

## The Exploring Factors that Teachers View as Hindering Quality in Teaching and Learning at a TVET College

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### ABSTRACT

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore teacher views on some issues that hinder quality in teaching and learning at technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. This is explored by considering challenges that face teachers in providing quality teaching and learning. A total of twenty-four lecturers participated in the study. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach and employed Karl Maton's Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as its analytical framework. Data were collected by means of interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. While a symbiotic relationship is expected to exist between expertise and decision-making structure in TVETs, there is a dichotomous gap in the two domains, which in turn compromises the quality of teaching and learning.

### KEYWORDS

Teachers; technical and vocational education and training; teaching; learning; legitimation code theory; South Africa.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The birth of democracy in South Africa in 1994 saw public spending on education changing from being highly unequal and based on race to targeting rural and disadvantaged institutions (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). A resilient legacy of the apartheid education is the inferior quality of education within historically disadvantaged and marginalised institutions (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges are identified as one of the key institutions that the South African state acknowledges as a catalyst for both social and economic development (Daniels, 2018; Holmes, 2009; Kato, 2017; Kingombe, 2012). Moreover, TVET may serve as a tool for achieving the state's sustainable development goals, aspirations, and global targets (King, 2017; McGrath, 2012). Despite the importance of TVET, the inferior levels of education at historically disadvantaged and marginalised institutions are reflected in TVET.

With the massification of higher education post-1994, doors of learning in higher education have been opened and historically disadvantaged students have gained access to universities in the TVET sector. Access to TVET education is a necessary but not sufficient condition for it to fulfil its potential as a catalyst of development. Both society and individual development cannot be increased by putting more individuals through the education system without first improving quality in teaching and learning (Sahlberg, 2010). It is only quality education that provides individuals and communities with a sense of belonging and improves the circumstances of community (Allis, 2012). Several studies have shown that the quality of teaching and learning in TVET is low, which increases poverty and negatively affects social development (Allais, 2012; Palmer, 2007, Sahlberg, 2010).

The South African state, through its Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), has introduced programmes and policies set to improve the quality of TVET education and the professional development of teachers<sup>1</sup> in the TVET sector (Allais, 2012; Powell, 2012). However, these policies hardly involve teachers' voices. Therefore, this study seeks to explore teachers' views of quality in teaching and learning at a TVET college in South Africa's Limpopo Province. Teachers as the drivers of teaching and learning are hardly/seldom? involved in discussing and designing quality in education (Batanero & Chernoff, 2018). Improving the quality of teaching and learning set in national policies can be hampered if TVET teachers have a different interpretation of quality teaching and learning and how the quality of teaching and learning can be improved.

### Understanding TVET sector in South Africa

The TVET college sector in South Africa is an element of the country's post-school system. TVET offers two programme types, National Technical Education (NATED) Programmes (N1 to N6) and National Certificate (Vocational) (NC[V]) Programmes (Dlamini, 2014). TVET colleges also offer learnerships and a range of programmes through Sector and Education and Training Authorities

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'teacher' has been specifically chosen; despite the use of the term 'lecturer' in South Africa TVET policy and practice, it is used in most Anglophone countries and, as a result, the TVET discourse.

(SETAs). NATED programmes for service and business-related fields have school grade 12 (matric) as an entry requirement and comprise N4, N5 and N6 certificate programmes, each taking a? semester to complete (South Africa, 2013). Engineering programmes are divided into two parts. Part 1, comprising N1, N2 and N3, each taking one trimester to complete, has an entry requirement of school Grade 9. Part 2, as in the case of service and business-related programmes, comprises N4 to N6; however, it takes a trimester to complete. The entry requirement to an N4 engineering programme is related to N3 or school grade 12.

The NC(V) was introduced at the colleges in 2007 as a DHET initiative to tackle the priority skills demand of the South African economy (South Africa, 2013). NC(V) programmes are offered at levels 2, 3 and 4 of the National Qualification Framework (NQF), with each level taking 12 months to complete. The NC(V) programmes were designed for young people who have only completed grade 9 (South Africa, 2013). They include both school subjects and vocational subjects. However, as Matshoba (2019) notes, most students enrol in an NC(V) programme and start at NC(V) Level 2, even if they have completed grades above grade 9. This means students who have passed grade 12 share a class with those who have only passed grade 9. According to Dlamini (2014), having NC(V) students with widely differing educational levels and knowledge in the same class compromises the quality of teaching and learning. As Matshoba (2019) points out, students who have passed grade 12 cope better with the NC(V) programme compared to those who enter having passed lower grades.

