



**A DECOLONIAL EXPLORATION OF THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL
(NCV) CURRICULUM: A CASE OF TWO TVET COLLEGES IN KZN**

By

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DECLARATION

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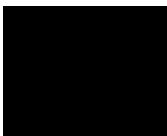
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DEDICATION

To my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ — my source of strength, wisdom, and hope. You upheld me when I was weary, guided me when the path was unclear, sustained me when I almost gave up, and provided for me when resources were thin. This work is a testament to Your unfailing faithfulness and grace. To You be all the glory.

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ABSTRACT

The National Certificate Vocational (NCV) curriculum was introduced to position Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as central to skills development and social transformation in South Africa. Yet, questions persist about whether the NCV genuinely responds to the lived realities and aspirations of students or merely reinforces Eurocentric frameworks that perpetuate historical exclusions. Against the backdrop of South Africa's youth unemployment crisis and persistent inequalities, this study interrogates the NCV in two KwaZulu-Natal colleges through a decolonial lens. Drawing on decolonial theory and the total curriculum framework, the study examines how colonial legacies are reflected, resisted or reinforced in the design, implementation and lived experiences associated with the NCV. It employed a qualitative case study methodology, grounded in the critical paradigm and informed by decolonising research methodologies. Data was generated through collaborative storytelling interviews, focus group discussions, collages and metaphor drawings with lecturers and students. These participatory approaches were instrumental in foregrounding marginalised voices while capturing nuanced perspectives on curriculum practices. The findings reveal that while the NCV was conceived as a transformative and student-centred programme, its enactment is constrained by systemic barriers, including the privileging of Western epistemologies, misalignments with the labour market expectations and limited lecturer agency. Students often experience the curriculum as alienating, particularly where content and pedagogy fail to resonate with their social and cultural realities. Despite these challenges, participants articulated possibilities for reimagining vocational education to

better affirm student's identity, integrate indigenous knowledge systems and enhance relevance to local communities. The study contributes to scholarship on curriculum transformation in the under-researched topic of decolonisation in the TVET sector, by illuminating how colonial logic persist within vocational education and how decolonial approaches might foster epistemic justice. It offers critical insights for policy, practice and institutional reform, highlighting the urgency of creating vocational curricula that are contextually grounded, socially just and capable of restoring dignity and opportunity to South African youth.

ACRONYMS

AI -	Artificial Intelligence
ANC -	African National Congress
AsgiSA -	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
CBD -	Central Business District
CCFO -	Critical Cross Field Outcomes
CHE -	Council on Higher Education
CNE -	Christian National Education
CTE -	Career and Technical Education
DHE -	Department of Higher Education
FET -	Further Education and Training
GEAR -	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GNU -	Government of National Unity
HEI -	Higher Education Institutions
HRDS -	Human Resource Development Strategy
IKS -	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
ILO -	International Labour Organisation
IoT -	Internet of Things
ISAT -	Integrated Summative Assessment Task
JIPSA -	Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition
NATED -	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV -	National Certificate Vocational curriculum
NDP -	National Development Plan
NEET -	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NSFAS -	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NQF -	National Qualifications Framework
OBE -	Outcomes Based Education

OE -	Occupational Education
OECD -	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR -	Participation Action Research
PSET -	Post School Education and Training
PVE -	Professional and Vocational Education
QCTO -	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RDP -	Reconstruction and Development Plan
SAIVCET -	South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training
SAQA -	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA -	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET -	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TVE -	Technical Vocational Education
UNESCO -	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNEVOC -	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization AND Vocational Education
VET -	Vocational Education and Training
VR -	Virtual Reality
WE -	Workforce Education
WPBL -	Workplace Based Learning
WIL -	Work-Integrated Learning

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The National Certificate Vocational (NCV) curriculum, introduced to position Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as engines of skills development and social transformation in South Africa, remains deeply contested in both purpose and practice. While it was designed to address the country's historical inequalities and equip young people with market-relevant skills, pressing questions remain about whether the curriculum genuinely reflects the lived realities, identities and aspirations of its students. In a nation still grappling with legacies of colonialism and apartheid, the NCV risks reproducing Eurocentric and externally imposed frameworks that fail to resonate with local contexts. This study asks whether the NCV curriculum, as enacted in two KwaZulu-Natal TVET colleges, embodies a decolonial orientation that advances epistemic justice, or whether it continues to entrench the very exclusions it was intended to dismantle. At stake is not only the transformation of curriculum, but also the broader struggle for relevance, dignity and opportunity in the education of South Africa's youth.

The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to illuminate how curriculum design and delivery can either empower or marginalise students within the TVET sector and in the process, offer an alternative way of reimagining the NCV curriculum. With South Africa's youth unemployment crisis hovering at alarming levels, TVET colleges continue to occupy a critical space in shaping pathways to economic participation, social mobility and community development. Yet, if the NCV curriculum remains tethered to colonial legacies, it risks producing graduates who are not only ill-equipped for the demands of the labour market but also alienated from their own cultural and social realities.

By interrogating the NCV curriculum through a decolonial lens, this study contributes to the ongoing national dialogue on curriculum transformation in South Africa. It offers critical insights to inform policy development, pedagogical practice and institutional reform within

the TVET sector. The research further underscores the imperative of reimagining education in ways that are contextually relevant, epistemically just, and socially transformative. Ultimately, it calls for an educational vision that restores dignity, agency and hope to South Africans by affirming the legitimacy of local knowledge and lived experiences within formal learning spaces.

1.2 Background

The TVET sector occupies a pivotal yet complex space in South Africa's post-schooling system. It bridges both the transition from school to university and the gap between education and employment (Norodien-Fataar, 2024; Rasool & Mahembe, 2014; Sebola, 2022). Unlike other subsectors, it serves a diverse student body, including recent school leavers, older adults returning to education, full-time and part-time students, and workplace learners. This complexity makes it essential to consider how the NCV curriculum responds to industry and community needs.

Recognising this complexity, government reforms positioned TVET colleges with a strategic mandate to align their performance with the developmental priorities of the state. From the outset, reforms were structured in nature, aiming to transform colleges into engines for addressing South Africa's developmental challenges (Moll et al., 2005). As part of this mandate, TVET colleges were tasked with tackling unemployment, inequality and poverty through diverse education and training programmes for unemployed, underemployed and discouraged youth (ANC, 2007). Their role further extended to creating access for workers in both the informal sector and casual employment, while also widening opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups, particularly black communities (Norodien-Fataar, 2024; Rasool & Mahembe, 2014; Sebola, 2022).

Structural reforms of the TVET college sector were first outlined in the Education White Paper 4, a Framework for the Transformation of the FET College in South Africa (1998), which called for the development of a vibrant system that would expand access to all learners. This policy positioned TVET colleges not only as institutions to bridge the skills

gap, but also as key to enabling South Africa to “chart its course in the global competitive world of the 21st century” (DHET, 1998, p. 14). It envisioned a restructured system with new governance, qualifications framework, quality assurance mechanisms, and funding models to drive change.

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014) reinforced earlier reforms by calling for a review of the TVET curricula. The 2005 Draft Re-capitalisation Plan advanced this agenda by requiring colleges to align programmes with community, industry and labour market needs, highlighting the need to balance theory with practice and integrate workplace experience (Oosthuizen et al., 2022).

Within this framework, the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) curriculum was introduced as a student-centred, outcomes-based model (DHET, 1997, 2006b; Spreen & Vally, 2010). It offers three fundamental subjects (English, Mathematics Literacy and Life Orientation), three vocational subjects and one elective, allowing flexibility across fields. NCV levels 2-4 are positioned as equivalents to Grades 10-12 within the National Qualifications Framework (South African Qualifications Authority, 2008). The NCV is regarded not only as central to skills development and economic growth but also as a strategic lever for national transformation and sustainable development. Recent studies affirm this shift that the NCV aligns with the goal of the National Development Plan for youth reskilling and socio-economic inclusion (Mafika & Khasane, 2024), while national policy and voices at global forums continue to underscore the vital role that TVET plays in economic competitiveness (Manamela et al., 2024).

The introduction of the NCV curriculum in South Africa thus reflects a broader global trend in which vocational education is increasingly recognised as central to skills development and economic growth (Ashton & Green, 1996; McGrath et al., 2006). Further, McGrath et al. (2006) highlight decades of reforms across contexts such as Germany, New Zealand, the UK, Sweden, Switzerland, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Botswana, where urgency in transforming Vocational Education and Training (VET) was tied to economic competitiveness.

Across these contexts, diverse Vocational Education and Training models share the conviction that reform can address youth unemployment and provide skills for current and future economic needs (Mafika & Khasane, 2024; Manamela et al., 2024; McGrath et al., 2006). UNESCO-UNEVOC (2024, 2025a) similarly argue that transformation is essential for expanding economic opportunities. Two insights are particularly relevant for this study; which are, first, elements of VET reform have been shaped by the “ideological certainty of neoliberalism”; and second, curricular reform is central to the policy agenda (McGrath et al., 2006, p. 89). The reforms of the NCV curriculum must therefore be understood as part of this broader global push for VET transformation.

Despite progressive policy reforms aimed at transforming the TVET sector in South Africa, a significant gap persists between policy intent and practice on the ground. National frameworks like the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, (2013) articulate an inclusive, responsive and socially just vision for the sector. However, the everyday realities within colleges often reflect systemic constraints including limited articulation mechanisms to other higher education institutions by NCV students and limited industry partnerships and employment opportunities. These challenges compromise the implementation of transformative policy objectives and perpetuate inequalities inherited from the apartheid education system. As a result, the aspiration of equity, employment and social redress embedded in policy discourse are frequently undermined by operational inefficiencies, bureaucratic inertia and contextual disparities across urban and rural colleges. This disjuncture between policy and practice underscores the need for critical reflection on how structural, institutional and epistemic factors shape the lived experiences of students and lecturers within the TVET landscape.

Research increasingly highlights the importance of recognising and integrating indigenous knowledge into curricula at both school and higher education levels (Hlela, 2017; Msila, 2007; Sepota, 2018). In South Africa, this debate has persisted for decades, with scholars arguing that the inclusion of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems is

essential to making education more relevant and beneficial to indigenous communities (Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016).

The debate for equitable access to higher education in South Africa gained renewed national attention during the student-led movements of #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch and #FeesMustFall which began in October 2015 and continued through 2016 and into early 2017. The Council on Higher Education's (CHE) Call for Papers: Colloquium 2018 (CHE, 2018) identified these protests as a collective demand for decolonisation and free education. These protests underscored the urgency of dismantling colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power in curricula. While universities have been at the centre of these debates, TVET colleges have remained largely on the margins, despite being central to building the technical and vocational skills required for South Africa's economy (DHET, 1998, 2013a).

Most research on TVET has focused on the historical development of vocational education in South Africa; on policy and legislative trajectory of vocational and technical education; on vocational skills discourse; on employability and responsiveness of TVET colleges to industry needs; on funding of TVET colleges, on the marketability of TVET colleges as colleges of choice, on leadership and management capacity of TVET colleges and on vocational pedagogy. Very little work has examined curriculum decolonisation in TVET colleges. This gap suggests a critical silence in both theory and practice, leaving open important questions about how TVET colleges might engage meaningfully with the broader project of decolonising vocational education in South Africa.

From a decolonial perspective, TVET colleges could play a crucial role in reimagining education systems that have historically marginalised indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. By aligning vocational training with local economic needs and cultural contexts, they could help build an education paradigm that values indigenous epistemologies, foster student identity and agency, and challenge the legacy of colonial education systems.

Curriculum decolonisation, that is, what is taught, how it is taught and by whom, is therefore essential for TVET colleges to achieve meaningful impact. Historically eurocentric curricula have often overlooked local social, cultural and economic realities. Embedding contextually relevant knowledge and decolonial pedagogies could enhance student engagement, retention and long-term outcomes (Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite the pivotal role that TVET colleges play in South Africa's skills development agenda, graduates of the NCV programme continue to face significant barriers to employability and professional recognition. Persistent challenges continue to affect both educators and students within the NCV system, as evidenced in the roles of lecturers, examiners, tutors, and youth skills development practitioners. Notably, NCV graduates are frequently excluded from government internship and work placement programmes due to the perception that their qualification is not equivalent to a diploma (DPSA, 2009). This exclusion has potential to undermine the employability prospects of NCV graduates which in turn raises questions about the value and recognition of vocational qualifications.

Furthermore, while national debates on decolonised education have gained momentum in universities, there is a conspicuous lack of discourse and activism around decolonisation within the TVET sector. Factors such as the widespread availability of NSFAS bursaries, centralised governance, limited student representation, socio-economic pressures, and a strong vocational focus have contributed to the muted visibility of student activism in TVET colleges. In this context, the term "muted" does not imply the absence of activism, but rather points to how structural, economic and epistemic conditions have subdued students' capacity to organise, mobilise and be heard, reflecting broader patterns of silencing within the post-school education landscape. Therefore, in this context, "muted" has been used to contextualise how a lack of power, visibility and agency in the students' pleas, has perpetuated a systemically entrenched disadvantage among historically disadvantaged black communities. Additionally, the absence of robust

student networks and limited exposure to decolonial discourse further constrain efforts toward curriculum transformation in these institutions.

