
EDITORIAL

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This fifth volume of the *Journal of Vocational, Adult and Continuing Education and Training* (JOVACET) continues to locate itself under the broad and founding rubric of the journal, which is ‘researchable issues in TVET, adult and continuing education and training’. The articles in this 2022 issue of the publication fall within three broad themes, which are necessarily intertwined and reveal synergies despite having different foci.

The first theme that can be discerned emerges from the first grouping of three articles in the journal (Stops, Lortan, Singh and Ramsuroop; Esau and Daniels; and Maluleke, Powell and Pillay). These articles speak to the theme of TVET college students’ experiences, a knowledge base that in South Africa – and in the South more generally – still has extensive room for growth. Annually at this time of year, when the end of the academic year is upon us, there is usually both heightened anxiety and a sense of great expectation among the cohort of learners at schools who are preoccupied with writing the matric examinations. These sentiments concern not only their performance in the examinations, but, beyond that watershed moment, also their future prospects, whether in furthering their studies or in obtaining work. And perhaps their anxiety is not entirely unfounded: South Africa has a growing NEET (not in education, employment or training) population of youths and adults, a phenomenon which has been exacerbated by two years of COVID-19.

As we contextualise the articles in this issue that are relevant to education, training and future prospects of study or work, there are some important facts to be borne in mind. These are ‘that the number of NEETs in South Africa grew from 38% in 2013 to 44% in 2020; that the increase in [post-school education and training (PSET)] opportunities is not enough to curb the high numbers of people who are NEET in the country; and

that the majority of people who are NEET in South Africa have education levels below matric' (Khuluvhe & Negogogo, 2021:14).

The conclusion to be drawn from the most recent statistics cited is that there are not sufficient opportunities in PSET for all those who desire them. We still do not have the kind of seamlessness in our education and training system that was anticipated in the establishment of a national qualifications framework – and this lack of seamlessness affects, among others, those in TVET and adult education. For instance, despite the regulations pertaining to the TVET college Level 4 National Certificate (Vocational) (equivalent to schooling's Grade 12) as an access route to university having been in place for about ten years or more, TVET college students still find their aspirations to entering higher education being thwarted when they apply to enter university programmes. Part of the reason for this is no doubt the persistent perception of vocational education as being academically inferior to general academic schooling, but historical underfunding and the negative stereotyping of vocational learners also play their part.

But two decades of sustained policy investment in TVET has slowly been chipping away at the old technical college edifice and its inherent inequalities. Admittedly, there is still a long way to go, of course, but, having been a participant observer for the past 25 years, I firmly believe that significant gains have nevertheless been made.

Stops, Lortan, Singh and Ramsuroop, in their comparative study, offer an encouraging perspective on school versus TVET college preparation for university engineering studies. In their quantitative research, National Senior Certificate students entering a university of technology's engineering programmes directly from school, on the one hand, and students who entered after completing a TVET college programme, on the other, showed no statistically significant difference in their performance at university. The TVET college entrants in this study had been allowed access to the university engineering programme *after* having completed a college programme, because they had not satisfied the university entry requirements upon exiting from school. A myriad reasons for this could be provided: for instance, insufficient foundation in mathematics or science owing to their high schools perhaps not offering the subjects at the level required. Nonetheless, accessing university after a period at a TVET college was a 'second chance' opportunity for these students, an opportunity which revealed that they performed as well as their counterparts who had entered via the school exit qualification route. The Stops et al. study was also therefore an investigation into the implementation of the South African national articulation policy (2017) in a particular context, as the TVET college qualification provided the stairway that enabled college-leavers to proceed vertically in engineering at university. Confirming the widely held misperception of TVET college learners, the authors conclude by saying that '... this study has served to debunk the notion that TVET qualifications and their learners are inferior and unworthy of pursuing studies at a University of Technology'. This study should propel further research to be done in exploring the number of TVET college students in other programme areas who are actually gaining access to university through

articulation. Are the aspirations of those who complete their TVET college studies being met or are they still having to compete with school-leavers for university places? And, if they are, on what basis?

Having considered students' entry to TVET colleges, our next contribution on the theme of students, by **Esau and Daniels**, reports on a study of the 'funds in families and communities that facilitate second-chance learning' of youths who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances. Here the 'funds' referred to are not merely financial, as may be generally understood, but rather a wide range of resources – emotional, physical and cognitive – that young TVET learners are able to garner among the many and varied support persons and structures in their lives. The authors hold that biological parents are not the only caregivers in this scenario; and neither can it be assumed that responsible adults in impoverished communities are uninvolved, for whatever reason, in their children's educational lives. In employing Community Cultural Wealth theory (Yosso, 2015), the authors explore the wider network of 'funds' that the young students have drawn on for inspiration and support in their TVET journey. Although they are acutely aware of the physical and financial hardships that these students face, the deficit model is not their focus in this instance; indeed, it is the in-depth narratives of the five research participants that give visibility to the often-invisible agentic involvement of significant family and community role players (and role models) who so often make the difference between success and failure. Colleges, it is argued, should seek ways to harness the power that these 'valued collaborators' exercise in the further education of vulnerable youths.