A common thread that unites both programme types, Dlamini (2014) notes, is low quality teaching and learning. Echoing the quality challenge, Matshoba (2019) argues, the key challenge faced by the TVET sector is that it is trying to be “everything to everybody”, particularly those who lack alternatives. Trying to be “everything to everybody” compromises quality while simultaneously making the programmes complex to administer.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Quality in Teaching and Learning

The concept of quality is not new to education. Quality in education has its foundational roots in post-World War II production processes and ideologies (Geiger, 2017). Quality measures, Sallis (2014) argues, have been applied in education since the mid-1990s because of state demands on the improvement of quality learning. Despite the existence of quality measures for decades, views of what constitutes quality, particularly in teaching and learning, vary significantly. Quality teaching is that which leads to improved students’ achievements using outcomes that matter for their future success (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Dube et al., 2022). This view is shared by several authors, including Suskie (2018), and Brown and Knight (2012), all of whom argue that the yardstick by which teaching quality should be assessed is student progress.

## **Quality in TVET Teaching and Learning**

The definitions of quality are contextual and operationalized through multi-dimensional, multi-level and dynamic approaches (Prakash, 2018). According to Idialu (2007), to ensure high quality teaching and learning in TVET, it is important that the students have opportunities to learn from teachers who continue to demonstrate rigorous professional standards.

TVET cannot function properly unless there is a high quality in the standard of teaching, material available and proper evaluation of students in the programme (Gamble, 2016). Thus, quality teaching and learning in vocational education ensure that students acquire the knowledge, skills and competences that are appropriate for their area of responsibility. The quality assurance in TVET is an essential tool required to ensure an efficient vocational education programme for the achievement of manpower development and skills acquisitions in our societies (Madimabe & Omodan, 2021).

TVET students are young adults and quality teaching in TVET calls for delivery modes attuned to adult learners (Powell & McGrath, 2013). The authors postulates that ground-breaking rules for adult learners that apply to TVET students lay the foundation for competency-based teaching. Since TVET students have already accumulated a great deal of learning and have real-life experience, the quality teaching in TVET must build upon developing existing competencies. Powell & McGrath, further argue that abstract teaching at TVET colleges leads to rejection and lack of interest on the part of students because TVET students are self-directed; therefore, their learning needs to cater to their career and personal interests and to be leaning towards direct application. This view is also shared by Gamble (2016) who contends that TVET students are harder/more difficult? to stimulate through external stimuli; therefore, TVET teachers need internal areas of curiosity and motives. The personal interests of TVET students need to be taken seriously and the teaching be refined according to their wishes, argues Gamble (2016).

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed at exploring the views of TVET teachers on what hinders the provision of quality teaching and learning at a TVET college in Limpopo Province. The investigation took teacher views into consideration on what is hindering or contributing to the provision of quality teaching and learning. The objective of the study was to understand the challenges that teachers face in providing quality teaching and learning.

## **Research Questions**

The question guiding the study is the following:

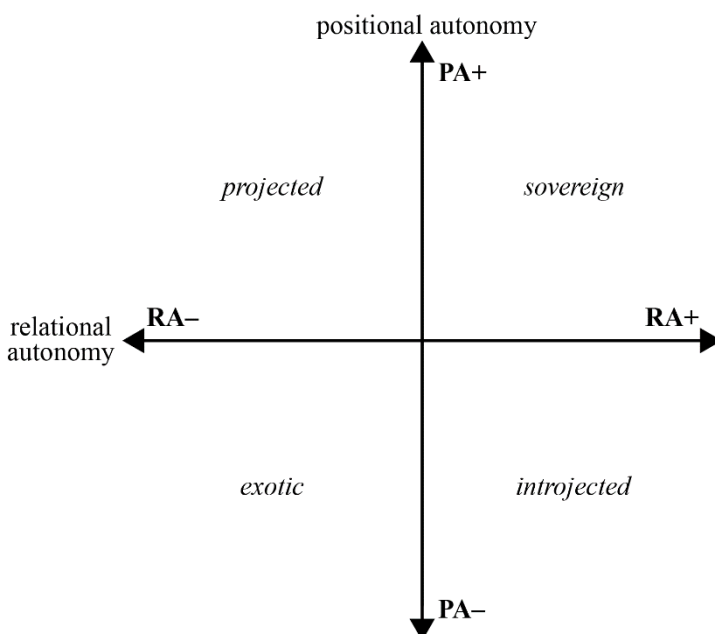
What are the challenges that TVET teachers face in providing quality teaching?