The problem, therefore, is twofold: first, NCV graduates encounter systemic barriers to employment and professional advancement; second, the TVET sector has been marginal in debates and actions around decolonising education, despite the pressing need for transformation. This study seeks to explore the underlying causes and implications of these challenges, with the possibility of informing policy and practice and contribute to enhancing the recognition, relevance, and transformative potential of TVET education in South Africa.

1.4 Location of the Study

The study was undertaken in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa in two Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges herein referred to as TVET college A and TVET college B. These institutions represent distinct socio-economic contexts – one urban and the other largely rural, thereby offering valuable insights into the diverse realities of the TVET sector in the province. A brief description of each college follows.

TVET college A

TVET college A is situated in the heart of KwaZulu-Natal's second-largest city, which also serves as the province's administrative and legislative capital. The city is also a significant economic hub located within the KwaZulu-Natal development corridor. The city hosts major business services such as legal, medical, parks and gardens, historical buildings and museums. Over the years, the city has experienced a decline in economic activity, losing more businesses and jobs than it has been able to attract.

TVET College A, located right in the heart of city means that it offers students a choice of five (5) campuses and a variety of study programmes. The 5 campuses are all easily accessible by students. For this study, participants were drawn from a campus in the

Central Business District (CBD) because of the proximity of the campus to business parks and other social amenities. TVET College A serves as a pivotal institution in the province's educational framework, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by youth unemployment. The college's strategic location places it at the forefront of the efforts to provide vocational education and training to a predominantly young population.

From a socio-economic perspective, the college is in a city that still largely reflects the layered legacies of colonial and apartheid spatial, economic and educational policies. Its current challenges such as persistent unemployment, economic stagnation and widening inequalities all mirror the structural disinvestment that has characterised many secondary urban centres in post-apartheid South Africa. The influence of colonial legacies is seen in the spatial inequality and segregation where colonial apartheid urban planning concentrated wealth, resources and economic activity in historically white areas, while marginalising black communities in peripheral townships. Even today, this manifests in unequal access to infrastructure, transportation and services, which limit economic mobility for most of the youth population.

According to the 2022 census, the city has a population of 618 536 people with approximately 35% of the population under 25 years of age which represents a significant youthful demographic profile (StatsSA, 2024). This youthful population presents both opportunities and challenges, many of which can be traced to structural inequalities within the labour market such as limited access to quality education and vocational training for historically disadvantaged communities.

TVET college B

TVET college B is situated in a Metropolitan city and serves a diverse student population drawn from urban, peri-urban and rural communities. The college occupies a pivotal position in the province's post-school system, providing vocational training pathways, while simultaneously addressing local skills shortages in technical and service-oriented industries. Its geographical location places it within a complex socio-economic landscape,

with youth unemployment exceeding 53%, and nearly half of young people classified as not in employment, education or training (NEET) (NYDA, 2022; StatsSA, 2025). Furthermore, uneven access to quality schooling and systemic inequalities shape the aspirations and challenges of its students.

The campus where the study generated data is situated in a rural community. This area, while rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty, faces significant socio-economic challenges. The area has a population of 2,190 residents living in 761 households. The community's proximity to nearby urban centers offers potential access to economic opportunities; however, many residents still grapple with limited access to quality education and employment prospects. Thus, youth unemployment remains a pressing issue in the region.

The availability of NSFAS bursaries has been instrumental in alleviating financial barriers to education for many students at this campus. However, the persistent high youth unemployment rates highlight the need for a more integrated approach to education and employment.

1.5 Youth Unemployment and Implications for TVET Colleges

At the time of writing this thesis, reports indicated that KwaZulu-Natal's youth unemployment situation was dire, with the province experiencing a significant increase in unemployment rates (StatsSA, 2025). KwaZulu-Natal's labour market weakened markedly over the past year with approximately 140,000 jobs lost between 2024 Quarter 2 and 2025 Quarter 2, representing a sharp 4.9% decline in total employment. The official unemployment rate rose from 31.1% to 33.4%, while the expanded definition increased to 47.9%, reflecting nearly 952,000 discouraged work seekers. The national youth unemployment rate for individuals aged 15 to 24 was 62.4% in the first quarter of 2025 and those between 25-34 about 40.4% (StatsSA, 2025). In KwaZulu-Natal, the youth unemployment rate mirrors this national trend, highlighting the regional alignment of these

socio-economic issues. Unemployment is entrenched and rising, especially among young people underscoring a critical demographic and economic challenge.

Young people, including graduates of the NCV program, often face significant barriers to entering the job market, particularly due to limited work experience and a scarcity of accessible entry-level opportunities. The situation is further complicated by weak industry partnerships and gaps in vocational training, which may contribute to high rates of unemployment among graduates (Akoobhai & Narsee, 2024). Persistent gender disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and a prevailing societal preference for university education over TVET pathways continue to shape these outcomes, potentially reinforcing patterns of joblessness and restricting social mobility (Madubela, 2025; Masuku, 2025). These intersecting challenges highlight the need for ongoing reflection on how TVET systems can adapt to better support youth in navigating the transition from education to employment.

South Africa's ongoing struggle with high unemployment rates underscores, among other factors, the enduring impact of structural inequalities rooted in colonial and apartheid histories. Within this context, the relationship between TVET curricula and the labour market continues to raise important questions about the legacy of eurocentric educational models that have often prioritised abstract, externally derived knowledge over skills and understandings grounded in local realities. This dynamic may contribute to a sense of disconnect for students and could influence their preparedness for meaningful economic participation.

As debates around decolonisation continue, there is growing interest in how TVET curricula might evolve to better reflect community needs, support entrepreneurship, and incorporate African Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Such shifts hold the potential to reposition education as a catalyst for empowerment and self-determination. Exploring these possibilities invites ongoing dialogue about how TVET can respond to the aspirations of students and the broader society, while addressing persistent challenges of unemployment and marginalisation.

1.6 Focus, Rationale and Purpose of Study

The focus of this study is to explore the National Certificate Vocational curriculum in two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal through a decolonial lens. This study seeks to critically examine how the curriculum is designed, implemented and experienced within these institutions, with particular emphasis on understanding how colonial legacies may be reflected, resisted or reinforced in the educational content and practices. By focusing on the NCV curriculum, this research aims to shed light on ways in which vocational education in South Africa engages with or challenges dominant Western epistemologies, and how it might better serve the needs of students and communities in a post-apartheid context.

The rationale for the study, therefore, stems from the ongoing debates on decolonisation in South African education, particularly with reference to the absence of the same in the context of TVET colleges. Despite the country's transition to democracy, the education system continues to grapple with the legacies of apartheid and colonialism, which shaped curricula, pedagogies and institutional cultures. This study is necessary because it addresses a critical gap in understanding how TVET colleges, which play a vital role in skills development and economic empowerment, can contribute to the broader project of decolonising education, vocational inclusive. By examining the NCV curriculum through a decolonial framework, this research will provide insight into how vocational educational practices could be transformed to better reflect the diverse knowledge systems, histories and experiences of South African TVET college students.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the decolonisation of education in South Africa by critically analysing the NCV curriculum in TVET colleges and exploring ways in which it can be transformed to better serve students and communities. Through this research, the study aims to identify the ways in which colonial legacies are embedded in the curriculum and propose strategies for decolonising vocational educational content and practices. Ultimately, the study seeks to inform policy and practice in TVET colleges, providing recommendations for how curricula could be reimagined to promote social

justice, cultural relevance and epistemological diversity. By doing so, this research hopes to contribute to the broader discourse on decolonising vocational education and to support the broader project of the development of more inclusive and equitable educational systems in South Africa.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Understanding the significance of this study requires situating it within ongoing efforts to transform South Africa's TVET sector in response to persistent social, economic, and educational challenges. By focusing on the lived experiences of lecturers and students within the NCV curriculum, this research aims to open new avenues for policy, practice, and scholarship that are informed by both decolonial insights. The study does not seek to prescribe solutions, but rather to illuminate areas where further dialogue, reflection, and innovation may be needed to ensure that TVET education is both relevant and empowering but also rooted in local epistemologies and responsive to community realities.

1.7.1 Policy

According to (Gaffoor & Van der Bijl, 2019; Kana & Letaba, 2024), there are ongoing debates about the need for curriculum transformation in the TVET sector, particularly regarding lecturers' limited involvement in top-down curriculum processes and persistent misalignments between NCV provision, student progression, and workplace realities. By engaging with the experiences of lecturers and students, this study seeks to contribute to these policy discussions in the light of decoloniality.

1.7.2 Practice

Previous research (Anthonie, 2019; Sepota, 2018; Vimbelo & Bayaga, 2023) has highlighted that students often struggle when lessons are disconnected from their lived realities. Building on these findings, this study aims to explore how curriculum design can

become more responsive to both community and knowledge contexts, as well as industry needs. Insights generated from this work may encourage lecturers to critically reflect on pedagogical practices.

1.7.3 Research

The TVET sector has often been sidelined in national conversations about decolonisation (Anthonie, 2019), and the voices of lecturers and students are frequently absent from curriculum reform processes (Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024). By foregrounding these perspectives, this study contributes to scholarship that advances decolonial understandings of curriculum transformation in vocational education.

1.8 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research is to explore the NCV curriculum offered in TVET colleges in South Africa using a decolonial lens. To this end, the six (6) objectives of the research are:

1. To understand how the agendas that shaped TVET colleges were enacted.
2. To explore the epistemologies of TVET colleges and how these have shaped the NCV curriculum.
3. To critique the reification of knowledge gained by the NCV student.
4. To create awareness and explore possible change of any curricula and pedagogic practices that students may find alienating in the process of enacting the NCV.
5. To develop a dialogue and raise awareness of how lecturers and students experience the NCV curriculum vis-a-vis a decolonial context.
6. To create a space where the beginning of a decolonised TVET curriculum could be envisioned.

1.9 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer six (6) questions:

1. How have agenda(s) that have shaped the transformation of TVET colleges been enacted?
2. What epistemologies influence the philosophical underpinnings of the NCV curriculum?
3. To what extent is knowledge gained by the NCV student deemed responsive and relevant to societal needs?
4. How is the NCV curriculum enacted in the classroom?
5. How have lecturers and students experienced the NCV curriculum?
6. What might a decolonised TVET (NCV) curriculum look like?

1.10 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in decolonial (including African Indigenous Knowledge Systems) theories, which critique the enduring legacies of colonialism in modern societies. Central to this framework are concepts of colonality of knowledge, colonality of being and colonality of mind. Colonality of knowledge refers to the ways in which Western epistemologies have been privileged over indigenous and local knowledge systems, leading to the marginalisation and erasure of non-Western ways of knowing. Colonality of being highlights the ontological impacts of colonialism, where the existence and identities of colonised peoples are shaped by external power structures that deny their humanity and agency. Colonality of mind, meanwhile, explores how colonialism has influenced the ways in which we think, perceive and understand the world, often internalising dominant Western perspectives. By applying these concepts, this research seeks to uncover how the National Certificate Vocational curriculum reflects, resists or challenges these forms of colonality.

In addition to decolonial theories, this study draws on curriculum theory, particularly the concept of total curriculum framework proposed by Moll, Steinberg and Broemann (2005) who propose this framework specifically for the TVET college sector within the South African context. Moll et al. (2005, p. 125), define curriculum as “official documents from a recognised authority that prescribes what should be taught and what should be achieved

in the classroom.” The total curriculum framework thus views curriculum as a holistic and integrated system that encompasses not only the formal, planned aspects of education but also the hidden and null curricula. The formal curriculum refers to the intended learning outcomes and content as outlined in official documents, while the hidden curriculum includes the unintended messages and values that students learn through the educational environment and practices. By examining the NCV curriculum, this research aims to provide comprehensive understanding of how knowledge is constructed, transmitted and experienced in TVET colleges, and how this might perpetuate or challenge coloniality.

The integration of decolonial theories with the total curriculum framework allows for a nuanced analysis of the NCV curriculum. This study will explore how the formal and hidden curricula in TVET colleges reflect or resist coloniality of knowledge, being and mind. By examining the ways in which knowledge is organised and transmitted in the curriculum, this research will uncover the power dynamics and epistemological assumptions that underpin educational practices.

1.11 Methodology

The study locates itself within the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm emphasises the need to challenge dominant assumptions, power structures and social norms. It involves critically examining the social, cultural and historical contexts that shape knowledge and reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). In line with this position, the study recognises that research is never neutral, nor is knowledge production disinterested. Every knower, including the researcher, is socially situated and implicated in the dynamics of power, privilege and ideology. The adoption of a critical paradigm signals an intention to move beyond description and analysis toward transformation. In this sense, the critical paradigm provides a necessary foundation for engaging with decolonial research approaches, as both share a commitment to questioning unequal relations of power and knowledge while unsettling the dominance of Western epistemologies that marginalise other ways of knowing.

