

Technical Vocational Education and Training Students' Migration Between Programmes

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Abstract

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges constitute a relatively new sector of South Africa's education system. This sector offers different programmes, including three-year National Certification Vocational (NC(V)) programmes and Report 191 or National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) programmes. The enrolment at TVET colleges has risen dramatically since the recapitalisation of these colleges. However, students' inclination to shift to Report 191 (NATED) courses during or after NC(V) programmes tarnishes this growth. This has an impact on the effective operations of TVET colleges and may render NC(V) programmes ineffective. This study investigated the causes of student migration between programmes so as to suggest improvement measures. A qualitative case study was conducted on a single TVET institution in Limpopo, South Africa. Purposive sampling was used, and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 students and four lecturers. The students' registration records, the departmental TVET policy (Post-School Education and Training), and the college admission policy were reviewed to supplement the interview data. The interviews were audio-recorded and observations were documented to ensure the accuracy of data. The data was interpreted using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The findings revealed that students switched programmes because companies undervalue NC(V) programmes, which might impair their career prospects. This relocation also impacts on resource allocation owing to inaccurate enrolment statistics. Based on the study's findings, TVET colleges and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) should promote NC(V) programmes more. The DHET should inform prospective employers about different programmes offered by TVET institutions, to enhance their prominence.



International Journal of Educational Development in Africa
Volume 10 | Sup | 2025 | #17529 | 20 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/17529>
ISSN 2312-3540 (Online), ISSN 2312-354(Print)
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Keywords: National Certificate Vocational programmes; National Accredited Technical Education Diploma; student migration; Technical Vocational Education and Training; TVET college

Introduction

Du Plooy and du Preez (2022) state that sustainable skills development and capacity building are essential to economic success, especially in emerging nations like South Africa. The post-schooling industry is crucial since it provides programmes and credentials relating to these abilities. In support of the need for on-going training and capacity building, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-UNEVOC) (2014) explains that countries like South Africa can use the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system to promote the integration of education and training, as well as the enhancement of learner mobility and progression, to ultimately meet the country's human resource needs.

The policy framework for education and training, released by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994, was adopted by the government and led to the promulgation of White Paper 4 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa 1998a), which targeted the transformation of further education and training opportunities in South Africa. This resulted in the constitution of TVET colleges in 2002, guided by the Further Education and Training (FET) Act 98 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa 1998b). TVET colleges were established as a result of a reconfiguration of FET colleges or trade schools (Powell and McGrath 2013). South Africa's 152 technical colleges (both state and state-aided) were transformed into 50 TVET colleges. State-aided FET colleges (historically white colleges) were funded by the state, covering 80% of students' programme costs, while the state FET colleges (historically black colleges) were fully funded and controlled by the government (Bisshoff and Nkoe 2005). The distinction between the state and state-aided institutions has, however, been dropped (see Powell and Hall 2000)

In 2008, FET colleges gradually adopted NC(V) programmes to replace the NATED programme in response to skills demands by the economy (Joint Education Trust (JET) Education Services 2014); however, student preferred the NATED rather than the NC(V) programmes. No research has as yet examined why students prefer the NATED curriculum. To address this gap, the researchers investigated the migration of students from NC(V) programmes to NATED courses with the purpose of identifying reasons for the movement and to suggest improvement strategies.

Background to the Study

At the 1999 UNESCO International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education in Seoul, South Korea, TVET was established to improve vocational training programmes worldwide. As such, TVET represents a global educational initiative which focuses on "the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world" (Boka 2017). At the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education, UNESCO-UNEVOC (1989, 2)

defined technical and vocational education as “a comprehensive term referring to all aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.”

South Africa’s 50 public TVET colleges were created in 2002 in terms of the Further Education and Training (FET) Act, 98 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa 1998), as stated in the introduction, through merging technical colleges, colleges of education, and training centres. In the main, the mergers were meant to form institutions that offer better programmes and curricula whose graduates would boast a wider range of skills (Human Resource Development Council 2013). The mission of TVET colleges in South Africa is to provide students with intermediate to high-level skills that lay the foundations for higher education, facilitate the transition from school to work, and develop autonomous life-long learners (UNESCO–UNEVOC 2015, 6).