## **Analytical Tools**

This study enacts Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as its primary theoretical and analytical framework. LCT is created in critical realism (CR) which says powerful social structures are always present, they are real and effective. The LCT is premised on the principle that control

and power manifest themselves through interactional and structural aspects of practice, and therefore have the potential to include and exclude. LCT as an analytical tool aids our understanding of students' success and failure by focusing on the 'what' of learning, i.e., on knowledge itself and the actors engaged in the knowledge practice. It thus distinguishes between *knowledge* and *knowers*. LCT comprises five dimensions: Specialization (structuring relations between the social and symbolic dimensions of the field), Semantics (structuring relations to context and to condensation of meaning), Autonomy (structuring external relations to the field), Density (structuring relations within the field) and Temporality (structuring temporal aspects of the relations) (Maton, 2014).

In this study, the dimension of autonomy was used. The dimension of autonomy conceptualises the organising principles as autonomy codes (Maton & Howard, 2018). It builds mostly from the work of Bernstein (2000) and Bourdieu (1996) and explores the boundaries that practices establish around their constituents and how those constituents are related. The dimension of autonomy is fitting in this study as quality is understood as a combination of knowledge and expertise. This study explored teachers' views of quality teaching and learning in TVET and the fact that the provision of quality teaching and learning is highly dependent on expertise and position. Autonomy begins from a premise that any set of practices comprises constituents that are related in a particular way. It conceptualizes insulation between their constituents (*positional autonomy*) and between how those constituents are related (*relational autonomy*). These concepts come together as *autonomy codes* in the following Figure 1:



**Figure 1:** *Autonomy codes: four codes based on concepts of positional and relational autonomy* (Maton & Howard, 2018, p. 11).

Therefore, the sovereign code (PA+, RA+) is stronger positional autonomy and stronger relation autonomy. In this study, the sovereign (ideal) is a decision maker who is also an expert.

This refers to a qualified and highly skilled teacher (expert) who is also in a leadership position (decision maker). The double code Expert/ Decision-maker combination is used in that order and thus an expert decision maker is coded (ED).

The projected (PA+, RA-) is stronger positional autonomy and weaker relational autonomy. In this study, here we talk of a non-expert who is a decision maker. The double code (eD) is used. The exotic (PA-, RA-) is weaker positional autonomy and weaker relational autonomy. Here we refer to a non-expert and non-decision maker. These are teachers who are not highly qualified or experienced and not in a position of power. They might be younger teachers joining the profession directly from universities after receiving their initial qualifications. Teachers in this category might solely rely on available material. The double code (ed) is used. Lastly, the introjected (PA-, RA+) is weaker positional autonomy and stronger relational autonomy. In the study, this is coded as an expert who is a non-decision maker (Ed).

**Table 1.** *Coding the participants into quadrants*

Code	Skills	Position	Condition
ED	Expert	Decision	Good relation (strong/ ideal)
Ed	Expert	Non-decision maker	Poor relation (Weak)
ed	Non-expert	Non-decision maker	Good relation (Weak)
eD	Non-expert	Decision maker	Poor relation (Weak)

### Research approach

The study employed a mixed-methods approach and a case study design (Creswell, 2011). A case study design was used as it enables an event, programme or individual to be studied for a defined period (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In addition, Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2012) add that case studies enable the researcher to use different forms of data collection from various sources. The case for this study was a TVET college in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

### Population and Sample

This study used purposive sampling, a method of strategically selecting where, when and from whom data will be collected, guided by the objectives of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). Purposive sampling allows researchers to select individuals who are likely to yield a better overview of the issues under investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The population of this study was forty-five teachers employed at a TVET college in Limpopo Province and teaching on NATED and NC(V) programmes. Twenty-four teachers participated in the study. The sampling frame for

participants comprised both new college teachers (those who have been at the TVET for five years or less) and teachers who have been at the college for a longer period (at least five years at the TVET).

**Table 2.** *Personal data of participants*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	9	37.5
Female	13	54.2
Not indicated	2	8.3
Total	24	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	2	8.6
26-34	4	16.7
35-44	7	29.2
45-54	8	33.3
55 and above	5	20.8
<b>Education</b>		
National Diploma	8	33
Bachelor's degree	7	29.2
Honours degree	5	20.8
Master's degree	4	17

### **Instruments**

The data collection instruments used were questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. These instruments gathered data from a small sample of teachers of TVET NATED and NC(V) programmes at TVET colleges.

