
EDITORIAL

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This seventh regular issue of *JOVACET*, which we are pleased to present, raises a range of interrelated concerns in vocational education and training across a variety of contexts and research participants. It is heartening and perhaps indicative of the evolving post-school context in South Africa and further afield that subjects and/or disciplines such as electronic technology and digital learning in vocational teaching, learning and assessment (see Gregory and Zulu; Mouwers-Singh and Arendse; Prinsloo), the creation of pathways through further and higher education (see Mantashe; Norodien-Fataar) and work-related training (see Briante and Barabasch; Wenger and Lamamra; Wickramasinghe and Wickramasinghe) are the focus of the articles in this regular issue of 2024. These thematic strands are not distinctly separate; indeed, they intersect at various points in the trajectories of young and adult learners as they transition from initial training to work or to continuing higher education.

Wickramasinghe and Wickramasinghe, writing from Sri Lanka, deal with Industry 4.0 (colloquially referred to as the ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’), a topic that has preoccupied technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in South Africa for the past decade. Their study of TVET offerings in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields investigated the implementation of Industry 4.0 competencies by tertiary institutions in 15 countries in the Indo-Pacific region. In it, the authors strive to identify critical success factors for promoting the desired competencies. Their findings indicate that staff capacity development, a supportive culture, the availability of resources, and public awareness are critical to the successful implementation of Industry 4.0 in institutions of higher education. In addition, the type of TVET institution played a significant role as implementing agent in putting in place the necessary elements that would serve to enhance the competencies being attained.

Picking up on the theme of technology-enhanced teaching and learning, **Gregory and Zulu** explore the use of an English vocabulary-building application to help TVET students in multilingual South African classrooms improve their verbal interactions in order to express

their ideas more confidently and also to support their reading and comprehension in English. The impact on academic achievement of studying in a second or third language has been well documented in the research literature. In South African TVET colleges, almost 90% of students have an African language as their first language, whereas the lingua franca of learning and assessment in TVET is English. Through applying a model of teacher change in this action research study, the authors' research produced promising outcomes for second-language learning. These outcomes served to highlight both the need for lecturers to engage with technology in their practices and the positive responses of those students who were exposed to more interactive teaching and learning methods.

Moving from college youths and technology-enhanced learning to an adult learner setting, **Mouwens-Singh and Arendse** investigated more closely older adult learners enrolled in an online master's programme at a university and the ways in which these adults coped with remote-learning studies that required them to become 'digital citizens'. Through in-depth interviews, this qualitative study obtained detailed information about the learning experiences of adults who were studying towards a postgraduate university qualification. While the older adult learners who participated in the study were achieving success, they revealed their anxieties about the use of digital technologies and expressed the need for more intensive assistance, mentorship and support in doing so. Innovative solutions and creative approaches were desired to increase their confidence in using technology, the use of which they believed came more naturally and easily to their younger counterparts. The participants acknowledged firmly, though, that enabling them to become proficient users of learning affordances would enable older adult learners to participate to their fullest capability in both education and society.

In a different post-school trajectory for digital learning, **Prinsloo's** article takes us into the domain of work and occupational certification. The recognition of prior learning (RPL) of artisans who have substantial work experience but lack the formal qualification to take the trade test for certification has been a concern of those policymakers engaged in increasing the numbers of qualified artisans. E-RPL is a relatively new methodology in South Africa that came into prominence particularly after the onset of COVID-19. E-RPL has made it possible for electronic, digital and mobile web technologies to be used to collect and record evidence of prior learning acquired, whether formally, non-formally or informally. In his research, the author conducted a study of the artisan RPL (ARPL) assessment being implemented at public TVET institutions that are also recognised testing centres. Although ARPL and capacity-building appeared to be gaining purchase in the TVET college sector, funding and resource constraints were found to be significant impediments to taking E-RPL to scale. These constraints were considered to be hampering the intentions of the stated policy to achieve the projected target of a substantial number of individuals becoming qualified artisans by 2030.