TVET colleges offer the NC(V) and NATED 191 programmes. NC(V) is a three-year programme and located at NQF Levels 2–4 (in parallel with general schooling levels grades 10 through 12) and is quality assured by Umalusi. Successful students are awarded a certificate after completion of the three-year programme, which is an equivalent of a grade 12 certificate. The programme covers theory and practice, which is covered or simulated in the workplace environment. For the NATED programmes, N1–N3 are quality assured by Umalusi, while N4–N6 programmes are quality assured by the Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) (Papier 2020, 29). On the other hand, the NATED programmes offer certificates at six sub-levels (N1–N6) for Engineering Studies and three sub-levels (introductory N4–N6) for Business and General Studies. Upon completion of a component focusing on work experience of 18 months (2000 hours) and 24 months (2670 hours) in Engineering and Business/General Studies, respectively, students qualify for a diploma at NQF level 6 (Sebashe 2018).

NC(V) programmes were meant to replace Report 191 courses and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) invested more in them, making them the preferred option. Despite the significant financial investment, studies have shown that students prefer the Report 191 (NATED) courses over the NC(V) programmes (Swiss–South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI), JET Education Services and National Business Initiative (NBI) 2016). In fact, a significant percentage of students switch from the NC(V) programmes to the Report 191 courses, before concluding the programme or even after completion of NC(V) programmes. Although numerous studies have shown why students change their preferred courses at higher education institutions (Quora 2023; William 2012), the findings apply to the broad spectrum of students, rather than focusing on explaining the migration of students from NC(V) programmes to NATED courses

Migration Between Study Programmes

As reported in the literature (SSACI, JET Education Services and NBI 2016; Sebashe 2018), some students studying at TVET colleges change their study programmes from NC(V) to NATED courses. Powell et al. (2024, 10) found that there was a higher demand for NATED programmes than NCV programmes. While enrolment in NCV programmes dropped significantly from 2010 to 2021, enrolment in NATED courses expanded from 50% in 2010 to 71% in 2020. One of the reasons for the decline in NC(V) enrolments and increase in NATED programme enrolments may be student migration within these programmes. Movements include changing to NATED courses after completion of (1) NC(V) level 1 (same college), (2) the NC(V) level 4 (same college), (3) level 1 or 4 (moving to a different college), or (4) after completing an NC(V) programme. The National Skills Authority (2016, 29) supports this when it mentions that most students who enrolled for the NC(V) level 1 did not complete level 4; they moved to other courses of study or left the TVET college to find jobs. The DHET should support students who lack the financial means to pay for their studies, and cannot access bank funding, study loans, or bursaries. Notably, studies showing the reasons for this movement are minimal.

While some studies (Quora 2023; William 2012) have explained why students in higher education institutions change their courses, no study has yet examined why students in South Africa or globally move from TVET NC(V) to NATED programmes. According to William (2012), students may migrate between study programmes or modules because they dislike some of the study material, finding out what they are good at, lacking the necessary understanding, not feeling encouraged to explore, having positive experiences in a specific module or field, feeling bored with the learning content, or making decisions about money versus passion. The Careers Group (n.d., careersgroup@careers.lon.ac.uk) adds that at times such a change is caused by the difficulty of a course, the course not being deemed interesting, a course being regarded as outdated, poor performance, and factors outside the university (e.g., financial issues and relationships). Other reasons why students migrate between study programmes include struggling to achieve in a particular course, not having a good lecturer, disliking the course, the course appearing to be irrelevant, an alternative course becoming available, a course not experienced as “catchy” or “fancy,” a course not deemed up-to-date with current developments, when too many students are enrolled in that course, and when the course does not create sufficient opportunities for further study and employability. According to a National Skills Authority survey (2016), the latter factor is the major cause of high unemployment among TVET college graduates. This is evident in the research conducted by the Skills Authority, which reflects that the unemployment rate among respondents who did NCV at the TVET colleges was high. In addition to this is the finding that of NCV graduates who do find employment, the majority were in part-time jobs in which they earned less than R3 000 per month.