### **Data collection**

Data were collected through administering questionnaires to the participants, analysing documents that guide teaching and learning and having follow-up interviews.

### **Questionnaires**

The use of questionnaires was convenient for reaching several teachers and gaining insight into a given phenomenon (Moerdyk, 2009). Data collected through questionnaires were also easy to be quantified, either by the researcher or using a software package (Rowley, 2012).

### **Interviews**

Interviews were useful for finding out about the participants' experiences as well as their interpretations which the researcher would not otherwise obtain from questionnaires (Rowley, 2012). Semi-structured interviews also allowed for flexibility and for interviewees to lead the

conversation. Follow-up questions and probes were used to aid in clarification and following up, depending on the route the interview took. The interview questions were meant to explore teachers' views of quality in terms of teaching and learning influencing TVET teachers' practice. The interviewer was also able to understand the challenges that teachers face in providing quality teaching and learning. A voice recorder was used to capture the interviews and transcriptions were made available to the interviewees for checking.

### ***Document Analysis***

Document analysis enabled the researchers to identify and understand the structures that guided and supported the implementation of quality teaching and learning at the chosen TVET college. Teaching and learning manuals, curriculum documents, assessment policy documents and documents on quality assurance policy at the institution as well as government recommendations were all examined.

### **Instrument reliability and validity**

The dependability/reliability of the questionnaires was determined by correlating the findings with the other source of data collection, namely interviews. To ensure the research validity, the researchers formulated questions carefully by phrasing them in simple and straightforward language that avoided ambiguity (see Appendix A). There was a pilot run of interviews and questionnaires administered to stakeholders in the university before the participants were involved. When collecting data, ethical issues were taken into consideration. For instance, research participants were told from the start that although they had agreed to be part of the study, they could withdraw at any stage and were not obliged to answer all the questions. In addition, they were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their information. Only pseudonyms were used in reporting the finding of this study. Furthermore, a consent form was issued stipulating what they were entitled to for the duration of the study and afterwards. The study received ethics clearance from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The ethics clearance number is EFEC 8-10/2019.

### **Data analysis**

Thematic coding and analysis were used (Lenneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) The study utilised descriptive coding (describing the data as it is), topic coding (data assembled according to themes that would emerge) and finally, theoretical coding (interpreting the data in relation to theoretical concepts from LCT) (Lenneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This three-pronged method of analysis enabled the researcher to structure and engage thoroughly with the data in addressing the overarching question of the challenges to TVET that teachers face in providing quality teaching and learning.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the 24 teachers that participated in this study, each participant was plotted in the fitting quadrants depending on the expertise and the position that the lecturer occupied at the college. Table 3 summarises the results:

**Table 3.** *Coding of lecturers according to expertise - position of power (n=24)*

LCT Code	No of lectures	Percentage	Condition
ED	3	12.6	Good relation (strong)
Ed	6	25	Poor relation (weak)
ed	4	16.6	Good relation (weak)
eD	11	45.8	Poor relation (Weak)

The results presented in Table B show that good relations on the expertise and position of power in the college only correlate on 29.2% of the cases. Note that the ideal situation is a good and strong relation, that is, experts being in decision-making positions so that good and fruitful decisions could be made to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, Table B shows that strong relations (ED) only amount to 12.6%, suggesting a very far from ideal situation. Thus, the quality of the teaching of teaching and learning is compromised (Gamble, 2016). The poor relation between expertise and position of power is very high in this case, amounting to 70.8%. There are more non-experts making decisions (45.8 %) while several experts do not occupy decision-making positions (25 %).

Very often there are decision makers who occupy positions of power, not based on their expertise, but owing to their having been at a college for a long time. There are other reasons as well, including political.

Although an expert teacher might know what quality teaching and learning means, the system might lead to the teacher's not being productive as s/he is not in a position of power and therefore cannot implement what s/he/ regards as best practice. The institutional culture might frustrate this expert. As participant Mokwene a master's graduate, says:

I feel like I am less valued, and my ideas don't matter. So, for now I just comply to have less stress at work. Unfortunately, those of us who are more academically focused don't get recognition; only those come cooperate world are taken seriously. Worse still, we

don't get opportunities or support to learn from industries, you are just told industry experience is important.

The frustration shared by Mokwene is also experienced by Tswiri when he says:

Every time I try to open to my mouth, I am told "You can't teach people how to fry eggs if you can't fry eggs yourself. You are not an artisan, so how do you want to manage artisans?"

