THE CAREER DESTINATIONS OF OFFICE ADMINISTRATION GRADUATES IN LABOUR MARKET: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED TVET COLLEGE IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

By

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DECLARATION

I, ***Thivhavhudzi Prince Magoloi***, declare that this masters' research is my original work and has not been submitted for any degree at any other university or institution. The research does not hold other persons' writing unless specifically acknowledged and referenced accordingly.



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"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens" (Philippians 4:13)

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Nndaa!

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ABSTRACT

Career paths have long been a subject of interest across various academic disciplines, with many studies focusing on graduate employment outcomes. However, limited research has explored the career destinations of graduates from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, despite the sector receiving significant investment and experiencing high student enrolment. This study investigated the career destinations of National Certificate (Vocational) [NCV] Office Administration graduates from TVET College in Limpopo, South Africa. The study was guided by Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which aligns with the focus on graduate employability. A qualitative research approach was adopted within the constructivist paradigm, which views knowledge as socially constructed through human interaction. Data was collected using a qualitative survey that included a semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire and an interview schedule. The questionnaire was completed by academic lecturers and student support services (SSS) staff within the college, while interviews were conducted with NCV Office Administration graduates. Purposive sampling was used to select participants: 20 NCV graduates, 10 lecturers, and 10 SSS staff. Thematic analysis was then employed to interpret the data and identify key themes and sub-themes aligned with the study's objectives. The study reports a mismatch between the skills acquired by graduates and the jobs they obtained. Experiential learning, a vital practical component of vocational education, was not effectively implemented to prepare students for the labour market. The findings also shows that there is little to no alignment between the programme and industry needs, which negatively affected graduates' job prospects. Although students received training in entrepreneurship, the lack of practical experience or business simulations limited their ability to apply this knowledge meaningfully. To address these issues, the study recommends the establishment of a career guidance unit at the college to help students make informed decisions about their programme choices. Experiential learning should place greater emphasis on business-related activities to instil a sense of self-reliance and entrepreneurship in students. Also, stronger links between the college, lecturers,

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and the business sector should also be fostered to ease students' transition into the labour market. Furthermore, the development of programmes should be informed by research based on current labour market needs. To this end, the study offers valuable insights into enhancing graduate employability in the TVET sector and suggests directions for future research.

Keywords: *Career destinations, TVET graduates, Office Administration, Graduate employability, TVET College, Experiential Learning Theory.*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DHET	:	Department of Education and Training
DoE	:	Department of Education
ELT	:	Experiential Learning Theory
FET	:	Further Education Training
NATED	:	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV	:	National Certificate Vocational
PSET	:	Post-School Education and Training in South Africa
SETA	:	Sector Education and Training Authority
SSACI	:	Swiss-South African Cooperation Initiative
SSS	:	Student Support Services
TEA	:	Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity
TVET	:	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WBE	:	Work Based Exposure
WBL	:	Work- Based Learning
WIL	:	Work Integrated Learning

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CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The ever-evolving landscape of the labour market in South Africa presents unique challenges for recent graduates across various fields of study. While certain qualifications are deemed 'attractive' and prioritized by industries, our institution is producing graduates at an alarming rate; TVET Colleges are no exception. This study aims to investigate the career pathways of NCV Office Administration within the labour market, using one of Limpopo TVET College as a case study.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Across the globe, there has been a growing shift towards developing long-term skills through vocational training (VT). Countries such as Germany and Japan recognise that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can stimulate economic growth by equipping individuals with practical, work-ready skills (Matenda, 2017). Similarly, the People's Republic of China views TVET as essential for economic development, social advancement, and job creation (Pavlova & Huang, 2013).

In response to global trends and domestic challenges, South Africa has adopted vocational education as a strategy to address the national skills gap. According to Matenda (2017), the World Bank has identified specific skill sets necessary for employment in a rapidly changing economy. Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges, in this context, are seen as potential vehicles for poverty alleviation and the promotion of social equity by offering practical and economic opportunities to historically disadvantaged communities. This approach is aligned with the African Union's vision for development, as captured in various Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in collaboration with the World Bank (AU, 2007).

South African TVET colleges have therefore been tasked with supplying relevant skills needed in a dynamic global economy (Fisher et al., 2003). Unlike traditional academic education, vocational education focuses on equipping students with

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hands-on skills aligned with industry demands. As Ntombela (2019) states, TVET prioritises practical, technical, and vocational learning to prepare students directly for employment.

The challenge of unemployment cannot be tackled effectively without addressing the country's shortage of artisans and middle-level skills. Statistics South Africa (2024) reports an official unemployment rate of 31.9% for the fourth quarter of 2024. Given this context, it is crucial to recognise the importance of artisans in driving economic activity, especially in sectors such as infrastructure development. This implies that TVET institutions should be placed at the centre of artisan development, as they are key to ensuring a skilled workforce that meets the demands of industry.

The South African government, through the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2012), views TVET education as a strategic response to the triple challenges of unemployment, inequality, and poverty. Deputy Minister Buti Manamela emphasised this in his public address on career choices, stating:

> *Not everyone is meant for university, and that's okay! South Africa needs skilled professionals in multiple sectors, and TVET colleges provide industry-ready training that leads directly to employment* (31 Jan 2025).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training education offers an alternative for learners who are unable to afford university education or who do not meet university entry requirements. It also presents an opportunity to empower the youth, particularly those who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), many of whom have either failed matric or dropped out before completing Grade 12. Historical inequalities, especially those rooted in apartheid-era policies, continue to limit access to quality education and employment for many young South Africans (Akoojee, 2016).

The importance of skills development through TVET is clearly outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP). Zungu and Munakandafa (2014), cited in Ngubane (2018), argue that TVET can help reduce youth unemployment and address the national skills shortage. In line with this vision, the DHET aims to increase enrolments in public TVET colleges from approximately 639,000 in 2013 to

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2.5 million by 2030 (DHET, 2013). More recently, Deputy Minister Dr Mimmy Gondwe encouraged learners to consider TVET colleges as a viable alternative during her outreach during her state of readiness visits to Free State and Western Cape visits (SA Government communication, 5 FEB 2025).

South Africa's 50 public TVET colleges offer two main programmes: the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) and the National Certificate Vocational (NCV). The NATED 'N-courses' consist of occupationally focused programmes that range from three to six months. Upon completion of N6, a learner qualifies for a National Certificate. Contrastingly, the NCV, introduced in 2007, is a three-year full-time qualification covering approximately 19 vocational fields such as business management, office administration, tourism, engineering, and IT. These programmes are offered at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Levels 2 to 4 and combine academic knowledge with practical workplace skills (WCED, 2009).

Despite these developments, there is ongoing concern about the relevance and impact of TVET qualifications. Critics argue that many graduates from TVET colleges, particularly those in NCV Office Administration, struggle to find employment or pursue further studies. Some even turn to volunteer work due to a lack of recognition of the qualification by employers or inadequate preparation for the world of work (JET, 2010). Questions have been raised regarding the NCV's purpose if it serves as direct preparation for specific occupations or merely as a foundation for further occupational learning (Makole, 2010).

Further complicating matters, there is little empirical evidence tracing the career paths of NCV graduates. This lack of data fuels speculation and undermines efforts to assess the success of the programme. Employers in South Africa and other African countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, have expressed dissatisfaction with the knowledge and competencies of TVET graduates (Nganga, 2015). Although both public and private sectors have attempted to support graduate employability through initiatives such as Work-Based Exposure (WBE), their effectiveness remains unclear.

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Given these concerns, this study seeks to investigate the destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates. Since the programme's inception in 2007, there has been limited scholarly engagement with this area. Thus, the current research aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on the extent to which the NCV qualification leads to employment or further education opportunities. By focusing specifically on the Office Administration stream, the study intends to offer insight into whether TVET is fulfilling its mandate of equipping learners with marketable and relevant skills for the workplace.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A core mandate of any institution of higher learning, including TVET colleges, is to prepare and produce graduates who are ready for employment and future career pathways. However, South Africa continues to face one of the highest unemployment rates globally, with the official rate currently at 32.9% according to resent statistics in first quarter (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Raising concerns about the efficacy of the country's education and training systems. Alarmingly, graduates from certain programmes particularly Office Administration appear to encounter significant difficulties in securing meaningful and stable employment. This trend raises critical questions about whether the core objectives of TVET education are being realised.

Paradoxically, while the government has committed to positioning TVET colleges as institutions of choice supported by an increasingly substantial budget allocation, the apparent disconnect between training and employment outcomes undermines this vision. If graduates are unable to transition successfully into the labour market, the efforts of both internal college structures and external stakeholders risk becoming futile. Within TVET institutions, the responsibility for facilitating student success has largely been placed on lecturers (for academic preparation) and student support services (for industry linkages), as directed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Yet, if these systems fail, the repercussions are most deeply felt by the youth.

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Without a thorough understanding of the obstacles faced by graduates, the career pathway crisis risks escalating, with broader implications for South Africa's economic stability. It is not uncommon for recent graduates to struggle to find employment that reflects their acquired skills and training. However, this contradicts the fundamental aim of vocational education, which is to prepare students for specific roles in the workforce. When training fails to result in relevant employment, its value is significantly diminished.

Considering the above concerns, this study seeks to investigate the career destinations of Office Administration graduates from the TVET College in Limpopo. Through examining their experiences in the labour market, the study aims to generate insights into the alignment between training and employment, and to identify possible gaps or systemic challenges that hinder successful graduate outcomes.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to investigate the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates from Limpopo TVET College within the labour market.

1.4.1 Objectives of the Study

To achieve the aim of the study, the following research objectives are pursued:

- To explore the employment sectors in which NCV Office Administration graduates are working
- To assess the relevance of the jobs obtained in relation to the skills acquired through the NCV Office Administration programme
- To determine the extent to which NCV Office Administration students are provided with experiential learning as part of their programme
- To propose strategies to support NCV Office Administration students in making a smooth transition into the workplace

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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The following are research questions:

- What employment sectors do NCV Office Administration graduates currently find themselves working in?
- How relevant are the skills acquired from the NCV Office Administration qualification to the demands of the job market?
- To what extent are NCV Office Administration students provided with experiential learning opportunities during their studies?
- What strategies can be implemented to help NCV Office Administration students transition effectively into the workplace?

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), first developed in 1984. ELT posits that learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984; Oliver, 2021). Central to this theory is the view that effective learning involves the learner's active engagement, incorporating not only experience but also personal reflection, conceptual understanding, and experimentation. Kolb argues that learning is influenced by cognitive, emotional, and environmental factors, with learners bringing their own goals, emotions, and individual characteristics into the learning process. The theory comprises a four-stage cyclical model:

- Concrete experience: engaging in a new experience or reinterpreting an existing one;
- Reflective observation: reflecting on the experience to gain insight;
- Abstract conceptualisation: developing theories or concepts based on the reflection;
- Active experimentation: applying the newly formed ideas in real-world contexts to test their relevance.

In simple terms, the four stages may be described as: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting (Morris and Konig, 2020). It is important to highlight that this

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cycle may unfold either rapidly or over an extended period, depending on the learning context.

Experiential Learning Theory has been widely applied in vocational and professional education as a means of preparing learners for diverse organisational environments. It encourages the development of innovative thinking and adaptability (Work-integrated learning has proven effective in preparing students for workplace expectations and fostering a sense of independence (Miller et al., 1991). Engeström et al., 1995) and is considered foundational for the formation of professional skills and identities (Kim, & Park, 2023). National initiatives, such as the New Deal programmes in the United Kingdom and Ireland, have successfully linked education and employment, promoting experiential learning as a core component of policy (European Commission, 1995). Internationally, organisations such as the United Nations have emphasised the importance of aligning education with employment to promote lifelong learning and sustainable development.

Recent scholarship (Tassoni, 2021; Mayombe, 2024; Kobia et al., 2024) supports the application of experiential learning in vocational education, highlighting its importance in the transition from education to employment. In this context, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is particularly pertinent to this study, which explores the career destinations of National Certificate (Vocational) [NCV] Office Administration graduates from TVET College in Limpopo, South Africa. The theory provides a useful lens for understanding how practical learning experiences or their absence may influence graduate employability outcomes within the South African TVET sector. Crucially, the theoretical framework served as a foundation for integrating the study's findings with the subsequent discussion, thereby ensuring coherence and analytical depth.

1.7 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

This study was motivated by the growing concern regarding the employability of NCV Office Administration graduates in South Africa, with particular attention to selected TVET College. Despite the strategic role that vocational education and training (VET) is expected to play in addressing national skills shortages and improving youth

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employability, many graduates continue to face challenges in securing stable employment. This disconnection prompts critical reflection on the alignment between training programmes and the demands of the labour market. Once empirical evidence is finalised, the findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge, supporting policy and curriculum-makers in evaluating the relevance and responsiveness of the programme.

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In this section, key concepts are defined and contextualised for the purpose of this study.

1.8.1 Qualifications

Qualifications are defined as a passing an examination or officially completing a course (Figar & Dordevic, 2016). In this study, a qualification refers to completing the required subjects needed to obtain the Office Administration Level 4 certificate issued by UMALUSI, showing that the person has gained the necessary skills.

1.8.2 NCV

NCV stand for National Certificate Vocational (DHET, 2007). It is a new and modern qualification that has been offered at FET Colleges since January 2007, in line with the South African National Qualification Framework (NQF).

1.8.3 Career

Sullivan and Baruch (2009) define career as an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both within and outside organisations, that form a unique pattern. In this study, career refers to students who have obtained an Office Administration qualification and have entered various fields of work.

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1.8.4 Career Pathways

Career pathways refer to a series of linked education and training programmes, along with support services that help individuals find jobs in a specific industry or type of work. These pathways also allow people to progress to higher levels of education and employment over time (Carnevale, Garcia & Gulish, 2017).

1.8.5 Skill Development

In this study, skill development refers to "occupational education and training programmes based in the workplace, such as apprenticeships or shorter training courses'' (Allais, 2012:633).

1.8.6 Skill Mismatch

In this study, skill mismatch refers to "different kinds of gaps between the skills that people have and the skills that are needed in the workplace" (Reddy et al., 2016:67).

1.8.7 TVET College

TVET is a commonly used abbreviation worldwide. It refers to the part of the education system that combines education, training, and skills development (Kanyane, 2016).

1.8.8 Human Resource

Human resource is the personnel of a business or organisation who are regarded as a significant asset in terms of skills and abilities (Wright and McMahan, 1992).

1.8.9 Employability Skills

These are the transferable skills a person needs to help them get a job. In this study, employability skills refer to the value of the skills provided by an Office Administration qualification in the job market (Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011).

1.9 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

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This study is guided by the Interpretivist paradigm, which is concerned with understanding the world through the perspectives and experiences of those who live in it. A research paradigm refers to a set of shared beliefs and assumptions about how people come to know things and how research should be conducted (Kuhn, 1962). It shapes how researchers view reality (ontology), how knowledge is formed (epistemology), and how it can be studied.

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), a research paradigm helps clarify how individuals see the world and how they go about gaining knowledge about it. This study adopts an Interpretivist approach, which aligns with an epistemological view that sees knowledge as socially constructed, that is, created through human interaction and shaped by cultural and social contexts (Crotty, 1998). As Crotty (1998:42) explains, interpretivism sees all knowledge as shaped by human experience and shared through social engagement. In other words, it is subjective in nature (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Andrade, 2009).

The interpretivist paradigm is most appropriate for this research because the study focuses on how students at selected TVET College make sense of their learning through both academic and work-based experiences. Knowledge, in this context, is not fixed but emerges from students' interactions within the college and with industry. To uncover these personal and social meanings, this study used a qualitative research approach, which is common in interpretive research. This involves collecting rich, detailed insights. This type of research values depth over breadth, it typically involves smaller samples. Accordingly, only a small number of participants from selected TVET College was selected. While findings from interpretivist research may not be generalised to larger populations due to their subjective nature, still, they offer deep, meaningful understanding of human experiences which is something this study seeks to achieve.

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design refers to the structured plan guiding the conduct of a study (Nayak & Singh, 2015). This study adopted a qualitative research approach, which focuses on generating data in the form of words to gain insights into specific aspects of social

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life. The primary aim was to explore and explain the existence of a particular phenomenon within a defined context.

In this study, the researcher explored the experiences and meanings attached to the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates from selected TVET College. The research design focused on the quality of responses to the topic under investigation. In other words, the study relied on narrative data (spoken words) collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. This study's researcher believes that the chosen research design aligned well with the problem statement, the aim of the study, and the research questions.

Specifically, this study employed an exploratory research design, which is mostly used when a problem is not clearly defined. Nayak and Singh (2015:63) recommend it as suitable "when little is known about the topic and previous theories do not explain the phenomenon". In other words, it is useful when a researcher has a general idea or a specific question, but little or no existing data or theoretical framework to guide the study. This design proved valuable, as it allowed this study's researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the existing research problem without needing to provide conclusive findings. One key strength of exploratory research is its flexibility, as it allows the researcher to change direction if new data or insights emerge.

To sum up, the exploratory design was preferred in this study due to the lack of recorded data on the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates at selected TVET College. This design enabled the researcher to investigate the research questions in depth.

1.11 METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to a systematic way of addressing a research problem by collecting data, interpreting it, and drawing conclusions (Garg, 2016). This study adopted a qualitative methodology, as it aimed to understand the meanings participants attach to their experiences, based on their knowledge and backgrounds in relation to the main research question and sub-questions. As Kielmann, Cataldo,

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and Seeley (2012:8) note, people make sense of their lives by giving meaning to events. Likewise, Haradhan (2018:1) explains that qualitative research enables the researcher to understand a situation from the participants' perspective.

Given that this study sought to explore the reasons behind the career paths taken by graduates of selected TVET College, the qualitative approach was most appropriate. It allowed the researcher to investigate how students experienced their careers and whether their qualifications supported them in achieving their goals. Qualitative research is particularly useful for gaining a deeper understanding of an issue through the collection of descriptive data, usually in the form of words. The methodology included selecting participants, collecting relevant data, and analysing it to produce detailed findings.

1.11.1 Population, Sampling Procedures, and Sampling Methods

In this section, the population, sampling procedures, and sampling methods are presented and a concise rationale for their design and selection is provided. The identified population, samples and sampling procedures are consistent with the statement of the problem, the aim of the study and the research questions.

Population

It is important to identify the target population from which the sample is drawn and to choose an appropriate sampling method. According to Willie, (2024:57), selecting a suitable sample involves several steps: identifying the population (or universe), defining the sampling units, creating a sampling frame (or source list), and specifying the study units. Willie (2024:153) further explains that the term population refers to the total group of items or individuals about which the researcher seeks information. In other words, the population includes all elements that are expected to form part of the study.

For this study, the target population was selected TVET College. The choice of this institution was influenced by its accessibility and proximity to the researcher, who is currently based at one of its campuses. This familiarity with the setting supported effective data collection and engagement with the participants.

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Sampling procedures

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a group from a defined population that accurately reflects the characteristics of that population (Buchstaller & Khattab, (2013:69). According Mohajan (2006: 60), a sample is “a group or subset of the chosen population” that “can be selected by random or non-random methods”. To generate meaningful findings, a suitable qualitative sampling method was employed to obtain relevant data to support the study’s objectives.

This research focused specifically on graduates of the NCV Office Administration qualification at selected TVET College. Therefore, only individuals who had completed this qualification were considered. In addition, lecturers and SSS officers who directly supported these students during their studies were included, given their valuable insight into the training process and student development.

A non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, was used. As Willie (2024:59) explains, purposive sampling allows the researcher to deliberately select individuals from the broader population who are most relevant to the study. This method relies on the researcher’s judgement to choose participants who are best positioned to provide rich and detailed information (Neville, 2007:31). Etikan and Bala (2017:1) similarly describe judgmental sampling as a process whereby participants are selected based on their ability to offer valuable insights.

In qualitative research, the aim is not to generalize to the wider population but to develop a deeper understanding of the research problem. This requires participants who can provide nuanced and contextually relevant perspectives (Lim, 2025:57). Accordingly, a sample of 60 participants was selected. This included:

- 40 Level 4 NCV Office Administration graduates from selected TVET College,
- 10 lecturers involved in the delivery of the qualification, and
- 10 administrators or SSS officers who supported these students during their studies.

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Lecturers and administrators were included to provide insights into curriculum delivery and institutional support mechanisms, while SSS officers were chosen due to their role in preparing students for career opportunities after graduation. These participants were drawn from the five campuses of selected TVET College where the NCV Office Administration qualification is offered.

The rationale behind this sampling strategy was to ensure a rich, multi-perspective understanding of the graduates' career trajectories, as well as the institutional factors that may influence their employability. Figure 1 below illustrates the sampling procedure adopted in this study.

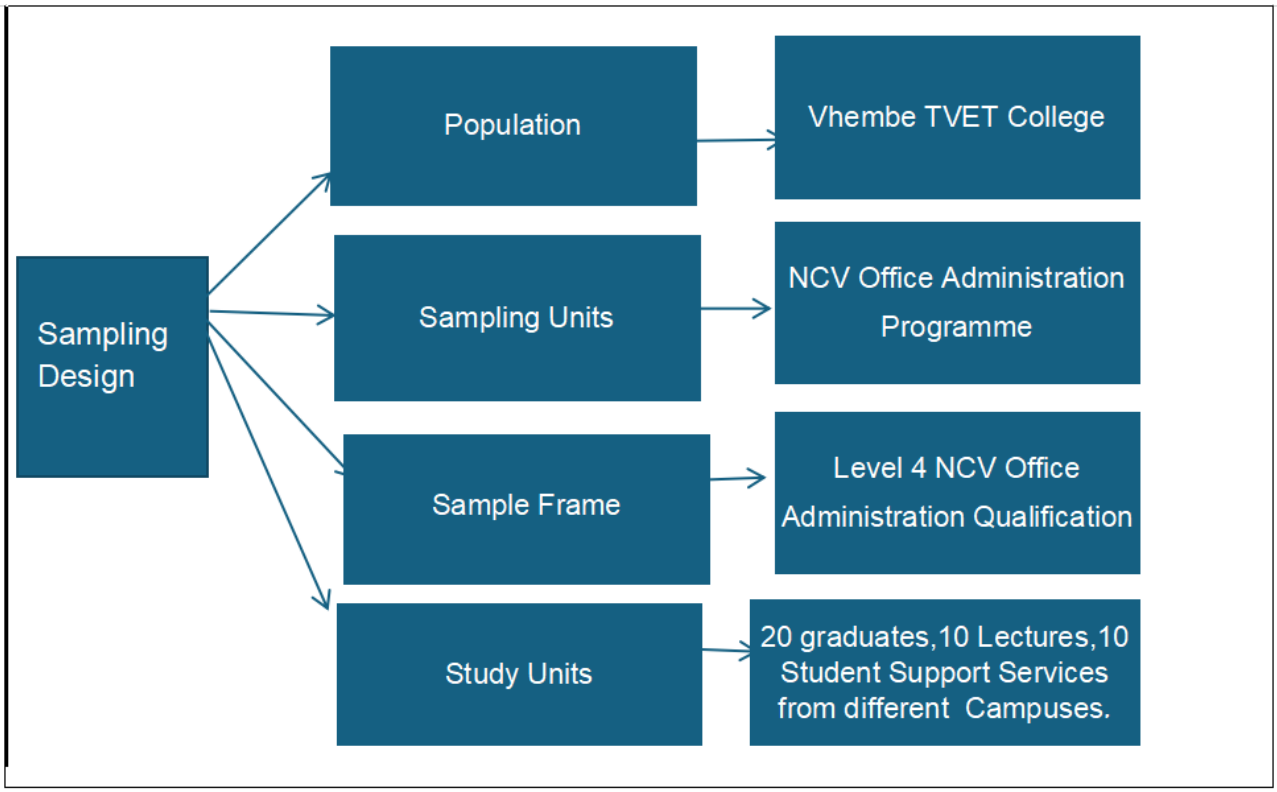


Figure 1: Structure of the levels of the sampling procedure

1.12 DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTATION

Data collection is the process of gathering and examining information about specific topics in a structured and organised way. This helps researchers to answer their research questions, test any assumptions, and evaluate results (Kabir, 2016). Gathering accurate data is important to ensure that the research is trustworthy.

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One of the strengths of qualitative research is its exploratory nature. In this study, data was collected using semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire. The purpose was to gather specific and meaningful views from the graduates. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses (Karatsareas, 2022).

While semi-structured interviews were used with one group of participants, an open-ended questionnaire was used with another group. Both tools are well suited to qualitative research, as they allow participants to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words. The instruments used for data collection were:

- An open-ended questionnaire, and
- An interview schedule for conducting semi-structured interviews.

1.12.1 Open-ended Questionnaire

Eckerdal and Hagström (2017) recommend qualitative questionnaires as a valuable method in information studies. In qualitative research, questionnaires are used to collect detailed, open-ended responses from participants. This approach allows researchers to gain deeper insight into participants' experiences, perspectives, and opinions. Such questionnaires typically include 'how' and 'why' questions that encourage detailed, narrative responses, rather than simple yes/no answers. As Adedoyin, (2020) explains, it is a method of gathering qualitative data through a structured set of questions that prioritise depth over numerical analysis.

In this study, open-ended questionnaires were administered to a purposive sample comprising academic lecturers and SSS staff. The aim was to explore the career destinations of Office Administration graduates in the labour market. This method data collection method was particularly convenient, as it allowed participants to complete the form in their own time and space. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. Also, a consent form was signed by each participant.

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1.12.2 Semi-Structured Interview

This study also used semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection, guided by an interview schedule. Schober, (2018:241) defines an interview as a face-to-face interaction in which an interviewer poses questions to one or more interviewees. Similarly, Pedersen et al. (2016:10). describe an interview as a conversation used to gather information, where the interviewer guides the discussion and the interviewee provides responses.

According to Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011:529), interviews are widely used in qualitative research because they allow the researcher to explore aspects of reality that may otherwise remain hidden such as personal experiences and subjective attitudes. As Brenner, (2012). explains, interviews enable participants to respond in their own words, rather than selecting from pre-set answers. Although this study included a few closed-ended questions, the focus was primarily on open-ended responses to encourage detailed and thoughtful answers.

The researcher was aware of the three main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. For this study, semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary tool for collecting data. MacDonald and Headlam (2008:40) describe this method as one that covers key themes while also offering flexibility to explore emerging issues during the conversation.

An interview schedule was specifically developed for the primary participants (20 NCV Office Administration graduates). Telephonic interviews were chosen as a practical and cost-effective method, particularly suitable for graduates who were geographically dispersed or only reachable by phone (Paulus et al.,2016). The researcher prepared a set of pre-determined questions focused on the career paths of graduates who had completed the NCV Office Administration qualification at selected TVET College.

This method was especially appropriate for graduates who had already left the college and were therefore difficult to contact in person. Contact details for these graduates were obtained upon request. As Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011:529)

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note, interviews allow researchers to access otherwise hidden aspects of participants' lives, such as personal attitudes and experiences. For graduates no longer on campus, the telephonic interview proved the most effective option.

Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that participation was voluntary. Interview questions were sent to them in advance via WhatsApp, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

1.13 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a continuous and reflective process that involves making sense of textual information through careful reading and systematic interpretation. According to Nassaji (2015:720). qualitative data analysis entails reading through descriptive data, noting trends and patterns, and forming descriptive categories. This process is closely connected to other aspects of the research, such as data collection and the formulation of research questions. It involves drawing insights by posing broad questions and making sense of the data provided by participants.