The National Skills Authority reported that students who completed the programmes as well as those who dropped out found it difficult to find employment. In 2011, 21.3%

were unemployed and the unemployment rate increased each year, reaching a high of 38.1% in 2015 (National Skills Authority 2016, 16). As stated above, existing studies were applicable to the broad spectrum of students rather than focusing on the migration of students from NC(V) to NATED courses specifically.

On the other hand, student migration from NC(V) to NATED might be aggravated by employers' attitudes. There is a perception among employers that these qualifications are of poor quality and at a low standard, which confirms the participants' views that an NC(V) qualification had poor employment prospects (Malale and Gomba 2016). According to Atkinson (2016), vocational education institutions face challenges when it comes to engaging with employers. Gellerstedt et al. (2025) agrees that the cooperation between the three stakeholders of work-integrated learning (WIL), namely students, employers, and institutions is challenging owing to differences in expectations, motives, culture, and ways of operating. Research on the causes of this movement is, therefore, limited. Given this context, this study addresses the following questions:

- Why do students move from the NC(V) programmes to Report 191 (NATED) programmes?
- Which intervention strategies can be used to address the problem of migration?

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991). The theory was introduced as the theory of reasoned action (TRA) in 1980 by Icek Ajzen, with the purpose of predicting individuals' intention to engage in a specific behaviour at a specific time and place. The theory was intended to explain any behaviours over which people can exert self-control (Armitage and Corner 2001). This theory was found to be suitable because we thought that the migration of students between programmes is a behaviour that is determined by their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about each programme and what others think of the programmes. Figure 1 provides an overview of the TPB as proposed by Ajzen (1991).

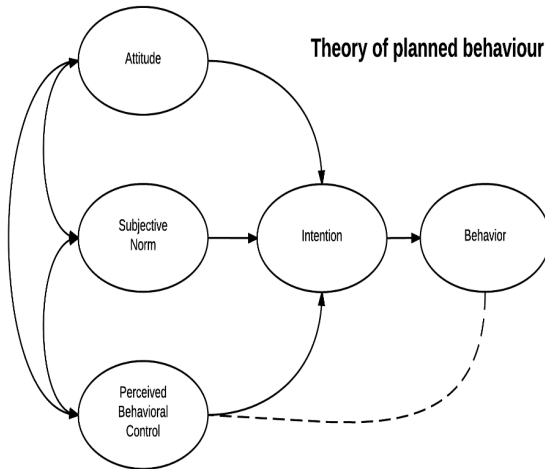


Figure 1: Theory of planned behaviour (Wikipedia, n.d.)

According to Maffei et al. (2012), a key component to the TPB is behavioural intent, with such intentions being influenced by the likelihood of a certain behaviour resulting in expected outcomes, and the subjective evaluation by an individual of the risks and benefits of that outcome. The TPB entails six constructs that collectively represent a person's actual control over behaviour (Boyd 2023):

- **Attitudes towards behaviour** refers to the degree to which a person makes a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour of interest, based on the consideration of the outcomes of performing the behaviour.
- **Behavioural intentions** are the motivational factors that may influence a given behaviour in which a strong intention to perform the behaviour will strengthen the likelihood of the behaviour being performed.
- **Subjective norms** capture the belief about whether or not most people will approve or disapprove of a certain behaviour, with this relating to a person's perceptions about the views of their peers and people of importance regarding the individual's participation in the behaviour.
- **Social norms** refer to the customary codes of behaviour of a group of people or individuals from a larger cultural context, with these representing normative or standard behaviour for the specific group of people.
- **Perceived power** captures the perceived presence of factors that may facilitate or impede the performance of behaviour, thus contributing to a person's perceived behavioural control over each of these factors.

- **Perceived behavioural control**, which relates to the perceived presence of factors that may facilitate or impede the performance of a behaviour.

