	It influences transformation because it wants to address the inequalities of the past.
	I think meeting these requirements or taking the recommendations of the EEA and implementing them into your organisation should be seen as an advantage in terms of making sure that the organisation has national and global appeal because being ethical is attractive.
	It is a policy or a guiding framework to ensure that we employ or employers recruit and employ with a sense of understanding the transformation agenda in South Africa and also with those transformation aspirations and how they should be represented at the workplace

The responses in both tables above are discussed in the following sections through diagrams that explain the relationship between workplace diversity and the EEA, and how employees view its importance in the organisation.

5. Discussion

To understand the responses in the table 1 above, the responses to Question 1 resulted in developing the code network diagram presented in Figure 2. In qualitative research, 'data clarifying the related responses is sampled into categories' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is essential to provide an overview of the responses, the network, and the codes between the responses. This sampling process enables the development of quotes that advance emerging perspectives and critical theories for

the general literature. The diagram below shows the code networks developed from Table 2 above.

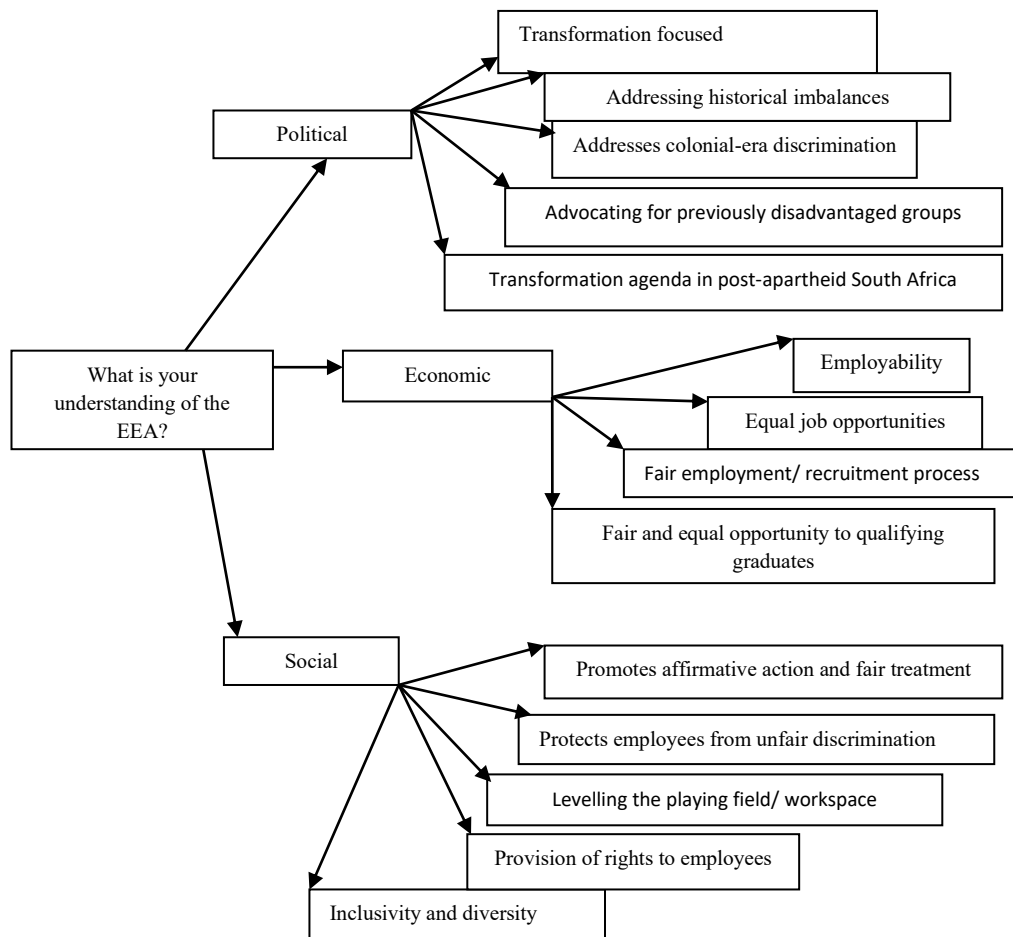


Figure 2. Code Network of Responses to Question 1

Figure 2 portrays the network code created using Table 2. It was found that the respondents have diverse perspectives towards EEA. Some respondents framed it as a political factor that pushes the agenda of eradicating colonial imbalances, apartheid systems, or discrimination. Simplified, EEA was understood as legislation associated with addressing the previous government's systemic imbalance and injustices of the previous government. These responses provided employees' perspectives on EEA as a political dimension. These political dimensions expressed the views of historical imbalances associated with the objectives of the implementation of the EEA. These dimensions are found in expressions such as 'racial injustice', 'gender balance',

‘protecting employees’, ‘inclusivity’, and ‘diversity’, suggesting political influence and social justice, highlighting the social dimension of the EEA. When addressing social dimensions through different feelings, the views flowed into an economic perspective held by employees. The expressions discussed economic balance, employment issues, equal job opportunities, and employability. The study found that employees perceived and understood the EEA from political, social, and economic dimensions.