In our third article on the theme of students, **Maluleke, Powell and Pillay** move to another sociological theory that grapples with and lays bare 'pervasive social inequalities'. A large proportion of TVET students in South Africa receive the National Student Financial Aid Support (NSFAS) grant, which indicates the precarious circumstances of substantial numbers of our TVET students. Their environments and circumstances have the potential to affect their aspirations in significant, often limiting ways. The 'structure–agency' dilemma (Bourdieu, 1977) is therefore often visible among our TVET student population, not least when they have to make career decisions. In an attempt to extend the more familiar structure–agency debates that explain the ways affected individuals use agency to navigate structures, the authors use 'Careership Theory' as adopted by Appadurai (2004). This theory argues that social agents need 'cultural, economic, and social capital' (Golding, 2013, cited by Maluleke et al., 2022) to exercise their 'capacity to aspire'. Here one can perceive strains of the 'community cultural wealth' theory expounded by Esau and Daniels in the article referred to above, in that individuals' aspirations are understood to result not only from their own choices, but as a result of their social interactions with others (the 'funds' that they draw on). In their contribution to this issue, Maluleke et al. conclude that Careership Theory, especially in research on TVET students' career decisions, may help to illuminate broader sociological questions and highlight the possible structural limitations that students can be guided to recognise and, hopefully, overcome.

Policy attempts to match skills supply with skills demand are evident from a number of country policies in Africa and those in countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom. In her article, which problematises this phenomenon, **Allais** criticises attempts to suggest that skills are somehow to be found outside of the economy. In an apt analogy for industry, perhaps, she maintains that ‘a society and an economy need to be seen as an organism of which skill-formation is a complex set of moving parts’ and that creating a false dichotomy between the supply of and the demand for skills can only result in what is commonly termed a ‘skills mismatch’. Instead of seeking constant regulatory mechanisms, she advocates the use of different ‘conceptual lenses’. But how ought governments and institutions to look differently at what seems to be a situation that is always in flux, with no apparent synchronisation between the provision of skills by training providers and the take-up of skills by an uneven and lethargic labour market?

Allais’s article looks beyond the partnership models that industry and institutions have been urged to follow to date, holding that ‘broader institutional arrangements in economies shape the way skills are developed and the opportunities for using skills’ and that there should therefore be more deliberate and directed partnerships which recognise this reality. This means that a wider range of social and civil partners is needed in order to target more sector-specific initiatives within a much bigger scenario than that which is offered by one-to-one arrangements between institutions and industry players. Her call for targeted funding is sure to strike a chord among institutions that, through lack of resources, are often compelled to view specific skills-development interventions as either add-ons or an unfunded mandate. By considering the supply of skills as endogenous to society and the economy, Allais contends that some energy may be injected into the system in addition to the flexibility that supports institution-building. Responsiveness, her article suggests, requires dynamic programmes, meaningful programmes and a long-term vision rather than a ‘frenzy of policy rules and tools’ for the purposes of regulation. The article makes some hard-hitting statements that will no doubt provide food for thought, and perhaps inspiration to put pen to paper so as to present a countervailing argument. Scholarly engagement and debate regarding ideas such as these are welcomed for future journal articles.

From robust policy debates we move to TVET curriculum matters, which are to be found in a cluster of three articles. **Madileng**, in her contribution, takes a closer look at the nature of knowledge in vocational education, using the English language subject curriculum – one of the compulsory fundamental courses at public TVET colleges in South Africa – to illustrate her points. Using Bernstein’s pedagogic device as a theoretical lens, she interrogates the path of curriculum development, from production to recontextualisation in the written specified curriculum. Her criticism of the outcomes- or competencies-based curricula which she characterises the English subject curriculum as being is based on what she identifies as insufficient content knowledge that is too vaguely described to serve as a guide to college educators about content selection. Furthermore, she finds that there is poor alignment between one of the curriculum’s purported intentions – that is, preparation for

the workplace – and the approaches suggested by its specified outcomes, a misalignment that is unlikely to foster goals related to proficiency.

The English subject curriculum is shown to fall short of providing vocational students with specialised language forms and functions that might serve them better in future workplace contexts. TVET specialists in this domain may find much to debate in this article, especially with regard to what the author considers to be lacking in the present curriculum, for instance: Does the ‘production of extended texts such as argumentative and discursive essays ... limit students’ opportunities to develop writing and reading skills ... essential to academic success and further studies’? What will no doubt not be contested is that the English language curriculum design should be ‘based on models suited to the educational, economic and employment needs of students in this sphere in South Africa’.