In summary, the key element of this theory is attitude, which refers to the general feeling about the phenomenon. This is the first trigger of behaviour. Secondly, the intended behaviour is influenced by the subjective norms which include social pressures. Thirdly, the pressure (positive or negative) leads to perceived behavioural control, that is, the feeling about performing a specific behaviour. Lastly, the feeling leads to action.

Methodology

We adopted the interpretivist paradigm as a lens in undertaking this study (Guba and Lincoln 1989) based on our view that knowledge and meaning making of experiences are the result of individual interpretations. As such, we sought to comprehend and reflect on the participants' varied interpretations, as complicated and sophisticated human beings, in relation to the phenomena under investigation, namely students' mobility between TVET college programmes. By following a qualitative approach (de Vos et al. 2011), we obtained an in-depth understanding of this social phenomenon within its natural setting, namely, a TVET college in the Limpopo province, South Africa.

Having implemented a case study research design (Creswell 2013), the researchers relied on the fact that the selected college was one of the largest in the province, was accessible, and had the advantage of the availability of the students and lecturers as study participants. Sampling thus combined purposeful and snowball sampling techniques, owing to fact that some participants were known by colleagues who identified and referred them to the researchers (Cohen et al. 2007; Lumadi 2015). Four teachers and 10 students (some of whom had changed programmes) were interviewed in-depth. Codes were used instead of participants' names to uphold the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy (McMillan and Schumacher 2010). For example, SP1-10 represented student participant one, while LP1-4 represented lecturer participant one. Interviews were guided by an interview schedule that contained questions about students' migration between courses. Documents were used to augment data from the interviews, and to enhance the validity of the study.

We implemented thematic data analysis as described by McMillan and Schumacher (2014). After evaluating the data transcripts, we sorted and categorised similar topics into themes. In terms of research ethics, we adhered to the principles of anonymity, confidentiality, autonomy, informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence, and volunteerism (Dakwa 2015, 306–307).

Results

Based on the thematic analysis, we identified four themes as possible reasons for students migrating between programmes, namely insufficient guidance, employers not

valuing NC(V) programmes, unclear articulation of policy, and the long study period and difficulty associated with the NC(V) curriculum.

Insufficient Guidance and Support

Most of the interviewees indicated that they did not receive the necessary guidance in terms of their choices of a suitable course to enrol for; as a result, they understood very little about the courses offered when making their choice. The following explanation attests to this:

No, I did not choose what I intended to study. I chose NC(V) Management practice and changed to Public Management. I am now doing Public Management N6. There must be enough space for all the programmes, you see. You choose what you want. Now they say all are fine and you end up choosing what you never planned to do. (SP2)

Other students echoed this view, noting:

No. I was not made clear regarding the NC(V) and NATED. (SP1)

I chose Civil. Sometimes we just choose without understanding. (SP1)

One of the lecturers confirmed that prospective students did not receive the necessary guidance when choosing a study programme, with the result that they often made a choice which they subsequently changed. The lecturer stated:

Students end up not choosing their preferred options. They choose NC(V) and later change to NATED. (LP1-4)

The participants' responses above indicate poor or no guidance for students during registration. This leads to students registering for some of the NC(V) programmes that may not have been their preferred choice or they discover later that they may not provide them with the employment opportunities they aspire to. Students discover later in their studies that they should have prioritised NATED rather than NC(V) in their choice at the point of registration, hence they later migrate from one programme to the other.