As this study adopted a qualitative research design, qualitative data analysis (QDA) was used. Woolf, and Silver (2017:10) describe QDA as a means of summarising and describing the extensive narrative data produced through interviews and observations. This approach allows raw data, such as field notes and interview transcripts, to be transformed into meaningful findings.

Darmody and Byrne (2006) define QDA as the process of systematically organising and interpreting interview transcripts, observation notes, and other non-numerical materials gathered during the study. In this research, the data obtained from participants via questionnaires and interviews was first reduced and organised. This was followed by the identification of significant patterns and the drawing of meaningful interpretations through a logical chain of evidence (Brenner, 2012). The data was then coded and grouped into categories or themes aligned with the study's objectives.

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In accordance with qualitative research methods, thematic analysis was adopted. Akinyode and Khan (2018:45) describe this as a process that begins with identifying and drawing out recurring themes from the data. This enabled the researcher to systematically analyse the data by grouping responses into major themes and emerging sub-themes. Similar codes were clustered together to uncover deeper meanings and patterns.

Data was collected from four campuses where the NCV Office Administration qualification is offered. The dataset included responses from graduates, lecturers, and SSS officers. Once collected, the data was transcribed, coded, and categorised according to key themes and sub-themes. This enabled the exploration of patterns and the drawing of informed conclusions that aligned with the research objectives.

1.14 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will assist the management and relevant departments at selected TVET College in developing appropriate models to guide students in selecting their courses. It will also help them evaluate whether their programmes remain aligned with the needs of the modern economy and contribute meaningfully to both social and economic development. The study accentuates the value of Office Administration as a course and offers useful insights for students considering a similar career path, enabling them to make informed decisions. Should any shortcomings be identified, the study may prompt college management to review the relevance of the existing curriculum. Furthermore, TVET colleges may be recognised as valuable partners for industry investment and empowerment, contributing to broader social and economic objectives.

1.15 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study focused on graduates who studied at selected TVET College and obtained qualifications in Office Administration. Although selected TVET College offers various programmes, the researcher specifically selected the Office Administration programme as the focus of the study. While there are approximately

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50 TVET Colleges across South Africa offering the same programme, this research concentrated solely on selected TVET College, located in Limpopo Province.

1.16 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations deal with the right or wrong things that a researcher needs to bear in mind when conducting research regardless of the chosen designs and methods (Bos, 2020). In other words, these include seeking permission to solicit data from study areas and protecting the anonymity of the participants, treating them respectfully and protecting their rights. Ethical considerations are meant to protect human beings from harm. There are several ways in which participants can be harmed: physical harm, psychological harm, emotional harm, and social harm (Polonski, 2011). Similarly, Mulaudzi (2015:15) emphasises the importance of this aspect within the university by opining that: before any research is conducted the proposal must be accepted by ethics committee constituted by the University Higher Degrees Committee (UHDC) members. This is to prevents any harm to the participants.

Ethical considerations must be observed to protect the researcher, the supervisor, and the institution from being placed in situations where individuals could allege inappropriate conduct, potentially resulting in public criticism or legal action (Polonsky, 2011). To mitigate such risks, the researcher implemented measures evident in the subsequent subsections.

1.16.1 Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the University of Venda. It is important to note that this study represents a small-scale investigation within the TVET sector in South Africa, considering the broader size and complexity of the higher education and training system in the country. However, the participants shared valuable insights that can help improve guidance for students on selecting courses that are aligned with current labour market demands.

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1.16.2 Informed Consent

To respect participants' autonomy and ensure their well being, the researcher prepared a written informed consent form, which was signed by all participants. Informed consent means that a person agrees to take part in a study after being given all the important information that might influence their decision (Hardicre, 2014). The researcher explained the purpose and nature of the study and assured participants of their right to understand what the study involved, how it might affect them, how it related to them, and how it would be completed. The study followed a voluntary participation approach, as explained by Nosenzo, and Tufano. (2017:140). This means that participants had the right to decide whether to take part, and their choice was fully respected.

1.16.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

In this study, the researcher adhered to ethical standards by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, making participation in the survey voluntary, and informing participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. As Polonski (2011:62) explains, confidentiality means "you [the researcher] know who the participants are, but their identity will not be revealed in any way in the resulting report". In other words, the participants' names were not disclosed to maintain anonymity. This was ensured by coding the data, preventing any link to participants' names. To protect confidentiality, the researcher stored the data securely, with access strictly limited to the researcher and relevant members of the University of Venda research team, including supervisors and research ethics committee members. Any information that could identify specific participants was kept confidential and would only be shared with their consent.

1.17 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters, as evident below:

Chapter One: This chapter presents an introduction to the study, focusing on how the study is relevant to the researcher's field and profession. It includes the background of the study, the motivation for the study, definitions of key terms, the

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problem statement, aim and objectives, research questions, and the structure of the study.

Chapter Two: In this chapter, the researcher reviews the work of scholars related to the history of TVET colleges, their functions, the nature of their courses, and the level of demand for these courses in the job market.

Chapter Three: This chapter outlines the methodology and design used to conduct the study. It describes in detail the research design, data collection methods, data analysis methods, coding of data, quality of data, ethical considerations, and delimitations of the study.

Chapter Four: This chapter presents the data collected. The researcher descriptively presents the data in both tabular and narrative form, supported by various graphical methods. The data is collected through a semi-structured interview.

Chapter Five: This chapter contains the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, based on the analysis and interpretation discussed in Chapter 4.

1.18 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the entire research plan relevant to the study. The next chapter will present a review of the literature, as explored by various scholars, focusing on the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates in the labour market.

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CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher reviews the work of various scholars related to the importance of skills education globally. The chapter discusses the formation of TVET colleges, the skills needed in the job market, collaborations between colleges and industries, careers linked to NCV qualifications, and strategies used by colleges to help students move into the labour market or connect with universities. It also explores the role and importance of SSS, Work Integrated Learning (WIL), and Work-Based Exposure (WBE) in linking students to employers. Finally, the chapter looks at the nature of self-employment and entrepreneurship in South Africa.

2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATIONAL IN THE WORLD

Vocational education was introduced in response to the growing need for skilled workers during the rise of industrialisation in the nineteenth century. This led to the creation of technical and vocational courses designed to provide young people with practical skills. Examples of such education include industrial schools in countries like England, Scotland, Switzerland, and Germany (Eichhorst, et al, (2015). These programmes combined hands-on training with part-time classroom learning and were later included in public education systems.

Vocational education received strong backing, particularly from the private sector. Businesses supported it to reduce training costs while boosting profits. The call for government-funded vocational education was also influenced by the belief that skills training aligned with national economic goals could support a country's development (National Planning Commission, National Development Plan 2030). This thinking foreshadowed what is now known as human capital theory (the idea that a skilled workforce is crucial for national growth and success). There was a general belief that industrial and technical education played an important role in achieving this aim.

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By the end of the First World War, vocational programmes had become more widespread (Benavot, 1983). After the Second World War, international bodies such as the International Labour Office (ILO) and UNESCO helped further develop vocational education through the work of education experts.

2.3 TVET AND STUDENT PREPAREDNESS FOR THE WORLD OF WORK: EVIDENCE FROM TANZANIA

As outlined in Chapter One, vocational education has been adopted globally, including across Africa and specifically in Tanzania. Tanzania has developed its own vocational education agenda (Nkunya & Mwila, 2024), recognised the importance of skills development and setting clear objectives, with a strong focus on career guidance.

To ensure that graduates meet labour market needs, technical students in Tanzania receive competency-based training that focuses on knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and other broad attributes (Lucas & Claxton, 2009). However, despite these efforts, employers in Tanzania remain concerned about the lack of appropriate job-related skills among technical school graduates (British Council, 2014; World Bank, 2014). It is argued that technical knowledge must keep pace with economic development (PWC, 2015).

Makumba (2010) notes that Higher Learning Institutions are becoming less relevant in addressing labour market demands. Graduates are often criticised for lacking innovation, communication skills (especially the ability to express themselves clearly in speech and writing) and having a poor command of the English language (Makumba, 2010; Mjema, 2015). Many graduates are also believed to lack subject-specific knowledge, practical skills, awareness of current events, digital literacy, and other soft skills required in the workplace.

Communication skills, ICT competence, and proficiency in English are widely viewed as key to securing employment (Onyango, 2015; Fulgence, 2016). However, many graduates struggle to demonstrate these abilities, largely due to limited English

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proficiency. In South Africa, for example, English is both the formal and business language used in most workplaces.

In Tanzania, another major challenge in technical education is the lack of adequate teaching and learning resources (Nkunya & Mwila, 2024). These include lecture rooms, computer laboratories, well-equipped libraries, and reliable internet access. Large class sizes, caused by limited infrastructure, often prevent instructors from effectively engaging students in practical demonstration lessons, which are essential in competency-based teaching (Onyango, 2014). According to NACTE (2024), a competency-based class should have a minimum of 50 and a maximum of 70 students. Due to resource constraints, instructors are often forced to focus on theoretical teaching rather than the practical skills required by employers (NACTE, 2007, 2014).

Career counselling is also essential in helping students prepare for the world of work. However, the absence of structured career guidance programmes has contributed to graduates lacking marketable skills. A well-developed career guidance and counselling programme supports individuals in making informed educational and career choices, aiming to strengthen their self-awareness, educational knowledge, vocational exploration, and career planning (UNICEF, 2015).

2.4 SKILLS SHORTAGE IN SOUTH AFRICA

The concept of ‘skills’ can be understood in various ways. Van Niekerk and Wolvaardt (2010:1110), for example, define the term in its singular form as a noun meaning “the ability to do something well; expertise or dexterity”, and as a verb meaning “to train (a worker) to do a particular task”. In simple terms, a skill refers to the ability to apply acquired knowledge effectively and quickly to complete a specific task. The term is often used to describe a range of competencies, including knowledge, values, attitudes, and motivation (Allen & van der Velden, as cited in Kreiner et al., 2009). Reddy et al. (2016:2) further contribute to the understanding of the concept of ‘skills’ by asserting that**:**

> *Skills can be difficult to define and measure at an aggregate level. Skills are socially constructed, intangible and unobservable. Research uses a*

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number of different measures to assess the quantity, level and content of skills possessed and deployed in the workplace.

Skills shortages or gaps refer to the inability to find suitably qualified workers to fill open positions, as well as mismatches whereby those seeking employment do not possess the necessary skills or qualifications required for available vacancies. South Africa, like many other countries, faces the critical challenge of creating employment opportunities amidst declining prospects in several sectors, as the national economy undergoes structural adjustments influenced by global trends (Ngcwangu, 2019). One of the most pressing issues currently confronting South Africa's economy is the shortage of skilled workers, which has significantly contributed to the high rate of youth unemployment.

According to SETA (2005:42), "scarce competencies" refer to occupations for which there is a shortage of qualified and accessible workers. This scarcity may stem from an absolute lack of skills or a relative shortage within sectors. In response to this challenge, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was introduced as a strategy to address the socio-economic inequalities affecting economically marginalised communities. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, improving the living conditions of disadvantaged populations became a central aim of the democratic government. This commitment was further reinforced in the 2011 National Development Plan (NDP), which emphasises that failure to address the skills gap will impede economic growth and constrain South Africa's competitiveness in the global economy.

This highlights the notion that skills are not merely accumulated but are tacitly and socially acquired. Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges play a significant role in the development and transmission of skills to prospective employees.

2.4.1 Requisition of skills through lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is widely recognized as one of the key factors in improving quality of life in the twenty-first century, as it allows graduates to take advantage of new opportunities (Demirel, 2009). It is increasingly seen as essential for securing

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employment and maintaining a stable income. Therefore, higher qualifications often indicate higher skill levels.

Lifelong learning goes beyond formal education and training; it also includes skills development. This term refers to the many ways in which individuals continue to learn and acquire new skills and competencies that affect their employability and earning potential (Adams, 2011). People with strong language and numeracy skills are not only more likely to find employment and earn higher incomes but are also less likely to experience long-term unemployment (OECD, 2005).

In South Africa, the mission of TVET colleges is to address the country's human resource needs for personal, social, civic, and economic development (HRDC, 2014). The Department of Education's White Paper 4 (1998a) highlights that a modern, high-quality, and responsive TVET system is a vital investment in South Africa's future. According to the policy, a successful TVET system must provide a range of programmes that support the values, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for South Africans to become lifelong learners and active contributors to society. Such a system should equip learners with intermediate to advanced skills needed for the country to compete globally (DoE, 1998a; RSA, 2016: iii).

Employability and skills are central to preparing students for the workplace. Employers often look beyond academic knowledge, placing value on the personal attributes and attitudes graduates bring with them. Yorke (2004:410) defines employability as "a set of achievements, skills, understanding, and personal characteristics that make graduates more likely to obtain employment and be effective in their occupation, benefiting themselves, the labour force, the community, and the economy".

While technical skills are important, employers also seek qualities such as adaptability, flexibility, competence, and commitment to excellence (Magnus et al., 2013). Jones and Killick (2013) also emphasise that employers expect a high level of skill from graduates. According to Bester (2014), TVET colleges are increasingly expected to develop students' employability. These institutions are encouraged to promote ethical values, sustainability, fairness, and cultural awareness. Easa (2013)

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adds that TVET curricula must align with workplace demands to ensure graduate employability.

This alignment provides academics with the opportunity to contribute to developing graduate attributes and support students in acquiring skills for lifelong learning in an evolving job market. Importantly, skills contribute not only to employment, but also to social inclusion and participation (OECD, 2015). Employability can be understood as the ability to obtain initial employment, remain employed, transition between roles within an organization, find new employment when needed, and ideally, secure meaningful and fulfilling work (Hillage & Pollard, 1998:2).

As noted earlier, employability allows graduates to apply their knowledge and skills in real work environments and sustain long-term employment. This capacity depends on a combination of competencies, which are shaped by both cognitive skills (such as technical knowledge and expertise) and behavioural traits (such as attitudes, values, and motivation) (Rahmat et al., 2012; Bridgstock, 2009). This point is reinforced by Nazamul et al. (2023), who reports that employers often express dissatisfaction with the skills of recent graduates, particularly in areas such as communication, critical thinking, professionalism, and teamwork. These essential skills are expected to be integrated into TVET qualifications, particularly in programmes such as the National Certificate (Vocational) in Office Administration.

2.5 FORMATION OF TVET COLLEGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

This section provides a review of the literature, outlining the history of TVET Colleges in South Africa before and after the country's transition to democracy. It clearly explains the development, purpose, and nature of Technical Colleges.

2.5.1 Technical Colleges Prior 1994

South Africa was historically excluded from the international community due to its apartheid policies. This section focuses on the role and nature of TVET colleges during apartheid. Khan et al. (2013: 95) note that education under apartheid was both racially and gender segregated. He further argues that technical and vocational education was demeaning for Black, Coloured, Indian, and poor White populations,

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as it was of low quality. Chisholm (1983) highlights that Black South Africans were only included in technical training for the mining sector from the mid-1970s. This suggests that Black people were largely excluded from such training before that time. This view is supported by the Department of Education (2001) and Badroodien (2004), who state that the previous TVET system was designed to prevent rural populations from migrating to urban areas. In other words, TVET education did not accommodate the diverse backgrounds and needs of all South Africans. As such, an inclusive history of TVET colleges arguably begins from this period.

Initially, technical and vocational education in South Africa was divided into technical education, vocational education, and industrial education (Gamble, 2003:11). By the mid-1970s, theoretical education was provided at vocational institutions, while practical training took place within large companies (Matenda, 2019). This arrangement meant that TVET colleges focused on theoretical knowledge, while companies were responsible for hands-on training. Therefore, the system combined theoretical instruction with practical skills in the technical, vocational, and industrial fields.

Badroodien (2004:21) notes that TVET has historically been shaped by apartheid ideologies and was presented as a form of salvation for poor Whites, as well as for African and Coloured urban workers. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) played a key role in challenging racial segregation in TVET colleges by promoting emancipatory, creative, and empowering education (Cooper, Andrew, Grossman & Vally, 2002). This advocacy led to the establishment of the HSRC Commission of Inquiry in 1980; however, the commission did not lead to any meaningful changes (Baatjes, Baduza & Sibiya, 2014).

During the 1980s, apprenticeships and vocational training in the college sector began to decline. Nzonzo (2017) attributes the declines to socioeconomic pressures such as the global oil crisis and the effects of globalisation. Nevertheless, the dysfunction in skills development persisted until the end of apartheid in 1994.

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2.5.2 TVET Colleges Post 1994

April 27, 1994, marked the beginning of the end of apartheid, which was finally put to rest on May 10, 1994, when the democratic government took power. Most academics refer to this period as the post-1994 or post-apartheid era. Terblanche (2017) writes about TVET colleges in the post-apartheid era, stating that in 1994, the new South African democratic government inherited an unequal education system that had been based on racial classification during the Apartheid system. South Africa's TVET college sector was established in 2002 under the FET Act 98 of 1998.

Although the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) recommended the use of the term 'TVET' (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), the official establishment of TVET colleges in South Africa only occurred in 2002. This period marked a major transformation in the vocational education sector. Before 1998, these institutions were known as technical colleges (Moll et al., 2005:16).

Since the transition to democracy, TVET colleges in South Africa have undergone substantial restructuring. According to Terblanche (2017), the Department of Education (2001) provided the rationale for reshaping the institutional landscape of what was then known as the Further Education and Training (FET) college sector. This restructuring was informed by several key factors: the National Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategy, the labour market needs outlined in the Provincial Skills Plan of 2001 by the Department of Labour, the FET Act 98 of 1998, and the educational demands identified in the Situational Analysis Report conducted across the nine provinces (National Business Initiative, 2000:3; South African Department of Education, 2001).

After UNESCO adopted the term TVET at a conference in 1999, the DoE conceptualised its transformation (Matenda, 2020). Due to the remnants of the Apartheid system, skill production was low. When reflecting on the role of TVET colleges in the post-apartheid era, Matenda (2017:7), drawing on Wedekind (2014:61), observes that "in the post-apartheid era that began in 1994, TVET consisted of institutions that were producing fewer numbers of graduates". This statement highlights a critical challenge faced by the sector during the early years of South Africa's democratic

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transition. Furthermore, apart from producing hairdressers and artisans, these colleges were considered unproductive.

The above discussion implies that TVET continued to provide education of low quality-education often viewed as degrading and limited in scope, mainly preparing learners for roles such as hairdressers and artisans. Akoojee, McGrath, and Visser (2008:254) refer to this scenario as an “inherited college that was not fit for its purpose”. This inadequacy stemmed from structural and systemic weaknesses carried over from the apartheid-era education system, which left many TVET institutions ill-equipped to meet the demands of a society and economy in transition.

According to Matenda (2020), citing McGrath (2000), the post-apartheid government viewed TVET as a key instrument for addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality, as well as for reducing crime and violence among unemployed youth. In line with this vision, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) released the 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET), which aimed to strengthen collaboration between TVET colleges and employers to facilitate work-based learning opportunities for students.

Beyond addressing the social inequalities inherited from apartheid, the DHET’s recommendation to shift from Further Education and Training (FET) colleges to TVET colleges also sought to meet the skills demands of the South African economy. This transformation called for the principles of equality to be embedded within the Further Education Act’s policy framework. As Matenda (2017) notes, this strategic shift aimed to challenge and remove the negative perceptions surrounding the sector since apartheid.

Matenda (2017) further identifies several factors that contributed to the FET sector’s negative image, including perceptions of poor quality and low status. According to Terblanche (2017), citing the Department of Education (DoE, 2007), many of the programmes were outdated, poorly aligned with the needs of a changing economy, and demonstrated low student success rates. Furthermore, these programmes had limited relevance for industry, thus exacerbating the sector’s already weak reputation. Consequently, the TVET sector faced criticism from skills development

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experts, researchers, and industry stakeholders who argued that colleges were failing in their core function of developing critical skills and needed to become more responsive to labour market demands.

In response to these criticisms, the government significantly increased investment in the TVET sector. For example, in the 2018/2019 financial year, the DHET allocated R10.7 billion of its higher education budget to TVET colleges (Pandor, 2018). This figure rose to R13 billion in 2020/2021. For the 2025 fiscal year, the government has allocated R14 billion to the TVET sector, alongside R55 billion to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and R27 billion to skills development levies, as part of a broader R332 billion national budgets for Basic Education (Budget Review 2025, National Treasury Republic of South Africa: 12 March 2025).

Despite this investment, the legislative framework supporting skills development was introduced within a broader neoliberal policy context that prioritised economic growth, often at the expense of broader social development. Powell (2013) argues that this framework sought to resolve the tensions between addressing apartheid-era inequalities and promoting economic competitiveness in a global context. According to Powell (2013), the government aimed to provide access to high-quality and relevant education and training that would equip learners with the skills and attitudes necessary for employability, including entrepreneurship, particularly considering the scarcity of jobs in the formal economy.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, unemployment remains high. In the fourth quarter of 2024, South Africa's official unemployment rate stood at 31.9% (Media Release, Statistics South Africa, 25 March 2025). This reality prompts critical questions about the nature and purpose of vocational education and training (VET), including: What forms of knowledge underpin VET? How is this knowledge produced, understood, and valued?

2.5.3 The Evolution of Technical Education Training in South Africa

South Africa's TVET system has undergone substantial transformation in response to the country's evolving socio-political landscape. One of the most notable shifts has

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been the movement from a racially exclusive system that primarily served the white minority under apartheid, to a democratic framework aimed at empowering historically disadvantaged and marginalised Black South Africans (National Development Agency, 2019: Development Management and Research Directorate). This transformation aligns with national imperatives to equip the youth with the skills necessary for employment within a globally competitive economy.

According to Matenda (2017), the complexity of the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) recommendations became increasingly evident, as they extended beyond Further Education and Training (FET) colleges to include senior secondary schools and technical colleges that also deliver vocational programmes. A notable reform in this regard involved the transition from the traditional apprenticeship model to the learnership model now offered by TVET colleges- reflecting international trends in vocational education.

As part of the restructuring process initiated in 2002, 152 former technical colleges were consolidated into 50 larger, multi-campus institutions. Simultaneously, the sector adopted the new designation "Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges", a term that more accurately captures the institutions' dual role in providing both technical and vocational education within the broader post-school education and training system. By 2013, the TVET sub-system comprised 50 multi-campus colleges operating across more than 260 campuses nationwide. Importantly, the enactment of the Further Education and Training Colleges Amendment Act (No. 3 of 2012) marked a significant milestone, as it shifted governance of these colleges from provincial to national control, thereby placing them directly under the jurisdiction of the DHET.

This policy change is widely regarded as a critical development, as it reinforced the strategic role of TVET colleges as the cornerstone of South Africa's skills development agenda. Consequently, the government has prioritised efforts to expand access and increase student enrolments in the sector. Enrolment figures have risen significantly in recent years, and this upward trend is expected to continue in response to the country's persistent skills shortages.

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2.5.4 The Purpose and Nature of TVET Colleges in South Africa

Branson et al. (2015:1) describe post-school education as including public and private higher education institutions (such as universities), TVET colleges, adult education and training centres, and workplace-based education and training. Universities have traditionally offered theoretical programmes, while technikons focused on more practical, technical, and vocational training. TVET courses are vocational and occupational in nature, combining academic learning with practical training to prepare students for specific jobs, employment opportunities, and career advancement.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has prioritised strengthening and expanding public TVET colleges to make them appealing institutions of choice for school leavers (White Paper, 2007). Total enrolment grew from just over 345,000 in 2010 to an estimated 650,000 by 2013, with projections of reaching one million by 2015 and 2.5 million by 2030 (White Paper DHET, 2013). One of the main objectives is to improve the quality of teaching and learning while ensuring greater responsiveness to local labour market demands.

The main aim of TVET colleges is to equip young school leavers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to succeed in the labour market. They focus on developing mid-level skills needed for economic development, especially in fields such as engineering, construction, tourism, hospitality, business, and management (PSET, 2013). TVET colleges are therefore responsible for teaching and preparing students for work, a concept commonly referred to as employability. This generally means that a graduate has the appropriate skills, knowledge, attitudes, and understanding of the world of work to contribute meaningfully to a company's goals soon after employment (Mason, Williams, & Cranmer, 2006).

TVET is broadly defined as education and training designed to help learners gain the skills, knowledge, and understanding needed for employment in a specific occupation or sector (Selane and Odeku, 2024). In this way, TVET contributes not only to individual employability but also to broader social and economic development (RBG, 2025). Given the limited availability of jobs, many young people are

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encouraged to start their own businesses and create their own employment (UN Habitat, 2003).

The origin and development of technical and vocational education in South Africa were closely linked to the demands of industrial growth. As such, TVET colleges adopted a mission focused on addressing the country's human resource needs for personal, social, civic, and economic progress (Terblanche, 2017:3). Nzonzo (2017:10) also stresses that TVET colleges must play a key role in addressing both unemployment and the shortage of skilled workers. In short, TVET's core function is to provide the technical and vocational skills needed for national development. In pursuit of this goal, South African policy makers have adopted a market-driven approach to education and training (Kruss et al., 2014). If these challenges are not addressed, TVET colleges may fall short in producing graduates with the required employability skills.

Both VET and TVET colleges play a significant role in transferring skills to potential workers. Maidment (2017:1–2) explains that the VET sector offers qualifications in three major areas: Engineering, Business Studies, and Services. In contrast, TVET colleges provide a much wider range of vocational programmes that prepare students for a variety of careers. These colleges offer four main types of qualifications: the National Certificate Vocational (NC(V)), the Report 191 Programmes, the National Introductory Certificate (N4), and the National Certificates (N4).

It is widely recognised that TVET focuses on skills development for employability, emphasising practical, technical, and vocational knowledge rather than academic theory. The World Bank (2010) highlights the importance of such individual skills in enhancing both economic growth and personal employment prospects. Accordingly, TVET aims to prepare individuals for productive work and sustainable livelihoods.

Fifty public TVET colleges were established in 2002 through the merger of former technical colleges, training centres, and colleges of education (Sheppard & Sheppard, 2012). Unlike universities, which often have strict admission requirements, TVET colleges are more accessible. Students who have completed

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Grade 9 can enrol in some programmes, while those with Grade 12 (with or without university endorsement) can access others, often without needing specific subjects or marks.

The purpose of post-school education is outlined in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET). The main aim is to create a single, differentiated but highly articulated system that contributes to inclusive economic growth by linking young people and adults to work through education and skills development. Post-school education has the potential to break the cycle of poverty by enhancing young people's employability and earning capacity (Branson et al., 2015:1). Given these benefits, post-school education and TVET is seen as a major driver of skills development in the country.

According to Objective 2.4 of the PSET (2007), one of the key purposes of the post-school system is to prepare individuals for employment or enable them to earn a sustainable income through self-employment or starting a business or cooperative. Everyone should be able to earn a living and contribute their skills to a developing economy. To support this goal, the National Skills Accord (2011) encourages businesses to offer 12,000 internship and apprenticeship opportunities for TVET graduates to help prepare them for the world of work. Ultimately, a graduate must acquire the necessary skills during their training to be considered employable. As such, many scholars have written extensively about the importance of developing employability skills through TVET.

2.6 EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TO EQUIP STUDENTS FOR FUTURE

Unemployment has been rising at an alarming rate across the African continent, and particularly in South Africa. In the fourth quarter of 2024, South Africa's official unemployment rate stood at 31.9%, a slight decrease from 32.1% in the previous quarter (Statistics South Africa, Media Release, 18 February 2025). While it is not entirely accurate to assert that most of the unemployed youth are TVET graduates, the issue of unemployment among this group remains a significant concern.

