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THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES (TVET) IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING: A HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDED AT BASIC EDUCATION STANDARD

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Abstract

The paper investigates the role of Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) Colleges in the provision of higher education in South Africa. The Technical Vocational Education Training Colleges are classified with universities as providers of higher education in South Africa's education system under the Post School Education and Training (PSET) system. The status of a Technical Vocational Education Training College as an institution of higher learning is very questionable, however, many scholars do not prefer to enter that terrain of the argument. In this paper I argue that the TVET colleges do not seem to clearly fit the profile of institutions, offering higher education in South Africa. Higher education institutions, such as Traditional universities, Universities of Technology and Private universities, have certain standards of competencies, adhered to promote students to the next level of knowledge, which are similar, but highly different from TVET colleges' promotion standards. The TVET Colleges are governed primarily through the Continuing Education Act, while the Universities are governed through the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, which is a clear separation of their educational mandates. The paper argues that TVET Colleges are not institutions of higher learning and are not capable of providing education at the level of higher learning, considering the academic competencies in the sector and the level of knowledge, expected to be produced. They are indeed self-styled Basic education institutions, operating wrongfully as institutions of higher learning in the South African Higher education band. The paper concludes that if TVET colleges are to be transformed into institutions of higher learning, all standards of competencies of both students and staff will have to be overhauled to fit the level of expertise to produce a higher education graduate, fitting the standard of an independent graduate.

Keywords: education, higher education, technical, training, vocational education.

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1. Introduction

Historically, South Africa had four types of public institutions, offering public education to students for post matric opportunities. Such included public universities, Technikons (now called Universities of Technology), Colleges of Education as well as Technical Colleges (which have now changed from Further Education and Training colleges to Technical Colleges for Vocational Education and Training). The mandates of Universities, Technikons and Colleges of Education were very clear as institutions, providing higher education knowledge and training to South Africans. The first clarity of higher education band institutions lies in the fact that despite their acknowledged different level of standards, which were clarified through minimum qualifications for recruitment of academics and admission requirements of students into the programme, they clearly showed that they offered post matric qualifications to students in preparation to the work environment.

The Technical Colleges (TVET) were ever controversial with regard to their identity as institutions, required to offer post matric qualification and the articulation of such qualifications to other qualification, offered in other higher education band systems. While they are hugely recognised for offering technically skilled driven programmes to resolve the socio-economic problems in a country, such is a function, also seen mandated to Universities of technology and other Universities, offering such in a better quality and competitive advantage than TVET Colleges can offer at a different level of standard.

Historically, Universities existed to offer teaching, research and promote community engagement within the society concerned [1]. Technikons on the other hand focussed only on Teaching and Training, while Technical Colleges focussed on teaching only like any other high school does, whether technical or commercial. In the new era, the Universities functions remain unchanged. When Technikons were transformed to Universities of Technologies, they were added with the function of research as a new academic mandate. While Colleges of Education's mandate was terminated to the University Faculties of Education in the country, the Technical Colleges (TVET) mandates remain primarily the same on teaching like any other high school can do. However, surprisingly they were recently promoted to the higher education band. The role of the TVET Colleges in providing higher education learning remained very controversial even in the past, although such was never academically engaged at discourse level. Significantly, it was ever noted, that their post matric is about only a semester or two to obtain a post matric qualification. In their favour, supporters of their existence argue for practical training as a replacement for argument that two or one semester cannot be enough for one to obtain a fully recognised post matric qualification. Based on that, in this paper I raise a rhetorical question: Are TVET Colleges capable of offering a higher education teaching and learning programmes and at the level of an institution of higher learning like universities does? In answering this research question the paper will focus on the following: the mandate of institutions of higher learning in South Africa, the TVET Colleges and their role in education and training, the admission requirements and promotion marks in TVET Colleges, the Minimum recruitment requirements of academic staff at TVET Colleges and the academic environment in TVET colleges.

Aim of the study. The aim of this research is to use literature information and analysis to argue that TVET Colleges do not clearly fit the profile of institutions, offering higher education in South Africa. A need exist to either find a suitable education band for them between basic and higher education band or to transform them to a real higher education band.

2. Materials and Methods

The paper used different secondary data materials, such as government policy documents, academic books and scientific articles from journals. The paper is qualitative in approach and it uses the desktop method to argue that TVET Colleges are not institutions of higher learning and are not capable of providing education at the level of higher learning, considering the academic competencies in the sector and the level of knowledge expected to be produced.