Employers Not Valuing NC(V) Programmes

It is important to note that WIL implementation must be prioritised for TVET NC(V) students as this will increase their employability and access to the labour market. The participants in this study indicated that some employers did not value NC(V) qualifications, resulting in students migrating to an alternate course. Three students stated the following in this regard:

I think our employer do[es] not value our practice. They think they are of low quality. Therefore, there are no job opportunities for NC(V). In addition, it is just a certificate. Any Grade 9 learner can do NC(V). Some community members despise this programme. (SP1)

Some companies do not recognise the NC(V) programme, as they doubt the standard of the certificate. (SP3)

After completion, you are still treated like you have Grade 12 without vocation, because it is a certificate. (SP4)

In support of these responses, a lecturer added:

The value attached to NC(V) by communities, businesses, and the industry is lower than that attached to the NATED. (LP4)

These contributions highlight the students' experience that in their current form, the NC(V) qualifications are not ranked highly by employers. Such perceptions by the students may discourage them from continuing with NC(V) programmes or may even discourage them from enrolling in them. This will create a negative attitude towards NC(V) programmes and a more positive one towards NATED programmes, thus leading to migration from NC(V) to NATED.

Unclear and Inconsistent Articulation of Policy

The majority of the students agreed that information about applications and possible admission to university following an NC(V) and a NATED qualification was unclear, and not consistently applied by the various institutions. The following responses by some of the interviewed students capture this view:

With NC(V) they just tell us that because we have matric equivalent, we can further our studies at universities. When you go to the universities, the treatments are different. Some will say upgrade your NC(V) or do [a] bridging course before you are admitted. It means you add more years [to your studies]. (SP2)

Even the equivalency of NC(V) to Grade 12 is doubted by universities. That is why they subject us to the strongest requirements. (SP5)

The perception of NC(V) students having limited access to university entrance was confirmed by a lecturer as follows:

It is currently easier for NATED graduates to get university entry than NC(V) graduates. When NATED students complete N6, they are allowed to do practicals for 18 months and thereafter [are] conferred with a National Diploma which is equivalent to a BED degree at some universities. It is not so with NC(V). (LP1)

The fact that NC(V) students find themselves with more limited opportunities for articulation into universities than NATED programmes may discourage them from continuing with their studies in these programmes. This will encourage movement between programmes.

Long Study Period and Difficult Curriculum

The participating students and lecturers gave the long study period and difficult curriculum of NC(V) programmes as reasons why students migrate from NC(V) to NATED courses. When asked why students tended to change their enrolled courses from NC(V) to NATED, one lecture said:

The problem with NC(V) programme[s] is that the period is too long—three years! If you fail, you are going to add more years. The curriculum is very broad. ... It really needs hard workers. (LP2)

Another lecturer added:

The NATED programme for business studies is only six months and three months for engineering studies. The students can see that those who have passed the NATED courses are getting jobs compared with those who have passed NC(V). (LP3)

A student confirmed this, stating:

The period is too long. You do three years. You go for work-integrated learning continuously (during study), but at the end it is not valued. You will have to again go for 12 months work integrated learning. (SP4)

Based on the perception above, it is evident that in comparing the study period of the two programmes, students will prefer NATED which is broken into one-year levels of N4–6, rather than NC(V) which is a three-year certificated programme, unlike NATED, where one is certificated at the end of each level passed.

Other students added:

Maths is a problem, especially for those who passed grade 9. You see, our lecturer was on leave and we were left for [a] long time without teachers or [stand-ins who were] not good in Maths. (SP2)

I moved to NATED, because in level 4 we do maths so NATED 4–6 we do subject[s] which do not need much [...] maths. (SP3)

The participants' views above indicate that students view mathematics as a subject that puts them at an advantage and see it better offered in NATED programmes. This is another reason why they may be migrating from NC(V) to NATED programmes.

Having presented the results, Ajzen's (1991) TPB may explain students' movement between South African TVET programmes. Attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived behavioural control influence conduct, according to the TPB. TVET students' programme switching decisions are likely affected by their perceptions about current and prospective programmes, which are influenced by factors including perceived

relevance, employment prospects, and personal preferences. Subjective standards such as social pressures and customs can impact students' decisions. Parental expectations, social pressures, and society's views on various courses may influence these standards. Perceived behavioural control, including self-efficacy and external limits, affects students' confidence in their ability to switch programmes. Financial constraints, academic preparation, and institutional assistance may affect their migration control perspective. The TPB can help policymakers and educators understand student migration at South African TVET institutions and tailor interventions to promote informed decision-making and smooth education system transitions.