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The growing challenge of graduate unemployment has often been attributed to the inadequate level of graduate competence and the mismatch between the quality of graduates and the expectations of employers (Aris, Baharum, Sanusi, Abdul-Rahman & Lee, 2013). It is, therefore, imperative to enhance graduate competency to ensure alignment with market demands.

The development of employability skills within the TVET sector is crucial for preparing graduates to meet the needs of industry. A comprehensive approach to curriculum design is required, one that embeds employability skills into all aspects of teaching and learning rather than treating them as standalone subjects. This integrated model ensures that employability is cultivated alongside technical competencies.

Malaysian research findings also affirm the importance of such skills. According to the New Straits Times (2005), many unemployed Malaysian graduates were not lacking in intelligence but rather in soft skills, such as effective communication, presentation abilities, and interpersonal competencies. These findings accentuate the necessity of equipping students with both technical and soft skills to enhance their employability. The subsequent section further elucidates the key factors contributing to graduate unemployment.

2.6.1 Soft Skills: A Developmental Skill for Employability

In addition to traditional academic competencies, there exists a category of abilities often referred to as ‘soft skills’ or ‘life skills. The modern workplace demands more than mere technical productivity; it requires employees to uphold strong ethical standards and values. As Maclean et al. (2019) argue, the capacity to distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviour is fundamental to workplace success.

In line with this, the DHET states that the primary objective of (TVET) colleges is to “train young school leavers, providing them with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market” (DHET, 2013:11). This suggests that TVET institutions should not only deliver technical training but also cultivate non-cognitive capabilities such as self-worth, motivation, and confidence, which are essential for both employability and personal development.

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Soft skills are thus indispensable not only for securing employment but also for career advancement and for contributing effectively to an organisation's strategic objectives. Such skills also enable individuals to navigate change and uncertainty (Callan, 2003). Employers increasingly seek candidates who demonstrate adaptability, and a broad skill set beyond technical expertise (Maclean et al., 2019).

According to Okorafor and Okorafor (2013), the evolving demands of the twenty-first-century labour market have led employers to reassess their methods of evaluating prospective employees. Rather than concentrating solely on traditional qualifications and experience, employers now prioritise adaptability and innovation. They argue that, in an era characterised by rapid technological advancement and job obsolescence, soft skills, particularly the ability to adapt, are crucial. Consequently, TVET colleges must assume a central role in equipping graduates with competencies required by the knowledge economy. These include problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and skills relevant to the information and communication technology (ICT) domain (Okorafor & Okorafor, 2013:6).

Majumdar (2009) further anticipates increased pressure on TVET colleges to respond to the rising demand for these scarce yet essential higher-order generic skills. He contends that "one of the ways believed to aid in coping with rapid technological change is building the foundations for a set of generic and soft skills as the next generation learners' baseline skills set" (Majumdar, 2009:2).

Lim et al. (2019) confirm that employers place significant value on generic skills because they facilitate workplace training and adaptability. Unlike technical skills, generic or soft skills are more challenging and resource-intensive to develop later in a worker's career (Dawe, 2002). Studies have shown that within five years, employability skills such as literacy (89.1%), time management (88.7%), communication (87.3%), enthusiasm and commitment (86.5%), numeracy (86.5%), and personal presentation (82.8%) are expected to be well developed. Furthermore, over 90% of employers expect candidates to possess at least a basic level of these core skills (Martin et al., 2008:2).

Among these, proficiency in the English language and strong communication abilities are especially valued in sectors such as hospitality and business process outsourcing, enhancing worker competitiveness. Likewise, general employability

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attributes such as teamwork, problem-solving, and communication are repeatedly emphasised as critical for success in the labour market (Tikly, 2013).

TVET programmes, such as Office Administration, are increasingly embedding these transversal skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT, critical thinking, and teamwork) into their curricula, thus reinforcing their relevance. The African Union (2012) has advocated for the incorporation of such employability skills into educational frameworks, a position echoed by both UNESCO and the British High Commission in 2014. This urgency was accentuated when a policymaker proposed a more holistic development of generic skills by encouraging learners to cultivate life skills both inside and outside the formal learning environment (Paryono et al., 2014:11). These skills (communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and critical thinking) are now widely recognised for their global significance in fostering human capital development (Paryono et al., 2014:11–15).

2.6.2 Communication: A Knowledge Economy Skill

> *Typical definition of communication would be the act of conveying ideas, opinions, and feelings through speech, writing, or nonverbal cues. A two-way process of achieving mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information but also create and share meaning* (Khattak, Yagoob & Basri, 2003:1).

One of the key employability attributes required for graduates to thrive in the contemporary workforce is effective communication. Nonetheless, employers frequently question whether graduates possess adequate communication competencies. Jalaludin and Inkasan (2014), in their study of master's students at TVET colleges, highlighted this concern, observing that deficiencies in communication skills remain a persistent issue.

Communication is not only central to employability but also fundamental to broader social interaction. Numerous studies affirm that effective communication skills benefit both individual employees and the organisations within which they operate. Jalaludin and Inkasan (2014) further noted that poor communication skills often contribute significantly to interview failures. A lack of communication proficiency may also impede successful social engagement, hinder teamwork, obstruct the application of

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appropriate communication methods, and limit the ability to resolve conflict constructively.

Moreover, communication plays a pivotal role in advancing human development. Diouf (1994:2) emphasised the contribution of communication to the empowerment of individuals and communities. Nam (2009) similarly stressed the necessity of strong communication skills within the workplace, particularly across countries within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). He stresses the importance of engaging effectively with individuals from diverse social backgrounds, asserting that “one must have the capacity to interact and engage effectively with others in heterogeneous groups” (Nam, 2009:6).

Despite the recognised value of communication, numerous employers across OECD countries continue to report that vocational education and training programmes do not sufficiently prepare graduates for the communication demands of the workplace (Nam, 2009). This suggests a persistent gap between the communication skills developed in educational institutions and those expected by employers.

According to Suarta (2016) and Made et al. (2017:4), the following are integral components of the communication skills required in the workplace: (a) effective listening, (b) clear and concise verbal expression, (c) competent oral communication, (d) courteous and professional interpersonal interaction, (e) proficient written communication, (f) the ability to ask pertinent and insightful questions, and (g) the capacity to communicate appropriately and professionally through social media. Writing and oral communication skills are consistently identified by employers as critical and high-priority attributes. This idea is supported by Beachboard (2013:47), who states:

> *Students should realise that good spelling and grammar are not trivial matters but the mark of an educated person and are skills that are expected by employers.*

Computer literacy has become integral part of communication in economic world. Digital proficiency is no longer a department or subset of an agency; according to (Hogshead, 2008:3). Strong computer skills are also in high demand, including

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proficiency with programmes for creating Web pages, spreadsheets, and data analysis others contends.

2.6.3 Teamwork: A Skill for Employability

Tarricone and Luca (2002:641) define teamwork as "individuals working together in a cooperative environment to achieve common team goals through sharing knowledge and skills". Several scholars, including Ghorbanhosseini (2013), King and Palmer (2007), Tikly (2013), and Wickramasinghe and Perera (2012), as well as Martin et al. (2008:2), emphasise the importance of English language and communication skills as valuable 'soft skills' that enhance the competitiveness of workers in key industries such as hospitality and business process outsourcing. Wickramasinghe and Perera (2012) also stress that teamwork should be considered a key capacity skill. It is widely recognised as a fundamental generic skill that contributes to human capital development, enabling employees to function efficiently and competitively in today's knowledge-based economy.

2.6.4 Leadership: A Skill for Employability

Leadership abilities can also be seen as a crucial component of general employability skills, just like communication and teamwork abilities. The demands of the new knowledge economy require leadership to be ready to handle new challenges and find new solutions. According to Canwell, Dongrie, Neveras and Stockton (2014), leaders should deal with critical thinkers, be problem solvers, be ready to adapt to new innovations, and have a variety of approaches to managing human capital. Canwell et al (2014:2) assert:

> *Companies face new leadership challenges, including developing Millennials and multiple generations of leaders, meeting the demand for leaders with global fluency and flexibility, building the ability to innovate and inspire others to perform, and acquiring new levels of understanding of rapidly changing technologies and new disciplines and fields.*

Dilts (1996) concurs with Canwell et al. (2014), who argue that having effective leadership skills is essential for our future survival and success in the new

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knowledge-based economy. He asserts that, when people attempt to take command of their own destiny and guide the destinies of their families, communities, organisations, and planet, the importance of effective leadership ability has become increasingly clear (Dilts, 1996:1).

2.6.5 Problem Solving: A Skill for Employability

When defining problem solving, Geldenhuys (2007:1) states,

> *In a typical problem-solving process, symptoms are usually identified, the root causes of the problem are analysed, possible solutions are brainstormed, best alternative solutions are selected and action plans for implementation are developed.*

Higher-order skills, such as problem-solving, are crucial for developing the knowledge economy (Gamble, 2013; Singh & Singh, 2008; Wickramasinghe & Perera, 2012; Barrie, 2006). Geldenhuys (2007) supports this view, describing problem-solving as a process that involves identifying the core issue, generating possible solutions, selecting the most viable option, and implementing an action plan. Similarly, Okorafor and Okorafor (2013) argue that TVET colleges play a vital role in developing generic skills, such as problem-solving, which are essential for expanding the knowledge-driven economy.

Complex problem-solving is a key skill for running a successful business. Chen and Hitt (2019) note the gap between the problems taught in business schools and those faced in the real world. They argue that teaching problem-solving skills is increasingly important to address the complex challenges encountered in business. Problem-solving also fosters innovation, which is crucial in non-profit organisations. It involves a series of steps designed to identify solutions to specific problems.

Among all the skills mentioned, poor communication and inadequate social skills are the leading reasons why graduates remain unemployed.

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2.6.7 Critical Thinking: An Employability Skill

As discussed by Thompson (2011), Brotherton (2011), and Gamble (2013), critical thinking skills are essential generic employability skills sought after in the modern knowledge economy. Gamble (2013:207) states that the knowledge economy demands workers with “higher-order skills of reasoning, conceptual problem-solving, and communication”. According to Thompson (2011), critical thinkers are naturally curious, capable of recognising that certain situations require multiple approaches, and acknowledge that there may be more than one solution to a given problem. Brotherton (2011:1), like Thompson (2011) and Gamble (2013), emphasises the importance of critical skills in navigating businesses through current technological changes to prepare for future generations.

The White Paper also highlights that the education and training system should not only equip individuals with the knowledge and skills needed by the economy but should also contribute to developing thoughtful citizens who can function effectively, creatively, and ethically in a democratic society (DHET, 2012). This perspective is supported by Kaminkow (2008), cited in Beachboard (2013:3), who asserts that organisations need people who can think critically and analytically, conduct research, develop and adhere to strategies, and apply common sense.

The TVET college programme already incorporates certain curriculum topics that address values, similar to the Life Skills programmes offered in the junior and senior secondary phases of South African high schools. Employability, as previously discussed, is effectively summarised by Nzonzo (2017:14), who argues that employability includes the enhancement of skills such as self-management, career development, general skills, and industry-specific skills. Improvements in self-management, career development, general skills, and technical skills all contribute to increased employability. Self-development requires career development skills, while occupational skills are technical abilities necessary for graduates to perform well in their jobs. Generic skills, such as written and verbal communication, are also vital in the workplace. Self-management skills focus on a graduate’s self-evaluation, encompassing emotional awareness, abilities, and values. Consequently, the overall outcomes of employability are divided into two categories: individual outcomes and

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economic outcomes. The Office Administration programme explored in this study should be viewed as integrating these essential skills.

2.7 THE EXPLORATION OF NCV EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AND ARTICULATION INTO UNIVERSITY

2.7.1 The Necessity of Integrating Pertinent Skills into the TVET Curriculum

In today's global economy, the concept of employability has become increasingly important. It is, therefore, essential to evaluate and prioritise the development of employability skills, particularly within academic programmes. According to Nzonzo (2017:7), employability refers to the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that graduates possess, and how these are applied when engaging with potential employers. In other words, employability encompasses both the ability to carry out tasks effectively and the capacity to apply relevant knowledge in real-world settings. Graduates must, therefore, hold the skills required by the job market to be employable.

This highlights the importance of a strong and dynamic relationship between TVET colleges and the labour market. Such engagement can help ensure that graduates acquire the necessary competencies to perform effectively and remain competitive in the workplace. Although TVET colleges continue to face challenges rooted in the legacy of apartheid, they are expected to meet the changing demands of the economy, as also noted by Papier et al. (2012). This alignment must be evident in the variety and content of programmes offered by TVET institutions.

However, as Gewer (2009) observes, TVET colleges are under considerable pressure to meet these expectations. McGrath et al. (2010) caution against allowing business interests to dominate educational priorities and instead call for a balanced approach that prepares students for meaningful participation in the global economy. This study therefore supports the inclusion of employability-oriented content within the TVET curriculum, with particular attention to the NCV Office Administration programme.

Employers also place high value on both personal and professional qualities such as ethical behaviour, cooperation, teamwork, honesty, integrity, and the ability to

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network. In addition to these, core graduate attributes include subject-specific competencies, analytical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creativity. These competencies are critical in enhancing graduates' ability to think critically and make informed decisions in complex work environments.

In recognition of the importance of such skills, President Cyril Ramaphosa committed to strengthening the curricula of TVET colleges throughout South Africa and expanding the network of technical high schools and specialised colleges (NYDA Youth Dialogue, Cape Town International Convention Centre, 12 February 2020).

2.7.2 Collaboration Between the College and Universities

The importance of a strong link between universities and colleges is emphasised by Papier et al. (2017:32), who argue that poor articulation between NCV and university courses limits TVET students' opportunities to progress to higher education. Even if only a few students choose this path, improved articulation and closer collaboration between universities and colleges would encourage more students to view TVET as a stepping stone to further study, rather than abandoning the possibility of higher education altogether.

There is broad consensus that, for TVET institutions to fulfil their intended purpose, they must be responsive to the world of work. Wedekind (2012) defines responsiveness as the extent to which an educational institution engages with and reacts to external stakeholders and influences to shape its programmes. The original mandate of TVET was to support the government's efforts to reduce inequality and poverty by providing education to marginalised communities. The White Paper (2013) acknowledges this mission while highlighting the need for colleges to become more responsive to industry demands, without neglecting their original purpose.

One of the key challenges is for employers to keep pace with rapid technological changes. As a result, TVET colleges must consider how to prepare learners for technologically advanced workplaces and meet employers' evolving competency requirements (Kruss, Petersen, McGrath & Gastrow, 2014).

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However, it is argued that the hierarchical structure of TVET colleges, and their traditional educational orientation, may hinder their ability to respond effectively to such changes. One way to improve this is through what Kruss et al. (2014) refer to as ‘network alignment’ (the strategic alignment of goals between employers and educational institutions). They also introduce the concept of ‘interactive capacities’, which refers to the ability of various stakeholders in the skills development sector to connect meaningfully and learn from each other.

It is suggested that colleges must develop the capacity to identify and respond to changes in the needs of their local contexts. Such responsiveness is critical for effective planning and for ensuring that the skills offered align with those required by employers. This would require colleges to continuously adapt their offerings to remain relevant. Adaptation is necessary at all levels, including lecturers, academics, and institutional leaders.

2.7.3 Reasons for Enrolling in TVET Colleges

It is unfortunate that many students enter TVET colleges with minimal knowledge or understanding of the programmes on offer. Powell and McGrath (2013) observe that most students enrol in TVET institutions with the hope that the education and training provided, if not in full, at least in part, will equip them to lead a decent life. The reasons cited for pursuing further education are varied. According to their study, the most frequently stated motivation is the desire to ‘achieve a higher qualification’ (31.5%), followed by a wish to ‘increase knowledge’ (28.8%) and to ‘improve the chances of finding a job’ (16.9%). Other secondary motivations include ‘getting a better job’, ‘earning more money’, and ‘improving promotion opportunities’ (Cosser & Winnaar, 2011).

Deci and Ryan’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory posits that motivation to pursue a qualification may be extrinsic, driven by external rewards such as societal recognition and the prospect of economic and professional advancement. Students are also drawn to the NCV programmes because of their integration of theoretical and practical components (Powell & McGrath, 2013). In addition to aspirations for a

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better life, many students are attracted to NCV programmes by a desire to work in financial institutions and attain financial independence.

Some students leave school as early as Grade 9 to register for NCV programmes with the explicit goal of educational progression (Powell & McGrath, 2013). For instance, students may enrol in the Mechanical Engineering programme with the intent of later pursuing further qualifications in the same field at a technical university. Deci and Ryan (2000) also distinguish between intrinsic motivations, such as self-actualisation, broadening one's education, or engaging in new learning experiences. These intrinsic values are deeply connected to students' personal development and long-term goals (Bailey & Phillips, 2015; MacFarlane, 2018; Wang et al., 2016). Thus, it can be inferred that some transitions from school to college are deliberate and strategically planned.

In contrast, other students view the NCV programme as a quicker route to employment. As Powell and McGrath (2013:8) note, "they thought it would be better for them to leave high school and to enrol at the college for a NCV in Finance, Economics and Accounting hoping it will help them to be ready for the workplace". These employment-related values are also connected to the students' overarching life ambitions (Bailey & Phillips, 2015; MacFarlane, 2018; Wang et al., 2016).

Furthermore, some students come to TVET colleges well-informed and with clearly defined vocational goals, often linked to family businesses. As one student stated, "I like to work with my hands because fitting and turning is something that I know" (Powell & McGrath, 2013:89). Other well-informed students include those who have left employment to enrol in NCV programmes full time to improve their qualifications and career prospects, often driven by experiences of being underpaid or undervalued in their previous roles.

For others, the decision to enrol in a TVET college is influenced by a desire to escape the negative social influences prevalent in some school environments. Powell and McGrath (2013) report that some students view college as an opportunity to distance themselves from peer pressure, risky behaviour, and drug use. In such

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cases, TVET colleges are seen as ‘spaces of rehabilitation’, offering learners a chance to reshape their futures.

The establishment of SSS was prompted by concerns about persistently low graduation rates within the TVET sector. Statistics reveal that the average NCV completion rate declined from 42.8% in 2011 to 34.5% in 2014, before increasing slightly to 40.0% in 2015 (Statistics on TVET, CET and Private Colleges, 2015). A growing body of research has consistently highlighted the lack of academic and personal support for students within these institutions (Nzembe, 2018). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013) has acknowledged these challenges, noting that, despite some progress, student success rates remain unacceptably low.

High failure and dropout rates not only undermine the TVET sector’s mandate but also impose financial and social costs on students, institutions, and society at large. According to the Public Further Education and Training Skills Plan 2013/14 from the ETDP SETA, TVET colleges continue to face challenges in fulfilling their mission, largely due to poor throughput rates. Cosser and Winnaar (2011) report that 60% of students enrolled in NCV programmes either fail or drop out.

This is where the role of student support services becomes crucial. International literature supports the notion that effective support services positively influence student development, retention, academic achievement, and overall satisfaction (Collins & Sims, 2006; Taylor, 2011). Holistic support mechanisms are thus essential to fostering student success and achieving the broader objectives of the TVET sector.

2.8 NCV OFFICE QUALIFICATIONS AND POSSIBLE DESTINATIONS

2.8.1 NATED 191 Programme and Career Paths

In South Africa, vocational training programmes and qualifications have evolved over time across a variety of contexts and through diverse processes. As a result, considerable confusion exists among prospective students, their parents, and employers regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the various programmes.

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Until the establishment of a democratic government, and for several years thereafter, qualifications offered at technical colleges (now known as TVET colleges) were predominantly based on the Nated/Report 191 Programmes (commonly referred to as N-programmes).

These programmes operated successfully for many years. They were offered as trimester-based courses specifically designed to align with industry needs; students would spend one trimester in college and two in the workplace. However, over time, the N-programme curricula were neglected and became outdated. Although some employers continue to support them, many express concern over their lack of relevance. Due to challenges in securing employment, most students no longer spend time in the workplace. Instead, they remain at their colleges for all three trimesters.

The NATED programme has been extensively researched. Various student destinations have been identified, as reported by Papier et al. (2017). According to their findings, 26.5% of students were permanently employed, 15.4% held short-term contracts, and 34.4% were engaged in internships or apprenticeships on a contractual basis. Only 15% were employed on long-term contracts. Significantly, the study revealed that over 50% of those employed held either permanent or long-term contract positions (Papier et al., 2017:32).

This highlights the need for equivalent research to be conducted on the NCV programme. Such research would facilitate the tracking of student destinations following certification. Although the primary purpose of TVET is to prepare students for employment, some are also attracted to colleges as a pathway to further education. The study identified five sectors in which technical college graduates are employed and outlined their respective occupations. While several sectors absorb graduates in mechanical and engineering disciplines, NCV Office Administration students tend to secure employment in only two sectors: wholesale and retail (as shop and sales assistants), and the social/community and personal services sector (in clerical roles).

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There is a prevailing perception that a TVET certificate is not highly valued by the labour market. Consequently, individuals employed with such qualifications often receive lower salaries. This suggests that a significant proportion of technical college graduates find employment in occupations for which their education has not sufficiently prepared them. Many of those employed report that their current roles are not aligned with their college qualifications. Some have indicated that they accepted jobs out of necessity, having been unable to secure employment that matched their training. Others have pursued self-employment, often citing the inability to find suitable positions within their field of study.

2.8.2 The Introduction of NCV Qualification and Career Paths

The National Certificate Vocational (NCV) was introduced as an alternative to the traditional matric qualification at NQF Level 4. According to Gewer (2010), the NCV was intended to equip students with the knowledge, practical skills, and applied competence needed for employment in specific occupations or for further study. It aimed to provide many young people with access to a general-vocational post-school qualification, combining both theoretical and practical learning in a college setting. However, industry feedback suggests that while the NCV offers a broad foundation, further training in the workplace is often required to develop occupation-specific skills. Concerns have been raised about the mismatch between NCV content and industry needs. Chabani (2013) highlights the difficulty in identifying the skills required for employment in South Africa, the most effective ways to prepare young people for work, and how to recognise programmes that achieve this.

The NCV programmes consist of 14 different categories which focus on the economic sector within South African (DHET, 2007). Each programme consists of three fundamental subjects: Language English first Additional Language, Mathematical Literacy, Life Orientation Skills together with four Office Administration subjects (DHET, 2007). These subjects envelop the skills necessary for employability. For instance, fundamental subjects like Life Orientation, Mathematical Literacy or Mathematics, and English as a First Language add employability skills and character traits to students' knowledge. Each of these foundational subjects serves a particular function: While Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy gives

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graduates the skills to manage the finances of institutions, Life Orientation equips graduates with the personal development abilities that result from understanding attitudes and values. English Language was designed to enable graduates to apply language in practise, such as writing minutes of meetings, letters, and summaries.

The NCV Office Administration programme's goal is to provide students with the knowledge and abilities they need to successfully enter an administrative secretarial field in any industry. To ensure administration competencies across all industries, including the formal and informal commercial sectors as well as the non-commercial sector, the programme integrates theoretical learning with practical skills. Office administration programme has the following career opportunities:

- Accounts Officer
- Bookkeeper
- Receptionist
- Administrative Officer or clerk
- Company Secretary
- Freight Forwarder
- Transport Administrator.
- Hospital Administrator
- Human Resource Manager
- Legal Secretary
- Personal Assistant

According to Umalusi (2013), the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) was implemented by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in 2007, following its launch as a new, modernised flagship programme at colleges. Institutions were simultaneously encouraged to phase out the NATED/Report 191 programmes. The NCV was introduced as a comprehensive and coordinated response to South Africa's pressing skills development needs (Pretorius, 2007). It represents a contemporary vocational qualification offered at NQF Levels 2, 3, and 4. The NCV curriculum was sequentially introduced at FET (now TVET) Colleges: Level 2 in 2007, Level 3 in 2008, and Level 4 in 2009. It was designed to offer a

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vocational alternative to the academic Grade 10–12 pathway, with an emphasis on industry-aligned training at NQF Levels 2–4.

However, significant resistance emerged against the discontinuation of the NATED programmes. As a result, the Minister of Higher Education and Training reversed the decision to phase them out and reinstated the N1–N3 Engineering programmes. The NCV, a full-time, four-year general vocational programme, was officially introduced in 2011 with the objective of moving beyond the limitations imposed by the NATED curriculum. It was argued that the NATED programmes restricted the breadth of college offerings and negatively affected the employability of college graduates (DHET, 2014).

The NCV was positioned as the foundation for future growth and innovation in the provision of college programmes. It was expected that the NCV would enable colleges to deliver broad vocational curricula that could prepare learners for direct entry into the labour market while simultaneously addressing critical skills shortages. Moreover, it aimed to provide an alternative pathway for young people exiting the schooling system after completing Grade 9, who wished to pursue a vocational career (Farao & du Plessis, 2024).

Furthermore, under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the NCV was intended to serve as the vocational equivalent of a matric certificate at Level 4. While the programme was initially aimed at learners who had completed Grade 9, individuals who have completed Grades 10, 11, or 12 are also eligible to enrol at TVET colleges starting at NCV Level 2 (White Paper, 2013, 3rd edition). Consequently, learners who have already passed the National Senior Certificate (NSC) may find themselves studying subjects they have already completed, alongside those with only a Grade 9 qualification (White Paper, 2013).

According to Kraak, Paterson, and Boka (2016), many NCV students do not meet the minimum academic requirements and thus struggle to progress from one level to the next within the NCV framework. The figure below illustrates the progression of students from secondary schools to TVET colleges, highlighting their educational pathways and exit points.

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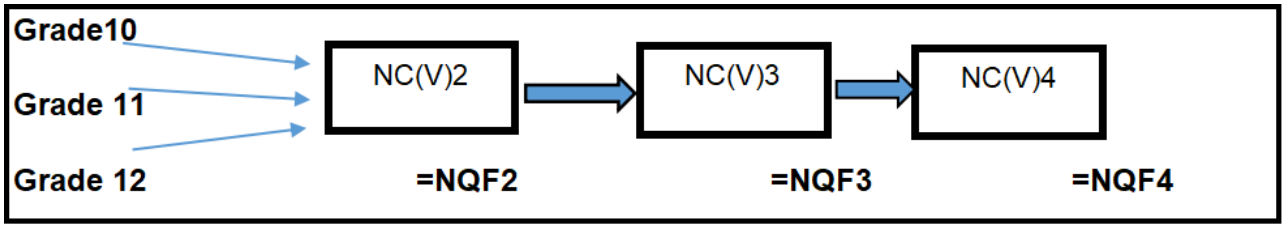


Figure 2.1: Current pathways into TVET College for the programme: Source HRDCSA, P5

2.8.3 The Role of Student Support Service (SSS) on Students' Career

TVET College saw the emergence of new cohorts of young adolescence. The College noticed these younger students were enrolling in TVET Colleges, which altered the demographics of those students. This younger group of students is typically between the ages of 16 and 18, and they are completing Grades 10, 11, and 12 at the college level. Prior to 2007, the college primarily served post-matriculated, older-than-18 students who adhered to the NATED (N1-6) programmes. These students, who range in age from 16 to 18, are a special group because they are neither Basic Education nor Higher Education students any longer. Instead, it appears that they are High School students attending a college that was originally intended for post-matriculants. According to Lolwana (2010:7),

> *The public FET College [now TVET] sector did not only experience institutional mergers but also a curriculum engineering, resulting in institutions that look more like schools with young students pursuing a set curriculum [the NC(V)] pegged at basic school levels (grades 10–12) and on a full-time basis*.