Still on the topic of the curriculum but from further afield regarding both our authors and the location of their research, we turn to Zimbabwe. There, collaborative research between a Zimbabwean university and two universities in the United Kingdom (**Muwaniki, McGrath, Manzeke-Kangara, Wedekind and Chamboko**) was conducted. In their research, Agriculture education and training was the target of curriculum reform, the authors averring that ‘the current Agriculture curriculum was developed for a different context altogether; therefore, it now lacks relevance to the prevailing socio-economic, political and environmental changes’. Their article draws on documentary and qualitative fieldwork among institutions involved in the Agricultural Extension curriculum and policy to highlight gaps in the curriculum. In doing so, they also explore what the ideal Agriculture curriculum might be. Again, there is the familiar scenario of a curriculum out of step with its contextual realities, in this case in particular a need to focus on the majority who are small-scale farmers and on issues such as the need for modern technology and climate-change interventions. Emanating from critical stakeholder interviews and documentary analysis, the article highlights the limitations of the reforms to date, albeit well meant, juxtaposed with aspects of reform that may prove to be too ambitious, given a constrained resource base – which offers readers a cautionary note about the delicate balance between the need for large-scale curriculum reform, on the one hand, but for reform that is both realistic and achievable, on the other.

Curriculum implementation or delivery that is aligned to curriculum intentions as set out in specified outcomes or other curriculum formats necessarily includes a focus on teaching, learning and assessment. It is this last aspect that is the focus of **Garraway’s** review article on assessments for work readiness. The article presents a literature review of competency-based assessment (CBA) in the TVET literature. At the outset, the author is clear about the purposes of his review article: first, that it is intended to provide teachers (lecturers or educators) with insight into ‘innovative practices from CBA in order to enrich their understandings of assessment’; and, second, it hopes to help with the understanding of the ‘assessment tools to mitigate some of the criticisms of current assessment practices in quality reviews’. The JOVACET has not published many review articles, but this contribution is published particularly in the light of the journal’s expressed mandate to support emerging authors.

In an article on the growing TVET and post-schooling research base in the South (see Papier and McGrath, 2020), the encouraging numbers of postgraduate students in the field were reported on and the view was expressed that this augured well for growing a local knowledge base that could ‘talk back’ to similar issues in international contexts. Colleagues involved in postgraduate supervision have often been heard to lament their students’ difficulties with writing strong literature reviews. Therefore, while this article takes a focused look at CBA in the scholarly literature, it also offers excellent modelling of what an informative, robust literature review should comprise. Some of the pointers in this regard are self-evident, and for this reason we hope the review serves both the purposes that the author identifies plus our additional purpose that goes beyond his original intent.

From the spotlights on students, policy and curriculum more specifically we turn last, but not least, to TVET leadership and the experiences of an enquiry-based management and leadership training programme. **Smit and Bester** take our readers through the seminal development process of a university postgraduate diploma (PGDip) Level 8 programme that was devised and launched at the University of Pretoria as recently as 2019. It is one of only two PGDip TVET programmes designed under official policy and based on qualifications aimed at TVET capacity-building – the other being a PGDip TVET focused on curriculum that has been offered by the University of the Western Cape since 2017. In particular, the mode of delivery of the University of Pretoria’s PGDip TVET leadership and management programme through enquiry-based blended learning is described and explained. The article presents a snapshot of the first cohort of TVET college leaders who participated in this new enterprise. In particular, it provides insights into the ways in which the participants reported their experiences of learning and teaching in the first cycle of its implementation at a time when South Africa and the world were thrust into the COVID-19 pandemic, curtailing contact-learning experiences. Consequently, of course, the programme could not be rolled out exactly as intended and some of its contact events had to be adjusted to become remote online initiatives. Despite the challenges of having to adapt a new programme to newer, unintended circumstances, the authors found that the TVET leaders’ experiences, with only a few reservations expressed, showed that enquiry-based blended learning as an approach to leadership and management education was a viable option for developing ‘critical and self-driven leaders in this sector’.

Finally, much of the research and writing for the contributions to this issue would have been done during the closing phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that continues to tax our authors, reviewers and editorial board. Accordingly, we want especially to thank, congratulate and express our great pride in all of the authors who subjected the products of their work to robust scrutiny. We sincerely hope that the research shared and the views expressed in this fifth volume of the JOVACET will be a stimulus to future contributors – both established and emerging scholars from South Africa and internationally – to publish high-quality research that will have a meaningful impact on the vocational, adult and continuing education sector. We wish you well as you continue on your research journeys.

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