Discussion

This study investigated the migration of TVET students from one programme to the other with the purpose of identifying the reasons for such movement and to suggest strategies to minimise it. It is evident that prospective TVET college students typically make poor decisions and change courses after not obtaining enough assistance and support while choosing study programmes or throughout the study time. The findings of the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (2014, 18) suggest that there is inadequate articulation between qualifications as well as programmes which span more than one sub-qualification framework, which leads to dead ends for learners. These findings are consistent with those of a study conducted by Ugwu et al. (2019) in Nigeria, who found that the guidance and counselling services units for TVET students' academic and career choices are ineffective. This challenge was further emphasised by the DHET's findings that the success rates of TVET college students were, in general, too low and that there was lack of effective support across colleges (DHET 2013).

As a result of insufficient guidance and support, students may move between programmes or even drop out and not complete a programme for which they initially enrolled. This finding emphasises the importance of offering better support services at TVET colleges, particularly given that some learners believe that TVET and NC(V) are targeted at low-achieving learners who struggled at the matric level and for secondary school dropouts (Gafoor and van der Bijl 2019; Ugwu et al. 2019). The findings of this study show evidence that students are influenced by beliefs regarding the inferiority of their achievement level at high school. This supports the TPB, which states that an individual's intentions to engage in a particular behaviour are influenced by their feelings towards the action, their perception of social norms, and their perceived control over the behaviour.

In applying the TPB to the context of this study, we assumed that students would develop attitudes (evaluations of ideas, events, objects, or people) which are generally favourable. However, owing to the fact that attitudes alone cannot determine intention, perceived control is required (i.e., the ease or difficulty with which a task may be performed/movement may be achieved). Since students can change courses, intention may seem easy to discuss, but these two antecedents alone cannot determine intention

without an individual's subjective norms, that is, attitudes and behaviours that are considered normal, typical, or average. We further assumed that individuals who are affected positively by an intention would approve of the task, leading to an intention being carried out and resulting in intended behaviour, that is, migration from an NC(V) to a NATED course. TVET students may migrate between programmes based on their perceptions about the different programmes and the views and attitudes of others about such programmes. These aspects are not necessarily actively or consciously examined during decision-making, but they provide context for the process. In other words, students' mindsets may not be spoken, yet they may influence their choices.

Even though some colleges offer academic and social support, effective support is lacking across colleges. Such a lack of effective support is visible where students need guidance on assistance with bursaries, programme completion, workplaces to complete practical components of the programmes, and identifying possible employment sectors after graduation. This is supported by the DHET which states that considering the needs of students in terms of coping with the requirements of college studies, finding employment, and adapting to the work environment without the necessary support while studying, the move from NC(V) to NATED courses may be understandable (DHET 2013). A study by Badenhorst and Radile (2018) revealed that the DHET has made student support policies available; however, the student support units do not seem to be effective.

Since some employers and community members do not value NC(V) programmes, this study suggests that the general community and potential employers may add to the challenge of students migrating between programmes. This may result in NC(V) graduates finding it difficult to obtain employment. This finding supports the findings of Mabunda and Frick (2020) who found that employers in the Eastern Cape were sceptical about NC(V) programmes for various reasons. Du Plooy and Du Preez (2019, 98) cement this by highlighting that there are extensive and critical gaps in communication and collaboration between role players in the South African industry/manufacturing training and employment context. They further emphasised this by citing Phakhathi (2018) who stated that at the heart of the challenges facing the TVET system is the rupture that occurred between colleges and employers. In addition to having a limited understanding of those programmes, compared with their knowledge of the NATED (Report 191) qualification, employers seemed suspicious about the professional maturity of NC(V) graduates, as this certification is equivalent to a grade 12 qualification.