Zarrett and Eccles (2006) assert that the transition to college and the perseverance required to remain there can be both challenging and stressful, largely due to students' need to practise self-governance and individuate from parental figures. To succeed academically, it is crucial that students receive adequate support during this transitional phase. In response to this need, SSS were established within colleges to assist students prior to enrolment, throughout their studies, and following graduation (Maimane, 2016). In the educational context, SSS are designed to support students facing learning barriers by offering a range of specialised interventions at various levels, enabling them to reach their full academic potential. Evidence suggests that students who have received academic support tend to show marked improvement in

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their test scores, as well as in their social and communication skills (Nelson-Royes, 2013).

Among the various services offered through SSS are student orientation programmes, educational counselling, library support, study skills development, examination preparation, language assistance, computer literacy, career placement services, guidance on occupational and subject choices, financial aid and bursaries, entrepreneurial training, sports activities, cultural engagement, and social adjustment support. Accurate career selection and placement are essential to ensure that students are well prepared in terms of knowledge, skills, and motivation to advance in their chosen fields. Inadequate career planning and decision-making may lead to wasted financial resources, frustration, dissatisfaction, and undue hardship (Maimane, 2016).

As Steyn (2014:8) points out, “support services are specialised functions that are typically not part of the education system”. Nonetheless, these services are embedded within institutional frameworks to enhance instructional effectiveness. Accordingly, the SSS are instrumental in providing vocational guidance and counselling to help students identify careers and professions aligned with their interests, values, and abilities. Vocational guidance also provides information on the qualifications and personal attributes required for specific occupations, including insights into labour market trends and the availability of employment opportunities.

While students may have preferences for careers, they must also consider whether there is demand in those fields and how changing labour market dynamics might impact their choices. As Mwamwenda (2004) cautions, counsellors can provide advice and guidance, but the final decisions rest with the students themselves.

Career counselling, therefore, plays a key role in informing students about the most appropriate academic pathways that align with their career aspirations, including the associated costs and available progression routes for further education. Academic support, which complements career counselling, is vital for all college students throughout their academic journeys. However, this does not imply that lecturers should offer preferential treatment to any student (Makibinyane & Khumalo, 2021).

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According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013), academic support refers to institutional efforts to assist students in meeting learning standards by employing a diverse range of pedagogical approaches, ensuring sufficient resources, and providing educational services.

When the DHET introduced the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) qualification at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in January 2007, it attracted students from Grades 9 to 12. These students presented with diverse educational backgrounds and unique needs, compelling institutions to develop structures that offered appropriate guidance and counselling. As a result, a formal SSS framework was published by the DHET in April 2008. This framework serves as a guide to assist students in achieving academic success (Department of Education, 2008). Its aims include the provision of pre-entry information, support throughout admission processes, and guidance during induction and transition phases (Maimane, 2016:1680).

Through vocational guidance and counselling, students are equipped with knowledge about which occupations align with their interests, values, and skills, as well as the qualifications and personal attributes required. They are also made aware of the availability of such jobs and potential labour market changes that could impact their career trajectory (Maimane, 2016). Each individual, particularly students, requires support to make informed career decisions that enhance their employability. As Mwamwenda (2004) reiterates, while counsellors can provide guidance, the ultimate decision-making authority lies with the students. This critical service is available at all seven campuses of the selected TVET College. It reflects both the aspirations of students and the broader governmental objectives and must therefore fulfil its intended role as students complete their college education.

Career guidance in TVET Colleges, particularly for the Office Administration programme, is clearly outlined in TVET Times (2022). Office Administration entails managing the daily operations of an office environment. Individuals undertaking this role (whether designated as Office Administrators or Office Managers) are responsible for organising files, answering telephone calls, responding to emails, sorting mail, assisting with stock control, providing secretarial support, supervising

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staff, overseeing junior employees, and interacting with clients. Success in this profession requires a diverse skill set, including effective communication, organisation, time management, and interpersonal abilities:

- able to supervise others;
- have a good oral and written communication skills;
- have the abilities to work with computers; and
- have a good organisational skill.

Additionally, office administrators should be able to use the following office equipment:

- computers;
- filling system;
- voice messaging systems;
- Fax machine; and
- Photocopier machine.

Graduates of TVET colleges who have acquired specialised vocational skills through their selected programmes are increasingly presented with enhanced employment opportunities (City Press, Willys, 2020). He utters:

> *The days when having a university degree was the only way to get a job are long gone. With the help of their chosen courses, graduates from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges who possess vocational skills now have better employment prospects.*

In the past, a qualification from a traditional academic institution often guaranteed entry into the workplace. However, this is no longer the case. Several reasons have been identified for this shift (Schonell & Macklin, 2019). Firstly, there is a need to address the historical bias that has sidelined graduates from vocational education. Secondly, TVET colleges provide technical training that is essential for a country's industrial development. Thirdly, TVET graduates are equipped with key employability skills needed for workplace productivity. Additionally, businesses now have access to substantial funding to support skills development. Office Management is one of

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the popular courses offered, leading to careers such as administrator, bookkeeper, personal assistant, and receptionist. These roles serve as entry points into office management, helping graduates to build on their strengths and grow into roles within organisations that best match their abilities.

2.8.4 NCV Programme Structure and Career Paths

Based on the previous section, two NCV programmes are commonly offered across all campuses of selected TVET College: Office Administration and Civil Engineering. This has led the researcher to examine this area more closely. The Office Administration programme, offered as part of the NCV qualification, is designed for students who wish to gain a formal qualification in office-related work. The course includes both theoretical knowledge and practical training. Each week, students spend at least two hours in a Simulated Enterprise, where they practise a range of office administration tasks. In their final year (Level 4), students are also expected to complete at least five days of work experience in a real-world environment (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). This qualification allows for further study, as a Grade 12 certificate or NCV Level 4 is often required for entry into higher education (Mabunda & Frick, 2020). Graduates may find work as administrative officers, company secretaries, legal administrators, or personal assistants (Northlink TVET College Prospectus, 2020).

Many students who enrol in the NCV programme believe it is mainly practical with limited theory. However, the opposite is true, which sometimes causes confusion. The programme combines both academic (general education) and vocational components (Department of Education, 2009: Final Report). The academic subjects lay the foundation for university admission. In addition, the inclusion of life skills, computer literacy, and English aims to equip students with soft skills, such as technological competence and communication abilities, which are highly valued by employers. Table 1 below shows the promotion criteria for NC(V).

Table 2.2: Promotion Criteria for NCV: Adapted from Department of Education for NC(V) complementation, 2007, 12

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Subject		Percentage
Fundamental Subjects	Official Language	40%
	Mathematics OR Mathematics Literacy	 30%
	Life Orientation	40%
Vocational Subjects (Three specialization/compulsory subjects and one additional subject from the optional subjects)		Minimum 70% in all FOUR vocational Subjects

2.8.5 Employment Status in other Programmes

According to MacGinty, (2024), TVET colleges in Limpopo Province recorded a relatively low graduate unemployment rate of approximately 33%, compared to 61% in the Western Cape. A graduate tracer study by MacGinty, (2024). found that 34% of graduates from various TVET college programmes were either employed full-time, part-time, or were self-employed. The study further revealed that, when including an additional 35% who were pursuing further studies or engaged in other activities, around 31% of graduates remained unemployed or were economically inactive for other reasons. Among NCV Level 4 Business graduates, the unemployment rate was approximately 60%, which is slightly higher than the 54% reported for NCV Engineering graduates. However, both figures remain significantly higher than the 46% unemployment rate observed among N6 Business graduates.

In contrast, around half of the N6 Business and N6 Engineering graduates were employed, at 50.5% and 46.8% respectively. These employment rates are notably higher than those recorded for NCV Business graduates. Among those who were employed (34%), the majority (65%) were working in the private sector, while 15% held government positions and 19% were employed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There was limited evidence of entrepreneurial activity, with fewer than 1% of graduates reported to be self-employed.

This raises a recurring question: what are the destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates? A tracer study conducted by SSACI, JET Education

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Services, and the National Business Initiative (2016) found that NCV Level 4 completers were more likely to gain employment compared to those who exited the programme at lower levels.

2.9 TVET COLLEGE STRATEGIES IN PREPARING STUDENTS ON THE WORLD OF WORK

The following section outlines several key strategies that have been found to help prepare students for the world of work. It explores the strength of the college's relationship with industry, the role of Work Integrated Learning (WIL), employment outcomes in other programmes, how graduates find jobs, the role of lecturers in supporting students to secure employment, and finally, the role of simulation-based learning.

2.9.1 TVET College's relationship with the world of work (Industries)

Several documents, including those from the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013), the Department of Education (2008), and the National Treasury (2011), highlight the importance of building stronger relationships between industry and TVET colleges. These partnerships are expected to improve the transition of students from college into the workplace. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) stresses the value of industry collaboration in providing students with workplace experience, helping them to combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Such partnerships are also crucial for keeping TVET colleges informed about changes in workplace practices and procedures. The FETi Study (2014) reports that businesses wish to be involved earlier in the development of projects and in engaging with students, so they can help shape learners' experiences and better prepare them for employment.

According to the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC, 2014), learners who gain some work experience while at college have an 82% higher chance of finding employment relevant to their qualifications, compared to those who do not. This highlights the importance of workplace training. However, research by Magnus et al. (2013) shows that more than half of students receive no work experience

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during their studies. This concern was echoed by the Minister in his 2013 Budget Speech, where he stated that one of the priorities of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is to strengthen the link between education institutions and the labour market. Gaining practical experience while studying significantly improves a student's chances of securing a job.

The 2013 White Paper on Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System builds on this point, stating that a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experience is not only beneficial but essential in many educational programmes. Therefore, work-integrated learning (WIL) should be a key part of college curricula. The White Paper emphasises that colleges must build and maintain strong relationships with employers in relevant fields. One of the main goals of TVET colleges is to prepare students for the world of work. To support this, it is necessary to strengthen employer partnerships (both at a national level and within individual colleges) to provide more opportunities for work-integrated learning and improve student placement after graduation.

In addition, it is important for employers to assist in giving lecturers exposure to the workplace, so they remain informed about industry developments. Partnerships with employers are especially valuable for TVET colleges with limited resources, as these employers can contribute financially or provide access to modern equipment for student training.

Changes in the education system in 2000, including the discontinuation of apprenticeships and the introduction of full-time programmes, have further widened the gap between TVET colleges and the labour market (Gewer, 2010). Allowing students to enrol without being linked to an employer weakened the relationship between colleges and industries, and ultimately between students and potential workplaces.

The National Development Plan (NDP) (DHET, 2014) envisions a broader environment for further education and training (FET), which includes job-specific training as well as programmes for youth and community development. A strong connection between curriculum and industry is essential. Sector Education and

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Training Authorities (SETAs) were established to help bridge this gap by facilitating partnerships for workplace learning between employers and education providers. Historically, trades and apprenticeships were vital qualifications for employment, but their role has declined since the mid-1980s. The creation of SETAs aimed to revive and support workplace-based training.

The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (PSET) further emphasises the importance of building partnerships with employers to provide WIL opportunities, assist with student placement, and ensure regular workplace exposure for academic staff. In many cases, college students have never held formal employment. As a result, graduates often face the challenge of lacking workplace experience when entering the job market (Ncube et al., 2018). To address this issue, work-integrated learning (WIL) has been introduced in South African TVET colleges. Its primary aim is to equip students with practical skills that will enhance their future employability (Sibisi, 2024).

The term Work Integrated Learning (WIL) refers to learning that takes place through the medium of work. The approach combines teaching and learning inside and outside the workplace in a structured programme (Billett, 2020).. For the learner WIL integrates theoretical knowledge learnt in the classroom environment and its practical application in the workplace. Policy statement in the 2014 White Paper for Higher Education and Training, in conjunction with WIL, DHET introduced workplace-based experience (WBE). NC (V) Level 3/4 and N4/5 learners are placed in industry for a period of five days, usually during their holiday period

These partnerships can benefit employers by providing access to young people who contribute to the organisation while gaining practical experience (Mesuwini, & Mokoena, 2023). They also allow employers to assess students during their workplace training, potentially preparing them for future employment. The involvement of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) further supports these efforts. According to the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) White Paper (2013), SETAs help link colleges with employers and provide resources to encourage companies to offer on-the-job training opportunities (Sibisi, (2024). To support this collaboration, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

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has made provision for SETA offices to be established at each college (Motsie, 2023).

The government is also taking steps to assist graduates in securing employment. President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the DHET aimed to place 10,000 graduates from TVET colleges into jobs starting from April 2022. This initiative is designed to help young people transition into the workforce and improve their employment prospects. Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, confirmed that by *20 November 2022*, approximately 7,000 graduates had already been placed. He expressed confidence that the target of 10,000 placements would be met by 31 March 2023.

However, there are ongoing concerns that many graduates are not receiving the necessary work placements and practical experience. Dr Nzimande emphasised the role of the department and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in addressing unemployment, inequality, and poverty through skills development. He urged SETAs to prioritise the work placement of TVET college graduates, as they need workplace exposure to complete their training and successfully move from education into employment. Nzimande said:

> *Government has already spent vast amounts of money to support our youth through the TVET system, and therefore, it is important that we assist them to transition to the workplace through appropriate placement.*

Nzimande stated that the department has increased its target for workplace-based learning for the financial year, beginning on 1 April 2022, with an annual target above 100,000. This is in response to the high rates of youth unemployment in South Africa (107 000). He further adds number for job placement.

> *In addition to the 107 000 workplace-based learning opportunities, we are also targeting 20 500 opportunities for apprentices, 22 500 for artisanal trades; 31 300 for those completing learnerships and 148 000 for learners entering into various skills development programmes, such as digital skills, crop production and plant production*.

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Additional funding from the National Skills Fund (NSF) has been redirected to focus more strongly on securing job placements for graduates of TVET N6 programmes in Hospitality and Catering Services, N6 Tourism, and NCV Level 4 Tourism. During the 2022–2023 period, the Bank SETA allocated R54 million to retrain and upskill workers in the tourism and hospitality sector. In addition, more than 44,000 unemployed young people were placed in learnerships (SAnews.gov.za). However, Gewer (2013) points out that although the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training sees TVET colleges as institutions meant to provide practical training where it is most needed, these colleges are often not effectively supporting the development of practical skills whether in college workshops or through workplace-based training.

2.9.2 Employability through Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and WBE

The main aim of the TVET college work placement office is to support the placement of successful graduates into industry after completing their studies. This is usually done through National Certificate Vocational (NCV) internships, commonly referred to as work-integrated learning (WIL). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has recognised that a key challenge in helping students find jobs is their limited exposure to real workplace environments (Paterson et al., 2017).

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is generally defined as “career-focused learning which integrates theoretical knowledge with workplace practical application, within a vocationally designed curriculum” (Patrick et al., 2008:67). Vision 2030 stresses the need for stronger partnerships between industry and training institutions (Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2020; DHET, 2013). WIL is designed to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice.

While many higher education institutions aim to produce work-ready graduates, Griesel and Parker (2009) highlight a continued mismatch between what employers expect and what graduates can offer. Many graduates lack practical experience, and employers often feel that existing training does not fully meet their needs. This concern was echoed by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the State of the Nation Address on 6 February 2025, where he highlighted the crucial role of the private

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sector in providing experiential learning opportunities for young people to prepare for the workplace.

Effective WIL can greatly improve graduates' chances of finding employment. Internship programmes offer benefits to both students and employers. For companies, hosting skilled students on a temporary basis can reduce costs and serve as a route for future recruitment. For students, internships offer important learning opportunities, including improved communication skills and a deeper understanding of their field of study (Milcham, 2021:29).

Some researchers argue that, beyond practical training, it is also important to consider students' behaviour in the form of a "work-based values approach" (Paterson et al., 2017:2). This helps students reflect on their own values, understand employer expectations, and engage in work relationships that are respectful and mutually beneficial. Values shape how workers, such as TVET graduates, respond to and interact with others in the workplace. Ideally, TVET students should graduate with a clear sense of their own values and an openness to understanding the values of others in the workplace, including colleagues, supervisors, managers, and business owners.

However, Paterson et al. (2017:13) argue that values education in the curriculum of South African TVET colleges is still underdeveloped. Encouragingly, the values-based approach offers a helpful structure through which young people can make sense of their work experiences in ways that improve their chances of finding and keeping employment, or regaining it if lost (Paterson et al., 2017:7).

Educational institutions in South Africa, including TVET colleges, have a duty to help young people understand how their personal values relate to work-related values that support employability. Paterson et al. (2017:7) emphasise that values are learned from various sources, and that values education should therefore be embedded in the curriculum. Such values are often developed not only in classrooms but also through practical training and real-life work experiences.

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In this context, work-integrated learning (WIL) has been introduced in South African TVET colleges (Maimane, 2016). WIL involves learning through practical work experience to enhance future employability. This method combines classroom learning with hands-on experience in the workplace through a structured framework. For students, it means applying what they have learned in theory to real-world situations (White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2014).

Alongside WIL, the DHET has introduced workplace-based experience (WBE), which places NC(V) Level 3/4 and N4/5 students in workplaces for five days, usually during school holidays. The goal of WBE is to build long-term partnerships between colleges and industry and to align the delivery of the NCV programme with labour market needs (City and Guilds Institute, 2020).

Since TVET colleges are meant to provide education and training for the world of work, WBE serves as an umbrella term for exposing current students to the workplace. The WBE model encourages colleges to sign agreements with employers, usually in the form of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), to ensure effective collaboration (SSACI, 2012:28).

2.9.3 How do Graduates Find their Jobs? Networking as a Strategy

Research shows that the likelihood of graduates finding employment depends on individual connections, or intensity of job searches (Wanberg et al., 2000). The urgency of job searches decreases with longer unemployment duration. A weak network of connections increases job search intensity, increasing employment prospects and reducing unemployment periods.

According to research (Tziner et al., 2004), job search strategies play a crucial role in how students find employment, especially in the context of rising global unemployment rates. These strategies are generally categorised into two types (Mahjoub and Kruyen, 2021). The first is structured information, which includes job opportunities formally advertised in newspapers or through employment agencies. The second is hidden information, which refers to vacancies discovered through

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informal networks such as friends, family members, or colleagues, or by approaching employers directly.

Several studies have compared the effectiveness of these two sources of job information (Allen & Keaveny, 1980; Eby & Buch, 1994; Sagen, Dallam, & Laverty, 1999; Silliker, 1993). Findings consistently show that informal networking is the most common and effective method of finding employment (Tziner et al., 2004:334). Informal channels enable job seekers to access unadvertised opportunities and connect directly with decision-makers, bypassing formal recruitment processes.

Networking is defined as the proactive efforts of individuals to reach out to their family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbours to obtain information, advice, or guidance related to employment (Wanberg et al., 2000). By networking, individuals can connect with a wide range of social and professional groups. The diversity of these networks significantly influences the quantity and quality of information accessible to job seekers. Sprecher, (2022) argues that effective networks rely more on weak ties such as acquaintances and colleagues rather than strong ties like close friends and family. These weak ties are more beneficial because they provide access to broader and more diverse information sources. The effective use of networking for job searching, according to Wanberg et al. (2000), entails (a) making a list of close connections, such as immediate family, friends, relatives, and acquaintances in a variety of fields (former bosses, subordinates, clients, doctors, lawyers, bank clerks, etc.); (b) informing these people that the individual is unemployed and looking for work; and (c) asking them if they know of any available jobs.

Students often take the initiative in seeking employment; therefore, it is important to explore how colleges, such as selected TVET College, are supporting students in this regard. Initiatives may include linking students with employment agencies, encouraging participation in holiday jobs, promoting self-employment, or advising students to place their own advertisements in newspapers. However, it remains unclear how effective selected TVET College's initiatives are in practice.

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Numerous tracer studies (Ponte et al., 2019), (Cuadra et at al., 2019) have shown that most graduates secure their first job through personal networks and contacts rather than through formal application processes such as submitting CVs. Cosser (2003) reports that more than half (53%) of graduates found work through personal connections, while only 14% obtained employment through college offices, whether directly or indirectly. While personal connections are clearly influential, they may include relationships with individuals (family members, friends, or acquaintances) who are linked to technical colleges or to companies that have formal or informal partnerships with these institutions.

Research by Cosser (2003) also indicates that it typically takes graduates approximately six months to find employment after completing their studies. In a related study, Wanberg et al. (2000) examined the link between personality traits and networking intensity. Their findings suggest that individuals who score highly in extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, and low in neuroticism, tend to engage more actively in networking. Extraverted individuals, for example, are more likely to socialise and expand their range of contacts, while conscientious individuals often adopt a variety of job search strategies to achieve employment.

Despite the importance of networking, many students enrolled in TVET colleges are believed to have limited employment networks (Adams, 2019). This is often due to high levels of unemployment within their families and communities, which results in a lack of mentors and professional contacts who could guide them towards employment opportunities.

According to the Baseline Study on the Destination of TVET College Graduates to Strengthen Employment Promotion in South Africa (2020), the most common methods of finding employment in Business Studies are through friends or family and online job searches. In contrast, college referrals and the submission of CVs are perceived as having limited impact in assisting graduates to secure employment.

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2.9.4 Lecturers and Industry's Connection as a Strategy

It is essential that college lecturers build and maintain their professional networks to connect more effectively with their students to employment opportunities (Verkend in TVET College Times, 2016:26). The college's connections with employers (both as a whole and through individual lecturers) may be the single biggest contribution it can make to improving students' employability. This unique connection helps colleges and businesses establish trust, which benefits students. The importance of lecturer industry partnerships and student's placement is captured in the White Paper for Post School Education and Training (2013: xii) as follows:

> *Emphasis will be given to strengthening partnerships with employers, both at system levels and that of individual colleges. Such partnerships will assist the colleges to locate opportunities for work-integrated learning, to place students when they complete their studies, and obtain regular workplace exposure to staff so as to keep abreast of development in industry.*

2.9.5 Experiential Learning as a Strategy

Experiential learning has become a key component of this research. Its importance is shown by using this theory as the foundation of the study, as explained in the theoretical framework in section 1.6 of Chapter One. Experiential learning, also known as work-based learning (WBL), involves gaining knowledge through direct, hands-on experiences. These experiences help learners apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations (Willy Publication, 5 September 2024).

In TVET colleges, experiential learning is a highly effective way to prepare students for the job market. Many studies have highlighted its benefits, particularly in helping students develop practical skills. This form of learning helps students build the necessary competencies to become relevant and competitive in their chosen industries. TVET colleges can work closely with industries to ensure that students gain relevant and up-to-date experiences, which improves their employability (Lantu et al., 2022; Papier, 2016). Mayombe (2024) also notes that experiential learning greatly improves employability by giving students real-world experience.

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TVET students are often involved in workplace learning through placements, internships, or apprenticeships. In addition, simulated work environments created within colleges can closely mirror real workplace conditions. Project-based learning is another approach, where students work on projects that solve real problems or meet industry needs. According to Moslehi et al. (2022), the outcomes of experiential learning include:

- Improved readiness for employment: students feel more prepared to enter the workforce.
- Increased confidence: learners develop greater confidence in their abilities.
- Strengthened industry links: colleges can build strong partnerships with industry stakeholders.

In the TVET sector, experiential learning is supported through Work-Based Exposure (WBE) and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), as outlined in the 2014 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has introduced workplace-based learning for NC(V) Level 3/4 and N4/5 students. These students are placed in industry for five days, usually during school holidays.

Through incorporating experiential learning into the curriculum, TVET colleges provide students with essential practical experience. This not only boosts their employability but also prepares them for successful careers.

2.9.6 Simulations as a Strategy

Simulation is an important component of learning. It refers to the imitation or representation of real-world situations, processes, or systems through models, algorithms, or virtual environments (Landriscina, 2013). Simulations provide a form of visual reality by offering immersive and interactive environments that mirror real-life experiences (Rubio-Tamayo et al., 2017).

Simulations allow learners to practice in a safe and controlled setting. They support the testing of hypotheses, system optimization, and outcome prediction. One of the key advantages of simulations is their ability to offer interactive engagement, which

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encourages active participation and experiential learning. They also present practical scenarios, bringing real-world relevance to the learning experience. Gaba (2004) defines simulation as a method to replicate, predict, or enhance real-life situations through structured, interactive experiences. This approach allows students to explore and learn without facing real-world risks, helping them learn from mistakes in a safe environment. According to Rubio-Tamayo et al. (2017), simulations have several benefits:

- They improve knowledge retention.
- They help students develop hands-on skills and apply theoretical knowledge.
- They increase motivation by making complex ideas more engaging and enjoyable.
- They support better understanding of complex systems or processes through visualization.

Simulations are widely used in educational contexts (Jennifer J. et al., 2023), such as:

- Business education: where students can simulate real business situations, practicing management, and decision-making.
- Language education: where immersive settings help learners improve their communication skills.

This is particularly relevant for subjects such as Business Practice and English First Additional Language, which are offered in the NCV Office Administration qualification. As noted by Jansen (2015), simulations also:

- Encourage analytical thinking by prompting students to analyse situations, make informed decisions, and reflect on outcomes.
- Enhance problem-solving by guiding students in developing practical strategies.
- Build the confidence and skills necessary to handle real-world tasks effectively.

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Incorporating simulations into NCV Office Administration teaching can help create a more engaging, interactive, and effective learning environment. Most importantly, it ensures that students are equipped with the practical knowledge and experience needed for the job market, enhancing their future career prospects.

2.10 SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: SKILL FOR JOB CREATION FOR TVET GRADUATES

This section explores the importance of self-employment, positioning entrepreneurship as a viable solution to address unemployment and economic challenges. It also examines specific courses that are deemed relevant for promoting entrepreneurial skills and self-reliance among graduates. Furthermore, the articulation pathways from college to university are investigated to understand the opportunities for academic progression. Lastly, the study examines the duration graduates typically spend before securing employment, offering insights into the effectiveness of current training programmes in facilitating job market absorption.

2.10.1 Self- Employment: A Skill Needed for Self-reliant

According to the White Paper (DHET, 2012), the aim of the TVET college sector is to prepare individuals for the labour market or self-employment. Several factors influence self-employment, including personality traits, cultural attitudes, economic conditions, and their interactions (Lambing & Kuehl, 2000). UNESCO (2016) also notes that TVET equips youth with essential workplace and entrepreneurial skills.

TVET graduates may pursue self-employment or wage employment, with self-employment viewed as a key option, especially for innovative and risk-taking individuals (TVET Strategy, 2008). However, job opportunities for South African graduates remain scarce, making economic self-sufficiency increasingly important.

Despite this, social perceptions and limited preparation hinder self-employment. Many students report that their training does not align with job requirements, often leading them to unrelated work. Furthermore, TVET is sometimes seen as second-rate education, discouraging graduates from starting businesses. Cultural beliefs may also associate self-employment with low status.

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Though entrepreneurship is encouraged, only a small percentage of NCV graduates are self-employed (SSACI et al., 2016). Most are absorbed into the private sector (Papier et al., 2017). Entrepreneurship is more than business ownership, it involves recognising opportunities, managing risks, and having the intention to create value (European Commission, 2003; Henley, 2007; Choo & Wong, 2009). Entrepreneurial intention, driven by factors such as family background and mentorship (Crant, 1996; Birley & Westhead, 1994), is vital.

Entrepreneurship supports innovation and job creation, making it crucial for South Africa's development (Maas & Herrington, 2006; Herrington et al., 2009). Yet, South Africa's entrepreneurial activity remains below global averages. Graduate entrepreneurship is thus seen as a response to job market saturation (Rwigema & Venter, 2004), though challenges persist.