3. Results

3. 1. The mandate of institutions of higher learning in South Africa

Even though the mandates of South African institutions of higher learning are clear, suffices to conclude that the ultimate objective is to produce an individual who will be appropriately and sufficiently prepared to contribute to the socio-economic improvement of the society. Such a person must be comprehensively developed to respond to the development, technical, technological and intellectual challenges, facing the society and him/herself. The TVET colleges in South Africa derive their mandate from the Continuing Education Act of 2006 [2], which stipulate the purpose as to: enable students to acquire knowledge, practical skills and applied vocational and occupational competence and to develop attributes for employment, entry into a particular vocation and entry into a higher education institution. While all aforementioned purposes are acceptable, but the fact that TVET colleges can prepare an individual to enter into a higher education institution has been difficult as Universities rarely accept a probable articulation.

The mandate of the TVET colleges in South Africa is seen within the broader context of training and skills development in the country [3]. Moving from the perspective of the neo-liberal assumptions, it is believed, that training leads to productivity, while skills lead to employability. Over and above training and skills development, the TVET colleges are earmarked to create self-employment [4], than job seekers in the country's employment market. Moreover, TVET Colleges are expected to meet the industrial requirements and societal needs [5]. Maringe & Osman [6] also noted that Universities are not hard skills, driven as TVET colleges are, however, they enhance

the employability of graduates in the world of work in diverse employment sectors. Although Maringe & Osman [6] separate the functions of a University versus a TVET along lines of the hard skills driven approach against the Universities lifelong analysis, scientific enquiries, technological awareness and critical engagement, my concern will be as to whether an engineer and an Electrician, produced by University of Johannesburg and or University of Witwatersrand or University of Pretoria, will not be hard skill driven. Not to mention and question the quality of the products from the two different educational setups of a university versus a TVET product by an engineering curriculum. The question I ask is whether a University technically produced student can compete at the same level with a TVET technically produced student.

Indeed, the overemphasis of TVET education is premised on the believe that it will resolve youth unemployment, which is very high in South Africa at the moment. However, contradicting Maringe & Osman [6], Swart [7] mentioned that “Universities must enable students to acquire the necessary disciplinary knowledge (theory), work place skills (practice) and the right graduate attributes (theory, practice and generic qualities), needed to meet the needs of the industry, business and communities. The role of Universities is more comprehensive than what a TVET College could offer to the society in educational context. Like all other GET band institutions of education, offering secondary education, I argue that TVET colleges may only offer programmes that prepare their learners for University entrance if articulation with University programmes can be agreed upon.

Buthlezi [8] noted that the previous education policies categorised educational institutions into three categories (General Education Band (GET)), Further Education Band (FET), which included secondary Schools and Higher Education and Training and the Higher Education Band (HET), which included Universities and Technikons). In 2010 a change of status of TVET Colleges was effected to the Higher Education band, subsequently after the realisation that they do offer post graduate programmes. In this paper I will continue to argue that the transformation from an FET band to the HET band was not clearly a necessary and a calculated move. Rightfully, noted, Paterson, Keevy & Boka [9] posit that TVET Colleges are “predominantly attended by marginalised African youth, many of whom have left school early, do not qualify to enter higher education, have limited financial resources to continue to study and are at high risk of employment”. From the aforesaid it is clear, that the TVET colleges are for learners who are unable to finish secondary education and are not able to access higher education because of restriction, imposed by admission criteria for higher education enrolment. Makgato [10] also noted that TVET colleges serve the dual purpose: which are further education and preparation for the world of work. They can indeed serve as a way to articulate to higher education than being viewed as higher educational institutions themselves. Such function is also emphasised by the Continuing Education Act of 2006 [2], however, the articulation of TVET qualification into the main stream higher education institution is likely to be difficult.

3. 2. The TVET colleges and their role in education and training

The TVET Colleges are earmarked “to provide a greater opportunity for, access and advancement in post school education, which includes training in skills and gaining knowledge and attitudes, required by the labour market” [11]. Such objective can only be achievable through a positive transformative process. The transformation of the role of a TVET college in South Africa emerged from a perspective of inequity and injustice of the previous apartheid regime, wherein a legitimate claim was made that South African blacks were excluded from their deserved education, especially technical and vocational education. They were advised and prepared to follow educational programmes, which did not benefit them at the world of work. Funding of TVET Colleges was discriminatory in the sense that only Whites TVET Colleges were extremely funded at the expense of the black child [8]. A change of perspective was to be achieved through the enactment of the South African Further Education Act, 1998, which was later amended to Continuing Education Act of 2006 [2] to transform the TVET sector and achieve equal access of TVET education to all deserving South Africans.