The study uses case study methodology, particularly historical case study. This form of case study is better suited as it integrates both descriptive and exploratory elements, allowing the study to address not only the “what” but also the “how” questions inherent in understanding the complex realities of the TVET sector. Additionally, the historical case study aligns with the aims of the study which employs a decolonial lens that foregrounds historical and structural dimensions.

Decolonising research methodologies therefore builds on the principles of the critical paradigm by directly confronting Eurocentric traditions that have historically undermined and silenced the knowledge and lived experiences of marginalised groups (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019). Such methodologies seek to promote social justice, empower silenced voices and ground research in indigenous worldviews, cultural values and languages relevant to the communities involved.

Against this backdrop, the study has employed data generation methods deliberately chosen to align with a decolonising research agenda. Research methods are not neutral tools; depending on how they are applied, they can reinforce colonial logic or become powerful instruments of decolonisation. Guided by this insight, the study adopts collages, collaborative storytelling interviews, metaphor drawings and focus group as methods that enable participants to share experiences in ways that honour their agency, voice and creativity. These participatory approaches are not only congruent with the critical paradigm but also position the research itself as part of the broader project of decolonial transformation, particularly in relation to re-imagining the NCV curriculum within the South African TVET colleges.

In positioning the study within the critical paradigm and grounding it in decolonising research methodologies, the research affirms its commitment to exposing and challenging the colonial logics embedded in the NCV curriculum. This stance is not only philosophical but also practical, as the chosen methods are designed to facilitate participant agency and co-construction of knowledge. Ultimately, this alignment ensures

that the study directly addresses its central research questions: how the NCV curriculum reflects or resists colonial legacies, and how it might be re-imagined through indigenous perspectives to advance social justice within the TVET sector.

1.12 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One

The opening chapter provides the background and rationale for the study, outlining its purpose and significance. The research aims to examine the NCV curriculum offered in two TVET colleges in South Africa through a decolonial lens, addressing the notable gap in scholarship on decolonisation within the sector. In addition, the chapter introduces the theoretical framework, methodology, and central research questions and presents an overview of the study's structure.

Chapter Two

Chapter two reviews literature relevant to a decolonial exploration of the NCV curriculum within two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. It begins with a historical overview of formal education and the evolution of TVET colleges in South Africa, highlighting key institutional and curriculum reforms. The chapter examines the NCV curriculum in depth, situating it within both local and global shifts in vocational education and training. It further engages with literature on decolonisation in higher education, pointing out its limited presence in the TVET sector. The review concludes by drawing on empirical studies of TVET colleges and identifies the need for suitable theoretical tools.

Chapter Three

Chapter three outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The first section engages curriculum theory, developed by Moll, Steinberg and Broemann (2005), emphasising its application as a framework tailored to address the unique needs of TVET

education. It focuses on the tenets of total curriculum, theoretical knowledge, vocational knowledge and vocational pedagogy, while situating the theory within its critical roots, applications and critiques. The second engages with decolonial theory, drawing primarily on the works of Mignolo (2011) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) to analyse the NCV curriculum through the lenses of coloniality of being, knowledge and power. This framework highlights how curriculum continues to reflect colonial and apartheid legacies, reproducing systemic inequalities while marginalising indigenous perspectives. It also draws on de Sousa Santos (2018) and (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017) work to consider strategies for embedding decoloniality into institutional practice, including TVET colleges. Together, these frameworks enable a robust exploration and analysis of the NCV's curriculum, philosophical and structural foundations.

Chapter Four

Chapter four outlines the research design and methodology adopted for the study, guided by the research questions and philosophical assumptions underpinning the inquiry. It begins with a discussion on decolonising research methodologies, highlighting their significance in shaping the study's strategy and approach. The chapter then details the generation methods, sampling procedures and processes of analysis and interpretation. Finally, the chapter reflects on the researcher's positionality, acknowledging how it influences knowledge production and the overall research process. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations and study limitations.

Chapter Five

The findings are presented across three chapters, each structured around key themes and related sub-themes. This chapter, the first of the three, focuses on views of knowledge in the NCV curriculum. To unpack how knowledge is perceived and experienced within the NCV, the discussion is organised into five sub-themes: the purposes of vocational education; awareness of ideological underpinnings; lesson planning; the utility of the NCV qualification including perceptions of community and

industry; and the extent to which NCV students can articulate into higher education Institutions (HEIs). The organisation of this chapter, together with the following two, is guided by central questions: What discourses emerge from the data, and where do points of convergence or divergence occur?

Chapter Six

Chapter six focuses on how the curriculum is understood, enacted and experienced in practice. It is organised around five sub-themes: the lack of vocational specific qualifications among lecturers; lecturers' feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment; the complexities of lecturer agency; student experiences of the NCV curriculum; and the interplay between language and learner identity. Together, these sub-themes provide a nuanced understanding of the curriculum in practice.

Chapter Seven

This chapter, the final of the three findings chapters, explores the theme of transformation within the TVET colleges. It is organised around four sub-themes: aspects of TVET system identified for transformation; changes in lecturer profiles; the role of TVET colleges in providing second-chance opportunities; and the persistence of colonial artefacts. These sub-themes collectively illuminate both the progress and challenges in transforming TVET colleges to better serve students and communities.

Chapter Eight

Chapter eight extends the theorisation of the study's findings through a decolonial lens. Building on the three key themes of views of knowledge in the NCV curriculum, experiences of lecturers and students, and the transformation of TVET colleges, this chapter applies deductive theorising using decolonial concepts and examines the findings in relation to coloniality of power, knowledge, being and space supporting the argument for the decolonisation of the NCV curriculum in TVET colleges.

Chapter Nine

Chapter nine concludes the study, reflecting on the transformative and sometimes unsettling journey of engaging with the NCV curriculum through a decolonial lens. The chapter synthesises the literature review, findings and theorisation, presenting the central claims and implications for TVET colleges. The chapter also critically interrogates whether TVET colleges will dare to decolonise, highlighting systemic and ideological challenges, while still offering a hopeful vision for a truly decolonised vocational education landscape.

1.13 Limitations of the Study

While every effort has been made to design a robust and meaningful study, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may influence the research process and its outcomes. Firstly, the dynamic nature of TVET college programming presents a potential challenge. During the period of data generation, one college was in the process of discontinuing a programme offering. This development may have affected the consistency and comparability of data gathered from lecturer participants within that college, as well as across different sites. The programme closure also introduced significant anxiety and frustration among participants, potentially influencing the relevance and nature of their experiences shared during the study.

Secondly, the availability of lecturers posed another limitation. Data generation coincided with periods of college recess or the marking of examination times when lecturers are often unavailable or have limited capacity to participate in research activities as was evidenced in one college. This resulted in delays in data generation and a reduced pool of participants, potentially affecting the depth and breadth of insights obtained from lecturer perspectives. Additionally, logistical constraints such as scheduling interviews or focus group discussions on institutional calendars and academic workloads further prolonged the data generation process.

A further significant limitation relates to the context in which data was gathered. Much of the data generation for this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by unprecedented disruptions to teaching, learning, and institutional operations. Restrictions on in-person interactions, shifts to remote or hybrid learning, and heightened health and safety concerns all posed challenges for accessing participants and conducting fieldwork. These conditions may have influenced both the availability and the responses of participants, as well as the overall scope of data that could be collected.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the experiences of lecturers and students within the NCV curriculum. Recognising these challenges from the outset allows for greater transparency and provides important context for interpreting the findings.

1.14 Conclusion

In sum, this introductory chapter has outlined the background, rationale and significance of the study, situating it within the broader context of South African TVET colleges. It highlighted the limited engagement with decolonial perspectives in existing scholarship and established the need to interrogate the NCV curriculum through such a lens. The chapter further articulated the purpose of the study and posed the guiding research questions, which will direct the analysis that follows. By framing the study within these parameters, this chapter provides a foundation for the chapters ahead, which will engage more deeply with the theoretical, methodological and empirical dimensions of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study by giving the background and the rationale of the study and the associated research questions. This chapter provides a review of the literature pertinent to the study, “*A Decolonial Exploration of the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) Curriculum: A case of two TVET colleges in KZN*”. The chapter starts with a discussion of a brief historical overview of formal education in South Africa, then moves to provide an overview of the historical landscape of TVET colleges in South Africa which leads to the institutional reforms that have taken place in TVET colleges and in particular, curriculum.

The chapter proceeds to look in-depth at the National Certificate Vocational curriculum (NCV) and its characteristics. Thereafter, the thesis offers comparative justifications for the need for a paradigm shift in vocational education and training in South Africa; comparing the local situation against global shifts that have occurred in other countries. The chapter then routes into literature on the renewed calls for the decolonisation of South African higher education institutions with the aim of showing the absence of the same in the TVET college sector. The chapter winds down by providing some pertinent empirical studies on the TVET college sector before concluding.

2.2 Conceptualising TVET in the Global Context

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has a long and diverse genealogy rooted in earlier forms of vocational, technical and apprenticeship-based education systems. Historically, skills formation can be traced to pre-industrial apprenticeship traditions in Europe, craft guild systems, and indigenous knowledge systems across Africa and Asia, where learning was closely tied to practice, occupation and community life (King, 2012; McGrath, 2012). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, industrialisation gave rise to more formalised systems of technical education and

vocational schooling, particularly in Europe and North America. Terms such as Technical Education (TE), Vocational Education (VE), and later Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) were widely used across different national systems well before the late 20th century (UNESCO, 2001; King, 2012).

In this context, the 1999 UNESCO International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education in Seoul, South Korea, did not introduce the concept itself but marked an important moment in consolidating and globalising the term “TVET” as an umbrella concept encompassing these diverse traditions (UNESCO, 1999; McGrath, 2012). It provided a common language to integrate education, training and skills development within a lifelong learning framework. UNESCO-UNEVOC established the International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Germany to support member states in strengthening post-school vocational systems. Thus, UNESCO-UNEVOC should be understood not as the originator of TVET, but as a key institutional actor in coordinating, standardising and promoting it globally within an already established field (UNESCO, 2001; King, 2012). Since then, TVET has been further institutionalised as a global initiative to enhance vocational training programmes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012a).

The UNESCO Report “*Shaping the Education of Tomorrow: The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*” (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012b), reaffirmed the 2004 Bonn meeting of international TVET experts, which emphasised TVET’s role in providing learning and life skills opportunities for both young people and adults. The sector is recognised as critical for equipping individuals with the skills and competencies required in rapidly changing labour markets. It is widely regarded as a vehicle for poverty reduction and socio-economic development by fostering employability, adaptability and practical expertise (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012a, 2015).

Terminology used by TVET colleges varies by country, reflecting different traditions and emphases. Terms like Apprenticeship Training; Vocational Education; Technical Education; Technical-Vocational Education (TVE); Occupational Education (OE);

Vocational Education and Training (VET); Professional and Vocational Education (PVE); Career and Technical Education (CTE); Workforce Education (WE) or Workplace Education (WE) are all used in different contexts. These variations reflect historically embedded national models (for example, dual apprenticeship systems in Germany, school-based vocational models in France, and competency-based training approaches in Anglo-Saxon contexts), rather than fundamentally different purposes (Greinert, 2005; Billett, 2011). Regardless of the term, all these refer to education and training aimed at preparing people for the world of work through acquiring both knowledge and applied skills.

UNESCO-UNEVOC (2012c) in its Third International Congress on TVET working document, *“Transforming TVET: Building Skills for Work and Life”* emphasises that TVET must adapt to evolving demands, that is, from local to global, and must enable transitions between education, training and work while fostering lifelong learning. The 2015 UNESCO Recommendation on TVET further defines it broadly to include education, training and skills development for a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2015). It further raises the importance of including work-based learning, continuing professional development and the development of transversal skills like literacy, numeracy, and citizenship in TVET programmes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2015). Thus, the multiple terms used across the world all point toward the same goal: to prepare individuals for meaningful participation in the labour market through relevant, adaptable competencies.

Recent UNESCO reports and initiatives (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024, 2025a) highlight skills transformation as central to modernising TVET systems and preparing youth for the future of work. Key priorities include integrating digital skills, green skills and transversal competencies (such as adaptability, problem-solving and citizenship) into curricula while ensuring strong alignment with labour market demand (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024). UNESCO underscores that outdated equipment, weak enterprise engagement and underprepared teachers continue to limit TVET effectiveness, calling for systemic reforms and stronger partnerships with industry and civil society (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2025b).