This suggests that industry experience is more valued than academic experience. Perhaps the comment made by Matswii, an industry expert who is also in a position of power at the TVET, explains why the industry experts are more preferred in a position:

Having worked in industries for many years, I get worried when what happens in classroom is far behind what is happening in industries. The textbooks refer to outdated machines and technologies which in other counties you will find those equipment's in museums. Our teachers need to learn about latest technologies so that our graduates can be relevant.

While Matswii's point seems to make sense, as someone who is in a position of power, his arguments would hold water if opportunities were created for college teachers to upskill themselves through industry-college partnerships. In this way they could learn about the latest developments in industry and thus improve the quality of teaching and learning to make the graduates more relevant. Being biased in favour of industry expertise at the expense of academic qualifications seems to be one of the frustrating factors at TVET, leading to the sector having less academically qualified teachers in positions of power. This is also shared by Ngwanamose when she says:

As educator who is trained for teaching, I am pushed to see my students as clients and forget about the college teaching vision but focus on industry needs. Our managers who come from industries, make the external factors guide our teaching more than the school policies.

## CONCLUSION

There is lack of consensus about what counts as minimum educational qualification for entry-level teachers at TVET colleges. Teachers of general subjects at TVET colleges seem to require the same or even lower requirements as teachers in the schools. While TVET is acknowledged as a core profession in the knowledge society, entry-level qualification for TVET teachers is lower in relation to that of school teachers. There is a tendency to base educational qualification at a very low level to attract and accommodate industry experts to TVET teaching. These industry experts lack pedagogical skills and thus the quality of teaching and learning is compromised. The industry experts are given positions of power at TVET colleges and make decisions about teaching and learning while they are not experts in pedagogy. The highly qualified teaching

experts become frustrated by instruction from non-experts for they know what best teaching pedagogies will improve teaching and learning.

Unlike what is classically regarded as academic education, quality in TVET rests on good cooperation among the different profiles of teachers, industry experience and qualification improvement. Legitimizing one at the expense of another hinders quality teaching and learning at TVET. The closer the relationship between industry practices and TVET institutions, the greater the relevance of TVET curricula and the better the chances of quality teaching in learning, thereby increasing the chances of graduates becoming employable. For quality teaching and learning in TVET, it is critical that experts serve in position of power as good leadership is a pivotal condition of educational success. It creates a positive organisational culture that encourages continuous learning and rewards excellence.

### **Recommendation**

The study recommends that high levels of education should be required for the employment of TVET teachers. Highly qualified teachers are needed for long-term sustainable quality teaching and learning in vocational education. Recruitment policies need to be strengthened to attract quality vocational teachers and develop policies that cultivate and underpin professionalism at TVET colleges. Teachers' academic knowledge and practical skills need to be enacted autonomously. It is critical that TVET teachers work together with industry continuously and learn the latest technologies and equipment to improve their teaching and learning and to ensure that graduates meet the requirements of industry. Teachers' knowledge and practical skills need to be enacted autonomously. The study also recommends that the decision makers at TVET colleges consider more experts who are at the forefront of their field, both in terms of academic qualification and industry-based experience. Thus, by having experts in positions of power and decision making, TVET could be strengthened in terms of its output.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview/ discussion guide

(Adapted from Cox, et al (2003, p. 90)

#### RESEARCH TITLE:

**Teacher perceptions of quality in teaching and learning at a TVET college in South Africa's Limpopo Province.**

1. Please share why did choose to study at a TVET College?
2. Why did specifically Choose Sekhukhune TVET among others?
3. In an ideal world, what do think learning/teaching/teaching & learning should be like in your college?
4. In your current role, what do you **like** about learning/teaching/teaching & learning environment?
5. Do you think we need **any changes** learning/teaching/teaching & learning? Why?
6. In your opinion, what would you say is the **goal(s)** of learning/teaching/teaching & learning?
7. What do you consider are the **most important factors** necessary for achieving that goal(s)?
8. What are the **necessary conditions** required to satisfy the important/critical success factors you just identified? a. Which (if any) of these necessary conditions are not being met?
9. What are some of the **obstacles** that impact your ability to achieving the learning/teaching/teaching & learning goals?
  - a. In your opinion, how would you **overcome** these obstacles?
  - b. Have you developed any **strategies** to overcome these obstacles?
10. Are there specific problems (**undesirable issues**) you have encountered within your role regarding learning/teaching/teaching & learning? (please avoid use of names)
  - a. Can you highlight 2 or 3 **most important** problems/undesirable issues? (please avoid use of names)