Key barriers include lack of funding, risk aversion, crime, and limited business or management skills (Maas & Herrington, 2006; Pretorius & Shaw, 2004; Papulova & Makros, 2007). While government agencies such as NYDA and SEDA support youth entrepreneurship, many graduates still lack the capital and skills to succeed.

Finally, in South Africa, the emphasis is often on earning an income rather than wealth creation, and a dependency culture persists (Kazela, 2009). Addressing these issues requires embedding business and entrepreneurship skills in TVET curricula.

2.10.2 History and Practice of Entrepreneurship Education in FET Colleges

Most scholars agree that entrepreneurship education serves an important purpose. Some view it as a potential solution to the high unemployment rates among FET college graduates. It also supports FET colleges' main goal of developing skilled workers for the national economy. Providing students with both technical and entrepreneurial skills is seen as a key step towards creating future entrepreneurs who can contribute to economic growth.

Entrepreneurship has long been part of the TVET landscape. It was included in the NATED curriculum in the 1990s but removed when the NCV programme was introduced in 2007. This shift led to the loss of the partnerships, capacity, and

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momentum built around entrepreneurship education. Although later reintroduced, it remained an optional subject.

According to the Research Final Report (2013:20–32), the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education has been hindered by both external and internal factors. External challenges include:

(i) lack of strong government leadership and policy,

(ii) curriculum limitations,

(iii) course structure and poor teaching materials,

(iv) limited funding, and

(v) the failure to recognise small business experience or business creation as credit-bearing for diploma purposes.

Internal challenges include:

(i) the absence of a dedicated internal champion for entrepreneurship,

(ii) limited expertise and motivation among lecturers,

(iii) weak teaching and assessment approaches, and

(iv) low student interest in entrepreneurship.

These aspects are detailed below in the subsequent sections.

Curriculum

It is thought that the current TVET curriculum is more academic than practical. The NATED is viewed as being out of date. On the other hand, the current NCV curriculum is thought to not adequately prepare students to start a business and instead prepares them to serve as managers in an existing business because it lacks

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a crucial practical component (Mkhize-Simelane, 2024). As it has been alluded by one Lecturer when approached in one of the reports: “We teach them about entrepreneurship – we don’t teach them to be entrepreneurs” (Research Final Report, 2013:32).

Structure of the course and teaching material

Entrepreneurship is a required subject at the N4 and N5 levels for business and management studies at the NATED level. At the N6 level, colleges vary; some still offer entrepreneurship, while others switch it out for income tax. New Venture Creation (NVC) is a course option at the National Certificate - Vocational [NC(V)] level, but it is entirely optional, according to report. Most colleges use material presented in the table below, which does not suit for teaching entrepreneurship.

Table 2.2: New Venture Creation Course Content for L2

Table 1: NC(V) Level 2 New Venture Creation Course Content		
Module 1: The business environment	**Module 2: Investigate the markets and needs for a new venture**	**Module 3: Financial requirements of a new business venture**
Explain the structure and roles of different types of organisations within their own industry in South Africa •Demonstrate an understanding of the concept of a market •Discuss and describe market positioning •Explain the role of professional associations in the business sector	Identify potential customers for a new venture Survey opinions for products of the new venture •Use statistical information to determine the type of product / service most valued by different communities	Income and expenditure of a new venture Financial and cash flow requirements of a new venture •Pricing and costing principles • Resources to obtain start-up capital

It is understandable that several respondents expressed the view that the current practice within FET Colleges tends to focus on teaching about entrepreneurship, rather than equipping students to become entrepreneurs. Based on the course content mentioned earlier, except for Module 3, there appears to be limited emphasis on the key qualities, practical methods, and guidance required to start and manage an actual business.

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Funding

The Department of Higher Education and Training does not mandate entrepreneurship education and development, so it is not funded as a separate focal activity. Therefore, funding and carrying out activities in this area is left to the colleges' discretion. Many colleges have formed partnerships with a variety of external organisations to address their funding issues, including SETAs, Chambers of Commerce, small business development organisations, municipalities, and provincial departments in charge of economic development. These partnerships, however, do not offer long-term, stable funding, and their interventions usually take the form of projects rather than programmes.

Lack of recognition of business creation and small business experience for Diploma award purposes

Presently, the practical component at workplace is embedded on student programme to obtain qualification. However, students are not adequately exposed to small business practices, as they are typically placed in large companies for workplace experience. This limits their opportunity to engage with the day-to-day realities of running a small business; an experience that could be vital in equipping them with the practical knowledge, skills, and inspiration needed to establish and manage their own enterprises.

Lack of a dedicated entrepreneurship champion within a college

There are views that the college principal should be the main proponent of the organization's efforts to promote entrepreneurship, outlining a clear vision and strategy for the whole organisation. However, the activity's part should be left to the college skills manager.

Entrepreneurship knowledge and motivation among educators

There are lecturers currently teaching Entrepreneurship and/or New Venture Creation who, according to reports, possess little to no academic training in the subject. Consequently, teaching responsibilities are often assigned without due consideration of the lecturers' prior knowledge or experience in the field. In the past, initiatives such as the Foundation for Entrepreneurship & Business Development

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(FEBDEV), which was active in the early 1990s, played a key role in training and inspiring educators in entrepreneurship. However, such support structures are now largely absent. As a result, many educators reportedly lack the expertise, enthusiasm, and motivation required to effectively lead the institution's entrepreneurship education and development programmes.

Pedagogical and assessment approach

The problem with FET colleges' entrepreneurship education programmes is that they are too academic, theoretical, and lack a practical component. Simulators provides students with practical component, unfortunately some colleges do not have such facilities. Computer-based business start-up and management simulations is considered important in entrepreneur education. As form of assessment, physical facilities such as internet, social media and computers are essential. Assessment in general is largely textbook-based and allows little room for students to present their own ideas and solutions to problems.

Student interest in entrepreneurship

When compared to starting one's own business, which is seen as a risk, students still prefer formal employment in larger companies because it is perceived as safe and offers more lucrative career prospects. As a result of this mind-set, which extends to a broader section of society, most students show little interest in entrepreneurship education and programmes. According to a participant in the research, "Students here are not thinking in terms of entrepreneurship; they're looking for jobs" (Research Final Report, 2013:43).

Colleges do not maintain records of their students after they complete their academic studies, meaning there is no way to track whether any of them have started or attempted to start their own businesses. As a result, monitoring the progress of students in the field of business startups is virtually non-existent. Additionally, findings from a World Bank tracer study reveal that workers with vocational training tend to earn less than those who have graduated from the general education system (World Bank, 2007:33). Those students who are not employed opt to offer services without expecting income, known as voluntarism. Volunteering entails devoting time and energy to providing a service that benefits someone, society, or the community

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without anticipating financial or monetary rewards. It has traditionally been practised in a variety of communities and fields all over the world. Smith (1982:25) defines a volunteer as:

> *An individual engaging in behaviour that is not bio-socially determined (e. g., eating, sleeping), nor economically necessitated (e. g. paid work, housework, home repair), nor socio-politically compelled (e.g. paying one's taxes, clothing oneself before appearing in public), but rather that is essentially (primarily) motivated by the expectation of psychic benefit of some kind as a results of activities that have a market value greater than any remuneration received for such activities.*

A volunteer is someone who "contributes time to helping others without expecting payment or other material benefit to herself", according to Wilson and Musick (1999:141). Volunteer work is therefore work performed without payment. The definition of volunteering given by Ellis and Noyes (1990:4) is "choosing to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility without concern for financial profit, going beyond one's basic obligations". Volunteerism may have different meaning to different people. According to Brudney (1990) and Duncombe (1985) volunteerism is not associated with non-profit organisations only, but also with public and for-profit organisations.

2.10.3 The Importance of Entrepreneurship Education

The broad role and significance of entrepreneurship education programmes were clearly expressed by The European Commission's Expert Group on Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education and Training (2009:15) as follows:

> *Entrepreneurial programmes and modules offer students the tools to think creatively, to be an effective problem solver, to analyse a business idea objectively, and to communicate, network, lead, and evaluate any given project. Students feel more confident about setting up their own businesses if they can test their ideas in an educational, supportive environment. Education for entrepreneurship can be particularly effective in … vocational training, as students are close to entering working life and self-employment may be a valuable option for them." However, the benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to boosting start-ups, innovative ventures and new jobs. Entrepreneurship is a*

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competence for everyone, helping young people to be more creative and self-confident in whatever they undertake.

The National Treasury of South Africa outlines the general function of entrepreneurship programmes, including entrepreneurship education, as follows: Entrepreneurship programmes promote skills in young people with the aim of creating and managing sustainable and effective businesses capable of providing permanent jobs and employment growth. According to this claim, entrepreneurship growth is crucial to addressing the country's current unemployment problem, which is particularly acute for young people. Entrepreneurship education is critical for developing enthusiastic entrepreneur attitudes, promoting entrepreneurial activity, and enhancing entrepreneurial aspirations. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) also cites a Western Cape Status of the Youth Report from 2008, which makes the case that entrepreneurship education can significantly affect four areas that are essential to entrepreneurship. The learners' self-confidence about their entrepreneurial abilities.

- The learners' understanding of business and financial matters
- The learners' desire to pursue entrepreneurship
- The learners' desire to further their education

According to Entrepreneurship in Education in FET Final reports (2013), the lessons can be drawn from other European education systems where the following are futures:

- Entrepreneurship is included in the national curriculum for vocational education.
- Collaboration between vocational education institutions and businesses is generally well established,
- Students are involved in practical projects and activities that highlight learning through practise and give them the opportunity to experience entrepreneurship in real-world settings.
- Non-profit organisations (NGOs) play an important role in organising entrepreneurship education in VET schools, especially by offering programmes based on practical experience and working on project.;

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- Were the following teaching methods are used, company visits, Computer simulations and business with Work placements, project work and group work.
- Entrepreneurship learning activities are either integrated into the compulsory curriculum or part of optional or extra-curricular activities.

A report was released by the Global Education Initiative of the World Economic Forum in April 2009. The report outlines the kinds of skills that students should be demonstrated through entrepreneurship education, as follows:

- Entrepreneurial behaviours and mind sets
- Self-confidence, self-efficacy and leadership
- Creativity, innovation and ability to think “out of the box” to solve problems
- Managing complexity and unpredictability
- Basic business and financial skills
- Opportunity identification
- How to build, finance and grow ventures
- Negotiation skills
- Building relationships, networks and social capital

A hands-on, project-based, multidisciplinary, and non-linear approach must be adopted. It is, therefore, necessary to depart from mainstream pedagogy to develop the skills, and the following activities should be included in the curriculum according to the report.

- Simulations and games
- Interactive teamwork and group activities
- Direct, action-oriented market research
- Student buying and selling events, using real money
- Field trips to local businesses, especially entrepreneurial ventures
- Entrepreneurs or venture funders as guest speakers in class
- Business plan and other competitions, with businesspeople as judges
- Student-run businesses, using real money (including in-school stores)
- Mentoring, coaching and incubation

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2.10.4 Time Spent Before Getting Employment after Exiting College

One of the most notable employment-related outcomes in tracer or destination studies is the time it takes for graduates or completers to secure employment. The proportion of graduates with various types of qualifications who found employment within six months of completing their TVET qualification has been documented. It was found that N3 Engineering and N6 Business graduates secured employment sooner than those with other qualifications, with 42% and 36%, respectively, finding work within this period.

Over two-thirds (67%) of graduates were employed within the first year after graduation, with 38% securing employment within the first six months and 26% within six to twelve months. Of particular concern is that 58% of employed graduates took more than six months to find their first job, and for 32% of them, this period was even longer (Papier et al., 2017: 3).

2.10.5 TVET Transition to University

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) advocates for collaboration between TVET colleges and universities to facilitate the academic progression of students who initially choose a vocational education pathway (HRDC, 2014). In alignment with this vision, a 2009 government gazette enabled students holding National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] qualifications to gain university admission, albeit with lower entry thresholds than those required of matriculants. More recently, comprehensive universities such as Nelson Mandela University and the University of Johannesburg have established specific admission criteria for NC(V) graduates, enhancing access opportunities. This aligns with the principles outlined in South Africa's White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013), which promotes the removal of academic dead ends and the support of sustainable livelihoods.

Despite these policy shifts, successful transitions from TVET colleges to universities remain rare and poorly documented in the South African context. According to a

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UNESCO study (2002) examining TVET in Sub-Saharan Africa, vocational education was predominantly offered at secondary level across most countries, with minimal opportunities for students to access higher education. Kraak (2018:24) similarly notes that, across the African continent, there is limited articulation between TVET institutions, polytechnics, and universities, resulting in restricted student mobility across these sectors.

TVET qualifications are typically designed to equip learners with occupational competencies rather than prepare them for further academic pursuits. Consequently, universities often express hesitance in admitting TVET graduates due to both the low public regard for TVET qualifications and legitimate concerns about students' foundational knowledge in disciplines such as mathematics and science.

Nevertheless, some studies indicate that a notable proportion of TVET graduates pursue further education. Mabunda and Frick (2020) found that graduates who struggle to secure employment frequently return to TVET or private colleges to acquire additional qualifications, such as diplomas. Supporting this trend, findings from SSACI et al. (2016), Mashongoane (2019), and Papier et al. (2019) show that 14%, 27%, and 17% of participants, respectively, were engaged in further studies. Wittekind, Raeder, and Grote (2010) argue that individuals with more qualifications tend to have access to a broader range of employment opportunities. Although NC(V) graduates often acquire useful vocational skills, the qualification itself (placed at NQF Level 4 and equivalent to the National Senior Certificate) may not sufficiently enhance their employability.

Evidence suggests that many students choose to pursue further education rather than immediately enter the labour market. A tracer study by the Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion (CBPEP, 2020:3) revealed that approximately 80% of N3 and NC(V) graduates remained within the TVET system to improve their qualifications. This contrasts with N6 graduates, who, having completed the highest qualification available in TVET colleges (roughly NQF Level 5), are more likely to exit the system unless they enrol in new programmes. Furthermore, N6 graduates demonstrate a greater propensity to articulate into university, particularly universities of technology. Motivations cited for this academic

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progression include the aspiration to obtain higher qualifications, the desire to deepen knowledge, and the intention to enhance employability prospects. According to the Pathways Report (2014:8), specific "N" programmes serve as recognised routes to obtaining a National Diploma.

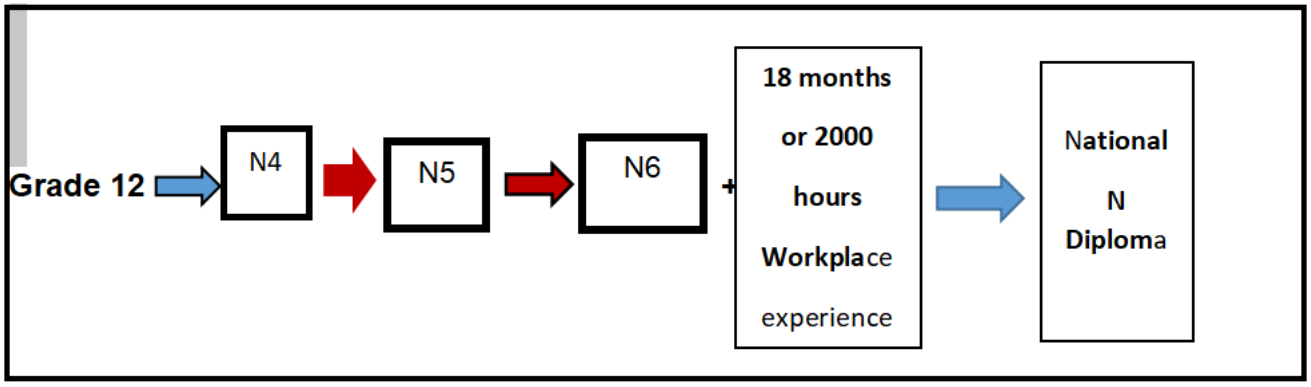


Figure 3.2: Current pathways into College for the N-programmes in Business and Services-rated programmes

According to Khambule (2019: 66), even exiting students thought their degree was an entry-level one. All of them stated that rather than entering the workforce with their NCV level-4 qualification, they would prefer to continue their education at a university or university of technology. Khambule (2019) also provides reasons for their decisions, such as wanting high-paying jobs rather than entry-level jobs that require NCV level 4 certification. They also understand that the labour market's competitiveness necessitates further study. They acknowledge that their NCV level 4 qualification may not guarantee a good-paying job.

> *When we graduate, we will be competing with people who have degrees. Even though we have work experience, and they don't, it doesn't count for much because our qualification level is not on their level.*

In contrast to the South African context, the United Kingdom's University Technical Colleges (UTCs) represent a model of integrated collaboration between colleges, universities, and industry stakeholders. UTCs offer a vocationally oriented curriculum to learners from the age of 14, fostering pathways into both higher education and workplace-based training, such as apprenticeships. These institutions, supported by universities and shaped significantly by local and national employers, ensure that

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students receive practical experience and targeted guidance. Teaching takes place in technologically advanced settings, covering subjects such as engineering, product design, health sciences, construction, and environmental services. Additionally, learners are equipped with ICT competencies and business acumen (British Council, 2012).

In South Africa, by contrast, a prevailing perception persists that universities are hesitant to admit students holding only a National Certificate (Vocational) Level 4 [NCV4] qualification, which sits at NQF Level 4. Universities tend to regard the Higher Certificate (NQF Level 5) as a more appropriate basis for admission. This qualification serves as a bridging programme that offers foundational knowledge and practical competencies, often incorporating work-integrated learning (WIL) or simulated work experience (SWE). Cosser (2010) advocates for the broader provision of intermediate qualifications such as those at NQF Levels 5 and 6 by diverse institutions, including, but not limited to, universities to support both self-expression and academic progression among students.

There is a clear need for a robust TVET system in South Africa that aligns effectively with labour market demands and higher education access, particularly within Universities of Technology (UoTs). Students who obtain a Higher Certificate at NQF Level 5 from a TVET college can progress to an Advanced Certificate (NQF6) or a Diploma, subject to credit accumulation. The baseline entry requirement for enrolment into a Higher Certificate programme is either a National Senior Certificate (NSC) or an NCV Level 4 qualification. However, it is important to note that not all NCV programmes are universally accepted by universities.

While the NCV qualification was originally legislated as a viable route into higher education, in practice, only approximately 30% of core TVET college subjects are recognised by universities for degree purposes. Nevertheless, certain institutions such as the University of the Free State and Nelson Mandela University, have developed specific admission criteria to accommodate NCV4 graduates. Despite these provisions, there remains limited empirical data on the number of NCV graduates who transition into university programmes.

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Employer confidence in TVET qualifications also remains low, with concerns frequently raised about the quality of instruction and training delivered by public TVET colleges. Some employers have pursued accreditation as training providers, driven either by dissatisfaction with existing TVET provisions or the belief that they can offer superior vocational training. Gewer (2016) argues that although TVET colleges are intended to provide hands-on, practical training, many institutions struggle to do so effectively due to resource constraints and infrastructural deficits. As a result, while NCV students often perform adequately in theoretical components, they typically have insufficient opportunities to apply this knowledge in real-world settings, which hinders the development of their practical skills.

At present, there is no systemic or uniform articulation route from the NCV Level 4 qualification to university education; access remains largely dependent on individual institutional policies and programme-specific criteria. In contrast, the N6 qualification stream appears to offer a more consistent and credible articulation pathway into university study, particularly within the domain of universities of technology.

2.11 TVET COLLEGE IN FOCUS

2.11.1 History and Evolution of selected TVET College

Geographically, the selected TVET College is situated in the northernmost part of the Limpopo Province, with its central administrative office located in Sibasa under Vhembe District Municipality. The district encompasses four local municipalities: Thulamela, Makhado, Collins Chabane (Lim 345 Municipality), and Musina. Thohoyandou serves as the district's primary administrative centre. Covering an area of approximately 21,000 km² - roughly 18% of the province—the district represents a significant territorial jurisdiction. selected TVET College maintains close working relationships with all four local municipalities and actively collaborates with a range of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), including the Services SETA, PSETA, MQA, ETDP SETA, MerSETA, SSETA, and Bank SETA. Furthermore, the institution has cultivated partnerships with various universities to enhance the articulation of students into higher education and to support shared resource initiatives.

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The local economy is predominantly sustained by small enterprises across sectors such as agriculture, tourism, mining, vehicle maintenance, and welding, primarily operating within rural settings. Despite these economic activities, the region is characterised by pervasive challenges including elevated unemployment, widespread poverty, and marked inequality -factors that contribute to an unemployment rate significantly above the provincial average. Additionally, the district faces notable infrastructural deficiencies and a limited industrial base, both of which hinder effective placement opportunities for students and staff in work-integrated learning environments.

2.11.2 Programmes offered at the college

Across its campuses, selected TVET College offers four different programmes, as outlined in Table 3.2 below. These programmes are designed with the aim of providing students with practical skills and knowledge to enhance their employability and contribute to the development of the local economy. The College seeks to equip students with the necessary competencies to succeed in various industries, fostering both personal and professional growth.

Table3.2:The programmes offered in selected College TVET Campuses

	Makhwarela	Mavhoi	Shingwedzi	Thengwe	Tshisimani	Musina
NATED programmes N1 – N6 (Engineering Studies) – 24 Months	X	X	X	X	X	X
NATED programmes N4 – N6 (Business Studies) – 18 Months	X	X	X		X	
NCV programmes L2 – L4 (Business and Engineering Studies) – 3 Years (36 Months)	X	X	X	X	X	
Short Skills Programme – Pre-Requisite: Post Grade – 4 Months				X		

Table 3.2 shows the programmes that are offered per campus in selected TVET College Campuses. The programmes are explained in the succeeding Figures 4.

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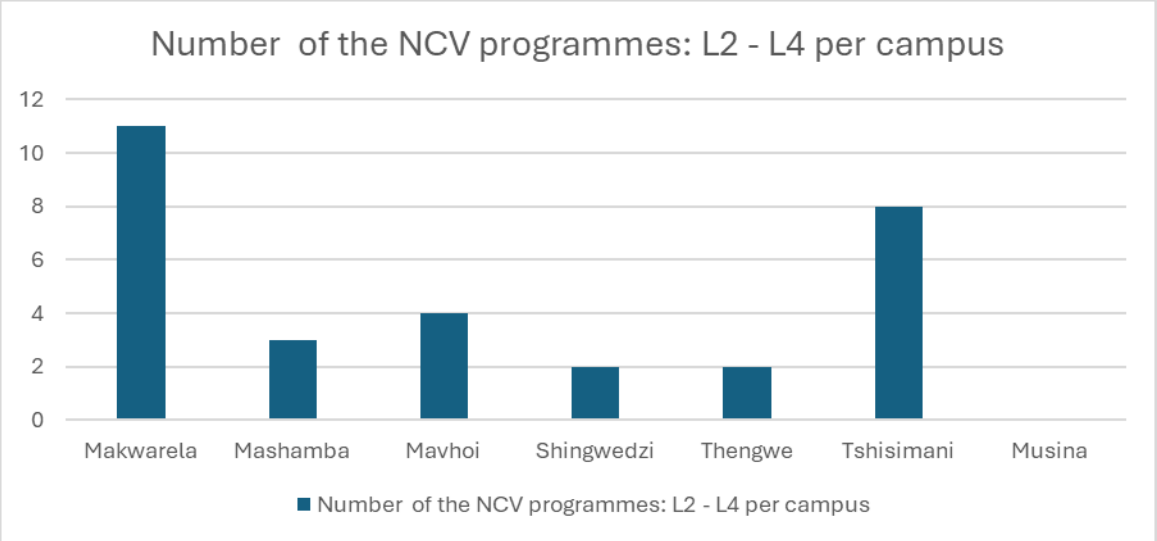


Figure 3.4: Number of NCV programmes: L2-L4 per Campus

Figure 3.4 above shows that out of the 7 (100%) campuses of selected TVET College 6 (85.7%) offer the NATED programmes N1-N6 (Engineering Studies) for 24 months and NCV programmes L2 – L4 (Business and Engineering Studies) for 3 years, that is, 36 months. Only 1 (14.3%) campus offers Short Skills Programme – Pre-Requisite: Post Grade for 4 months while 5 (71.4%) campuses offer NATED programmes N4-N6 (Business Studies) for 18 months.

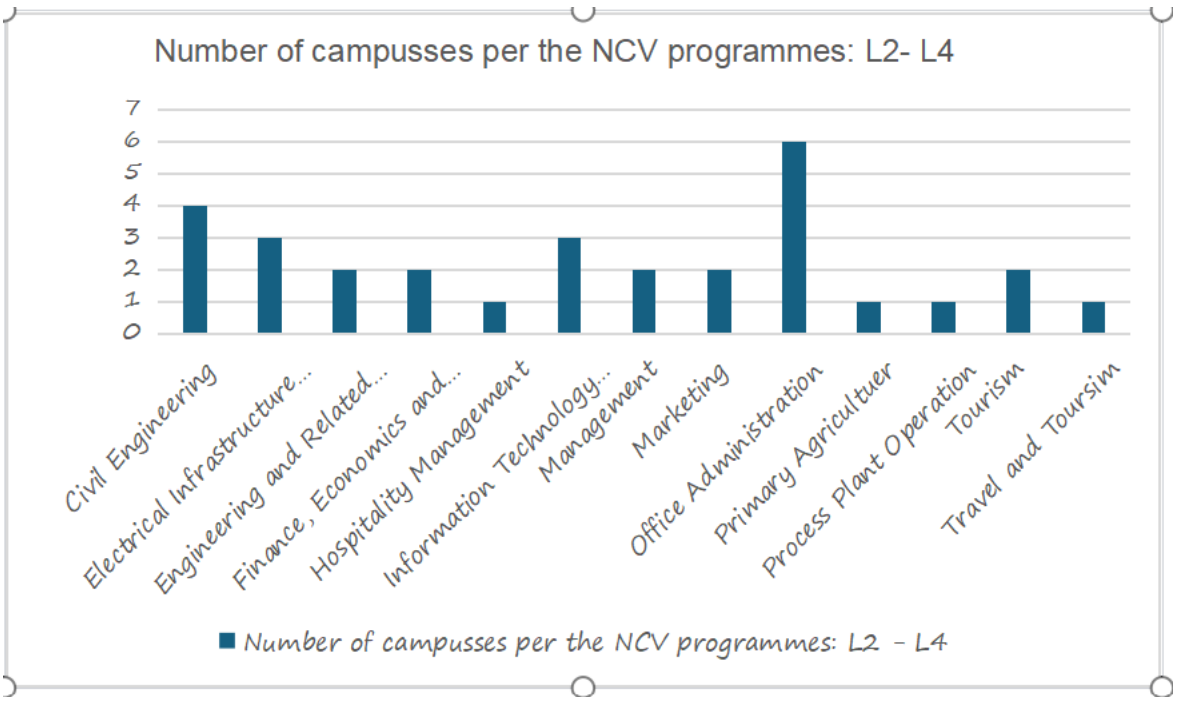


Figure 3.5: The NCV programmes offered in selected College TVET Campuses

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As illustrated in Figure 3.4, among the seven campuses (100%) that constitute selected TVET College, Musina Campus (1 campus, representing 14.3%) is the only one that does not offer the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes at Levels 2 to 4 in both Business and Engineering Studies. This indicates that six campuses (85.7%) do provide these NCV programmes. If Musina Campus is excluded from the calculation, these six campuses constitute 100% of the NCV-offering sites within the College.