The challenge of being unemployable is further exacerbated by the fact that the NC(V) programmes do not necessarily lead to employment, as students need to undergo 12 months of WIL, which refers to a form of curricular experiential education that formally integrates a student's academic studies with quality experiences within a workplace or practice setting (CEWIL 2012). The NC(V) students at the TVET colleges acquire both academic and practical learning. A lack of employment may result in some NC(V)

graduates taking on employment that is unrelated to what they would have studied, with a NC(V) engineering graduate, for example, ending up cooking food in a hotel (FET Round Table 2010). Mabunda and Frick (2020) also argue that NC(V) graduates feel that they are doomed to failure as they remain unemployed after completing their programmes. They pin their hopes on returning to the vocational institutions to register for the NATED programmes as the only means of survival. Incidents such as these may highlight the barriers which come with stigmatising NC(V) graduates, and prompt students to migrate to NATED programmes.

Related to the problem of unemployment is the challenge of a lack of work experience, which may lead to low absorption rates of TVET completers in the work sector. One of the most important features of a tracer study conducted by the DHET is the ability to explore the transition from education or training to the labour market. One of the key measures of interest in this regard is the labour market absorption (or employment) rate. In line with the broader TVET literature the absorption rate among this sample of TVET completers is somewhat disappointing, with an absorption rate of 40% (DHET 2020). The Skills Development Amendment Act No. 37 of 2008 (Republic of South Africa 2008) requires an NC(V) student who completes the programme to also complete a period of prescribed work experience, before sitting for a trade test. A college graduate is, in this regard, quoted as having said, “If we do not have practical experience, it is the same as having nothing” (Du Plessis 2012).

Although NC(V) students’ unemployability can be attributed to a lack of practical experience, some studies reported the contrary. In terms of possible reasons for this, Munishi (2016) states that poor foundational education, ineffective curricula, incompetent lecturers, a lack of general knowledge and career guidance, coupled with unfavourable educational policies and reforms are factors that may contribute to vocational graduates in Tanzania not developing sufficient employability skills. Factors such as these may demotivate students to enrol for, or continue studying, an NC(V) course, and may thus potentially contribute to the migration of students between programmes.

The DHET regards the articulation of TVET colleges with the rest of the post-school system as a priority, as is evident in the Policy on Post-School Education and Training, published by the DHET in collaboration with Higher Education South Africa (DHET 2014) and JET Education Services (2014). For example, the way in which TVET colleges articulate with universities needs to be clear to prospective students. Therefore, TVET college graduates should be able to find work or attend other higher education institutions. The option of articulation is, however, not an easy route, and fewer students move from colleges to universities in South Africa. In citing Themane et al. (2022), James (2023) asserts that the realisation of a fully articulated higher education system in South Africa remains elusive, due to many complexities and lack of policy implementation. movement between TVET colleges and universities has not been of substance owing to the lack of proper mechanisms for articulation when compared with

countries such as Germany and the Netherlands (DHET 2013). Needham and Papier (2011, 14) mention that a problematic part of college articulation relates to students entering an FET college unaware of the disjuncture and (possibly) encountering an unexpected glass ceiling on completion of their studies.

The articulation process in South African higher education is complicated by discrepancies between NC(V) output skills and university-level admission criteria. Furthermore, the fact that those universities are at liberty to set additional requirements to stated policy leads to some tertiary institutions setting stringent criteria for the selection of college students whom they are reluctant to register (FET Round Table 2010). This tendency of setting stricter minimum requirements for the admission of college students than for learners from academic schools might be an indication of mistrust of the FET college sector (Needham and Papier 2011; Makura and Nkonki 2017).

Concerns have been expressed about the lengthy period of study and difficult curricula. Although many studies do not specifically identify the difficulty of the curriculum as the reason why students change programmes, Badenhorst and Radile (2018) reported that the level of difficulty of the curriculum of the NC(V) programmes is very high, in fact, higher than that of high school of the same level. It was also observed that students with a grade 9 background are overwhelmed by the knowledge delivered in a short time. Moreover, the focus is more on content knowledge than on practice. Often a curriculum which is too difficult leads to dropouts or compels students to look for alternative routes to complete their qualifications. The possibility of students changing courses because of the difficulty and lengthy period of study cannot be ruled out. The period of study has been a bone of contention since the inception of the NC(V) programmes. The community is especially concerned that students with grades 10, 11, and 12 are expected to study for three years. An argument can be made in support of the idea of crediting students who join the NC(V) after passing grades 10, 11, and 12, instead of “repeating” the whole NC(V) curriculum.