Despite the funding challenges in such institutions, there were also skills challenges of the very same Lecturers in TVET Colleges with the given responsibilities of imparting knowledge to

the already educationally struggling TVET black students. Gewer [12] through a commissioned research by the Development Bank of Southern Africa discovered that from the TVET employees in the South African Colleges, 41 % (a largest percentage) have qualifications NQF levels 6–8 (but do not have pedagogical qualifications), 26 % have technical qualifications NQF levels 2–5 (but do not have pedagogical qualifications) and 33 %, which is the second largest group, have pedagogical qualifications but no technical qualifications. The disappointing fact is that the majority of those with technical qualifications extremely lacks pedagogical qualifications. The changing role of a TVET College is to offer solution to a high rising unemployment and where possible prepare learners for entrance into the higher education sector. To achieve such, transformation has to be fostered through good governance mechanisms, coupled with strategic and visionary leadership of the Department of Education. Achievement in this regard has thus far been very slow.

Very frustrating on the achievement of such is the reality that most TVET Colleges themselves are not institutions, which are ready to offer effective vocational education worth to play a leading role in the economy. It is clear, that learners who failed in the normal academic programmes are likely to have no opportunity for further education if TVET Colleges cannot offer such opportunity [13]. The TVET College targets are mainly school leavers [14] and probably the unemployed, who are individuals who have already demonstrated that they want little to do with skills from normal educational programmes or cannot benefit from formal academic educational programmes. The intention to put the future of the entire economy in the hands of the lowest achievers in educational programmes leaves too little to believe in the potential of the TVET sector's capability. Unless scientifically proven, studies are required to determine the capacity of the TVET sector to achieve a higher education mandate. The government of South Africa indeed want to achieve an enrolment target of 2.5 million TVET students against 1.6 Million public university students by 2030 [15]. Already such doubtful ambition is showing signs of failure through lower throughput rates and high dropout rates in South African TVET Colleges [11]. The reasons for such are varied, and some mentioned that their independence as adult student may have high effect, since indeed not the majority of them are adults' worth of independent learning. The same reason they failed to achieve through formal programme could be the same reason, they are failing to complete their course in the TVET College. The increase of enrolment of TVET Colleges against the public universities may be suggesting that the Universities are not producing skills driven programmes. It is not even clear, why the mandate of TVET Colleges should not be terminated to create Specialised Technical Universities to handle skills driven programmes. If indeed we believe that the termination of College of Education mandate to University Education Faculties in the country resolved the teaching quality problems, then a similar approach can be adopted for TVET Colleges and give space for a model of Technical universities to pursue technical and vocational education, taught by highly skilled and technically knowledgeable graduates in the field. Such will be easy to achieve because there are Universities, which produce technical students.

It may, however, be argued, that the role of TVET Colleges in the socio-economic conditions of South Africa is over exaggerated because of the prevailing economic conditions. Sibiya & Nyembezi [15] have noted with concern the socio-economic challenges of poverty, inequality and high unemployment rates in South Africa. The problem of youth unemployment in South Africa and everywhere else is over exaggerated and heavily reliant on an unresearched hypothesis of lack of skills. It has not been established as to whether the high youth unemployment really comes from skills problem or other factors. Masoabi & Alexander [5] show that even the high income countries have shown to have high youth unemployment rate, and moreover in South Africa, 31.2 % of TVET graduates are not employed. Therefore, assuming that TVET education will resolve the South African socio-economic problems in totality is not all possible. There should be other factors to focus on such as whether the TVET graduates are really of quality, required by the labour market, or whether there are no job creation opportunities by the corporate companies.

3. 3. The admission requirements and promotion marks in TVET colleges

The TVET Curriculum is known to have two curriculum streams. Namely the National Vocational Certificate (NCV) and the NATED Curriculum.