Correspondingly, Figure 3.5 reveals that the Office Administration NCV programme is available at all six (100%) of the NCV-offering campuses. Civil Engineering follows, being offered at four campuses (66.7%). Meanwhile, Hospitality Management, Primary Agriculture, Process Plant Operation, and Travel and Tourism are each available at only one campus (16.7%). Furthermore, Engineering and Related Design, Finance, Economics and Accounting, Management, Marketing, and Tourism are each offered at two campuses (33.3%). Situated midway in terms of availability are Electrical Infrastructure Construction and Information Technology and Computer Science, each provided at three campuses (50%).

2.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature, emphasising the importance of vocational skills, which informed the establishment of TVET Colleges in South Africa. It also explored the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) Office Administration programme, detailing the intended career pathways and the institutional strategies implemented to support students in acquiring employability skills.

The review emphasised the essential role of employability competencies that ought to be embedded within the NCV Office Administration curriculum. A range of scholarly sources highlighted the value of integrating ‘soft skills’ into the qualification, which has proven to be of considerable importance to employers. Furthermore, entrepreneurship education emerged as a vital component, promoting self-reliance and economic development.

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The NCV Office Administration qualification should also serve as a conduit for progression into higher education. The literature examined the potential career trajectories available to NCV Office Administration graduates and provided a comprehensive account of these pathways. Additionally, the review brought attention to the critical relationship between TVET Colleges and industry, essential for facilitating a smooth transition into the labour market. This is made possible through initiatives such as Work-Based Experience (WBE) and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), which are coordinated by colleges. The literature indicates that lecturers can play a pivotal role in linking students to industry opportunities.

The insights gained from this literature review have contributed to identifying knowledge gaps and have informed the formulation of the research questions and objectives. The subsequent chapter will outline the research design and methodology, detailing the research approach, data collection methods, instruments used, and procedures for data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology, detailing the plan and processes employed to conduct the study. It further provides a comprehensive explanation of the research methods used, including procedural steps and quality control measures undertaken to ensure rigour and validity.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates from selected TVET College in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The research offers an opportunity for these graduates to share their career trajectories and to evaluate whether the skills acquired during their studies at selected TVET College facilitated their entry into employment. The overarching research question guiding this study is:

- In which employment sectors are NCV Office Administration graduates currently working?

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- How relevant are the skills acquired from the NCV Office Administration qualification to the demands of the job market?
- To what extent are NCV Office Administration students provided with experiential learning opportunities during their studies?
- What strategies can be implemented to help NCV Office Administration students transition effectively into the workplace?

This chapter also discusses the research design adopted to address the above research questions. In addition, it elaborates on the sampling techniques, data collection methods, and procedures for data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations, which are fundamental to the integrity of the research, are also addressed.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is a broad framework that encompasses the purpose and process of a research study, as discussed in Chapter One, Section 1.9. This study is guided by a constructivist paradigm, as described in Section 7. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51) define a paradigm as “a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods”. Richards (2003:33) reinforces this perspective by highlighting the philosophical foundations underpinning research practice.

Given that the aim of the study was not to generate numerical data but to explore the lived experiences of participants within a specific context (Salkind, 2012:3), a basic generic qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate, as discussed in Section 8 and introduced in Chapter One. According to Richards (2003:33), cited in Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51), ontology refers to beliefs about the nature of reality or existence. In contrast, epistemology, as defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003:13), also cited in Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51), concerns the nature of knowledge and the means through which it is acquired and validated.

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Furthermore, Rehman and Alharthi (2016:52) explain that methodology serves as a guide for researchers in identifying the type of data required, as well as the appropriate tools for its collection. Methods, in this context, refer to the specific techniques employed for data collection and analysis. Merriam (2009:14–17) outlines four defining characteristics of qualitative research: a focus on meaning and the understanding of how individuals interpret their experiences; the recognition of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; the inductive nature of the research process; and an emphasis on providing a rich, descriptive account of the findings. Qualitative inquiry typically seeks to answer questions such as who, what, and how.

Accordingly, this study sought to explore the contributions of various stakeholders involved in the training of NCV Office Administration students. These stakeholders included lecturers, SSS, and industry partners. The investigation focused on key areas such as the career trajectories of graduates, the employability skills developed through the training programme, and the mechanisms through which students acquire these skills.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design refers to the structured plan outlining how a study will be conducted (Nayak & Singh, 2015). Its primary purpose is to ensure that the research methods employed are appropriate for addressing the research questions. As previously indicated, a qualitative research design was adopted for this study. Durrheim (2006:34) describes research design as “a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research”. In qualitative research, the design is typically open, fluid, and changeable (Durrheim, 2006:35), thereby allowing for flexibility and non-linearity in the research process.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that qualitative methods are particularly useful for acquiring new insights into familiar phenomena, obtaining in-depth information that is challenging to quantify, and understanding issues about which limited prior knowledge exists.

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This justification is particularly relevant in the current context, as there is a noticeable absence of documented evidence regarding the career trajectories of NCV Office Administration graduates at selected TVET College. Although there is limited anecdotal evidence suggesting that some graduates struggle to enter or contribute meaningfully to the labour market, empirical research on their experiences remains scarce. Hence, further investigation is necessary to better understand the career paths and challenges faced by these graduates.

3.3.1 Case study research design

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), there are three types of research designs commonly associated with qualitative research: ethnographic studies, case studies, and life histories. This study adopted a case study research design.

Leedy (1997) and Yin (1994) define the case study design as a form of qualitative research in which the researcher explores a single 'case' that is confronted with a particular problem. In the present study, the focus was placed on graduates. The case study approach typically involves a small number of participants, allowing for an in-depth investigation. The use of the case study design, along with the methodologies employed in this research, enabled the researcher to uncover unexpected findings and to examine the topic under investigation in greater depth. This is more appropriate for this study as it is very wide and complex and should be narrowed, and therefore the researcher focused on Office Admiration graduates so that he could be able to accomplish the aim and objectives of the current study.

The study intended to provide detailed and specific answers to the research questions and use the case study to focus on the Office Administration graduates' experiences rather than being too general. Gerring (2004) suggests that the case study design is more useful and appropriate when the phenomenon is not necessarily known. In this study, the Office Administration graduates' destination is not necessarily known. According to Maree (2007), multi-perspective analysis of case studies creates an opportunity for the researcher to consider not only the perspectives of one or two participants in the settings, but also the voices, perspectives and interactions of the other relevant groups.

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All the participant-provided data was organised so that the researcher could come up with the most accurate answers to the research questions. The researcher was able to investigate and comprehend the experiences of graduates, the reasons behind their predicament, and the functions of lectures and student support services in helping students become employable. This will serve as a reference of what need to be considered intensively in future research study.

Despite criticism for the case study's lack of representativeness and statistical generalisability. According to Yin (2003, 2003), case studies can be expanded by considering a variety of circumstances and actors, and they can be applied to make analytical generalisations. As opposed to attempting to be representative, the case study allows for greater emphasis on the lessons that can be drawn from a single case that is being studied (Tellis,1997). Case studies are crucial for developing and enhancing awareness. The purpose of this study is to specifically investigate the final destinations of selected TVET College office administration graduates. which may then be applicable to a different educational setting with comparable features.

Utilising a variety of sources of evidence, according to Yin (1994), ensures construct validity. In this study, the researcher adopted multiple sources of evidence, namely interviews and open-ended questionnaires, to ensure this. The researcher was able to interact closely with the participants by using this design, and the follow-up or probing questions helped the researcher gather comprehensive information especially during interviews.

3.3.2 Possible sources of error in case study design

One potential source of error in case study research is researcher bias, which may arise from the researcher's prior beliefs or expectations regarding the study (Mouton, 2001). In this study, the data collection methods were deliberately selected to minimise such bias. The use of open-ended questionnaires and telephonic interviews reduced physical interaction with participants, thereby helping the researcher to maintain objectivity and avoid the influence of non-verbal cues that could signal approval or disapproval of participants' responses.

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Another potential source of bias is the interviewer effect, which refers to the possibility that the interviewer's characteristics may influence participants' responses (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1982). In this study, the researcher's role as a lecturer at selected TVET College may have positively influenced participants' comfort levels, as they were.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to a systematic approach to addressing a research problem through the collection of data using various methods, the interpretation of that data, and the formulation of conclusions based on the research findings (Murthy & Bhojanna, 2009). This study adopted a qualitative research approach, as its primary aim was to understand the meanings derived from participants' responses, rooted in their knowledge and lived experiences relevant to the central research question and its sub-questions.

According to Kielmann, Cataldo, and Seeley (2012:8), individuals construct meaning from events to make sense of their lives and experiences. Haradhan (2018:1) similarly contends that the purpose of qualitative methodology is to enable the researcher to comprehend a phenomenon from the participants' viewpoint. Given that the study sought to explore the meanings and significance that graduates of selected TVET College attach to their chosen career paths, the qualitative approach was considered most suitable. It enabled the researcher to gain rich insights into the graduates' experiences across various career fields, and how their NCV Office Administration qualifications had shaped their employment trajectories.

Qualitative research is particularly concerned with understanding phenomena through the collection of data expressed in words and meanings. Accordingly, the methodological framework of this study encompassed sampling strategies, data collection, and data analysis techniques that facilitated the production of textual evidence regarding the influence of NCV Office Administration qualifications on graduates' career outcomes.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

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Research methods are a group of tools and techniques used to answer research questions in a scientific manner (Salkind, 2012:47). It is important to distinguish between methods and methodology in a research study. According to Henning et al. (2004:36), a method refers to a specific way of doing something such as a particular data collection tool. Methodology, on the other hand, refers to a coherent group of methods that complement one another and demonstrate a strong alignment with the research question and the overall purpose of the study.

In line with this understanding, the study considered several key aspects: how access to the research context was obtained, who the participants were, how data were collected, and what was done with the information to help answer the research questions. Each of these elements contributed to ensuring that the methods used were appropriate, consistent, and effective in generating meaningful findings.

3.4.1 Population, Sampling Procedures, and Sampling Methods

In this section, the population, sampling procedures, and sampling methods are identified and a concise rationale for their design and selection is provided. The identified population, samples and sampling procedures are consistent with the statement of the problem, the aim of the study and the research questions as outlined in Sections 2, 3 and 4, respectively. The rationale is supported by employing an analysis of the literature.

Population

There is a need to identify the target population from which the sample was drawn, to select a suitable sampling method. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) define population as a group of people, events or objects that the researcher intends to conduct research on and generalise the research findings. In the process of selecting a suitable sample, Khothari (2004:57) proffers the steps to be followed as inclusive of the population (universe), sampling units, sampling frame (source list), and study units. Khothari (2004:153) says the term ‘population’ refers to the total of items about which information is desired. This means that all the items that are anticipated to become part of the study are jointly regarded as the population. The study focused on the

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selected TVET College, as the population of this study. Its proximity to the researcher informed his choice of it as he is working in one of the Campus.

The population refers to the source from which answers to the research questions could be drawn to address the research problem and achieve the research objectives. Qualitative research is well suited to non-probability sampling procedures for selecting cases from the population (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). In non-probability sampling, units are deliberately chosen. In this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling, as it aligns well with the qualitative approach (Patton, 1990). Purposive sampling aims to identify information-rich cases that can be studied.

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000), the selection of a particular unit for inclusion in the sample depends on the researcher's subjective judgement. Therefore, the researcher purposefully and subjectively selected participants, which included NCV Office Administration graduates, lecturers, and SSS staff. Participants were selected based on known characteristics, such as relevant experience related to the research topic (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Both lecturers and SSS staff were considered suitable and relevant for achieving the study's objectives. The sampling frame consisted of NCV graduates who had qualified specifically in Office Administration.

Selected TVET College comprises a central office and seven main campuses that offer both business and engineering programmes. These campuses include: Makwarela, Thengwe, Shingwedzi, Tshisimani, Mashamba, Mavhoi, and Musina. However, only five of these campuses: Makwarela, Tshisimani, Mashamba, Mavhoi, and Thengwe, offer the NCV Office Administration programme. These were the campuses from which the samples were drawn.

Sampling procedure

As outlined in chapter one, Sampling refers to the process of selecting a sample from a defined population that accurately represents that population (MacDonald & Headlam, 2008:69). A sample is defined by Mathers, Fox and Hunn, (1998:56) as "a group or subset of the chosen population" that "can be selected by random or non-

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random methods". To achieve this, a relevant qualitative method should be employed to obtain relevant information that will assist in getting precise outcomes. Only NCV Office Administration graduates within selected College TVET college were selected. Also, the same apply to lecturers and Student Support Offices (SSS) who have assisted them to transition to workplace were sampled.

Non-probability sampling includes deliberate and purposive sampling techniques. According to Willie (2004:59), these techniques allow the researcher to deliberately and purposively select specific units from the broader population to form a sample. In this study, the researcher used both deliberate and purposive sampling. This approach enabled the researcher to apply personal judgement in choosing available units that best aligned with the research objectives. (Casteel and Bridier, 2021:31). Judgmental sampling focuses on study units believed to possess the necessary information (Etikan & Bala, 2017:1).

Babbie and Mouton (2001:166) argue that, in certain instances, it is appropriate to select a sample based on the researcher's knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of the study. This judgement-based approach aligns with the purpose of the research. Patton (2002:230) supports this notion by highlighting that in purposeful sampling, the researcher selects "information-rich" cases, which is central to the "logic and power" of this method.

Purposive sampling also presented several practical advantages, including reduced cost, less time consumption, and easier administration, which contributed to a higher participation rate. This sampling method allowed the researcher to manage a small yet representative group more efficiently than would have been possible with a large population. A total sample of 40 participants was selected. Due to the researcher's position as a lecturer within the institution, it was convenient to select the samples from all five campuses offering the NCV Office Administration programme.

Kothari (2004:153) defines sampling units as groups or lists that form the basis of the sampling process. In this study, the sample consisted of 20 Level 4 Office Administration graduates, 10 lecturers, and 10 administrators or SSS staff across the college. Lecturers and administrators were included to explore their roles in

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curriculum delivery and their perspectives on preparing students for future career destinations. The total sample size was thus 40 participants.

This decision aligns with Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:274), who assert that empirical research is generally conducted on samples, which may include individuals, groups, organisations, or archival records. To draw the sample from the selected population, a clear and systematic procedure was followed. This illustrated (See Figure 1 in Chapter One Section 1.11).

Data collection and instrumentation

Brynard and Hanekom (1997:30) assert that qualitative research employs a range of data collection methods, including case studies, in-depth interviews, participant observation, questionnaires, and document analysis. Data collection involves the systematic gathering and evaluation of information on variables of interest, enabling researchers to address research questions, test hypotheses, and assess outcomes (Kabir, 2016). Accurate and methodical data collection is essential for upholding the integrity and credibility of any research endeavour.

A key advantage of qualitative research lies in its exploratory nature, which allows for the use of open-ended interview questions and probing. This approach enables participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences in their own words, rather than being confined to predetermined response options (Patton, 2002). To this end, two primary instruments were used in this study: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules. These tools facilitated the collection of rich, narrative data concerning the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates from selected TVET College.

Open-ended Questionnaire

Gray (2005:187) defines a questionnaire as a research instrument in which participants respond to a uniform set of questions presented in a specific sequence. Eckerdal and Hagström (2017) endorse the use of qualitative questionnaires in information studies, noting their capacity to elicit comprehensive responses that reveal participants' subjective experiences, beliefs, and perceptions. Open-ended

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questionnaires are designed to prioritise depth over numerical data by incorporating 'how' and 'why' questions that encourage reflection and storytelling (Langley, 2004). However, Langley cautions that such tools must align with the overall objectives of the study.

Creswell (2011) describes questionnaires as credible, efficient, and effective data collection tools, while Kothari (2004) and Orodho (2003) highlight their reliability, noting that their validity can be established prior to fieldwork. Across the literature, it is agreed that the construction of a questionnaire must be guided by the research problem and objectives.

In this study, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to secondary participants specifically, 10 academic lecturers and 10 members of the SSS unit. This instrument was well suited for exploring their insights on the employment outcomes of Office Administration graduates. Importantly, the questionnaire allowed respondents to complete it at their convenience, thereby promoting thoughtful engagement. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, and asked to provide written consent prior to completing the questionnaire.

Questionnaire limitation

Though questionnaire is recommended as method of data collection in qualitative research, it has its limitation (Adam, (2019). Such as participant may not respond accurately and honestly. And also, Low response rates can limit the representativeness of the sample. However, this was mitigated by using a clear and concise language in questions (Nkuzo, 2024).

Interview Schedule

In addition to questionnaires, interviews were employed to gather data from primary participants. Schober, (2018: 241) defines an interview as a face-to-face interaction in which an interviewer poses questions to one or more respondents. Easwaramoorthy and Zarinpoush (2006:1) similarly describe interviews as structured

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dialogues intended to elicit information, guided by the researcher and shaped by the interviewee's responses.

Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011:529) argue that interviews are widely used in qualitative research because they enable access to experiences, attitudes, and beliefs that may not be directly observable. Patton (2002) adds that interviews afford participants the opportunity to speak freely, thus enriching the data. While some closed questions were included in the interview schedule, the majority were open-ended to encourage in-depth responses.

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews, which offer a balance between structure and flexibility. As noted by MacDonald and Headlam (2008:40), this technique addresses core themes while allowing the interviewer to explore emergent issues during the discussion.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 graduates of the NCV Office Administration programme. Given the geographic dispersion of participants, many of whom had relocated or were no longer affiliated with the college, telephonic interviews were conducted in certain instances. Fox (2009) identifies telephone interviews as a practical and cost-effective method, particularly for reaching dispersed populations. To support the process, a pre-determined set of interview questions was developed, focusing on participants' career trajectories following graduation. The contact details of the graduates were accessed through appropriate channels, and the interview questions were shared in advance via WhatsApp. Prior to the interviews, all participants were fully informed about the aims of the research, assured of confidentiality, and reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Interview limitations

Interviews are a valuable research method, but however, they have limitations by various aspects such as small sample size(Vasileiou et al., 2018). This was mitigated by careful planning through developing of a well-structured interview protocol

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researchers to increase the validity and reliability of the research (Panyasai & Ambele, 2025).

3.5 MEASURES OF QUALITY CONTROL FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

3.5.1 Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Research

Trustworthiness deals with the quality of qualitative research. It is the credibility of the study. A study is trustworthy if steps are taken if steps are taken during the research process to make sure that participant perspectives are accurately represented in the findings and authentically gathered (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). The following parallel criteria are mentioned by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) to achieve trustworthiness in qualitative research: *credibility, transferability, dependability (auditability)* and *confirmability*.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research pertains to the extent to which findings authentically reflect the meanings and experiences of participants. It acknowledges the subjective nature of reality and the importance of capturing diverse perspectives. According to Merriam (2009), credibility is achieved when there is a clear alignment between the researcher's interpretations and the actual viewpoints of the participants. To ensure this, researchers must engage rigorously with the data and guard against bias and reactivity (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). In this study, credibility was enhanced through data triangulation, which involves gathering information from multiple sources and engaging multiple analysts in the review process (Polit & Beck, 2012). In-depth individual interviews, as recommended by Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999), was conducted with students, lecturers, and administrators at selected TVET College to support the credibility of the findings.

Transferability

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Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied or found meaningful in other contexts, including theoretical frameworks, practical settings, or future research (Given, 2008). It involves assessing whether the results are relevant beyond the immediate study and whether they offer insights for similar environments. In this study, the researcher aims for the findings from selected TVET College, one of 50 public colleges in South Africa, to be transferable to other colleges with comparable contexts and circumstances.

Dependability (Auditability)

In qualitative research, dependability refers to whether the research design and processes are clearly outlined and could be followed or repeated in other studies. It helps to show whether the study used sound methods and whether the findings can be trusted within the given context (Merriam, 2009). To support dependability, strategies such as reflexivity and keeping a detailed audit trail can be used (Merriam, 2009). These measures allow other researchers to understand how the study was carried out and apply the approach in similar contexts. As the research topic is relatively new, the findings may serve as a useful point of reference for future studies.

Confirmability

Confirmability is based on the acknowledgement that research is never objective, to the degree to which the research findings reflect the meaning intended by the participants, rather than the preconceptions of the researcher (Jensen, 2008). To achieve this, the method of data verification must be used. It must demonstrate that the findings and data are clearly linked. To comply, on this aspect the researcher used the data obtained through interview objectively to draw findings.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal in ethical consideration in research refers to the participants' right to withdraw from a study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits (Dahal, 2024). This principle is essential in ensuring the autonomy and dignity of participants.

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Participants were informed about their right to withdraw and also that their participation is voluntary, and participants should feel free to withdraw without coercion.

Victimization

Victimisation in research refers to the exploitation or harm of participants, often due to power imbalances or lack of protections. To prevent victimisation, researchers must prioritise participants' well-being and safety (Kaplan et al. ,2023). to mitigate this aspect, participants were made to understand the research and were provided with voluntary consent form. Ethics approval was obtained from relevant review University boards.

Coersion

Coercion in research refers to the use of pressure, threats, or undue influence to force individuals to participate in a study or continue participating against their will. (Mumford et al., 2021). This undermines the principles of informed consent and voluntary participation.

The are forms of Coercion (Bayles, 2017) which include the following: 1. Direct coercion; explicit threats or pressure to participate. 2. Indirect Coercion; implicit pressure or incentives that may influence decision-making. This was mitigated by making sure that participants understood their rights and the voluntary nature of participation. Also, by emphazing that participation is entirely voluntary.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was a continuous process of reflection on the collected information. It involved making sense of the data by reading it carefully, taking notes, and identifying patterns throughout the study. According to Roberts and Greene (2002:763), qualitative data analysis required reading descriptive data, noting down trends, and developing descriptive categories. This process was closely linked to other stages of the research, such as data collection and refining research

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questions. It included using participants' responses, asking broad questions, and forming analysis based on the information shared.

As this study followed a qualitative methodology, Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) was used. Lacey and Luff (2009:6) explained that QDA helps to describe and summarise large amounts of text generated from interviews or observations. In this context, QDA allowed the researcher to turn interview responses and field notes into clear and meaningful findings.

Bogdan and Biklen (1997) described qualitative data analysis as the process of systematically sorting and organising transcripts, notes, or other forms of non-numeric data to better understand the research topic. The researcher reduced the large number of responses from participants and then identified significant patterns. These patterns were used to build meaning by forming a logical chain of evidence (Patton, 2002). The data were then coded and sorted into categories or themes based on the objectives of the study.

In keeping with the qualitative approach, thematic analysis was adopted. MacDonald and Headlam (2008:42) stated that this process begins with identifying and developing themes across interviews. This enabled the researcher to examine the data in terms of major themes and sub-themes. The primary data were systematically coded and organised based on similarities. Where possible, qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used to support this process. A holographic method, as described by Seidel (1998:2), was employed. This method involved noticing, collecting, and reflecting on data.

Data collected from the four campuses where NCV Office Administration was offered were analysed. This included responses from graduates, lecturers, and SSS. The collected data were transcribed and grouped according to key themes and emerging sub-themes. These were then coded systematically, with similar ideas organised together to explore patterns and draw meaningful conclusions.

3.7 CONCLUSION

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This chapter has provided a detailed account of the research design and methodology adopted to explore the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates from selected TVET College. Anchored within the constructivist paradigm, the study employed a basic qualitative research design and a case study approach to gain in-depth insights into the lived experiences of graduates and the perceived relevance of their qualifications to the demands of the labour market. The chapter has also elaborated on the rationale for selecting qualitative methods, highlighting their suitability for exploring subjective meanings and contextual experiences.

The use of multiple data collection methods was instrumental in ensuring the richness and depth of the data while also mitigating potential researcher bias and enhancing the trustworthiness of the study. Furthermore, the sampling procedures, data analysis strategies, and quality control measures were systematically outlined to establish methodological rigour and transparency. Attention was also given to ethical considerations and possible sources of error inherent in case study research. By acknowledging these limitations and incorporating measures to address them, the study maintained a strong commitment to research integrity.

In sum, the methodology adopted in this study was carefully selected to align with the research questions and objectives. It provided a robust framework for exploring the complexities surrounding graduate employability, skill relevance, and the effectiveness of experiential learning initiatives. The findings derived from this methodological framework are discussed in the subsequent chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the data collected for this study. The main aim is to explore the findings in detail, placing them within the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework outlined in earlier chapters. The data is presented thematically, with themes derived from the research objectives. After presenting the data, it is interpreted to uncover its meanings. Finally, the findings are discussed, linking them to the existing literature.

4.2 PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA ANALYSIS

As explained in the preceding chapters, the qualitative data collection process involved documenting and preserving the interview instrument, including the questions to which students responded. The verbal data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires were transcribed and coded according to emerging themes. By following several stages of qualitative data analysis (QDA), as outlined by Grbich (2012), the researcher was able to establish connections among the various identified themes, which are examined in the subsequent sections of this chapter. These themes emerged from the data collected through participants' responses to the open-ended questionnaires and are aligned with the research objectives and questions regarding the career trajectories of Office Administration graduates. The findings are supported by verbatim quotes, represented as follows: [Uemp] for unemployed graduates, [Semp] for self-employed graduates, [Emp] for employed graduates, [Acds] for those in academic roles, and [SSS] for those involved in Student Support Services. The findings are structured into 4 (four) main themes, with several incorporating sub-themes to capture additional nuance. This thematic organization was necessitated by the diverse range of perspectives articulated by participants during the data analysis process. The data is presented in alignment with this framework as follows:

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Theme 1: Employment sectors for NCV Office Administration graduates.

Theme 2: Graduates' job suitability based on the skills acquired through the NCV Office Administration programme.

Theme 3: Experiential learning of NCV Office Administration students as part of their programme.

Theme 4: Strategies to support NCV Office Administration students in transitioning successfully into the workplace.

Having presented the themes, it is important to note that the data is organised according to the research questions, as summarised in the table below.

Question no.	Research Question	Themes
1	In which employment sectors are NCV Office Administration graduates currently working?	1
2	How relevant are the skills acquired from the NCV Office Administration qualification to the demands of the job market?	2
3	To what extent are NCV Office Administration students provided with experiential learning opportunities during their studies?	3
4	What strategies can be implemented to help NCV Office Administration students transition effectively into the workplace?	4

Table 4.1: Themes and research questions

4.2.1 Theme 1: Sectors of Employment for NCV Office Administration Graduates

This theme explores the employment sectors in which NCV Office Administration graduates are currently employed. Understanding graduates' perceptions of how the qualification influenced their career trajectories is essential, as the qualifications they

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pursue are intended to shape their futures and may significantly impact their personal and professional lives, either positively or negatively.

All participants in this study had completed the National Certificate (Vocational) Office Administration Level 4, offered at one of the TVET colleges in Limpopo, South Africa. This group constituted the study population, with the Office Administration graduates forming the key sample. Their experiences provided valuable insights into whether and how their qualifications have translated into employment opportunities, thus aligning with the overall objectives of the study.

According to Gewers (2010), the NCV qualification was introduced as an alternative to the traditional matric, with a dual aim: to provide access to the labour market and to facilitate entry into higher education. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) positioned the NCV as a qualification intended to equip learners with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills required to operate in a specific occupational field. However, the realities experienced by graduates often appear to diverge from these policy intentions.

A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed via WhatsApp and email, as many graduates had already exited the college system and were no longer easily accessible. Of the 30 graduates contacted, only 15 responded. In addition, 7 out of 10 academic lecturers and 4 out of 10 student support staff completed the questionnaires, either through hand delivery or electronically. Despite the relatively low response rate, the data collected revealed several noteworthy trends and challenges faced by the graduates, as evident in subsections below:

Sub-theme 1A: Insights from unemployed graduates

A significant portion of graduates reported that they were currently unemployed, not engaged in further studies, and not self-employed. Many pointed to the absence of official certificates as a key barrier to employment. One respondent [Uemp 1] stated plainly:

How can I be employed without a certificate?

