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# EDITORIAL

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Welcome readers to the 10th issue of *JOVACET* published during the journal's eight years of its existence. Over this period, we have seen submissions grow substantially, readership has increased nationally and we continue to extend our footprint internationally. *JOVACET* consistently strives to publish articles of high quality, and for this we have to appreciate our pool of committed reviewers. In our pursuit of quality output, a high number of submissions unfortunately do not make the cut, but every effort is made to encourage authors to resubmit successfully. The topic of quality and what constitutes it is much debated and applies equally to many aspects of vocational and continuing education, inter alia, institutional issues, teaching and learning, policy implementation, curriculum, student performance and research.

In this issue of *JOVACET*, the broad theme of inclusivity can be discerned in studies undertaken in different vocational learning contexts where students experience various forms of marginalisation or 'othering' – whether as adult learners in community colleges, students seeking an alternative route into higher education, as hearing-impaired learners in vocational schools or as students trying to live authentic, successful lives.

We begin with three articles that address student performance. Powell, Muronda and Tini (2025) adopt a realist capability approach to 'reframe' TVET student performance in terms of how students are able to convert educational endeavours into achievements that are meaningful for them. Using conceptual argument and the results of their empirical data, they arrive at a four-dimensional framework encapsulating 'institutional endowments, student endowments, the broader skills development system and socio-economic situatedness'. The data pointing to these four elements of the framework highlight issues that have long been manifested in the interrelated domains that shape vocational students' ability to succeed. There are findings of inadequate institutional student support, a college language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in English without systematised accommodation for the 90% of students who have one of the other official African languages as first language, and socio-economic vulnerabilities in the face of an inefficient national student funding scheme,

all of which require students to draw deeply on self-motivation and resilience. This study confirms the inter-relatedness of ‘the relational, institutional and social ecosystems that shape (students’) real opportunities to thrive’ and the stressors that ultimately cause many TVET students to drop out of the system.

Nefdt, Dippenaar and Engel-Hills (2025) examine further how TVET students cope with stressful factors in their contexts by applying the Lazarus theory of stress. In terms of their study, students’ social ecosystems reveal the financial constraints, daily domestic pressures and academic challenges that result in significant stress. While some students draw on individual reserves and coping mechanisms, others need the targeted support of strong support systems if they are to improve their well-being and enhance their success.

The third article on the theme of student performance and success is that of Ngoveni, Motseki and Machaba (2025) who through trial-and-error analysis utilise a ‘design-based research approach’ to enhance students’ comprehension of financial mathematics concepts. The researchers adapted financial problems familiar to students’ own situated environments and investigated how entry-level students interpreted and tried to solve them. By analysing the errors that students made, the study used ‘iterative cycles of design, implementation and analysis’ to continuously refine the instructional strategies for this subject. Once initial student errors were identified after application among the first group of students, the second iteration targeted specific misunderstandings and attempted to make abstract concepts even more concrete. A subsequent, similar group of entry-level students showed greater success in understanding the key concepts, which was reflected in their higher scores, confirming that contextualised learning experiences and continuous feedback can lead to improved performance outcomes.

Two articles in our second theme deal with marginalised students who are often invisibilised in vocational settings: the first concerns the experiences of violence and ‘othering’ of students perceived to be ‘different’ and, the second, the attempts at achieving inclusivity for hearing-impaired students. Siwela (2025) undertook a brave exposé of the experiences of violence against ‘black lesbian students at a TVET college’. This qualitative study combined verbal accounts and visual narratives to build a picture of the harrowing violence that students often suffer at the hands of homophobic and prejudiced peers. Respondents who were willing to speak out revealed ‘sexual, emotional, physical and verbal violence’ during the course of their studies. While some higher education spaces may be more welcoming and open to diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, the author points to TVET spaces in particular where authorities should employ intentional and consistent interventions to sensitise students to diversity and support the emotional well-being of *all* students.

Muwaniki and Matara (2025) shine light on hearing-impaired students in vocational education in Zimbabwe, while integrating an important, relatively new feature of our education and training landscape, that of social media and the affordances of artificial intelligence (AI). AI promises to fundamentally change every aspect of our lives, including posing new

and difficult challenges for all levels of education and training. Learning institutions and educators are currently grappling with what the applications of AI mean for questions of, amongst others, ethics, authenticity and independent learning. But the benefits of digital and AI tools for learning and participation cannot be ignored, specifically for hearing-impaired learners, which is what the writers of this article explored. Data gathered from purposively selected students showed that social media and AI tools significantly expanded learning for a potentially marginalised group of students by offering them inclusive opportunities despite persistent barriers that hinder the optimal utilisation of such future-focused technologies in their institutions.