National Vocational Certificate (NCV)

The NCV programme in South Africa was introduced to the TVET colleges in 2006 [16] and the industries were reluctant to accept it. The NCV programme is offered up to level 4. It is a general three-year institution based programme [9] and was “introduced as an alternative route to level 4 “Matric” [12]. The admission requirements into the programme are therefore Grade 9 (Level 2), since it is offered from level 2 to 4 [17]. According to Garraway, Bronkhorst & Wickham [18], the NVC level 2–4 gives the grade 9 learner a vocational alternative to an academic Grade 10–12. However, it is also preferable for the qualification to be studied by post Matric students. NCV qualification may because of its matric equivalence lead to other matric subjects, being credited to a student studying, while they have already acquired matric. The Curriculum is composed of five subjects (almost similar as normal matric curriculum composition). The other 5 subjects should be passed at minimum 50 %, while a different diversion is required for English at 40 % and Mathematical Literacy at 30 %. Even if the qualification is said to be recommended as suitable for post matric individuals, it doesn't worth look the grade, accorded to it. However, there is a practical component to complete the qualification, which also does not equally make it a genuine post matric qualification. Especially because the end results of the qualification are at level 4, which is matric equivalent, and not post matric. Higher education institutions, such as public universities, have no admission requirements, which are pre-grade 12. Moreover, the pass mark in all modules (subjects) at universities is at 50 %. A mark of less than 50 % cannot be a pass for a post matric student in a real higher education environment in South Africa. Makura & Nkonki [19] have noted the frustrating articulation of the TVET curriculums and the Universities Curriculum. Although the authors are of the opinion that lack of such articulation is unfair, suffices from my opinion to conclude that one cannot equate a 30 % pass to a 50 % pass and find an amicable articulation either vertically or horizontally at knowledge accumulation level.

Nated (national education policy) programmes

Like the NCV Programme, the NATED programmes also have a minimum of Grade 9 (level 2) as admission requirement, depending on the level the candidate is at the time of application. The NATED programmes are offered on the tri-semester or semesterised basis at 4 subjects. The pass mark for each subject should at least be at 40 %. The NATED programmes are normally offered from N1-N6 and are structured over a period of six years, in which half of the time is at the institution and half at the work station [9]. Only the last two semesters of a NATED programme are regarded as post matric. The NATED programme, although with only two semesters, recognised as post graduate, does not reflect the character of a post matric qualification in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Their average pass mark of 40 % in each subject does not reflect the real institution of higher learning character.

Even Colleges of Education in South Africa as post Matric institutions never had a 40 % mark as a pass for promotion to the next knowledge level. Only 50 % as a minimum was acceptable for progression to the next level. However, Colleges of Education Diplomas also never articulated to degree or Diploma programmes at Universities. Like the NCV programmes, the NATED programmes are unlikely to articulate to University programmes because of their promotional marks to the next level or graduation. It will indeed be unfair to equate an individual who passed through a minimum of 40 % educational system to someone who passed through a 50 % minimum system. Makura & Nkonki [19] argue that the changing of TVET Colleges from the Higher Education and Training Band is not helpful if TVET qualifications cannot be harmonised with University qualifications. Suffices to conclude that the two systems do not talk to each other and will never be equated, unless changes could be made to the TVET to articulate to the university curriculum and higher education level.

3. 4. The minimum recruitment requirements of academic staff at TVET colleges

The recruitment of academics in institutions of higher learning in South Africa requires a minimum of a Masters degree. A Honours degree is only a requirement for a Tutor with the potential to complete a Masters within a year of appointment. TVET colleges in South Africa are the

most understaffed institutions because of lack of trained individuals in the sector [20]. Gewer [12] showed that only a small fraction of TVET Lecturers has a University qualification equivalent to a Honours degree. The rest either have a post-secondary qualification or a trade Test qualification. The worst case is that those with Technical qualification have no pedagogical qualifications, while those with no technical qualifications have pedagogical qualifications, making them all inappropriate personnel for the sector.

Badenhorst & Radile [17] noted that TVET College Lecturers are the most ill equipped in the education sector. Some Lecturers even could be qualified, but their lack of industry experience contributes to poor technical teaching [20]. Surely, one cannot prepare people for the work he/she has no experience of in the first place. One of the worst limitations is that some TVET college Lecturers especially in the Science and Engineering field, still have a qualification, ranging from level 2–5 qualifications, which are not even post matric. Such cannot be a situation acceptable in any public university, offering Engineering sciences. As Unesco-Univoc [21] showed, the instructional qualification requirements in TVET colleges are significantly a Diploma in Vocational Education or an advanced Diploma in Vocational teaching, which is hardly a requirement, met by the majority of South African TVET colleges.