Curbing the Migration of Students from NC(V) to NATED Programmes

Based on this study, intervention techniques may address student movement across programmes. To keep TVET colleges as first-choice institutions, possible improvements to NC(V) programmes should include lateral migration to the job market and strengthening industry collaborations. It is important to acknowledge that the concept of using TVET institutions as a springboard to universities is a relatively recent one, following the example of countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, in terms of lateral migration to the labour market. Even though the articulation pathway is effective in certain European nations, their contexts vary from that of South Africa, hence the result of such initiatives may differ.

Currently, universities in South Africa are overcrowded, with many prospective students being denied admission. In addition, many university graduates are not

absorbed by the job market upon completion of their qualifications. Vocational institutions tasked to produce graduates for the job market may lure students with vertical articulation opportunities to universities as NC(V) students, instead of preparing them for the job market (i.e., horizontal articulation). As a result, students may join other unemployed university graduates rather than entering the workforce. Therefore, articulation to universities may raise doubts about the main purpose of NC(V) programmes, which is to train students for the job market than to prepare them for progression routes to higher education. This argument is not a criticism of NC(V) programmes, but rather a plea that they do not compete with higher education, as their main goal is to prepare students for the job market and for them to gain the necessary skills.

Increased TVET-business or industry involvement is another way to reduce the significant proportion of NC(V) students who transfer to NATED courses. TVET institutions, qualifications, and NC(V) student training levels must be clarified for such collaboration to be possible. By being better informed about the NC(V) programme, business and the industry may perceive these qualifications and graduates in a more positive light (Malale and Gomba 2016). Mabunda and Frick (2020:96) agree with this notion by soliciting that the TVET sector, for its part, must ensure that NC(V) graduates exit their study programmes as employable. Such an employability factor should be aligned to government policies that should be enacted to drive industries towards increasing employment opportunities (Berntson and Marklund 2007) and subsequent inclusion for these graduates. To this end, DHET (2013, 5) suggests that TVET colleges focus on strengthening their relationships with the potential employers of graduates. Colleges may hold monthly college-business forums in their communities to advocate NC(V) programmes and activities. This relationship may increase job opportunities for college graduates and facilitate work-integrated learning for TVET students.

Conclusion

Based on the study's results, we believe that the inter-programme migration challenges that TVET institutions face are a harsh reality. The reasons for this trend include limited student guidance and support by TVET colleges, lack of respect for NC(V) programmes by employers, inconsistent and confusing articulation system, and the extended study time and tough curriculum connected with NC(V). As a consequence, students may finish the three-year NC(V) programme and then change courses, adding years of study to their NATED coursework.

Based on the arguments in this study, effective guidance and support should be provided at school, college, and university levels. Poorly performing grade 9 learners should be directed to Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and not TVET colleges, and the grade 9 curriculum should include skills programmes. TVET colleges offer educational training for careers whilst CLCs offer an opportunity for adults to acquire basic education and to complete grade 12. In other words, referring poorly performing grade

9 learners to CLCs would help to prepare them for NC(V) programmes as an exit to the job market, access to skills training at CLCs, and also create an opportunity for university articulation. The CLCs are part of Community Education and Training (CET) and offer learning opportunities to learners without basic skills to acquire skills to improve the community, whilst TVET colleges provide technical and vocational education to learners with basic education (Samuels 2024).

Furthermore, the curricula of TVET colleges should be aligned with grade 9 requirements and the admission requirements of universities be aligned to NC(V) graduates. Finally, further research is recommended that focuses on the extent of success of the NC(V) articulation route, and the extent to which NC(V) programmes meet the needs of employers. Finally, further research that focuses on the effectiveness of the NC(V) articulation route and the degree to which NC(V) programmes satisfy the demands of businesses is recommended.

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