New initiatives, such as the Skills for the Future Platform (2025) and the Pan-African Digital Transformation of TVET and Skills Development Systems project, aim to empower youth through digital transformation, inclusive lifelong learning opportunities, and greater participation in shaping TVET policy (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2025a, 2025b). Overall, UNESCO's framing of skills transformation moves beyond narrow job training to embrace a holistic, future-ready model of human development, innovation and sustainable socio-economic growth.

Over time, global reforms of TVET systems have been shaped by dual but intertwined theoretical perspectives: one emphasises productivity and economic growth, assuming that skills lead to employability, then jobs, then national wealth; the other emphasises human development, arguing that TVET should foster sustainable livelihoods, equity and social inclusion (Rasool & Mahembe, 2014; Tikly, 2013). Recent evidence continues to support this dual framing. For example, the World Bank, ILO, and UNESCO's 2023 joint study (World Bank et al., 2023) underscores that many low- and middle-income countries are seeking to reform TVET to better align with labour market needs (such as digital, cognitive and entrepreneurial skills), partly to harness demographic dividends and partly to advance human development goals like decent work and social justice. In Africa, reports such as *Building Pathways to Sustainable Growth* highlight that strengthening linkages between TVET and productive sectors is not just about boosting productivity, but also about structural transformation, inclusive employment and reducing inequality. In the South African context, this dual paradigm is visible: national policies reflect both developmental state goals (e.g. employment creation and productivity) and commitment to equity, inclusion, human capital formation and reducing social economic disparities (ANC, 2007; Rasool & Mahembe, 2014).

A developmental state is characterised by an active role in shaping economic development and strategically deploying national resources to address societal needs. It seeks to balance economic growth with social development using state influence to combat poverty, inequality and unemployment while simultaneously expanding economic opportunities (Rasool & Mahembe, 2014). The theoretical underpinning of the

developmental state in South Africa is the economic development approach (Rasool & Mahembe, 2014). In the South African context, the developmental state paradigm is grounded in an economic development approach that emphasises the dual goals of productivity and social justice. This orientation is consistently reinforced through key national policy frameworks and strategies, including the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) (1994), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) (1996), ANC Report (2007), Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010-2030 (HRDS for South Africa) (2009), National Skills Development Strategy III (2010), and the National Development Plan (2012). Collectively, these frameworks articulate a vision of a state that not only drives economic competitiveness but also promotes inclusive human development through education, training and expanded opportunities. Despite the clarity and ambition of existing policies, their translation into practice remains uneven. Later in this section, the research examines these policy gaps as they manifest in the TVET college sector.

Importantly, this developmental vision is operationalised through a set of concrete institutional and policy mechanisms within the post-school system. Central among these is the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2030 (HRDS), which provides a long-term framework for aligning education and training with national development priorities, and the National Skills Development Strategy 2030 (NSDS), which translates these priorities into short to medium-term skills planning cycles. These are further operationalised through Master Skills Plans (MSPs), developed by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which identify sector-specific priority occupations, scarce skills, and training interventions based on labour market intelligence. At the provincial level, MSPs are complemented by regional and provincial skills planning processes, which seek to align national priorities with local economic contexts and labour market dynamics. The NSDS is implemented through Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which serve as intermediary bodies responsible for skills planning, funding allocation, and facilitating workplace-based learning within specific economic sectors (Allais, 2012; Wedekind, 2010). Through mechanisms such as learnerships,

internships and apprenticeships, SETAs are intended to create structured pathways between TVET colleges and the labour market.

In addition, funding and governance levers play a critical role in shaping the TVET sector. The skills levy system where employers contribute a percentage of payroll towards skills development provides a key financing mechanism that is redistributed via SETAs to support training initiatives. At the same time, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) exercises centralised governance over TVET colleges, including curriculum frameworks, funding allocations, and performance monitoring. These levers are intended to steer the system toward national priorities such as scarce skills development, youth employment and industrial growth, reflecting core features of a developmental state (Allais, 2012; McGrath, 2012).

Despite the clarity and ambition of existing policies, their translation into practice remains uneven. Challenges such as weak coordination between SETAs and colleges, limited workplace-based learning opportunities, administrative inefficiencies in funding disbursement, and variable institutional capacity continue to constrain the effectiveness of these mechanisms (Wedekind, 2010; Allais, 2012). Later in this section, the research examines these policy gaps as they manifest in the TVET college sector. The DHET (1998) on *“A programme for the transformation of further education and training: Preparing for the twenty-first century through education, training and work”*, together with the DHET (2013a), set out the government’s education policy trajectory and explicitly emphasise the “catalytic role” that the TVET college sector within the broader post-school education and training system was to play. These policy documents position TVET colleges as central to addressing the challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment that characterises a developmental state. In this regard, the ideology of a developmental state locates TVET at the heart of the national development agenda (Rasool & Mahembe, 2014).

To reinforce this perspective, Akoojee (2010), notes that the success of skills development is inseparably linked to the success of a developmental state, and that it is

impossible to engage in debates on the developmental state without considering the pivotal role of skills development. In line with this, Rasool and Mahembe (2014, p. 8) contend that “any discussion about the purpose of the TVET college sector in South Africa should be firmly rooted within the paradigm of a developmental state.” This study takes that paradigm as a central point of reference. Akoojee (2016) examined the extent to which developments in the South Africa’s TVET system, as outlined in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, reflect the principles of a developmental, democratic and inclusive agenda. He found that although the policy articulates a transformative vision, its implementation has been characterised by “creative tinkering”, which are incremental adjustments insufficient to generate the momentum needed to realise its intended outcomes.

However, the South African developmental state is not uncontested and reflects an ongoing tension between developmental and neoliberal policy orientations. While frameworks such as the RDP and NDP emphasise state-led development, redistribution and social justice, others, most notably GEAR, introduced market-oriented reforms, fiscal restraint and an emphasis on efficiency and competitiveness. Scholars argue that this has resulted in a hybrid policy environment in which TVET colleges are simultaneously expected to address social inequalities and respond to labour market demands, often with limited resources (McGrath, 2012; Allais, 2012). The skills development system, including SETAs and performance-based funding mechanisms, also reflects this duality by combining state coordination with market-driven principles such as employer demand and outcomes-based accountability (Wedekind, 2010; McGrath, 2012).

Building on this, the positioning of TVET colleges at the centre of South Africa’s developmental state agenda must also be understood within the rapidly changing context of the Fourth and emerging Fifth Industrial Revolutions. These revolutions, characterised by technologies such as Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, virtual reality (VR), and artificial intelligence (AI), are fundamentally reshaping the ways in which people live, learn and work (Carrim, 2022; NYDA, n.d). For TVET colleges, this means that their mandate extends beyond addressing historical challenges of poverty, inequalities and

unemployment: they must now also prepare graduates with the digital and adaptive skills required for an economy increasingly driven by automation, connectivity and human-machine collaboration. Within such an environment, the developmental state's vision of using education and training as a lever for socio-economic transformation becomes even more urgent, placing TVET at the intersection of both human development imperatives and technological disruption.

While TVET colleges play a central role in advancing South Africa's developmental state agenda and responding to the evolving demand of the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions, their function cannot be fully understood in isolation from the country's broader socio-historical context. The legacy of colonisation and apartheid has profoundly shaped the structure, accessibility and purpose of Vocational Education and Training, influencing not only how skills are developed but also who has historically had access to quality education. Vocational Education and Training has never existed in a vacuum; it has always been embedded within, and shaped by, the wider formal education system. Understanding the historical trajectory of the South African education and training system is therefore essential for mapping the development of the TVET college sector and assessing its current role. The following section provides a brief historical overview of the colonial and apartheid-era education, which sets the stage for examining the evolution and positioning of TVET colleges in South Africa.

2.3 Divergence between TVET Policies and Institutional Practice

While this study does not primarily focus on the policy-practice gap in TVET colleges, the current state of this divergence has important implications for the recommendations that will emerge from the research. A growing body of scholarship highlights the persistent misalignment between national policy intentions and institutional realities within South Africa's TVET sector.

Needham (2019) for instance, examined the tensions between neo-liberal and developmental approaches in South African TVET policy, illustrating how these conflicting

ideologies shape implementation challenges and create tensions for both educators and students. Similarly, Papier et al. (2023), reported that the development of mid-level skills in the post-apartheid context continues to face difficulties in aligning college training with labour market needs. Akoobhai (2023) further observed that employers still perceive TVET graduates as lacking key competencies such as planning, organising, project management and financial management thus highlighting a disconnect between institutional training and industry expectations.

Adding to this discourse, Selane and Odeku (2024) found that TVET institutions operate within a fragmented policy environment marked by unclear accountability structures and insufficient funding, particularly in relation to sustainability and green skills initiatives. More recently, Prinsloo and Papier (2025) argued for the expansion of competence frameworks to better recognise prior learning, contending that a more inclusive approach acknowledging diverse learning experiences is essential for bridging the persistent gap between policy intentions and institutional practices.

2.3.1 Implications for the present study

The persistent divergence between national TVET policies and institutional practice underscores the systemic and epistemic tensions that this study seeks to unpack. While existing literature foregrounds administrative, structural and policy implementation challenges, less attention has been given to how these gaps reproduce deeper colonial logics that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is recognised as a legitimate knower within the TVET context.

This study extends the conversation beyond policy alignment by interrogating how coloniality continues to manifest in everyday institutional cultures, curriculum design and student experiences within the TVET colleges. The identified policy-practice gap, therefore, provides an entry point for examining how policy discourse, though framed as transformative may inadvertently sustain exclusionary practices that marginalises local

epistemologies and student identities (this is discussed in detail in the theoretical framework chapter as well as the findings chapters).

By situating these findings within a decolonial framework, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of transformation in the TVET sector, one that goes beyond compliance with national policy directives to foreground epistemic justice, contextual relevance and inclusivity in vocational education.

2.4 The Beginnings of Formal Education in South Africa

The beginnings of formal education in South Africa are rooted in colonial encounter at the Cape in 1652, when the Dutch East India Company established its first formal school in 1658 after having consolidated its settlement (Lewis, 2016). This school created primarily for the children of enslaved people brought to the Cape on Dutch ships, carried many of the oppressive features that would come to define the South African education system in subsequent centuries.

Learners were systematically distanced from their cultural identities, languages and histories within formal schooling. While certain periods of South African education, most notably under apartheid, invoked discourses of cultural differentiation, such recognition was neither equitable nor emancipatory. Instead, it operated within hierarchical frameworks that devalued African knowledge systems and subordinated them to colonial and Eurocentric epistemologies (Christie, 1991; Alexander, 2002). Thus, from its inception, formal education in South Africa was not only an instrument of literacy and instruction but also a tool for domination, assimilation and control thus laying the foundation for the racialised and exclusionary educational structures that continued under apartheid and which still cast a long shadow on post-apartheid education, including the TVET sector.

The establishment of a more structured system of formal education in South Africa began under the British colonial rule, which was characterised by a deliberated attempt to anglicise Cape society (Lewis, 2016). This period ushered in significant social, political

and economic changes that reshaped the colony. Following the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 1807 and its subsequent outlawing across the British Empire, colonialism in its “classical” form emerged more visibly in the Cape (Lewis, 2016). Within this context, education became an important tool of colonial administration and control, serving not only to promote British cultural dominance but also to entrench social hierarchies. Accordingly, this study situates its analysis within the intersection of colonialism and education, examining how the formalisation of schooling under British rule extended the colonial project of cultural assimilation, social stratification and labour control.

Building on the foundations laid during the early years of British rule, colonial control in South Africa, much like in other parts of the Empire, was explicitly aimed at consolidating imperial dominance (Lewis, 2016). Systems of governance and education that mirrored those of Britain were established, embedding colonial authority into the fabric of society. Education in particular, became a powerful tool for both cultural assimilation and social control (Christie, 1991). English was made the official language in all colonies, reinforcing British linguistic and cultural hegemony (Christie, 1991; Lewis, 2016). Institutions such as Lovedale College and the University College of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape, together with a network of missionary schools, were central in advancing British cultural influence (Msila, 2007). Missionary education, while introducing literacy and limited opportunities, carried a hidden curriculum that sought to shape Africans into compliant participants in colonial society, often justified through Christian philosophy (Christie, 1991; Msila, 2007). Thus, education under British colonialism served a dual purpose: on the one hand, it was framed as a public good aimed at “civilising” the so-called “ignorant native”; on the other, it functioned as a private and political instrument to entrench colonial authority. While missionary schools promoted anglicisation, Afrikaners simultaneously began formulating their own parallel education system, laying the groundwork for later contestations over the purpose and control of education in South Africa (Msila, 2007).