To further achieve the purpose of the study, the second research question focused on the relationship between the EEA and organisational objectives. The question was coined to obtain the relevance of the EEA to the objectives of the organisation. The perspectives of the employees on EEA are essential to understand how they find it relevant to the objectives of the organization. The participants responded to ‘how they find EEA relevant’.

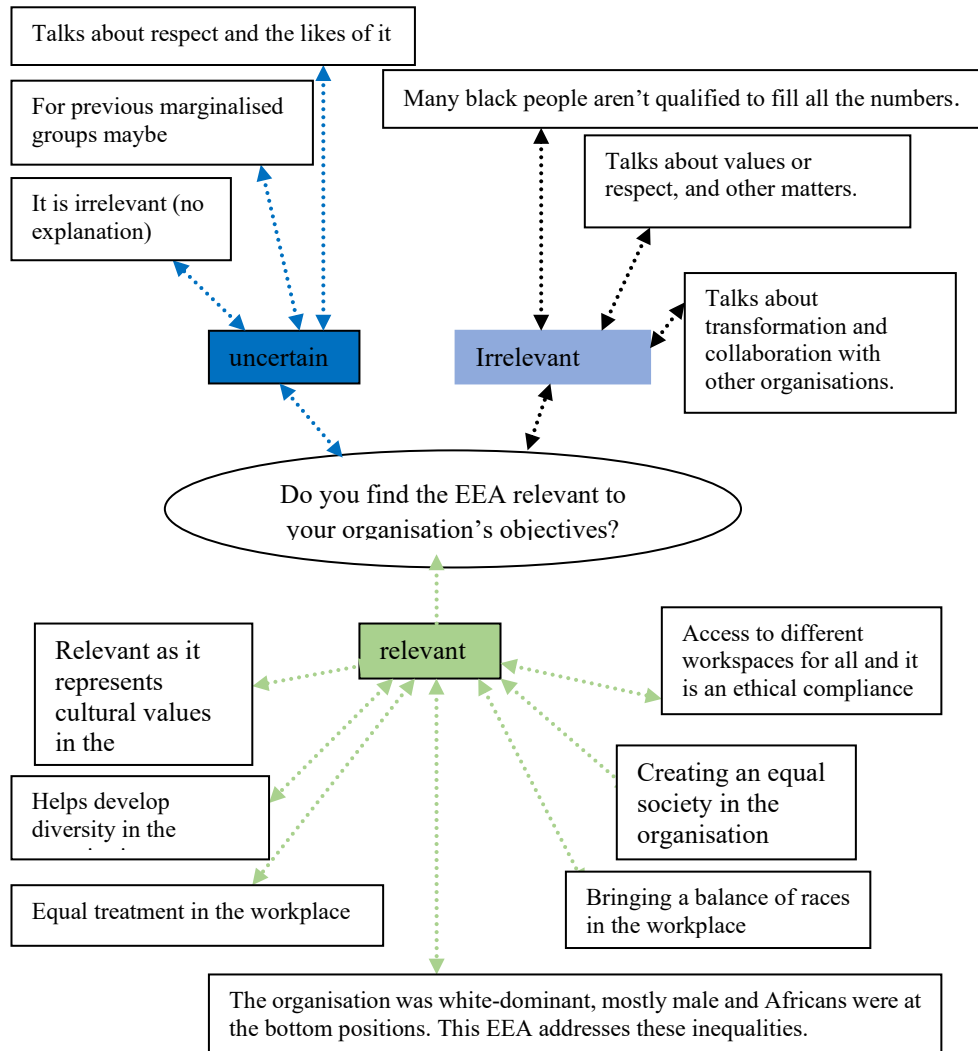


Figure 3. Code and Quotations from Question 2: How Do You Find EEA Relevant to the Organisation's Objectives

In analysing whether the EEA can be considered relevant to the objectives of the organisation, the following responses were exposed: relevant, irrelevant, and neutral. Respondents who found the EEA relevant praised its added advantage of diversity in the workplace, the expanded pool of ideas and exchange, and the creation of a learning organisation. Additionally, the respondents related it to the history of apartheid and how the EEA has made significant changes to make organizations reflect the diversity of South African society. Contrary to the general relevance

outlook of the EEA, some respondents felt that the EEA was not relevant and argued that it does not communicate the economic objectives of an organisation. EEA-influenced employment does not often accommodate the performance gap, but statistical representation, applicable skills, and abilities toward the organisational goals are still lacking.