The next article changes tack slightly to a focus on TVET college completers who wish to continue their studies at university but encounter institutional and programme obstacles in their attempts to gain access to higher education. Here, **Mantashe** examines the lack of

curriculum alignment (or outright curriculum misalignment) as a possible cause. Whereas government post-school education and training policies place a clear emphasis on TVET college and university alignment in pursuit of a ‘seamless’ system for articulation and progression, institutional practices reveal that this does not occur in reality. This is largely because what should be equivalent or compatible university and TVET college programmes still tend to be largely siloed, with little interface between their curricula. The evidence shows that without actors who are empowered to drive the relevant institutional policies, curriculum reviews have not been incorporating articulation principles that might otherwise result in alignment. What is more, overarching policies are not finding expression at the level of curriculum planning, resulting in institutional impediments to the goals of the national articulation policy.

Norodien-Fataar continues on the theme of TVET students’ pathways into higher education by examining the systemic processes needed to enhance access for aspirant university applicants. Her article reports on a high-level project specifically targeted at formalising transitions from college to university and establishing a ‘more inclusive and adaptable higher education system’. The project that is the subject of this article is still in its infancy and relies on cultivating deliberate processes for collaboration between universities and TVET colleges in the interests of increasing access for vocational college students. One of the mechanisms being considered is that of collaboratively offered Higher Certificates (a university offering) developed with the needs of a particular occupation in mind and designed to integrate theory and practice. These mechanisms would effectively constitute a deliberate focus on the kind of curriculum alignment between TVET colleges and universities envisaged by Mantashe’s contribution.

In this issue, we have two further international contributions, both emanating from Switzerland – those of **Briante and Barabasch** and of **Wenger and Lamamra** – which are both located in the area of workplace training, an essential feature of the success of the European vocational system. In the first of these contributions, Briante and Barabasch report on research conducted among Swiss postal service employees. They examine the ways in which workplaces might enhance the competence outcomes of their apprentices-in-training by satisfying people’s basic psychological need for autonomy. The authors argue that gaining autonomy has been shown to have a positive impact on the development of young adults, leading to better learning and, ultimately, to work satisfaction. Their findings indicate that the practices aimed at fostering such autonomy among apprentices include encouraging learners to plan and direct their learning pathways in consultation with their coaches. This enables them to take greater responsibility for, and display more initiative in, workplace projects and adequately express their needs so that these may be responded to by employers.

The second of these two international articles shines a light on Swiss workplace trainers and their own need for continuing education. Despite the sophistication of the European ‘dual vocational’ education and training system, the authors hold that ongoing training for in-company educators remains limited. Their quantitative study focused on the attitudes of

these in-company trainers to continuing professional development and the offerings available to them. Applying a ‘latent class analysis’ approach, the researchers identified four descriptive categories of in-company trainer and highlighted the differences and preferences regarding the types of training needs that were revealed among them. The authors aver that their study emphasises the complex pedagogical role that workplace trainers perform rather than simply the perception of their role as being that of ‘occupation transmitter’ – the implication being that these trainers require ongoing and tailored training to suit their particular pedagogical needs.

In closing, we again need to thank the excellent reviewers among our editorial board members and those elsewhere who continue to ensure that the articles submitted to *JOVACET* meet the highest standards for publication. As allied contributors to maintaining the quality of our journal, we could not omit to mention our copy editor, John Linnegar (McGillivrayLinnegarAssociates), who has for years now meticulously corrected language imperfections in the articles accepted for publication; nor could we fail to acknowledge the expertise and attention to detail of our own managing editor, Catherine Robertson. Finally, we extend our grateful thanks to our publisher, Felicity Gallagher (COMPRESS.dsl), and our website manager, Ashley Richardson, who have since the inception of *JOVACET* ensured that our journal is published annually in both hard-copy and online formats, and who deal diligently with all the glitches associated with producing a publication.

We hope that you enjoy reading this the 2024 edition of *JOVACET* and are inspired by its research contributions. Thank you again for continuing to support our publication.

All the best for 2025.