2.4.1 Afrikaner Nationalist education and apartheid

The Afrikaners had set up their schools in the trekker states such as the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, where the foundations of apartheid education were laid. Early Afrikaner education, dating from the 1600s to the 1800s, was minimal and largely church or parent-led (Lewis, 2016; Msila, 2007). However, following their defeat in the Anglo-Boer War, Afrikaners grew increasingly resentful of British education, which they saw as alienating and eroding their cultural identity. This discontent gave rise to Christian National Education (CNE), a philosophy that became central to the ideology of the National Party. When party came to power in 1948, CNE provided the foundation for the institutionalisation of apartheid, systematically organising South African social, political and economic life along racial lines. The 1948 CNE policy explicitly framed the role of White South Africans “Christianising” and “civilising” Black South Africans within a framework of white supremacy (Msila, 2007). This ideology was entrenched through the landmark legislation in the 1950s, culminating in the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which formalised racial segregation and entrenched inequality in education (Kallaway, 2015).

The teaching of Black South Africans under apartheid was deliberately grounded in the worldview of the Whites, particularly the Afrikaner “trusteeship” model that positioned themselves as custodians of the so-called native. In this sense, apartheid education was not a rupture but rather an extension of colonial and missionary schooling, inheriting its racial hierarchies, religious justifications and political purposes. Education became a tool of social engineering: religion was manipulated to legitimise White supremacy, and schooling entrenched the master-servant relationship by reinforcing the supposed superiority of Whites over Black (Kallaway, 2015). The Bantu Education Act institutionalised this approach, with the explicit purpose of restricting the intellectual development of Black learners, distorting school knowledge, and ensuring state control over both teachers and learners. It simultaneously served as a mechanism for state propaganda (Kallaway, 2015).

While Bantu Education is widely understood as a system designed to entrench inequality, it is important to acknowledge that it also operated through a discourse of “cultural recognition.” The apartheid state justified separate education systems on the basis that different racial and ethnic groups required schooling aligned to their “own culture” and linguistic backgrounds (Kallaway, 2015; Christie, 1991). This included the promotion of mother-tongue instruction in the early years and the structuring of curricula around ethnically defined identities. However, this form of cultural recognition was deeply instrumental and cannot be equated with epistemic justice or educational quality. Rather than affirming African knowledge systems on their own terms, Bantu Education reified ethnic divisions and subordinated African identities within a broader framework of white supremacy and economic exploitation (Alexander, 2002; Heugh, 2000). As such, the apparent recognition of culture functioned to legitimise segregation and limit intellectual advancement, reinforcing the structural inequalities that underpinned apartheid education.

Economically, Bantu Education fulfilled two interlinked objectives: it replaced missionary control with a state-run system of mass education, and it deliberately prepared Black South Africans for unskilled, low-wage labour to sustain the needs of the economy (de la Rey, 2001). This rationale was explicitly articulated in colonial discourse, which argued that teaching Africans to read and write was “of little use” unless paired with manual labour training, as illustrated in the industrial-school proposal cited by Moll et al. (2005). Consequently, the education provided to Black South Africans was deliberately inferior and fragmented, closely tied to the homeland system that reinforced ethnic divisions and apartheid’s racial logic (de la Rey, 2001). Both the colonial and apartheid schooling thus systematically undermined indigenous culture and identity, ridiculing or prohibiting traditional practices within schools (Tedla, 1995).

2.4.2 Democratic education

The post-apartheid era from 1994 ushered in a radically new educational landscape in South Africa. The unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1990,

accompanied by its extensive engagement with educational policy discourse, laid the groundwork for systemic transformation. The political imperative of the democratic transition was to dismantle the deeply racialised education system of apartheid and replace it with a unified framework that reflected the values of equity, redress and nation-building. One of the earliest structural reforms was the consolidation of the 18 racially fragmented education departments into nine provincial departments under an overarching national department, thereby ensuring coherence of policy and philosophy (Mouton et al., 2012). Within this framework, new policies were introduced to transform pedagogies, curricula and qualifications (Mouton et al., 2012; Msila, 2007).

Central to this transformation was the adoption of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (DHET, 1997), supported by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which sought to replace the rote, authoritarian methods of apartheid schooling with learner-centred approaches. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) is a results-oriented approach to curriculum design that focuses on clearly defined learning outcomes and the demonstration of competencies at the end of a learning process. Its theoretical foundations are commonly traced to curriculum theory and mastery learning traditions associated with scholars such as Ralph Tyler and Benjamin Bloom, as well as later developments by William Spady, who formalised OBE as a comprehensive educational model (Spady, 1994; Killen, 2000). At a conceptual level, OBE emphasises clarity of outcomes, learner-centred pedagogy, and the belief that all learners can achieve success given appropriate support and time (Spady, 1994; Killen, 2000).

In South Africa, there were two main reasons that were identified as pivotal in the introduction of OBE. First, the apartheid education system for Black South Africans fell significantly short of international standards, particularly in mathematics and science whereas the system designed for White South Africans was regarded as world-class. Second, OBE was framed as a vehicle for building a prosperous, united and democratic South Africa. It was envisioned not only as an educational reform but also as a broader societal transformation project aimed at addressing social inequities, reducing political tensions and promoting economic growth.

OBE is a results-oriented approach to curriculum design that emphasises making learning meaningful and relevant to learners and their projected life experiences. It assumes that every learner has a potential to learn. It therefore encourages teaching approaches that allow learners to be self-thinkers, be able to learn from the environment and could respond to guidance provided by teachers (Jaya et al., 2025; Kaliannan & Chandran, 2012). This approach assumes that teachers value creativity and self-motivated learning.

However, it is important to distinguish between OBE as a theoretical framework and its varied interpretations and implementations in different contexts. In South Africa, OBE was adopted as part of broader post-apartheid reforms aimed at equity, redress and economic transformation, but its translation into practice was shaped by systemic constraints, institutional capacity, and policy design choices (Jansen, 1998; Chisholm, 2005). Criticism of OBE in South Africa is thus extensive and well-documented (Jansen, 1998; Motala & Vally, 2014; Chisholm, 2005). The NCV curriculum, as an OBE-aligned qualification, reflects some of these broader systemic challenges.

Firstly, OBE has been criticised for its complexity and the difficulties associated with its implementation. The curriculum required significant shifts in pedagogy, assessment and curriculum planning, placing substantial demands on educators who were often insufficiently prepared for these changes (Jansen, 1998; Chisholm, 2005). These challenges were not inherent to OBE theory itself, but rather to the scale, pace and conditions of its implementation in the South African context.

Secondly, critics argue that OBE was linked to overly optimistic assumptions about the relationship between education and economic growth. Jansen (1998) contends that positioning curriculum reform as a direct driver of economic transformation underestimated the structural constraints within the labour market. This critique remains relevant in the TVET sector, where the NCV was expected to enhance employability and economic participation. However, empirical evidence suggests that structural barriers continue to limit graduate outcomes (Majola et al., 2024; Needham, 2019).

Thirdly, OBE has been criticised for insufficiently accounting for contextual inequalities across institutions. While the model assumes that all learners can achieve specified outcomes, this assumption depends heavily on the availability of resources, educator capacity and institutional support (Allais, 2014; Jansen, 1998). In the South African TVET sector, persistent disparities in infrastructure and funding continue to constrain effective curriculum delivery (DHET, 2020; Makole et al., 2023).

From a decolonial perspective, critique of OBE should not be directed at its foundational principles alone, but at the epistemic assumptions embedded in how it has been interpreted and operationalised within specific contexts. OBE's emphasis on measurable outcomes, standardisation and accountability reflects broader global trends in education influenced by managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2003; Allais, 2014). These tendencies may align with positivist traditions that prioritise quantification and comparability, potentially marginalising forms of knowledge that are relational, context-bound and not easily measurable.

However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that OBE inherently imposes a single epistemology. Rather, the South African experience demonstrates how globally circulating curriculum models are selectively adopted and reshaped within local political and institutional contexts (Jansen, 1998; Allais, 2014). The limitations observed in the NCV curriculum therefore reflect not only the theoretical underpinnings of OBE, but also the challenges of policy borrowing, resource inequality and uneven institutional capacity.

2.5 Demographic Influences on Education in South Africa

In terms of the Constitution of South Africa, the country is divided into nine provinces. Each province features its own distinctive landscape, vegetation, climate and socio-economic issues. One of the major socio-economic issues which some provinces face is poverty. Extreme poverty conditions where food and shelter are a dominant concern, undermine educational needs, viewing them as secondary. The need to alleviate poverty, unemployment and inequality are high on the socio-economic agenda of the country.

In the light of this harsh reality, obtaining a worthwhile education is seen as an opportunity to escape from poverty. However, as the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen, some writers have suggested that perhaps alleviation of poverty should have been the starting point to the new democracy rather than radical changes to an education system (Chiramba & Motala, 2023; Mabotha, 2024; Nongxa, 2010).

The prevalence of extreme poverty in some communities is often reflected in the schools within these communities. Many poor communities have schools which are still under-resourced and are grappling with classroom shortages, long distances to clean water supplies, decent ablution facilities and long distances to walk to school (Akuoko, 2024; Byrne, 2020).

HIV/AIDS is a further factor. The scourge of HIV/AIDS has caused a lot of havoc in the country as its influence on human and social development is very strong. Increased illness, death and reduced life expectancy affect development objectives. South Africa is no stranger to the phenomenon of child-headed households who, in many cases, face social problems including hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS and violence (UNICEF South Africa, 2024). These socio-economic problems of necessity will also have a devastating influence on academic achievement (Nekhubvi et al., 2025).

Another demographic factor worthy of consideration is that of language. This remains a highly controversial and emotional issue in South Africa (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025). Despite the provision in the constitution stating that all 12 official languages including Sign-Language must enjoy parity of esteem, and equal use where applicable, there is a marked move towards unilingualism in the public sector (Rakgogo, 2024). In education, mother-tongue instruction is increasingly sacrificed in favour of English. However, research indicates that many parents actively prefer their children to learn in English (Rakgogo, 2024; Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025).

Income, poverty and inequality require attention too. Seekings (2007) and Bundy (2020) record that apartheid had perpetuated income, poverty and aggravated income inequality in many grievous ways. This was done by ensuring that African people were dispossessed of most of their land; provided with restricted opportunities for employment or self-employment; confined to low-quality public education and health care; and being physically confined to impoverished parts of the countryside or cities. On the contrary, the white minority were beneficiaries of discriminatory public policies. It was, therefore, not unexpected that democratisation was accompanied by high hopes that income, poverty and inequality would be reduced.

Recent analysis confirm that South Africa continues to be among the most unequal countries globally (David et al., 2025; Robeyns, 2025). The top 10% of earners consistently receive roughly 65%-66% of total national income, while the bottom half earn less than 5%, and the income of the top 1% increased by 50% between 1993 and 2019, even as the poorest 50% saw a one-third decline in pre-tax income (Chatterjee et al., 2021; David et al., 2025).

Significant to this study is the aspect that emphasises the deep rootedness of colonisation and apartheid which in some cases seem to undermine efforts to correct the imbalances of the past. This undermining element exists because race is still a key determinant of differences in income levels, educational attainment, job opportunities and wealth. This has remained the trend in spite of several reforms, such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which aimed to redress the inequalities and segregationist legacy of apartheid by improving access to housing, education and social services for the poorest South Africans.

The above demographic factors go to show that many detrimental factors from the pre-1994 dispensation are still present and continue to affect the provision of education to the extent that some researchers have maintained that there have not been any significant changes in the alleviation of these factors since democracy (Bundy, 2020; Seekings, 2007). The factors presented above also indicate that even though several progressive

policies were implemented after the apartheid demise, these may not be sufficient to counter a profoundly unequal socioeconomic structure.

The South African context of decolonisation is distinct and unique, as the education system continues to grapple with historical injustices embedded in both colonisation and apartheid. Apartheid-era educational policies were explicitly designed to reproduce and maintain a racially divided political, social and economic structure, leaving deep and lasting effects on South African society (Akinmolayan et al., 2024). The legacies of these policies continue to shape contemporary schooling and higher education, where Western-centric ideologies and structures often hinder meaningful transformation and perpetuate colonial and apartheid-era epistemic hierarchies (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024).

Recent scholarship critiques the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 for its reliance on Western-centric frameworks that prioritises market-driven growth, industrialisation and foreign investment over local contexts and indigenous knowledge systems. For instance, the NDP promotes commercial agriculture and agro-industrial expansion modelled on Western agribusiness systems, thereby neglecting indigenous agricultural practices such as crop rotation, mixed farming and the use of drought-resistant indigenous crops that have long supported sustainable food systems (Msuya & KwaZulu, 2024). Similarly, the plan overlooks indigenous ecological knowledge, including the use of local indicators for weather forecasting and community-managed resource systems, in favour of industrial-scale renewable energy projects like solar and wind farms based on global models (Madzivhandila, 2024).

The relevance of this brief history is to illustrate inter alia; the powerful themes of brutal dehumanisation, racial degradation, sexism, oppression, loss of identity, violence and domination of the indigenous people which are still inherent in the education system (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). Thus, despite the ostensible efforts by the democratic government to develop a new integrated, equitable system, these historical differences are still evident largely in society and in the current education system (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024; Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). The

next section provides a brief account of the evolution of vocational education in South Africa – which is the subject of this study.