The findings suggest that the EEA is understood from social, political, and economic perspectives. Within these perspectives, the detailed views emphasise that EEA and diversity are one concept, as their practices are similar in outcomes but different in approach. Additionally, the results emphasise that the EEA is considered a numerical balance of employees across all diverse groups in an organisation, supported through the amended (Robbins et al., 2016; Brummer & Strine, 2022). Moreover, the amended act emphasizes the numerical representation of various employees through reports. The political relevance of the EEA is reflected in responses that articulate past political injustice. In contrast, social relevance is argued through social equities and economic relevance is emphasised on financial inclusion for all in the society.

These results confirm existing literature discussing that the EEA is relevant to eradicating socioeconomic imbalance, education, and economic exclusion, and past injustices through apartheid (Cox, 1991; Jabbour et al., 2011; Meeussen et al., 2014; Frijns et al., 2014; Manoharan & Singal, 2017; Roberson, 2019). Future research may examine the EEA and diversity as a business strategy, political dimension, social factor, economic dimension, and statistical representation of the society in an organisation

6. Conclusion

This document reflected on the perspectives of employees about the EEA and its relevance to organisational performance. The study relied on social constructionism to understand the meaning held by the employees and used structural injustice theory to understand how the EEA is applied to redress the past. The theory of structural injustice presented a lens of understanding that organisational workforce imbalance represents injustices, i.e., no gender equity, no representation of marginalized groups, and exclusion of people of colour in senior positions. These injustices represent a systematic divide that requires organisational change and improved implementation of the EEA and related labour laws. For internal improvement, the institution can reflect on structural injustice in developing and maintaining diversity that speaks to the objectives of the EEA and organisational performance.

However, this study concludes that the application and relevance of the EEA in an organisation differ as private institutions do not operate under the same principles as public entities. The relationship between the EEA and diversity may be theorised or applied to existing theories in future research to understand their implications and consequences. Furthermore, this study concluded that the EEA, in practice and theory, offers the result of diversity in an organisation if implemented accordingly. Therefore, theorising a relationship between EEA and diversity is essential for organisational performance.

The study drew conclusions that implicated policies and practices in the organisation, especially regarding the implementation of the EEA. Respondents expressed an understanding that EEA and diversity are seen as one concept, as the implementation of either has results that encompass the other. Thus, in the organisational practice of the EEA, diversity must be understood to develop policies that will advance their adoption. The diversity training workshops within organisations should encompass discussions on the EEA and other legislation related to employees' workspace.

The conclusion is that the EEA is relevant/irrelevant to organisational goals. It proposes developing the EEA and diversity policies aligned with the organisational goals. As a policy, the EEA offers implementation thresholds based on sector, size, and financial profits. However, organisational policies must be designed to reflect the organisation's goals while advancing constitutional legislation. In addition, this will enable easy practice of the EEA, enabling achieving diversity specific to the organisation. Organizational practices and policies in the EEA should focus on improving performance through the development of a diverse workforce. In summary, practitioners must align their EEA and diversity objectives with organisational goals.

The conclusions of this study perpetuate the need for more research to understand the EEA and its progress toward reducing inequality and injustice in the workplace. However, the study was conducted in a research institution and does not offer implications of the EEA in a profit-driven institution. Thus, more research on the EEA and its impact on organisational objectives may be conducted in a different sector and form of organisation, i.e., the private sector and profit-oriented markets. More research on EEA can focus on understanding diversity management practices and their contribution to the organisation, as this study highlighted the relevance or irrelevance to organisational objectives rather than practical implications.

The study found that the EEA is understood from social, economic, and political perspectives; More research can investigate these perceptions in detail to outline the cause and effect on organizations. However, a significant direction for future research includes the discovery of the relationship between the EEA and diversity, the EEA's relevance to organisational goals, and the implications of the EEA on organisational objectives. The study excluded specific components of the EEA used for inclusion, equality, and equity toward marginalised groups. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the aspects of EEA that develop diversity in the workplace.

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