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Another respondent [Uemp 2] echoed this frustration: *We have just spent four years for nothing.*

Some graduates expressed that they had never even been called for an interview. This indicates a systemic failure in transitioning these individuals into the workforce. A single respondent noted having had an opportunity for temporary public service employment despite lacking a Level 4 certificate, but such cases were rare. Further, the perception that the qualification itself lacks value was a common theme. One respondent [Uemp 3] shared:

I am not even called for interview because I don't have a certificate.

Another [Uemp 4] added:

It is not easy to be employed with such a qualification. A diploma could be better.

Some unemployed graduates expressed a desire to change their career paths entirely, often citing a shift towards Early Childhood Development (ECD) or teaching. As one put it:

Because I don't have a certificate, I've never worked. I am thinking of changing to ECD.

These findings are consistent with prior research indicating a mismatch between vocational qualifications and labour market needs. According to Cosser (2003), many college programmes do not adequately prepare students for the realities of employment, resulting in underemployment or employment in fields unrelated to their studies.

Sub-theme 1B: Self-employment as a coping mechanism

A small number of graduates pursued self-employment, running micro-enterprises such as spaza shops and decoration businesses. These activities were typically survivalist rather than entrepreneurial in nature. For instance, one graduate [Semp 1] noted:

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Presently, I am working at a crèche.

Another [Semp 2] stated:

I am working in the decoration business.

While some were interested in starting their own businesses, most cited lack of funding as a major hindrance. One graduate [Semp 3] explained:

I am interested in a sales business, but finance is a challenge to me.

These stories suggest that while there is some entrepreneurial intent, structural barriers such as access to capital and business training limit the potential of self-employment as a viable path for these graduates.

Sub-theme 1C: Employment in marginal sectors

Among the graduates who were employed, the sales sector and Early Childhood Development centres were the most common fields. Most were working as unqualified teaching assistants and were simultaneously pursuing further studies to gain formal teaching qualifications. As one employed graduate [Emp 1] explained:

I am now interested in teaching, a profession that I am pursuing.

However, these positions were typically located in the private sector, offering low wages and little job security. None of the respondents reported employment in the public service, where jobs tend to offer more stability and benefits. This discrepancy raises concerns about the equity and reach of employment opportunities for TVET graduates.

The findings from this group of graduates challenge the policy vision of TVET as a credible and valuable alternative to academic education. As Papier et al. (2017:32) rightly note: “Inadequate alignment between NCV and university courses limits the capacity of TVET students to transition to higher education”.

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This misalignment, coupled with limited employment opportunities, leaves many NCV graduates in a state of limbo, with restricted upward mobility either into the workforce or into further academic study. Having presented the findings from Theme 1, the researcher presents findings from Theme 2 below.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Examination of NCV Office Administration Graduates' Job Suitability considering the Acquired Skills

A prevailing perception among participants was that TVET qualifications, such as the National Certificate (Vocational) [NCV], are not highly regarded in the labour market (Omar, Muhd Khaizer et al., 2020). This devaluation often leads to graduates receiving relatively low salaries and taking up employment opportunities misaligned with their academic preparation. Many graduates employed in various sectors reported that their current occupations were not commensurate with their field of study. Some accepted such positions solely due to the lack of alternatives that matched their qualifications, while others pursued self-employment after being unsuccessful in securing employment within their area of specialisation.

When participants were asked about the relevance of their qualifications to their current occupations, their responses were varied. Several graduates affirmed the applicability of their qualifications, whereas others were employed in fields entirely unrelated to their academic training. Even among the unemployed, there was a degree of optimism, with some expressing confidence in the eventual utility of their qualifications. One unemployed graduate stated:

Yes, though I am presently unemployed, the qualification relates to the career I am pursuing. I was once called for an interview and got a job as an Admin Assistant [Uemp 1].

By contrast, a currently employed graduate remarked:

It is not related because presently, I am working at a crèche I was never trained for [Emp 1].

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Another unemployed respondent echoed a similar sentiment:

It is not related because I am presently pursuing a career in construction due to a lack of job opportunities [Uemp 2].

However, not all responses were negative. A self-employed graduate offered a more positive reflection:

Yes, it is related because presently I am working in the decoration business, which has a relationship as it also involves principles of profit and loss which I learnt in one of the subjects, Business Practice [Semp 2].

Yet, another employed graduate expressed an interest in a field completely unrelated to their qualification:

It is not related because I am interested in teaching, a profession I am pursuing [Emp 3].

These findings accentuate the reality that many NCV graduates are employed in occupations outside their formal training. Despite this, some have shown adaptability and confidence in transitioning to alternate career paths, highlighting the broader discourse around vocational education and its purpose of fostering self-reliance. Vocational education aims not only to equip graduates for formal employment but also to enable them to become self-sufficient entrepreneurs through skill-based training embedded in the curriculum and practical components.

Graduates were asked whether their qualifications had sufficiently equipped them with the competencies required for self-employment. This question was particularly relevant considering research by Okorafor and Okorafor (2013), which suggests that 21st-century employers increasingly value innovation and adaptability over standardised credentials. Once again, graduates' responses varied. Some were sceptical of the extent to which their training enabled entrepreneurial pursuits. For example:

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No, our qualification is more about office work. We are taught about employers' expectations, especially in the Office Practice subject [Uemp 5].

Another unemployed graduate affirmed this concern:

No, because I received practicals in Office Administration only [Uemp 6].

One unemployed graduate expressed disappointment:

No, I don't think I was equipped enough [Uemp 7].

These critical perspectives highlight a possible misalignment between the objectives of vocational training and the perceived realities of its outcomes, particularly regarding self-employment. Nonetheless, several graduates conveyed more encouraging views. Some had already embarked on entrepreneurial paths, while others cited a lack of financial capital as the principal barrier to doing so. For instance, one self-employed graduate shared:

Yes, I am presently doing a decoration business [Semp 2].

Another graduate, although not yet self-employed, expressed enthusiasm for entrepreneurship:

Yes, I am interested in a sales business, but finance is a problem for me [Uemp 4].

Overall, the responses reveal a complex picture: while some graduates recognise the relevance and utility of their NCV qualifications, others feel insufficiently prepared for the labour market or for entrepreneurial ventures. The disparity in experiences suggests a need for further curriculum reform, enhanced practical training, and support structures particularly financial and mentorship-based that could better bridge the gap between vocational education and sustainable employment outcomes. Having presented the findings of Theme 2, below the findings for Theme 3 are presented.

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4.2.3 Theme 3: Ascertain whether NCV Office Administration students' Experiential Learning is provided as part of their programme

The theory of experiential learning, developed by Kolb (1984), has been adopted in this study. It epitomises vocational education and distinguishes TVET colleges from other forms of educational training. Experiential learning is a method of 'learning by doing'; it promotes learning that encompasses practical work experience. Such an approach is undertaken to enhance graduates' prospects of future employment.

It is, therefore, essential to seek input from all relevant stakeholders, namely, graduates, academic lecturers, and student support services staff. The responses from graduates are crucial, as they directly reflect how the qualification has impacted their career trajectories. In contrast, academic lecturers and support staff bear the responsibility of preparing students for the job market and ensuring that the curriculum aligns with labour market demands.

Sub-theme 3 A: Responses from NCV Office Administration graduates

Upon inquiry regarding the provision of experiential learning during their training, all graduates confirmed that they had participated in some form of practical experience. The data revealed that this experience was predominantly limited to administrative office work. However, concerns were raised about the adequacy of the time allocated for these practical sessions. One unemployed graduate stated:

Yes, I was involved in practicals at schools doing admin work [Uemp 6].

This sentiment was echoed by another graduate who remarked:

I was provided with practicals at Mutale Traffic Police Station [Uemp 7].

However, dissatisfaction with the duration of experiential learning was evident. One graduate lamented:

Yes, five days, which is not enough. It would have been better if it was five weeks [Uemp 3].

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Sub- theme 3B: Responses from student support services (SSS)

The same question about the provision of experiential learning during graduates' training was posed to SSS officials. They were asked about the type of experiential learning programmes the college provides to NCV students in preparation for the work environment. In response, the officials emphasised the role of Work-Based Exposure (WBE) in linking students to industry opportunities. The official confirmed the provision of experiential learning, as evident below:

Students are sent to 5 days outside the Campus in offices and business for work environment experiences [SSS 4].

Another official adds:

NCV students do WBE for 5 days during college holidays where they go to industries to experience and work what is related to what they learn in class [SSS 1].

Sub-theme 3C: Responses from academics on experiential learning to graduates

In response to the question regarding the type of experiential learning offered to Office Administration students, academic lecturers indicated that their subjects incorporate a practical component either through the inherently practical nature of the subject or via exposure to the workplace. One academic lecturer shared the following insight:

My subject is practically oriented. Students are always based in the computer lab because it includes Computer Literacy [Acds 1].

Another lecturer added:

Students are taken to various workplaces with the purpose of learning and familiarising themselves with the work environment. It is compulsory for Level 4 students to spend five days at workplaces through WBE [Acds 5].

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It is important to highlight that all lecturers agreed that students acquire practical knowledge and experience related to real-world office duties during their training. However, the system designed to facilitate connections between students and industry requires further investigation.

Findings indicate that no student reported having undergone experiential learning within the business sector. This raises concerns about potential disadvantages faced by students at selected College, which is situated in a deeply rural area. The expectation is that these students should acquire the business acumen needed to encourage entrepreneurship.

This observation challenges the assertion by Malale and Sentsho (2014:683) that SMMEs (Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises) are the primary alternative for students in rural settings. Rather, the findings support the view that students in these contexts struggle to secure formal opportunities within larger businesses and industries, thus impeding their access to meaningful work experience. The scarcity of employers and industries in rural areas compounds this issue.

4.2.4 Theme: 4 Suggestions of Strategies to Assist NCV Office Administration Students to Transition Well into the Workplace

Several strategies were suggested to support NCV Office Administration students in making a smooth transition into the workplace. The following participants contributed valuable insights regarding these strategies: academic lecturers and student support staff. Their suggestions are discussed in the sub-themes below.

Sub-theme 4A: Imputes from academics on strategies in assisting graduates

The data presented below were drawn from academic staff responses and are embedded within key themes developed to answer the study's research questions. Lecturers who were contacted confirmed their responsibility for various subjects aligned with the National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] curriculum, as designed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and approved by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (DHET, 2007). These responses affirm and validate the purpose of this study. The participating lecturers included those

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responsible for all three Fundamental subjects: English First Additional Language, Life Orientation, Mathematical Literacy, and Computer Literacy, as well as the four Vocational subjects, namely Office Practice, New Venture Creation, Business Practice, and Office Data Processing (DHET, 2007).

When asked how they assist students in accessing industry-relevant opportunities, lecturers offered diverse perspectives on equipping students with the requisite skills for the labour market. Core competencies such as computer literacy, interpersonal communication, and knowledge acquisition were consistently identified as essential. One academic noted:

We provide/teach them computer skills, interpersonal relations skills and knowledge [Acds1].

In addition, communication and interview skills were identified as fundamental. Students are also assigned research projects related to real businesses. According to Martin et al. (2008, p. 2), English language and communication skills are regarded as vital soft skills that enhance worker competitiveness in sectors such as hospitality and business process outsourcing. Another lecturer commented:

The content of the subject contains information that will assist them and prepare them for the job market. This includes topics such as preparation for interviews, report writing, and expected workplace behaviour [Acds2].

These remarks reinforce the assertion that digital literacy and communication are crucial in the contemporary labour market. Expanding on the role of communication, one academic noted:

By preparing students with modernised communication skills relevant to their future careers; this is achieved through orals and class discussions [Acds3].

On the development of business skills, another academic stated:

I give them projects to research about businesses in my subject [Acds4].

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This emphasis on research and innovation is central to developing critical thinking and fostering self-reliance and independence among students attributes that are fundamental to entrepreneurship. The data support the argument that entrepreneurship may serve as a viable solution to address unemployment, reduce poverty, and promote social cohesion. The question of how the Office Administration programme prepares students for entrepreneurial pursuits was also explored. Academics uniformly agreed that entrepreneurial training is embedded across disciplines, either through computer-based data interpretation or through communication skills, both regarded as essential in today's business environment. A vocational lecturer explained:

We teach them how to start a business. We have integrated a Summative Assessment Task (ISAT) as a practical component in New Venture Creation to train them to start a business. They are required to go into the field on fact-finding missions and are also trained to develop business plans [Acds5].

Similar sentiments were echoed by another lecturer:

Office Data Processing is essential for students who want to pursue business, as they learn to interpret data using computers. They also learn logical reasoning [Acds6].

A Fundamental subject lecturer also pointed out:

The language subject exposes students to knowledge on both small and large-scale entrepreneurship. The content texts and scenarios are all business-oriented [Acds7].

These perspectives illustrate that entrepreneurial content is integrated across multiple subject areas, thus necessitating further investigation into its implementation. According to the NC(V) curriculum guide, New Venture Creation is an elective that aims to educate students about the principles of entrepreneurship rather than to create entrepreneurs per se. This distinction has implications for curriculum design and pedagogical strategies.

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In exploring the experiential learning opportunities available to students, academics highlighted that their subjects either have practical components or offer work exposure opportunities. A Fundamental lecturer affirmed:

My subject is practically oriented. Students are frequently in the computer lab due to Computer Literacy [Acds1].

A Vocational lecturer added:

Students are placed in various workplaces to gain exposure. Level 4 students are required to spend five days in real work environments through the Work-Based Exposure (WBE) programme [Acds5].

It is evident that lecturers recognise the importance of practical knowledge and real-world experience in preparing students for employment. However, further inquiry is needed to evaluate how these industry linkages are facilitated and sustained. The importance of leadership in the labour market was also explored. Wickramasinghe and Perera (2012) argue that teamwork is a key human capital skill, while Canwell et al. (2014) contend that effective leadership is vital in the knowledge-based economy. To assess whether such skills are consciously taught, academics were asked about the integration of leadership development within their subjects. One academic noted:

Yes, this is done through peer group learning [Acds7].

Another lecturer added:

Yes, through group work. A group leader is appointed to lead the group [Acds5].

Such responses suggest that leadership development is embedded in group-based learning activities. Scholars have asserted that soft skills such as communication, behaviour, ethics, values, and leadership are not merely vocational attributes but essential employability traits. Lecturers affirmed this view:

Yes, our subjects contain aspects of leadership, communication, and behaviour. We also teach them the code of conduct to prepare them for leadership roles [Acds2].

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Every day, students engage in practical activities. Social subjects like Life Orientation and Data Processing support these aspects [Acds4].

They study different customer types and cultural diversity [Acds5].

Students learn teamwork, interpersonal skills, and conflict resolution through role play [Acds7].

These examples confirm that soft skills development is integrated into the teaching and learning process, often through interactive and experiential methods such as role-play, teamwork, and scenario-based activities. However, while simulation-based training is recognised as a critical tool for entrepreneurship education, its availability appears limited. Academics expressed concern over the lack of access to simulation facilities:

We don't have simulators to train students on how to start businesses like internet cafés on our campus [Acds].

There are no simulators to train students in business communication, such as handling business calls [Acds2].

At present, only one simulation room is available at the Makwarela Campus for the entire selected TVET College. Although theoretically accessible to other campuses by appointment, actual utilisation appears limited, suggesting a gap in proactive implementation. As such, students at Thengwe Campus are disadvantaged in this regard.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that while entrepreneurial education and soft skills are generally embedded across subjects, significant challenges remain in terms of infrastructure, industry exposure, and simulation access. These gaps warrant further investigation to enhance the efficacy of the Office Administration programme in preparing students for the realities of the workplace and entrepreneurial ventures.

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4.2.4.2 Sub-theme 4B: Student support staff (SSS) responses concerning strategies to assist graduates

In response to the inquiry regarding the types of strategic mechanisms implemented to help Office Administration students transition smoothly into the workplace, several stakeholders shared their insights. This responsibility does not rest solely with academic staff but also includes Student Support Staff (SSS). Simulation has been identified as the main mechanism endorsed by the college to prepare students for employment. This approach is accompanied by training in communication skills. One official highlighted the importance of simulation, stating:

Students should spend more time doing practical office work by having simulation on our campuses so that they can practise within the institution [SSS 1].

Such simulations also help students improve their communication skills. This was supported by another official:

Communication should be clear and professional. This skill is vital during interviews [SSS 2].

When asked whether career guidance is offered to Office Administration students, all officials confirmed that it is. They explained that academic staff provide such guidance at the beginning of the year, introducing students to possible career paths and further study options. One official noted:

Students are oriented at the beginning of the year by student support staff [SSS 3].

Another added:

Career guidance is offered to show them the types of jobs they can do and how they can pursue further studies [SSS 1].

In response to questions about specific career information provided, officials mentioned roles such as office administrator and managerial support. One official explained:

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Students are guided on various career paths they could pursue [SSS 4].

Another elaborated:

They are exposed to careers such as office administration, client support, and managerial support [SSS 3].

Regarding experiential learning programmes offered to NCV students to prepare them for the workplace, officials referred to the Work-Based Exposure (WBE) initiative, which connects students to industry partners. Academic staff also indicated that their subjects include practical components or opportunities for work experience. One lecturer stated:

My subject is practically oriented. Students often work in the computer lab because of the Computer Literacy component [Acds 1].

Another lecturer added:

Students are placed in various workplaces to familiarise themselves with the working environment. It is compulsory for Level 4 students to complete a five-day WBE placement [Acds 5].

An official echoed this:

Students spend five days off-campus in offices and businesses to gain workplace experience [SSS 4].

Another confirmed:

NCV students participate in WBE for five days during college holidays, where they go to industries to apply what they have learnt in class [SSS 1].

When asked whether the programme helps students transition effectively into the workplace, opinions were divided. Some officials supported its effectiveness:

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Yes, they complete ISAT, which includes a practical component, as well as experiential learning at various workplaces [SSS 3].

Others were less convinced:

It does not contribute much to workplace preparation [SSS 2].

In response to whether simulators are used to train Office Administration students in entrepreneurship, all officials agreed that simulators are available.

Yes, there is one at Makwarela Campus. Lecturers can schedule sessions to use the centre [SSS 1].

However, another official noted:

The college has an Entrepreneurship Centre, but it is not being utilised by Office Administration students [SSS 3].

When asked about strategies to support these students further, one official suggested extending the duration of experiential learning and including exposure to business environments:

Students should be given more practical days, over at least two months, divided between office and business settings to encourage interest in business [SSS 4].

This idea was supported by another official, who commented on the need for more structured simulation:

Students should spend more time doing practical office work through simulation on campus so they can practise within the institution [SSS 1].

However, there were concerns about the willingness of employers to support student placements:

Host employers should be encouraged to allow students to do practical work in their industries [SSS 4].

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Finally, one official emphasised the specific skill students gain through simulation:

Communication should be clear and professional. This is a crucial skill during interviews [SSS 2].

4.3 DICUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents a detailed discussion of the findings based on participants' responses. The findings are organised according to the main themes that address the central research question: *What are the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates in the labour market from selected TVET College?* To answer this question, the following study objectives were examined:

- To explore the employment sectors in which NCV Office Administration graduates are working.
- To assess the relevance of the jobs obtained in relation to the skills acquired through the NCV Office Administration programme.
- To determine the extent to which NCV Office Administration students are provided with experiential learning as part of their programme.
- To propose strategies to support NCV Office Administration students in making a smooth transition into the workplace.

4.3.1 Exploration of Sectors of Employment for NCV Office Administration Graduates

The findings revealed frustration among many graduates because they are still unemployed even after completing a qualification. This is contrary to the expectations of the acquired skill as outlined in DBSA report (Gewer,2010). The NCV Level 4 qualification is supposed to equipping students with knowledge, practical skills, and applied understanding for specific jobs or trades, or higher education. Career paths related to Office Administration have been clearly outlined in Chapter TWO 2.9.4 of this study. The careers include:

- Bookkeeper

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- Receptionist
- Administrative Officer or Clerk
- Accounting Officer
- Company Secretary

This supports earlier studies that suggest the NCV qualification does not fully prepare students for the labour market (Malale and Gomba 2025).

Another concern raised from the findings is that some NCV Office Administration graduates have not received their certificates, even three years after completing their studies. This delay, often caused by administrative issues in the department, affects their chances of getting a job and undermines the department's credibility.

It emanated from the study that graduates that they did not get enough time for practical learning, which goes against the purpose of vocational programmes. The Vocational education is different from traditional academic education because it focuses more on practical training. The study also found that most graduates are not self-employed, showing a lack of self-reliance. This supports earlier research, such as the SSACI et al. (2016) study, which showed that very few NCV graduates start their own businesses. This conflicts with the goals of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). According to Objective 2.4 of the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET), the post-school system should prepare people either to enter the labour market or to earn a living through self-employment or by starting a business or cooperation.

Even among the small number of graduates who are self-employed, many are not working in areas related to their training. For instance, some are running businesses like event decoration, which are not connected to their Office Administration studies.

The study also showed that NCV Office Administration graduates are not very interested in furthering their studies at university. This could be caused by a weak connection between TVET colleges and universities. Papier et al. (2017:32) state that the lack of alignment between NCV and university programmes limits students' chances of continuing their education.

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In addition to not pursuing further studies or self-employment, graduates also seem uninterested in entrepreneurship. Their training mostly focuses on work experience in office environments, with little emphasis on business development. The study reviewed the New Venture Creation course in the Business Studies curriculum. Although it covers business concepts, the course appears to focus more on theory than on hands-on entrepreneurial experience.

This is supported by a previous study, where a lecturer commented: “It is clear that we teach them about entrepreneurship, we don’t teach them to be entrepreneurs” (Research Final Report, 2013:32). One reason could be that some lecturers teaching entrepreneurship may not have the passion, background, or real-world experience needed to teach it effectively (Foundation for Entrepreneurship & Business Development, FEBDEV).

According to the DHET White Paper (2012), TVET colleges are meant to prepare students either for the job market or to help them create their own sustainable livelihoods through self-employment or starting businesses (DHET, 2012, p. 13). Gree and Thurnik (2003) also note that entrepreneurship is a major driver of economic growth. This purpose (self-employment) according to findings is nonexistence.

Entrepreneurship, as defined by the European Commission (2003) and Van Gelderen et al. (2008), involves recognizing and taking opportunities to create value or earn income. The lack of student interest in entrepreneurship, despite lecturers claiming they teach it, raises important questions about how the Office Administration programme is being delivered.

From the findings, although academic staff believe they provide business-related training through modules like computer applications and communication skills, this is not helping students develop true entrepreneurial abilities. The New Venture Creation course, described in Section 2.12.2 of the report, is optional in the NC(V) curriculum. However, it is revealed that its focuses on explaining entrepreneurship rather than developing entrepreneurial skills.

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4.3.2 Examination of the Suitability of Jobs Held by NCV Office Administration Graduates in Relation to Acquired Skills

The findings further show that many employed graduates work in roles unrelated to their competencies. This indicates that the training offered by the college does not align well with either student expectations or the needs of the labour market (Cosser, 2003:11). There is a common perception that employers do not hold TVET college certificates in high regard (Omar, Muhd Khaizer, et al., 2020). As a result, many graduates in employment receive low wages. This suggests that many technical colleges graduates work in jobs that do not match their training. Those who are employed often report that their current jobs do not align with their qualifications or the skills they gained during their studies. This mismatch occurs despite graduates having completed a four-year qualification.

Study shows that students gain computer skills through subjects such as Office Data Processing, Life Skills, and Computer Literacy, which involve practical work in computer labs. In today's economy, computer skills are considered essential and play a key role in improving employability. Computer literacy has become an important part of workplace communication and productivity. As Hogshead (2008:3) notes, "digital proficiency is no longer a department or subset of an agency". The data shows that students gain these skills through subjects such as Office Data Processing, Life Skills, and Computer Literacy, which involve practical work in computer labs.

Previous research also suggests that unemployment can be reduced if higher education institutions (HEIs) design their programmes to meet market needs. The aim is not only to produce graduates who can generate new ideas, but also those who can apply their knowledge to improve services and support technological and economic development.

To support the national goal of producing well-rounded individuals who can contribute to development, institutions must ensure that graduate skills match those required in the workplace. This view is supported by various scholars. For example, Chavez, Camello, Dotong, and Pamplona (2017:155) state that "knowledge, skills,

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and attitudes acquired during study at HEIs are assets for graduates seeking employment".

The study also found that some graduates who become entrepreneurs are determined, adaptable, and willing to start businesses. However, they face difficulties in accessing funding. Maas and Herrington (2006) also identify limited access to finance as the second biggest barrier to starting a business in South Africa.

It emerged from the study that soft skills are also embedded during during training process. Such skill is demanded by employer. Employers now look beyond technical skills and qualifications and place value on adaptability and innovation. According to Okorafor and Okorafor (2013), employers have adjusted how they assess job applicants in response to 21st-century demands. . Other scholars have pointed out that vocational training alone is not enough; soft skills are also essential in the workplace. These include communication, professionalism, ethics, values, and leadership.

Soft skills, often called 'life skills', are seen as crucial for employability. Today's work environment demands more than task completion; values, ethics, and interpersonal abilities are also important. Key soft skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, and responsibility. Martin et al. (2008:2) explain that English language and communication skills are particularly valuable in industries such as hospitality and business process outsourcing. This is relevant to NCV Office Administration, where English is a core subject.

Dilts (1996) and Canwell et al. (2014) also highlight leadership as a vital skill for success in the knowledge economy. The data suggests that students begin developing leadership skills through group work and collaborative projects across subjects. Wickramasinghe and Perera (2012) further argue that teamwork should be viewed as a key component of human capital. Teamwork and leadership are essential for helping graduates become productive and competitive in modern workplaces.

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In summary, although NCV Office Administration students gain both technical and soft skills, there remains a gap between what is taught and what employers expect. Bridging this gap requires better alignment between curriculum content and industry needs, as well as a stronger focus on practical entrepreneurial training.

4.3.3 The Importance of Provision of Experiential Learning to NCV Office Administration Students to Prepare them for Work

A structured system has been introduced to enable students to gain work experience while studying. This approach distinguishes vocational education from traditional academic pathways. It is informed by John Dewey's theory of experiential learning, encapsulated by the phrase: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn" (Franklin, 2005:10). This stresses the importance of learning through practical engagement.

It emerged from the study that, all graduates confirmed their participation in experiential learning in a form of practical training. However, the data revealed that these experiences were largely confined to routine office tasks. Furthermore, concerns were raised regarding the limited duration allocated to practical sessions. Significantly, none of the participants reported any exposure to the business sector. This lack of engagement is particularly troubling for disadvantaged students attending selectedTVET College, which is in a remote rural area. Without exposure to authentic business environments, students may struggle to acquire the skills necessary to establish and manage their own enterprises in future.

This finding challenges the assumption that small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs) are a realistic alternative for rural students (Malale and Sentsho, 2014:683). It highlights the structural barriers faced by these students in accessing formal placements within larger firms or industries, thus limiting their opportunities to gain meaningful work experience. Many rural areas lack sufficient employers or industrial infrastructure to support student placements.

The quality of practical training could be enhanced through the more effective use of simulation rooms. Previous studies have also emphasised the value of simulation in

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entrepreneurial education, noting its capacity to offer immersive, practice-based learning. Regrettably, access to such resources remains limited. The data indicated that only one simulation room exists, which is situated at the Makwarela Campus, and this is considered insufficient to meet student demand.