2.6 Overview of the Historical Landscape of TVET Colleges in South Africa

It is not the intention of this study to delve too deeply into the historical development of what is now referred to as TVET colleges. However, a brief historic landscape is intended to provide the context of the study.

Early forms of apprenticeship training were introduced to South Africa by Dutch, French, German and British immigrants during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Traditionally, an apprentice was understood as an individual taken on by a skilled practitioner to learn a trade, often receiving board and lodging in exchange for their labour (Gamble, 2021). However, this seemingly benign understanding obscures the more coercive dimensions of apprenticeship within colonial and slave-based labour systems. In such contexts, forms of “apprenticeship” were at times used to regulate the transition from enslavement to nominal freedom, effectively maintaining control over labour.

A deeper historical perspective therefore complicates contemporary understandings of vocational education and training. As noted by Jeanne Gamble, apprenticeship systems in South Africa have long been embedded within racialised labour regimes that structured access to skills along lines of race and class (Gamble, 2003 & 2016). In this sense, apprenticeship functioned not only as a mechanism for skills development, but also as a tool of labour control, often confining Black workers to subordinate economic positions (Badroodien, 2004; Kraak, 2004). This historical legacy continues to shape both the organisation and perception of vocational education in the present, raising important questions about the extent to which current models may reproduce inherited inequalities (Allais, 2012; Wedekind, 2010). Engaging with this history is therefore critical for any meaningful project of decolonising the TVET sector.

The conditions of freedom required that the slave served his/her master for 7 years as a way of being prepared for the world of freedom. In practice, however, this system often served to extend the control of former slave owners over labour, limiting the autonomy and mobility of freed individuals while maintaining a disciplined and dependent workforce. It is therefore likely that this term was brought to South Africa by British Settlers who popularised its use firstly between masters and their workers and then eventually it found its use in technical colleges to refer to the master trainer – trainee relationship (Gamble, 2003 & 2021). This genealogy suggests that apprenticeship, rather than being a neutral skills formation mechanism, was historically embedded in unequal power relations and systems of labour control, which continued to shape its institutionalisation in colonial contexts such as South Africa.

The term apprenticeship is still loosely being used by some employers though the term has now been replaced by Learnerships (Department of Labour, 1998). The traditional mode of apprenticeship was in practice until 1922 when the Apprenticeship Act of 1922 was introduced to include technical education into the curriculum and the undertaking of training at technical colleges (Gamble, 2003 & 2021). The evolution of vocational training was closely tied to the expansion of industrial development, particularly in mining, railway, harbour, and small engineering sectors during the early twentieth century. For instance, technical colleges such as the Witwatersrand Technical College (established in 1903) and training institutions under the South African Railway and Harbours (SAR&H) provided structured apprenticeship programmes for white youths in trades like fitting, turning and electrical work, ensuring their access to skilled and supervisory positions.

In contrast, black South Africans were channelled into racially segregated systems of industrial education that emphasised manual labour and moral discipline rather than technical expertise. Institutions such as Lovedale and Tiger Kloof offered training in carpentry, agriculture, bricklaying and domestic work to prepare learners for the subordinate roles in the colonial economy. Mining compounds and railway labour schools further reinforced this racial division by offering blacks limited, task-specific training that excluded them from artisan certification. Consequently, vocational education became a

mechanism for reproducing racialised labour hierarchies under colonial and segregationist industrial expansion (Christie, 1991; Kallaway, 2015; Moll et al., 2005). This differentiation can be read as an extension of earlier apprenticeship logics, where access to full skill formation and occupational mobility was systematically restricted along racial lines.

The expansion of the apprenticeship system was evident in the 1960s for both industrial and political reasons. The increasingly diversified industrial base saw the establishment of several industrial schools which were differentiated by focus area, for example, technical, agricultural or home economics schools and by race (Gamble, 2021; Moll et al., 2005). The greatest enforcer of the differentiated training system was the coming to power of the apartheid government in 1948. The views of the apartheid government in relation to education for black people is captured below.

Native education should be controlled ... if the native in South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake ... there is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... (Moll et al., 2005).

The similarity of views from both the European colonisers and Apartheid regime was the foundation and inheritance of the education system in South Africa. In this sense, apprenticeship and vocational training systems cannot be understood outside of their historical role in structuring and sustaining unequal labour relations. It was pressure from industry for increased skills among blacks in the 1970s and 1980s which forced government to re-examine the then Vocational Education and Training (VET) system and thus widen access of blacks into technical colleges to meet the needs of industry. Through the Manpower Amendment Act of 1990, responsibility of training devolved from the state to industry thus making industry dictate training needs. In spite of this, training in technical colleges of historically white and black students concentrated on the interest of each race group and programmes implemented did not consider the needs, context or diverse backgrounds of all people living in South Africa (Terblanche, 2017).

The period following the end of apartheid witnessed a plethora of policy changes with the aim of bringing reform to TVET colleges in order to align them with strategic education and training priorities of the new democratic government. Training was focused mainly on the upskilling and retraining of black people for the purpose of employability (Gamble, 2003 & 2021). Further, changes included the introduction of a new curriculum on vocational qualifications primarily aimed at youth who desire to follow a vocational qualification. These changes are discussed in detail later in this chapter. During this phase, also of significance was the moving of TVET colleges from the further education and training sector to the higher education and training sector (DHET, 1998). The changes to the sector were motivated by the need to reform outdated programmes that were no longer meeting industry needs.

It is noted that during the period of technical education and training of apprenticeships from 1881 to 1997 training was sponsored by employers and thus students enjoyed the status of employees and thus had easy access to on-job training as training was undertaken on a part-time basis. Industry had a direct influence in designing curricula as in some cases, training was directly funded by industry (Gamble, 2003 & 2021). In contrast to the situation currently, the “employer-learnership” relationship does not mostly exist. Even though the Technical and Vocational Education and Training space has been deracialised and provides greater access to young black people to prepare for intermediate and higher-level occupational categories, they have less access to on-job training as employer sponsorship has declined (Gamble, 2003 & 2021). The financial responsibility for funding youth who undertake studies in TVET colleges now lies squarely on Government through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS, 2016; De Villiers, 2023).

These historical dynamics reveal that education and skills development in South Africa have never been neutral processes, but are deeply embedded in political, economic and epistemic struggles, an insight that is central to contemporary decolonial critiques of the TVET sector.

2.6.1 Institutional reform

As indicated above, the advent of democracy in 1994 was followed by a plethora of significant changes in the Post-School Education and Training sector (PSET) and particularly in the TVET sector. The TVET college sector is diversified within a differentiated PSET system in a developmental state (Norodien-Fataar, 2024; Rasool & Mahembe, 2014; Sebola, 2022). A point summary of the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013a) regarding TVET provisioning include inter alia, the name change from FET colleges to TVET colleges; the drastic increase in student intake from 650 000 in 2014 to a targeted 2.5 million in 2030 with accompanying infrastructure and human resource increase. Furthermore, it mentions the alignment between universities, TVET colleges and SETAs; and the strengthening of institutional arrangements for the South Africa Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAVCT) to provide expert support to the college sector in developing innovative curricula. The positioning of the TVET colleges in such a context then required a strategic mandate which would accelerate the performance of colleges in line with the envisaged national priorities of a developmental state. The reform of TVET colleges from the onset was that of a structural nature (Moll et al., 2005) with the intention of turning colleges into machinery that would contribute to resolving the developmental challenges facing South Africa.

Although the policy framework outlines the alignment between universities, TVET colleges and SETAs, as well as the strengthening of institutional mechanisms through the SAIVCET, the translation of these ambitions into practice has been uneven. The envisioned collaboration and curriculum innovation has been hindered by weak institutional capacity, fragmented coordination among departments and limited resource allocation. As a result, the implementation gap between policy intent and practical realisation remains evident as TVET colleges continue to struggle to fulfil their strategic mandate within the broader developmental agenda (Wedekind, 2014; Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016).

As part of a multi-pronged approach, TVET colleges were expected to play a contributory role in addressing the problems of unemployment, inequality and poverty (ANC, 2007). This meant being involved in a wide range of education and training programmes for the unemployed, underemployed and discouraged youth. In addition, the role was extended to include the creation of access to learning for workers in the informal sector and casual workers in the formal sector (Moll et al., 2005). Thus, the TVET college sector was intended to play a role in widening access to quality learning opportunities for the black race groups (Norodien-Fataar, 2024; Rasool & Mahembe, 2014; Sebola, 2022).

Interventions of structurally reconfiguring the TVET college sector were evident from the Education White Paper 4 - *“A framework for the transformation of FET colleges in South Africa”* (DHET, 1998): *Preparing for the 21st Century through education, training and work*. In particular, it recommended that the college sector be developed and expanded into a vibrant further education and training sector which would allow access to all learners. This set the tone for the transformation of the TVET college sector. In the White Paper 4 it became clear that the TVET college sector was not only seen as an avenue that would bridge the skills gap, but one which would help the country to “chart its course in the global competitive world of the 21st century” (DHET, 1998, p. 14). It was envisaged that the central features of this restructured system would be “a new governance framework, a new framework for programmes and qualifications, a new quality improvement and assurance institution, and a new funding system that would provide an important lever for system change” (DHET, 1998, p. 14).

The policy framework was provided through the promulgation of the Further Education & Training Colleges Act 98 of 1998 which would further address the fragmented and non-co-ordinated TVET system which existed at that time, as outlined briefly in the historical section above. The policy clearly outlined the importance of TVET colleges in contributing to Human Resource Development, thus making it the interface between Education & Training and the Skills Development Strategy initiated by the Department of Labour. Thus,

by providing the policy foundation and framework for the new responsive, effective, efficient and accountable TVET system, the restructuring process was set to commence.

The transformation of South Africa's TVET sector has been significantly influenced by the Further Education and Training Act 98 of 1998, which aimed to establish a nationally coordinated system that promotes cooperative governance and provides for programmes-based further education and training. This Act sought to redress past discrimination and ensure equal access to education and training for all South Africans. Recent studies have highlighted the evolving role of TVET colleges in higher education, noting the challenges and opportunities they face in aligning with national educational standards and policies (Sebola, 2022). Additionally, historical analyses have traced the development of vocational education and training in South Africa, emphasising the need for continuous transformation to address contemporary challenges (Xaba, 2024). The Act was also significant in enabling TVET colleges to equip students with knowledge, skills and competencies required for employment, entry into specific vocations, occupations, or trades, as well as access to higher education institutions. The emphasis on articulation and mobility within and between qualifications became increasingly evident in subsequent TVET policies. It was clear from the FET Act that the government's skills development agenda was largely entrusted to TVET colleges.

In 1999 government announced its intention to merge and convert technical colleges into TVET institutions in line with the FET Act 1998 (DHET, 2002). This was followed by the announcement by the Department of Education of its Statement of Priorities delivered on 27 July 1999, in which nine key areas were prioritised. Of these, two had a direct bearing on curriculum change that was to take place in further education and training. These were priority number six – Enabling active learning through outcomes-based education; and priority seven – creating a vibrant further education and training sector. The subsequent “New Institutional Landscape for FET Colleges” (DHET, 2002) outlined the merger process of the 150 technical colleges into 50 multi-campus institutions to improve efficiency and coordination. While some scholars have interpreted this restructuring as a move towards “privatisation” or “marketisation” (and both being examples of Eurocentric

influences) of public colleges, this study references it primarily as a policy-driven consolidation process (Kraak & Hall, 1999; McGrath, 2002).

The TVET landscape now comprises 50 multi-campus TVET colleges which have been beneficiaries of the R1.9 billion recapitalisation fund for college infrastructure (DHET, 2005). This was intended to enable colleges to provide 21st century state-of-the-art learning spaces, equipment and infrastructure. The aim of the recapitalisation was to enable colleges to adopt business models of responsive programme delivery to both the communities they serve and industry.

2.6.2 Curriculum reform

With institutional frameworks in place, attention turned to reforming TVET college curricula. The National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) programmes were criticised for being outdated, overly theoretical and lacking external quality assurance, all while colleges struggled with limited funding and little programme innovation. Recent analyses confirm that these criticisms remain relevant as NATED 191 programmes continue to be described as theoretically weak and misaligned with the post-apartheid skills development goals, prompting their replacement with NCV qualifications, yet implementation challenges persist (Makole et al., 2023). Furthermore, curriculum development remains largely controlled by the Department of Higher Education, limiting lecturer involvement. While emerging partnerships with industry are beginning to introduce practical components, the curricula remain the exception rather than the norm (Kana & Letaba, 2024).