In a second article on the topic of AI, its potential for offering expansive learning to another group of marginalised students – adults seeking access to higher education via recognition of prior learning (RPL) – is highlighted. Here, Rambharose (2025) looks at the use of AI applications in RPL assessment, facilitating processes that have been lamented as being cumbersome and resource-intensive through automation and more accurate assessments. In a systematic literature review and reflective analysis, the author juxtaposes the roles of AI-driven tools with adult learning principles and shows the synergies between them. But a cautionary note is sounded in that, despite the more efficient and transparent AI-driven RPL processes, ethical safeguards and ongoing critical reflection need to be put in place by responsible practitioners. The potential of AI for inclusive and expanded learning opportunities is recognised in the literature, of which the article offers a helpful and analytical summation.

The fourth theme is that of vocational skills development in the form of an article dealing with workplace learning and skills ecosystems; and another that discusses work placements for vocational adult educators-in-training. South African researchers in the field of education and labour have generally acknowledged the need for vocational students to obtain authentic learning and experience in the workplace and have shown that the number of students seeking such opportunities perennially exceeds the number of placements that employers can offer.

Ramsarup, Mlauzi, De Clercq and Robbins (2025) argue that in light of ‘the reality of African labour markets, a more place-based approach to framing skills development in building local economies is needed’. They adopt a framework that places the onus on a ‘systemic collective’ to identify skills needs in local contexts rather than placing this burden on individuals. The conceptual framing of skills ecosystems is used to explore the skills needs in installation repair maintenance (IRM) hubs in four South African townships, examining the stakeholders and policies that affect the skills environment in these contexts. Findings emphasise that the various layers of skills development in these ecosystems require comprehensive approaches to strengthen skills development partnerships among institutions and potential medium, small and micro-enterprises (MSMEs), and, inter alia, ‘aligning training programmes with MSMEs’ needs, improving access to capital and infrastructure and market visibility’.

In a second article on the theme of learning and work, Seleke, Teis and Matiso (2025) conduct a comparative evaluation of teaching practice placements for adult education students at community colleges in rural and urban areas. Set in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, the research focused on placement sites for the mandatory work-integrated-learning (WIL) component of a diploma programme in adult and community education and training. As with conventional teacher training programmes, the adult educator qualification requires a prescribed number of hours of workplace practice in an authentic adult education context, but this largely under-funded sector of education offers limited opportunities for such placement. Moreover, the inequities between urban and rural adult education settings are often starkly visible. Unsurprisingly the empirical evidence revealed such disparities: the urban institutions offering significantly enhanced workplace experiences for potential adult educators, compared with rural institutions that presented constraints impeding good-quality teaching experiences. What needs to be done would appear to be quite clear from the research – but it remains to be seen how and when this uneven provision will be addressed.

We close our 2025 issue with an article on TVET college governance and management, a topic that cuts across and possibly impacts on all of the matters of concern in this issue of the journal. Dieltiens and Engelbrecht (2025) report on a research project that investigated the form and function of college councils in South African public TVET colleges. College councils operate in terms of national policy on college governance and comprise internal and external college stakeholders, including ministerial appointments. An interesting question posed by the study was whether this form of governance (the college council) matches its functions in terms of oversight and accountability responsibilities. A fairly large survey and a number of interviews that were held with relevant role players led to the conclusion that ‘college councils add another layer of accountability to TVET colleges without necessarily contributing to their institutional development’. According to the authors, this conclusion was derived from findings which revealed weighty demands made of college councils which do not have the ‘structure, operational procedures and capacity ... capable of carrying the weight of these responsibilities’.

Given these brief glimpses into the contents of our 2025 *JOVACET*, we trust that your intellectual curiosity/interest has been piqued and that you will be tempted to delve deeper into the articles or even expand on the topic by submitting your own research into it. We look forward to original submissions based on robust justification that stimulate and invigorate our readers.

Thanks again to our editorial board and committee members, and our peer reviewers who continue to make *JOVACET* a valuable addition to the vocational and adult education and training landscape.