Simulation has been identified by the college as a key strategy for preparing students for the labour market. This includes the development of essential communication skills, which are reportedly addressed through this platform. Although all campuses may request access to the simulation room by appointment, the data suggests that lecturers seldom take advantage of this opportunity.

The absence of simulation facilities across other campuses negatively affects the scope and quality of students' practical training. Ideally, students should be exposed to real-world scenarios that reflect the complexity of contemporary business operations. However, the findings indicate a general lack of entrepreneurship-oriented activities, which are crucial for preparing students for both self-employment and broader participation in the formal economy.

4.3.4 Strategies to Assist NCV Office Administration Students to Transite Well into the Workplace

According to findings, the collaboration between College and industry is non existent. Several policy documents including those by the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013), the Department of Education (2008), and the National Treasury (2011) accentuates the necessity of enhanced collaboration between industry and TVET Colleges. Such partnerships are seen as pivotal to facilitating the effective transition of learners from college to the world of work. The 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training further highlights the importance of these collaborations in ensuring that learners supplement their theoretical knowledge with practical, workplace-based skills, thereby attaining vocational and occupational competence.

It was revealed that students are involved in WIL but only short period. In this context, the implementation of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in South African

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TVET colleges has emerged as a central strategy (Maimane, 2016). WIL refers to the structured process through which students acquire knowledge and skills via engagement in real work environments. This approach aims to enhance employability by integrating academic instruction with experiential learning both within and beyond the professional context. According to the 2014 White Paper for Higher Education and Training, WIL allows students to apply classroom-acquired theory in practical workplace settings.

Alongside WIL, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has introduced Workplace-Based Experience (WBE), whereby NC(V) Level 3/4 and N4/5 students are placed within industry settings for a period of five days, typically during the academic holiday period. This also like the previous system (WIL) has not been practised, according to findings. The primary aim of WBE is to cultivate long-term partnerships between colleges and industry, thereby aligning the National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] programme more closely with labour market needs (City and Guilds Institute, 2020). As the core mandate of Further Education and Training (FET) colleges is to prepare students for the world of work, WBE functions as an umbrella term encompassing exposure to, and experience in, real-world work environments for students currently enrolled in their courses. The model promotes the establishment of formal agreements between colleges and employers through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) (SSACI, 2012:28).

Research and innovation skills have been discovered to be central in vocational subjects according to academic staff. These facilitate the acquisition of market-relevant skills among students. Key competencies identified during training include computer literacy, interpersonal communication, and knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, communication and interview skills are highlighted as integral to the curriculum. In addition, students are often assigned research projects related to specific business contexts. Martin et al. (2008:2) identify English language proficiency and communication skills as crucial ‘soft skills’ that enhance the employability of workers in high-demand sectors such as hospitality and business process outsourcing.

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Furthermore, professional network between has proved to be a challenge. Lecturers must also take an active role in cultivating and maintaining professional networks to improve students' access to employment opportunities (Verkend, TVET College Times, 2016:26). The partnerships developed between colleges and industry, whether through institutional agreements or individual staff efforts, are instrumental in improving graduates' employability. These collaborations foster mutual trust between educational institutions and employers and ultimately benefit the students.

Upon graduation, colleges bear the responsibility of ensuring that students are adequately prepared and competitive within the labour market. To this end, both academic staff and SSS have critical roles to play. Lecturers are expected to deliver curriculum-aligned instruction while embedding essential employability skills into their teaching. Concurrently, SSS units are tasked with providing academic and financial support and with reinforcing institutional links to industry through WBE initiatives. Moreover, SSS staff assist students in applying for financial aid, particularly through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), thereby supporting broader access and retention.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined and analyzed the findings derived from the perspectives and experiences of graduates, academic staff, and SSS personnel, using a case study approach. The findings were categorized into themes that emerged from similar ideas and information obtained through open-ended questionnaire responses. The findings revealed that most graduates with a National Certificate (Vocational) in Office Administration from selected TVET College are neither employed, self-employed, nor involved in any entrepreneurial activities. This highlights the pressing need to enhance entrepreneurship initiatives among students. The discussion connected these findings to the existing body of literature, as reviewed in Chapter Three. The next chapter presents the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

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CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents summary of the findings, recommendations, and conclusion based on data collected through interviews and open-ended questionnaires with participants, namely: graduates, lecturers, and Student Support Staff (SSS). The discussion is aligned with the study's objectives, which focused on the career paths of NCV Office Administration graduates. This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What employment sectors do NCV Office Administration graduates currently find themselves working in?
- How relevant are the skills acquired from the NCV Office Administration qualification to the demands of the job market?
- To what extent are NCV Office Administration students provided with experiential learning opportunities during their studies?
- What strategies can be implemented to help NCV Office Administration students transition effectively into the workplace?

5.2 FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The following findings from the study based on the responses of three groups of NCV Office Administration graduates: those who are unemployed, self-employed, and employed.

5.2.1 Findings regarding Sector of employment for NCV Office Administration graduates (Objective 1)

The following findings are based on the responses of three groups of NCV Office Administration graduates: those who are unemployed, self-employed, and employed.

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Findings from unemployed graduates

The findings reveal that a significant proportion of graduates are currently unemployed. Numerous respondents reported being either unemployed, self-employed, or engaged in further studies. Several graduates expressed concerns that their qualifications have not facilitated access to employment opportunities. A particularly pressing issue raised is the Department of Higher Education's delay in issuing certificates, which many believe has contributed to their being overlooked by prospective employers.

Only a minority of graduates have been invited to interviews or secured temporary employment. Alarmingly, many have not attended a single job interview since completing their studies. These findings point to the need for a critical reassessment of the objectives of the NCV Office Administration programme, and indeed, of the vocational education and training system more broadly.

In response to persistent unemployment, some graduates are contemplating further studies as a strategy to enhance their employability. Others, however, expressed frustration and are considering changing their career trajectories altogether. There is a growing inclination among certain graduates to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, although financial limitations remain a considerable obstacle. Additionally, some graduates are redirecting their efforts toward careers in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and education, potentially driven by a desire for greater financial stability.

These findings echo earlier research indicating that the NCV qualification may fall short in preparing graduates adequately for the labour market. A considerable number of graduates are employed in sectors unrelated to their field of study, underscoring a misalignment between college curricula and the demands of the contemporary job market (Cosser, 2003:11).

Notably, there appears to be a reluctance among graduates to pursue further study at universities. This trend raises critical questions about the anticipated articulation between TVET colleges and higher education institutions. As Papier et al. (2017:32)

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observe, “the insufficient alignment between NCV and university courses restricts the ability of TVET students to progress to higher education”.

Findings from self-employed graduates

Only a small number of graduates reported being self-employed. They run small businesses, such as decoration services or spaza shops, often aimed at providing basic goods like food. One graduate reported starting a spaza shop but later decided to study further, due to limited business growth. Most of those who started their own businesses did so as a way of coping with unemployment. However, lack of funding has prevented many from expanding their businesses. Some are now considering a change in career in the hope of finding better opportunities.

Findings from employed graduates

The data shows that those who are employed mostly work in sales or as teaching assistants in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres. Many of these teaching assistants are not yet qualified and are continuing their studies in that field. Like the self-employed group, many of these graduates have changed their career paths because of limited job options.

The findings also reveal that most employed graduates are working in private institutions like ECD centres, rather than in public service or government roles. It is commonly believed that public sector jobs offer more stability and benefits, yet few graduates find work there. Importantly, even those who are employed or self-employed often do not work in the field for which they were trained.

5.2.2 Findings on NCV Office Graduates’ Job Relevancy Considering the Acquired Skills (Objective 2)

The study reveals that the qualification obtained by graduates is not aligned with the skills currently demanded by the labour market. Many individuals are employed in professions for which they have not received formal training, yet they appear to have adapted and feel comfortable in these roles. Furthermore, the skills acquired during

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their training do not adequately support self-reliance, particularly in terms of preparing them for entrepreneurship. These findings challenge the primary objective of vocational training, which is to equip students with the practical skills needed for both employment and self-employment.

5.2.3 Findings on Whether NCV Office Administration Graduates are Provided with Experiential Learning as Part of their Programme (Objective 3)

The findings reveal that none of the NCV Office Administration graduates from selected TVET College have engaged in experiential learning within the business sector. This absence of exposure is deeply concerning, particularly for disadvantaged students and those with entrepreneurial aspirations. The lack of real-world business experience reinforces the argument that rural students encounter substantial barriers in accessing formal opportunities within established businesses and industries. This limitation not only impedes their ability to acquire meaningful workplace experience but also challenges the prevailing notion that Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) represent the sole viable alternative for these students (Malale & Sentsho, 2014:683).

5.2 4 Findings on Strategies to Assist NCV Office Administration Students to transition effectively into the Workplace (Objective 4)

This section presents the findings related to strategies designed to facilitate the transition of NCV Office Administration students into the workplace. The data was drawn from interviews with academic staff and SSS, focusing on curriculum design, practical exposure, and the role of support mechanisms in preparing students for employment.

Findings from academic staff

The findings highlight several mechanisms intended to support students in their transition from college to the workplace. Academic staff confirmed that the curriculum includes a range of subjects embedded with skills necessary for employment. These include the three Fundamental subjects (English First Additional Language, Life

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Skills and Computer Literacy, and Mathematical Literacy) as well as four vocational subjects: Office Practice, New Venture Creation, Business Practice, and Office Data Processing (DHET, 2007).

The study revealed that valuable skills such as computer proficiency, interpersonal communication, and knowledge acquisition through business research projects are embedded in these subjects. The inclusion of research projects is especially important, as it cultivates innovation, critical thinking, independence, and self-reliance (key traits of entrepreneurship). Martin et al. (2008: 2) highlight the importance of English language and communication skills as essential 'soft skills' for professional advancement across industries.

The findings therefore support the study's assertion regarding the growing importance of digital technologies in the labour market, with computer literacy being particularly critical. The ability to interpret and communicate data effectively is increasingly recognised as vital in modern business settings. Moreover, entrepreneurial experiences are integrated into the curriculum across a range of subjects. However, the subject of New Venture Creation, which should be practical and entrepreneurship-focused, has become overly theoretical. While some lecturers have integrated practical components into their teaching either through the nature of the subject or through work-based exposure, this is not consistent across the curriculum.

Academic staff also emphasized that leadership skills are developed when students work collaboratively. These skills are fostered through practical activities and active participation, such as role play, although this is not a universal practice across all subjects.

A critical concern raised by the findings is the lack of simulation facilities, which are essential for preparing students for real-world business environments and for training future entrepreneurs. Only one simulation room exists at the Makwarela Campus, serving the entire selected TVET College. While students from other campuses may book access, lecturers lack the initiative to utilise this facility effectively. At Thengwe Campus, no simulation facilities are available, limiting students' exposure to realistic

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workplace scenarios. This shortfall undermines entrepreneurial training and practical skill development.

Findings from student support services (SSS)

The findings also indicate that while SSS are formally tasked with providing career guidance, this role has, in practice, been assumed by academic staff. Student support services did, however, confirm the provision of experiential learning through the Work-Based Exposure (WBE) programme, which aims to connect students with industry. Nonetheless, the limited involvement of actual businesses in this process is seen as critical oversight.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STUDY

The information below outlines the recommendation of the study emanated from the findings. This will help to inform the decision- making. The recommendations would offer practical suggestions for policy makers, practitioners or stakeholders.

5.3.1 Recommendations Regarding Sector of Employment for NCV Office Administration Graduates

Implementation of career guidance

The findings show that professional career guidance and counselling are not well integrated into the students' training journey. As a result, many students lack clear knowledge about their course options and possible career paths. Effective career guidance should include realistic advice about life after graduation. This would help students make informed choices and better prepare them for the challenges of the workplace. It is, therefore, recommended that professional career guidance and counselling be made visible and accessible throughout the students' time at college.

Addressing the skills mismatch

There is a clear mismatch between the skills students acquire and what employers require. This has caused frustration for many graduates who struggle to find

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employment because their qualifications do not meet market needs. To address this, it is recommended that the curriculum be thoroughly reviewed to ensure that it matches the demands of the job market. Supporting this view, Saud and Hussain (2008) state that providing a programme of study that aligns with the needs of employers, and the industry is crucial for preparing graduates for the job market.

Resolving certification discrepancies

In any developed country, the awarding of certificates serves as formal proof of skills acquired. This study revealed ongoing issues with certification, which has left many NCV students frustrated. These discrepancies hinder graduates' career progression. It is recommended that the Department of Higher Education and Training allocate the necessary resources to improve the systems and processes for issuing certificates efficiently and timeously.

Strengthening links between colleges and universities

The findings revealed a lack of clear pathways for NCV graduates to transition into universities or other higher education institutions. As highlighted by Papier et al. (2017: 32), strong partnerships between colleges and universities are essential, but such relationships were found to be absent. The misalignment between NCV programmes and university courses prevents students from continuing their studies. This gap could be addressed through regular university visits to TVET colleges, offering information and guidance on further study opportunities that align with the NCV curriculum. The findings suggest that universities have shown limited interest in the NCV Office Administration programme, contributing to the weak connection between the two sectors.

5.3.2 Recommendation on NCV Office Graduates' Job Relevancy Considering the Acquired Skills

Importance of technological skills

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Proficiency in computer skills is essential in the contemporary world. The concern is not solely about producing graduates who can generate new ideas, but also about equipping them with the ability to apply their knowledge in delivering improved services within the evolving technological and global economic landscape. The inclusion of computer-based subjects such as Life Skills, Computer Literacy, and Office Data Processing within the NCV Office Administration curriculum is commendable. Furthermore, the provision of personal laptops to students has strengthened this initiative. However, these laptops have proven problematic for many students, with issues relating to functionality and suitability for academic tasks. It is therefore recommended that students be provided with high-quality laptops pre-installed with appropriate learning software to enhance the development of critical digital competencies.

Recommendation on imparting entrepreneurial skills and interest

To promote self-reliance among students, it is more effective to train them to become entrepreneurs rather than merely instructing them about entrepreneurship. Students should be equipped with the skills and experience required to establish and manage businesses, rather than engaging solely with theoretical knowledge. Their educational foundation should be firmly rooted in entrepreneurial practice. Experiential learning should prioritise business contexts over traditional office settings, to ignite commercial awareness and entrepreneurial curiosity.

5.3.3 Recommendation on Whether NCV Office Administration Graduates are Provided with Experiential Learning as Part of their Programme

Experiential learning system to be strengthened

The practical component of the NC(V) programme has been shown to be inadequate. The curriculum does not seem to be designed to offer apprenticeships in the way that the NATED programme does. Instead, it focuses more on theoretical learning than on practical training and real job experience, which are key requirements for employers (Taylor, 2011). The current practice of offering only five days of external work placement has proven to be insufficient for students to gain

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meaningful job experience. According to Johannesburg: JET, candidates should have at least two years of experience to be considered for employment opportunities (Mabunda and Frick, 2020:13).

This lack of practical exposure prevents students from building important social and professional relationships, which are valuable to both students and potential employers. Often, students return from placement without having gained the necessary job-related skills. This placement process happens only once, during the final part of the Level 4 exit phase. It is therefore recommended that students should undergo at least three months of work experience every year during their training period.

The access of simulation within the Campus

The significance of a simulation room cannot be overstated. This allows students to develop competencies in areas like communication and entrepreneurship during the training period. The centralized simulation has demonstrated a lack of success. To address this issue, it is essential to have a simulation room on each campus within selected TVET College.

5.3.4 Recommendation on Strategies to assist NCV Office Administration Students to transition effectively into the workplace

Soft skills to be enforced to NCV Office Administration students

Numerous studies have demonstrated the significance of 'soft skills' as required by companies. This demonstration was shown to be insufficient in the investigation. This encompasses competencies such as leadership and teamwork, among others. These qualities are expected to be practically displayed by students during training across every subject, as indicated by the English lecturer in the study. This could be accomplished through presentations and oral presentations.

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Recommendation to remedy in link between college and employers

To equip graduates with workplace skills, staff required strong links with employers, enabling enactment of an authentic curriculum. Regular industry visitation help to maintain currency. Something lacking.

Frye (2000) and his colleagues investigated the methods through which employers and learners 'needs can be considered in formulating future skills assessments. This model helps existing systems to promote a framework for all learners to gain the skills they need important and to maintain purposeful employment. The group used a supply and demand model comprising three main components as employers demand for skills, providers' supply of education and training opportunities and learners demand for skills. This model identified following matches and mistakes; 1. Employer demand-provider supply: the mismatch between employers demand for particular skills and the flow of skilled people arising from provider supply, 2. Learner aspirations-employer demand: The mismatches between what learners aim to achieve through education and training and the skills need of employer and 3. Provider supply-Learner aspirations: the mismatch between courses offered by providers and the expectations and needs of learners.

Recommendation on reinforcing strong connection of lecturer to assist Student's industry exposure

The investigation has revealed the fragile connection between the selected TVET College Lectures and the industries. This impacts students adversely as they lack sufficient connections with the industries. This contrasts with other colleges that have demonstrated a stronger connection with industries, enhancing students' job prospects. It is therefore, recommended that Lecturers ought to have strong relationship with the industries trained to become business people rather than merely learning about it. The foundation of their training ought to center around entrepreneurship. Their experiential learning should emphasize business contexts rather than office environments. This will stimulate their commercial curiosity.

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Recommendation on NCV certificate

It can therefore be concluded that the NC(V) qualification in general, and Office Administration in particular, may be insufficient to enhance employability, as evidenced by the experiences of graduates. Wittekind, Raeder and Grote (2010) argue that the higher the qualifications graduates possess, the greater their employment opportunities. Given that the NC(V) qualification is positioned at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) exit Level 4 equivalent to a Grade 12 certificate, its capacity to significantly improve employment prospects remains limited, despite the vocational skills it may confer.

It is, therefore, recommended that stronger articulation pathways be established to enable NC(V) graduates to pursue further studies at universities, particularly universities of technology. Strengthening this academic progression could improve both qualifications and employability outcomes.

Prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly two-thirds of South Africa's youth were either unemployed or not economically active, prompting many to characterise youth unemployment as a national crisis (Stats SA, QLFS Q3, 2020).

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The research was conducted at selected TVET College in Limpopo province, which constituted my population. The college is situated in a rural area with economic dynamics distinct from the rest of South Africa. Consequently, it is imperative for additional studies to be undertaken in diverse populations within different environments. Thus, the findings may not be transferable.

The same study could be expanded to include the career destinations of NCV Office Administration graduates from other colleges. They may yield different outcomes. The findings of this investigation have highlighted the aspirations and experiences of graduates, lecturers, and SSS exclusively. The perspectives and insights of college management and curriculum managers were not considered. Further research is needed to examine their views, expectations, and plans regarding the graduates in question.

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The function of SSS in providing career guidance and counselling warrants additional investigation. Its role, among others, is to guide and inform students about career opportunities across various programs. It is essential to conduct further investigations to explore the effectiveness of SSS in guiding and counseling students toward employable courses as required by the market.

The qualitative methodology employed is limited to a small sample because of its inherent characteristics. It also incorporates information and perspectives. It is essential for additional studies to be carried out using diverse methodologies.

5.5 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This section of research reporting discusses factors that are sometimes beyond the researcher's control but may affect the methodology or outcomes in some way (Akanle et al., 2020). Although the project was self-funded and faced some challenges, it is important to note that through careful planning and good preparation, the quality and integrity of the research were not compromised. This was made possible by having clearly defined research questions and objectives that were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

5.6 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study only covers four campuses in selected TVET College, a rural Province in Limpopo, South Africa; therefore, the findings could not be generalised. It is important, therefore, to extend the study to another environment with different socioeconomic conditions to explore the 'destination career destination of NCV Office Administration graduates in the Labour Market'.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding chapter presented and analysed the findings derived from the perspectives and experiences of graduates, academics, and student support staff (SSS), using a case study approach. The findings were thematically organised based on common ideas and information gathered from open-ended questionnaire

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responses. The findings of the study revealed that most students who graduated with an NCV in Office Administration from selected TVET College are neither employed, self-employed, nor engaged in entrepreneurial activities. As a result, significant efforts are needed to foster entrepreneurship among students. The discussion linked the findings to the existing body of literature as outlined in Chapter Three (Literature Review).

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARENCE CERTIFICATE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Mr TP Magoloi

STUDENT NO:
8900400

PROJECT TITLE: **The career destinations of office administration graduates in labour market: a case study of Vhembe TVET College in Limpopo of South Africa.**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/25/CSEM/03/2402**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr F Ravhuhali	UNIVEN, EDUCATIONAL STUDIES	Supervisor
Dr SE Madima	UNIVEN, EDUCATIONAL STUDIES	Co-Supervisor
Mr TP Magoloi	UNIVEN, EDUCATIONAL STUDIES	Investigator -Student

Type: Masters Research
Risk: *Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment (Category 2)*
Approval Period: February 2025 – February 2026

The Research Ethics Social Science Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
  - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
  - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
  - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: February 2025

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee..... Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro

Signature.....

University of Venda
PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8554/8313 FAX (015) 962 9060
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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2025 -02- 24
Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

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APPENDIX B: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL FROM DEPARTMENT

Enq; Magoloi TP

Cell: 061 547 3519

P. O. BOX 1734

SIBASA

0970

03 March 2025

THE PRINCIPAL, DEPUTY PRINCIPAL ACADEMIC

VHEMBE TVET COLLEGE

SIBASA

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT

I am Magoloi Thivhavhudzi Prince, master's student at the University of Venda. I am a Lecturer at Thengwe Campus and intending to conduct research project at selected TVET College. My research topic is:

THE CAREER DESTINATIONS OF OFFICE ADMINISTRATION GRADUATES IN LABOUR MARKET: A CASE STUDY OF VHEMBE TVET COLLEGE in LIMPOPO of SOUTH AFRICA.

Only 40 participants will be required in NCV programme and to participate during their free time.

The research is guided by ethical professional standards of the University of Venda. As a confirmation, an ethical certificate is attached for your consideration.

The following will be considered:

- The research will not interfere with the normal teaching and learning process at the Campus.
- Participation in the research would be on a voluntary basis.
- The findings could be available for college consideration.

Thank you for your understanding in advance.

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APPENDIX C : APPROVAL LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT

higher education & training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

VHEMBE TVET COLLEGE
Central Office
Site 203, Unit A
SIBASA
LIMPOPO, 0970
Tel. (015) 963 7000
Fax (015) 963 3150/4
E-mail: info@vhembecollege.edu.za
VHEMBE T.V.E.T COLLEGE

Enq: Office of the Deputy Principal Academic Services
015 963 7000/7093

To: Thivhavhudzi Prince Magoloi
Contact Number: 0615473519

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT VHEMBE TVET COLLEGE

The above matter refers;

After review of the study protocol, Vhembe TVET College hereby grants Thivhavhudzi Prince Magoloi permission to conduct her study at Vhembe TVET College under the following research topic:

The career destinations of office administration graduates in labour market: A case study of Vhembe TVET College in Limpopo of South Africa.

Approval is given with an exception that the research will be conducted without interference in the daily activities of the college.

Kind Regards.

Deputy Principal Academic Services

Mrs. Booi M

Date: 11/03/2025

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APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

ESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

UNIVEN Informed Consent

Appendix B

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study :

The career destinations of Office Administration graduates in labour market: a case study of Vhembe TVET College in Limpopo of South Africa.

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : (**(MAGOLOI TP**, *BA, UED, BEDGC, PG Dip in TVET, Cert in Assessor,Facilitator, and Moderator.*)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : (*Name, qualifications*)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study

In-line to global world , South Africa has prioritised Vocational training (VT)as is seen as a solution for needed skills to boost economy and to reduce unemployment, inequality and poverty eradication . The world organisation such as World Bank and United Nation (UN) has also supported TVET training agenda. TVET delivery method has been considered to be important as it focuses on practical skills that equip students with innovative competence, that enable one to participate meaningful to the economy. A competency that the academic mainstream education could not offer.

It is from that background that the country and society expect the graduates to have edge in labour market.This expection is embeded to South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)\policy and country's government National Development development Plan (NDP). it is for this reason that Researcher seeks explore and investigate the career destinations of the graduates in one of the programme in TVET College and Vhembe in particular.
South Africa prioritizes vocational training (VT) to boost the economy and reduce unemployment, inequality, and poverty. World Bank and UN support this agenda, emphasizing practical skills and innovative competence. Graduates are are therefore, expected to have an edge in the in competitive labour market, reflected in the South African Department of Higher Education and Training policy and the National Development Plan.
The study aims to investigate the career destinations of NCV Office Administration students from Vhembe TVET College

Outline of the procedure

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APPENDIX E 1: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT (GRADUATES)

QUALIFICATION DETAILS

1. Name of the selected College TVET Campus you were registered in.

---

2. Share with me about the course you were doing and the year in which was completed?

---

3. How does the qualification you have relate to the career you want to pursue?

---

4. Did your qualification empower you to be employed or self-employed?

---

5. Share with me if you have been provided with experiential learning ?

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

6. What are you currently doing?

- employed OR Self- employed
- unemployed
- looking for job
- furthering studies,

6.1 Share with me the status of your the employment ?

☐ Permanent employment
Fixed-term contract employment
I am a casual worker
Trainee ship

6.2 If employed share with me the job that you are currently doing ?

6.3 How is your current job related to the qualification you have?

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6.4 If self -employed do how do your current job relate to the qualification you have?

6.5 If unemployed , what do you think is the reason ?

6.6 if studying ,where: TVET College University Others

6.6.1 What is the main reason for studying towards your current qualification?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

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APPENDIX E2 : DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT (ACADEMICS)

1. Name of subject offered ----------

2. Explain how you are assisting NCV Administration students with career access to relevant industries.

---

3. Share with us how NCV Office administration programme prepare students for office administration to the world of work?

---

4. How does Office Administration programme prepare students for entrepreneurial world?

---

5. What kind of experiential learning is provided to office Administration students?

---

6. What strategies mechanism do you think can be provided to Office Administration students to transition smoothly to the workplace environment?

---

7. Share with us how is leadership skill embedded in teaching and learning, and how is it transmitted to students?

---

8. Do you think Office Administration students are acquiring enough 'soft skills'(communication,leadership,behaviour, etc) to assist them in the world of work?. Explain in detail.

---

9. How is Simulators train Students of Office Administration to be entrepreneurs?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIM

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APPENDIX E 3 : DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT (STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES)

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Share us if there is any career guidance offered to office Administration students.

   ---

   if so who are responsible?

   - Support Service staff
   - Academic Staff
   - Internal Career practitioners
   - External Career practitioners

2. What kind of career related information opportunities offered to Office administration students?

   ---

3. What kind of experiential learning programme do College providing to NCV Students in preparation to work environment.

   ---

4. Do you think the programme provided to NCV Students is able to assist them to transition well to workplace environment?

   ---

5. Does the College have Simulators to train Students to be Entrepreneurs? If available, how is it relevant to Office Administration students?

   ---

6. Do you think of any new strategies to be adopted to help Office Administration students.?

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APPENDIX F: LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

Nendauni editing hub
Let us perfect your document.

COPY-EDITING ENDORSEMENT

To whom it may concern,

This is to certify that the dissertation which title appears below, has undergone editing for the purpose of ensuring correct English language grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall style. However, it remains the responsibility of the researcher to consider and implement suggestions provided by the editor.

TITLE

The Career Destinations of Office Administration Graduates in Labour Market: A Case Study of Vhembe TVET College in Limpopo of South Africa

RESEARCHER

Thivhavhudzi Prince Magoloi

DATE EDITED

12 May 2025

Signed

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