The White Paper (DHET, 2013a) for Post-Schooling Education and Training called for a thorough review and restructuring of the TVET curricula, positioning curriculum at the heart of the TVET transformation strategy. Gamble (2003), in recognising the importance of understanding the TVET historical perspective urged that the TVET curriculum of the future should be informed by adequate perspective of the past as a baseline. Thus, the Draft Re-capitalisation Plan (DHET, 2005) for funding programmes offered at TVET

colleges provided the impetus for the shift towards more responsive programme delivery approach. This initiative compelled TVET colleges to align their offerings with the needs of local communities, industries and workplace-based learning (Kraak & Hall, 1999). However, recent studies reveal that despite these policy directions, curriculum control remains centralised with limited institutional autonomy, and meaningful industry partnership, though growing, are still not widespread (Kana & Letaba, 2024).

Indeed, funding played a catalytic role in transitioning TVET college curricula from the traditional NATED 191 model to an outcomes-based framework resonant with NQF requirements. As (Gewe, 2016) noted, that the Department of Education's funding model became the basis for steering TVET institutions toward an outcomes-based approach to education and training. In 2006 the *Qualification Policy Framework for FET programmes* was gazetted (DHET, 2006c). The first mention of the National Certificate (Vocational) programmes was found here. The changes in policy mentioned earlier and this present change signalled that TVET colleges were to offer programs determined by thorough analysis of needs of the community, the regional economy and in line with national priorities (Gewe, 2016). Programmes offered would also be subject to external quality assurance by uMalusi. By July of 2006, curricula for the 11 TVET priority programmes was published with implementation of the first level in 2007 (DHET, 2006a, 2006b).

This funding-led impetus was further bolstered by the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), a national macroeconomic strategy aimed at accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty and unemployment, and its associated Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), which specifically focused on addressing scarce and critical skills needed to support economic development. The influence of these initiatives was evident in ASGISA-linked strategies such as JIPSA and the rollout of the National Certificate (Vocational) (NCV) programme, providing both financial and structural motivation for curriculum reform (DHET, 1998; DoL, 2001).

At the policy implementation level, a targeted curriculum review led by QCTO began in 2013, embedding industry standards into the new occupational qualifications and

reinforcing the shift from theory-heavy programmes toward practical, workplace-aligned training (DHET, 2013a; Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, 2021).

2.6.3 National Certificate Vocational (NCV)

The National Certificate (Vocational) (NCV) curriculum adopts a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, underpinned by the ethos of an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design (Department of Education [DoE], 1997, 2006). The curriculum offers a wide range of programme options. Each programme comprises three fundamental subjects (English, Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation), three vocational subjects, and one elective subject. The elective may be selected from across different fields or programmes, thereby enabling a range of curriculum permutations for learners. NCV Levels 2 to 4 correspond to Grades 10 to 12 in the general education system, as articulated within the framework of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) established under the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995.

With the introduction of NCV programmes, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges were expected to respond more effectively to industry needs and to adopt organisational practices resembling those of business enterprises (Akoojee, 2008; McGrath et al., 2006). Contemporary research suggests that this expectation not only persists but remains central to ongoing reform efforts. In particular, TVET colleges are increasingly oriented towards industry responsiveness, often with limited emphasis on community-based partnerships (Njengele et al., 2024). For instance, some colleges have implemented dual-system apprenticeship models and expanded workplace-based learning partnerships in sectors such as automotive manufacturing, renewable energy and information technology. These initiatives aim to align training provision more closely with labour market demands and to enhance graduate employability.

However, despite these efforts, persistent systemic challenges remain (Njengele et al., 2024). Parliamentary oversight has further underscored these concerns, highlighting high levels of youth unemployment and the continued marginalisation of the TVET and

community college sectors (DHET, 2024). Concerns raised include stagnant funding since 2013, the persistence of a university-centric post-school system, and limited progress in repositioning vocational education despite clear policy intentions (DHET, 2024).

While this study advances a critical decolonial perspective on the NCV, it is important to acknowledge countervailing positions that emphasise the functional role of standardisation, centralisation and labour market alignment within TVET systems. Scholars such as Stephen Billett, Lorna Unwin and Alison Fuller, as well as policy-oriented bodies such as CEDEFOP, emphasise the importance of structured and standardised vocational systems in ensuring coherence, quality and labour market relevance (Billett, 2011; Fuller & Unwin, 2011; CEDEFOP, 2017). From this perspective, the NCV's structured curriculum, assessment regimes and nationally standardised outcomes are viewed as essential mechanisms for ensuring quality assurance, comparability of qualifications, and responsiveness to economic demands. This position is further reinforced in TVET literature that highlights the central role of vocational education in preparing learners for the world of work and aligning skills formation with labour market needs (McGrath et al., 2019; Wheelahan, 2015). Proponents argue that excessive localisation or curricular flexibility may undermine the portability and credibility of vocational qualifications within both national and global labour markets.

However, while these concerns are not without merit, this study contends that an uncritical prioritisation of efficiency and standardisation may reproduce the very inequalities and epistemic exclusions that decoloniality seeks to address. It is against this background and description of TVET institutional, and curriculum change that a decolonial exploration of the NCV curriculum has been problematised.

2.7 Teaching and Learning in Context: Why Pedagogical Reforms Fail in Sub-Saharan Africa

The criticism of OBE has already been addressed in earlier sections. In this section, I situate this critique within broader debates about why pedagogical reforms fail in Sub-Saharan Africa and from a decolonial perspective. OBE assumes that knowledge is context-free and transferable, expecting students everywhere to achieve the same “competencies” regardless of cultural or local context, while overlooking African worldviews in which learning is communal, process-based, relational and deeply tied to lived experience and environment. Furthermore, OBE privileges Western epistemologies and marginalises African Indigenous Knowledge Systems that value oral tradition, observation, spirituality and communal learning, a pattern that often contributes to the failure of reforms.

According to Tabulawa (2013), reforms in African education frequently fail because they suffer from context mismatch, ignoring the social, cultural and historical realities of African classrooms where teaching practices are shaped by authority relations, cultural expectations and societal norms rather than policy alone. Material constraints such as large classes, limited resources and overcrowding hinder the implementation of learner-centred pedagogies, while insufficient teacher preparation results in superficial adoption; systemic pressures like exam-oriented curricula further reinforce traditional teacher-centred approaches. Tabulawa emphasises that teaching is fundamentally embedded in a socio-cultural world, and that reforms fail when teaching is treated as a technical issue rather than a social practice.

Many scholars have also critiqued policy borrowing, showing that importing Western educational models without adaptation leads to symbolic compliance rather than meaningful change (e.g., Shah & Basnyat, 2024 on learner-centred policy transfer; Allais & Wedekind, 2020 on externally driven reform agendas that are poorly grounded in local realities). As a solution, Tabulawa advocates for a contextualised pedagogy: locally grounded, culturally responsive teaching methods that emerge from the realities of the classroom rather than being imposed from outside, acknowledging that effective pedagogy may not resemble Western learner-centred models.

From a decolonial perspective, these critiques highlight the tension between globally circulating curriculum models and locally grounded educational needs. While OBE promotes flexibility and learner-centredness in principle, its implementation within standardised national frameworks may inadvertently privilege dominant epistemologies and marginalise indigenous knowledge systems that are relational, communal and context-specific (Odora Hoppers, 2002). This tension is particularly significant in the TVET sector, where questions of relevance, employability and social justice intersect.

2.8 Global Changes in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Global VET policy discourse has increasingly positioned skills development as a primary driver of economic growth, reflecting the influence of Human Capital Theory and global competitiveness frameworks (OECD, 2023; World Bank et al., 2023; Allais, 2014). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) reports that approximately one in three 25-34 year olds in OECD countries holds a vocational qualification as their highest level of education, underscoring the importance of VET in education systems (OECD, 2023). The increasing proportion of youth attaining vocational qualifications in OECD countries demonstrates that VET is not merely an alternative to academic education, but a strategic pillar in human capital formation and national development. For South Africa, aligning with these global trends is particularly relevant given the country's high youth unemployment and persistent skills mismatch between education outputs and labour market needs. Additionally, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2024) highlights that many countries are revisiting VET curricula to align with industry and labour market changes, adopting modular approaches and flexible pathways to enhance responsiveness (CEDEFOP, 2024). Furthermore, UNESCO's strategy for 2022-2029 aims to transform TVET to promote skills development for empowerment, productive employment, decent work, facilitating transitions to more digital, green and inclusive economies and societies (UNESCO, 2022).

While organisations such as OECD, CEDEFOP and UNESCO present VET as a neutral and technical response to global economic change, their policy frameworks are underpinned by particular assumptions about the purpose of education. Central to these is the prioritisation of employability, productivity and skills alignment with labour market needs, reflecting the influence of Human Capital Theory and broader neoliberal policy orientations (Allais, 2014; McGrath et al., 2006). These frameworks promote standardisation, modularisation and measurable outcomes as indicators of success, which, while useful for comparability across systems, may also narrow the conceptualisation of education to primarily economic ends.

From a decolonial perspective, this global policy discourse can be understood as part of a wider process of epistemic dominance, where models developed in the Global North are circulated and adopted in diverse contexts without sufficient interrogation of their underlying assumptions (Mignolo, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). As a result, VET reforms in countries such as South Africa are often shaped by external policy logics that prioritise economic competitiveness over local relevance, social justice and epistemic diversity. This raises critical questions about whose knowledge counts in curriculum design, whose interests are served by VET systems, and whether global “best practices” can adequately respond to historically rooted inequalities and contextual realities.

Over recent decades, scholars and policy makers (e.g. McGrath, Akoojee, Gewer, Mabizela, Mbele & Roberts, 2006) have documented the transformation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in many countries, noting the urgency to align TVET policy with changing economic goals. In the current era, this demand has intensified as economies globally confront new challenges such as technological change, climate transitions and demographic shifts. TVET must evolve to meet not only traditional technical skills but also digital, green and adaptive skills. Recent global studies show that low-and middle-income countries are especially under pressure to reform TVET systems to improve relevance, quality, access, financing and alignment with labour market needs (World Bank et al., 2023).

In addition, several countries have been cited (Germany, New Zealand, UK, Sweden and Switzerland, Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique and Namibia) as continuing to be examples in current policy and research of how TVET is being reshaped. For example, in Sweden, recent OECD surveys emphasise skills-labour-market matching as central to economic productivity. In Botswana, the government is holding forums such as the “TVET Pitso” to drive national dialogue and align policy with economic diversification goals (HRDCSA, 2021). Meanwhile, research in South Africa (a representative case in Southern Africa) highlights the need for regular curriculum transformation to keep up with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, employer engagement in practical training and more flexible pathways.

To this end, several VET models exist across countries, and most are driven by a belief that a transformed VET would address the problem, especially of youth unemployment and provide skills development necessary to address and contribute to a country’s present and projected economic opportunities and challenges (McGrath et al., 2006). UNESCO also holds consensus that VET transformation is necessary if the goal of creating economic opportunities must be realised (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2012b, 2014b). Of note to this study are two aspects: first, is that many reforms are rooted in what McGrath et al. (2006) describe as the “ideological certainty of neo-liberalism,” where education systems are restructured to prioritise efficiency, market responsiveness and economic returns. Within this paradigm, VET is increasingly framed as a mechanism for producing labour market-ready individuals, rather than as a broader social or epistemic project. Second, that curriculum reform remains central to the broader set of issues shaping VET policy and practice. The reforms within the NCV curriculum, therefore, fall within wider global efforts to design curricula that can advance the VET reform agenda.

In addition, comparative analyses continue to highlight lessons from systems in New Zealand, Scotland and the UK, which have pursued curriculum reform to ensure that education produces graduates who can respond to global economic pressures while contributing meaningfully to their domestic contexts (Keep, 2024; Moll et al., 2005; Moodie & Wheelahan, 2023). South Africa’s TVET reform trajectory continues to draw

parallels with these cases. Especially in the emphasis in employability pathways to higher education and responsiveness to industry needs. Across Africa, similar reform logics have been observed. For example, recent work shows that Kenya and Zimbabwe continue to view VET reform as central to addressing colonial legacies and socio-economic inequalities, while at the same time negotiating tensions between global policy transfer and local needs (Wanyama, 2021).

A key concern raised in decolonial scholarship is the uncritical transfer of globally dominant policy models into African education systems, often without sufficient attention to context, history or local knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016). In the field of VET, this manifests in the adoption of competency-based and outcomes-driven frameworks that privilege standardisation and measurement, while marginalising forms of knowledge that are embedded in community, practice and lived experience (Allais, 2014; Odora Hoppers, 2002). This critique underscores the importance of situating TVET reform within broader debates on decoloniality and knowledge justice.

Turning specifically to the South African context, education and training remain central to achieving the economic goals of a developmental state, particularly in relation to youth job creation and reducing unemployment. Within this framework, TVET colleges and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) have been positioned as key drivers of skills development (Wedekind, 2014; Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016). The continuing call for TVET colleges to be responsive to labour market needs through reforms in institutional arrangements and curricula reflects the predominant Eurocentric influence of Human Capital Theory (HCT). HCT posits that education enhances productivity and efficiency by increasing the stock of economically valuable knowledge, skills and attributes among individuals (Almendarez, 2013; Netcoh, 2016; Schultz, 1961). In simple terms, investment in human capital through education and training is expected to improve employability and foster economic growth.