3. 5. The academic life of lecturers in tvet college environment

The academic life of academics at TVET Colleges rarely reflects the culture of institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Their work ethos is heavily influenced by labour unionism, which is a character, rarely exposed in South African institutions of higher learning, such as universities. Their behavioural pattern reflects clearly a secondary school teacher prototype, ignoring the important role of producing a prepared labour force to the industry. To a particular extent, more are affiliated to the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which is highly comprised of primary and Secondary school teachers. Most institutions of higher learning academics in South Africa are affiliated with NEHAWU (National Education Allied Workers Union) and other higher education institutions unions, which exist to foresee a stable higher education environment.

3. 6. Are TVET colleges fit to be called institutions of higher learning?

The question as to whether TVET Colleges are indeed higher education or are lower in grades to higher education is very difficult to pronounce. It is however, very clear from the categorical classification of educational offering, that TVETs are classified with others as Post School Education and Training (PSET) [22]. A category, which by design and intent differentiates them from universities, which offer higher education curriculum of both theoretical and practical nature in other disciplines. The complexities of TVET colleges as institutions of higher learning emanate from two major problems: The legislative governing frameworks as well as the promotion marks in completing the qualifications. Unlike higher education, governed by specific higher education legislation, the TVETs are governed by a number of legislative frameworks, which cut across both the General Education and the Higher education band, which complicate their identity in education offering. The following legislation acts are applicable to the TVET colleges and they apply to both GET and the higher education:

- South African Qualification Authority, Act no.58 of 1995: Provides for development and implementation of NQF levels;
- National Education Policy, 1996: articulates the policy, legislative and monitoring responsibilities of the Minister and formalises the relations between national and provincial education authorities;
- Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997 [23]: Provides a unified system of higher education; established by the council on Higher Education;
- General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, 58 of 2001: establishes UMALUSI as the quality council for FET colleges;
- Further Education and Training Colleges Act, 16 of 2006: Provides regulation of FET, establishment, governance, funding and employment of staff for public FET and registration of private FET colleges;

– National Qualifications Authority, Act 67: Manages the NQF, its qualifications and quality assurance.

4. Discussion

The South African education system is very clear and has three bands, which are General Education, Further education and Training and Higher Education. While General Education is a feeder to either Further education or Training and Higher Education bands, the TVET colleges fall between the Further Education and Training as well as the Higher education bands in the current education system. Hence complicating the status of a TVET College in educational offering. The identity of a TVET college as an institution, offering education, becomes practically complex. The government of South Africa itself acknowledges the challenges and complexities of the role of Vocational education and training in South Africa. City & Guilds Group [24] mentioned funding and the systems of more than 20 authorities responsible for such training in the different vocational training sectors. Further to that complexity, City & Guilds Group [24] showed that 65 % of vocational students are not able to secure work place experience. Indeed, if an institution has to choose offering a work place opportunity for Engineering practical experience between a TVET and a University student, such institution will opt for a university student for practicals. Unless in some specialised knowledge like Diesel Mechanic, while for technical disciplines like Mechanical, Chemical, Civil and Electrical Engineering they might be challenges of competing with students from universities.

The role of TVET in higher education is from conception, slightly skewed in objective. More often the rationale, which dominates its existence, is targeting the poor, youth unemployment and making post school education accessible [25]. From this objective, it becomes clear that such existence cannot be about standards of education, but rather more about making something inaccessible to be accessible to a particular class of people who are not capable of accessing an opportunity through normal means available. Such group of people will therefore not have to be accessed in the same normal way other people may be assessed. Such approach may explain why those in TVET are to progress through a 33 and 40 % pass in subjects, while those in universities have to progress through a 50 % pass in modules. Hence my argument that TVET colleges cannot be classified as Higher education, while not progressing like higher education institutions in pass percentage scales.

Limitations of the study. The study is limited to the geographical area of South Africa and applicable to the South African education system. The findings of this study cannot be used to generalise any foreign post education and training system in either African regional or international context.

5. Conclusion

This paper argued that the TVET are considered higher education institutions despite them having a limited character to fit such definition. This paper further argues that it is inappropriate for TVET colleges to be considered institutions of higher learning, while in reality they provide more of basic education curricular than higher learning education. It is recommended, that the TVET were indeed better categorised under the further education and training band than being under the higher education band. A category of Further Education and Training band is the most appropriate for the current TVET model. Unless in the future if the government can consider shifting all Diploma, offering education, to TVET colleges and change the pass percentages to 50 %, then TVET should remain under the Further Education and Training band.

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