Recent studies, however, caution that while South Africa's TVET policy discourse strongly embraces HCT, challenges such as weak industry linkages and limited workplace exposure undermine its effectiveness (Papier, 2020; Wedekind et al., 2021). This has led

some scholars to argue for more integrated approaches that go beyond narrow employability to include social justice, lifelong learning, and adaptability in the face of technological change and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Akoojee & Ganong, 2023; Powell & McGrath, 2019). Examples of such integrated approaches could be partnerships with local community “Shisa-Nyama” (a restaurant that sells braai meat) places for students in the hospitality industry, local community mechanics or local events hosting businesses to serve as places where students can obtain work-integrated learning (Limpopo Provincial Government, 2008).

The premise of HCT and its assumed link to economic growth has been widely criticised. Vally and Spreen (2014) argue that when the relationship between education, training and society is reduced to narrow economic ends based solely on assumptions about unemployment and work, that relationship becomes “tenuous and misconstrued” (p.1). They further caution that in South Africa, the dominant view that shortages of critical skills can only be addressed through education and training is problematic, as it is based on limited understanding of the broader role of vocational education. They emphasise that the value of education and training should be “defined in socioeconomic, cultural and political terms and not solely reduced to the needs of economic growth” (Vally & Spreen, 2014, p. 3).

Wedekind (2014) similarly critiques the discourse of responsiveness and employability that frames TVET reforms. He observes that reforms in South Africa often position TVET colleges as central to solving social problems, particularly unemployment, while relying heavily on HCT. This, he argues, has produced a “circularity of the reform process” (p. 76) in which the same problems are continually restated without structural transformation. More recent scholarships have extended these critiques. Papier (2020) and Wedekind et al. (2021) point out that the discourse of employability remains dominant in South Africa TVET, but in practice, weak workplace linkages and structural inequalities prevent reforms from achieving their goals. Powell and McGrath (2019) argue for moving beyond the narrow framing of HCT towards a human development perspective, where TVET is seen as contributing not only to employability but also to social justice, citizenship and

well-being. Likewise, Akoojee and Ganong (2023) highlight that uncritical reliance on HCT risks entrenching a skills-economy mismatch unless reforms consider technological change, inequality and the broader societal role of education.

In addition, several authors have argued that there is no simple, direct correlation between improving education and training with immediate job creation (Ashton & Green, 1996). Crouch et al. (1999) also contend that government often relegates the responsibility to judge what skills are to be provided and by what means, to individual firms. Deferring such decisions to businesses, they argue, negates the collective responsibility of developing necessary skills across the economy.

Further, arguments in the South African context emphasise that the problem is not just, or even primarily, the supply of skills but rather the structure of the economy; macroeconomic policy, political economy dynamics and corruption also play significant roles (Gumede, 2019; von Holdt, 2025). Recent reports support this: in the OECD Economic Surveys: South Africa 2025, for example, while skills mismatch are acknowledged, persistent unemployment is linked less to the absence of education per se and more to structural constraints such as inefficient infrastructure, weak industrial policy, regulatory barriers and poor coordination among government, industry and training institutions (OECD, 2025).

Also, meta-analysis like in (Rosenberg, 2022) show that even where educational qualifications increase, many graduates remain unemployed because their fields of study do not align well with market demand, or because of bottlenecks like limited work experience opportunities, weak absorption capacity of industries and inequalities in access to high education.

Finally, recent work on South Africa's youth unemployment and political economy highlights that high unemployment is increasingly tied to issues beyond education: corruption, state capture, favouritism in public procurement and employment, spatial

inequality and macroeconomic instability (Pillay et al., 2023). These deepen the mismatch between what education produces and what jobs are available (Rapanyane et al., 2022).

Of particular interest to this study is the premise on which Baatjes et al. (2014) approach the reform debate in TVET colleges. They argue that vocational and instrumental learning orientation implicit in the HCT shape a philosophical orientation that deeply influences how educators conceive of their roles, what they believe about their students, how they select and design curricula and how they facilitate learning. Baatjes et. al further assert that while vocational education is often justified instrumentally, which is as a tool to address poverty, inequalities and unemployment, it negates the “deeply rooted complexities of economic systems underpinned by the ideology of neoliberalism” (p.82).

For this study, then, the implications of the neoliberal ideology on vocational provisioning become critical to explore, especially considering decolonisation discourses that call for education to be more than just a technical or economic instrument, but also a space for epistemic justice, inclusion and affirmation of local knowledge. More recent scholarships build on this critique. For example, “Reimagining career empowerment in South African TVET: A Freirean critique of policy and pedagogy” (Majola, 2024) highlights how policy and pedagogical practice in TVET often reproduce neoliberal frameworks, reducing learners to “human capital” for labour markets at the expense of critical agency and transformative potential. Majola argues for pedagogies rooted in dialogue, reflexivity and socio-political awareness. Similarly, Ronnie (2023) uses a Bourdieusian lens to examine TVET in South Africa and demonstrates that the sector’s field is shaped by power relations, cultural and social capital and institutional norms that reinforce neoliberal logics and marginality.

These newer works indicate that while Baatjes et al. (2014) laid a strong foundation, the debate now increasingly demands both macro and micro theoretical tools to understand how neoliberal ideology is embedded in reform, and how decolonial alternatives might be enacted in curricula, pedagogy and institutional culture. Thus, global VET reform agendas are not merely technical solutions to skills development challenges, but are embedded

within broader political, economic and epistemic projects that shape how education is imagined, implemented and experienced in postcolonial contexts.

2.9 A Call to Decolonise South African Higher Education Institutions

Research increasingly highlights the importance of recognising and integrating indigenous knowledge into curricula at both school and higher education levels (Msila, 2007; Hlela, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). In South Africa, this debate has persisted for decades, with scholars arguing that the inclusion of African knowledge systems is essential to making education more relevant and beneficial to indigenous communities. For instance, the University of Fort Hare has integrated indigenous knowledge into its agriculture programmes where postgraduate students in agricultural extension engage in community-based experiential learning, applying traditional farming techniques alongside modern practices. This approach not only enhances students' competencies but also supports sustainable agriculture practices within local communities (Cheteni & Umejesi, 2023). In addition, the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Discipline of Traditional Medicine offers programmes that incorporate African traditional healing practices. The programme aims to restore the dignity of African Traditional Medicine and become a centre of excellence in this field. This inclusion ensures that healthcare education is culturally relevant and respects indigenous healing systems.

This study recognises that decolonial pedagogy functions both as a lens and a practice, rethinking what counts as knowledge and how learning occurs, with the aim of empowering students and dismantling colonial hierarchies in education. While it can be supported by experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and other community-based participatory methods, these approaches do not inherently require Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to be valid, though they can be enriched by them. Importantly, the use of experiential or community-based methods alone does not constitute a decolonial approach; such a pedagogy also demands a critical interrogation of whose knowledge is enacted, validated, and reproduced through these practices (Le Grange, 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

The literature reveals diverse interpretations among scholars regarding what should be decolonised in higher education institutions and how this process should unfold. Such divergence is unsurprising given the vast scope of decolonisation and its varied impact across racial and cultural groups. As Turok (2018) observes, South Africa remains uniquely divided compared to other African nations, with entrenched spatial and institutional legacies of colonialism. Despite commitments to non-racialism, these divisions are evident in higher education, where universities often remain demarcated along historical racial lines, perpetuating colonial relationships in the present.

While many scholars (Batisai et al., 2022; Cowan et al., 2024; Modisane, 2025) continue to contend that South Africa's higher education system remains shaped by historical racial divisions, some recent studies offer more nuanced perspectives. Havergal (2015) observed that although inequalities persist, race is no longer the sole determinant of access and opportunity, as class-based disparities and socioeconomic status increasingly influence student participation across institutions. Similarly, Sehoole et al. (2024) highlight tensions surrounding race-based admissions policies, noting that while such measures address historical inequities, they also risk reinforcing race as the central axis of disadvantage, thereby obscuring other intersecting forms of exclusion such as class and geography.

Chikoko (2024), in a systematic review of decolonisation in higher education, finds that the extent of transformation varies widely with some universities having undertaken more substantive curricula and institutional changes, while others remain largely symbolic thus indicating that racial and colonial legacies are being actively contested rather than remain uniformly reproduced. Together, these perspectives suggest that while the imprint of racialised inequality persists, it is being reframed within the broader debates about equity, transformation and the multidimensional nature of exclusion in post-apartheid higher education.

Several scholarships (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000) assert that a “decolonial epistemology that overtly assumes a decolonial geopolitics and body-politics

of knowledge as points of departure to a radical critique” (p.7) would be the right tool in undertaking studies that seek to understand colonial-type of power that still exist in our present day. Grosfoguel (2003) has persuasively argued that it is the concept of decoloniality which is able to unveil the reasons why colonial forms of domination continue in the present day because the concept of decoloniality addresses the issue of colonial domination from several vantage points including “cultural, political, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression” (p.240) and not from an isolated and singular point of departure which in this case is the existence or absence of colonial administrations.

Mignolo (2009) conceptualises the colonial matrix of power as an enduring global structure that emerged from colonialism and continues to organise economic, political, social and epistemic relations. This matrix operates across four interconnected domains: control of the economy (land, resources, labour), control of authority (institutions, governance), control of gender and sexuality (social hierarchies and identities) and control of knowledge and subjectivity (epistemologies, worldviews). Through these domains, coloniality sustains asymmetrical power relations, privileging Eurocentric modernity while marginalising indigenous and local knowledges.

In the context of South Africa’s TVET sector, examples of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and training could involve integrating holistic projects that connect trade skills with sustainability, environmental awareness and local practices (National Research Foundation, 2018). For instance, construction students may be evaluated not only on technical specifications drawn from Western standards but also on traditional building techniques and materials. Similarly, hospitality students can complement theoretical learning with participation in community events such as traditional weddings, where they learn service customs and etiquette from cultural mentors and elders. Partnerships such as formal Memoranda of Understanding with local artisan groups and indigenous elders strengthen this integration by including them as advisory boards and curriculum co-creation. These indigenous practices promote community wellbeing, cultural preservation and ethical application of skills, while embedding ecological principles such as indigenous

building methods, organic agriculture and sustainable resource use into vocational education and training (National Research Foundation, 2018).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016, 2017, 2020 & 2025) has held a consistent argument, which is removing colonialism physically does not equate to removing it epistemically. Colonialism is a complex power structure that transforms people's way of life. It is the invention of asymmetrical and colonial intersubjective relations between coloniser and colonised and it economically institutes dispossession and transfers of economic resources from those who are indigenous to those who are conquering and foreign. He further argues that decolonisation has to remain a revolutionary term with both theoretical and practical value that speaks about rehumanisation. In this regard the concepts of coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being become critical to the revolution.

De Sousa Santos (2017) proposes a multidimensional approach to assessing the decolonisation of higher education institutions, offering six interrelated guidelines. These include expanding equitable access to students to a university career; transforming research and teaching contents to reflect diverse epistemologies; revising disciplines of knowledge, curricula and syllabi to dismantle Eurocentric dominance; adopting inclusive and contextually relevant teaching and learning methods; restructuring institutional structures and governance to democratise decision-making, and redefining the relationship between the universities and society to prioritise social justice and community engagement. Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework of reimagining higher education as a space that actively resists colonial legacies and fosters epistemic plurality.

Both Mbembe (2016) and de Sousa Santos (2017) write from the vantage point of decolonising universities. Mbembe's argument, which is relevant for this study, is in pointing out what is wrong with institutions of higher learning – that they are “Westernised”. In his view, westernised means that institutions are local representations of Eurocentric epistemic models. Institutions that are Eurocentric espouse truth as only relating to the Western way of knowledge production. It thus disregards all other forms of

knowledge or holds them in low esteem. Mbembe sharply points out that Eurocentrism “portrays colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression” (p. 32). The project of decolonisation is massive, and care should be taken that we do not misunderstand the brief to decolonise. For institutions of higher learning to be decolonised, Mbembe calls for a reconceptualisation of diasporic intellectual networks, transnational engagements and harnessing globalised talent mobility to contribute to the success of the decolonisation project of universities in South Africa.

The main contribution of Vorster and Quinn (2017) to this study is the question their scholarly article raises of “what decolonisation would mean for academic development”. They acknowledge that the discourses of transformation have failed to achieve their end, having given rise to new discourses such as decolonisation. For this study the question is important as it seeks to understand what would be required of academic staff of TVET colleges in the instance that data shows that curricula needs decolonisation. This would be a discussion to be had with participants during the Participant Feedback session at the end of my study.

Post-colonial and in particularly, post-apartheid discourses in South Africa have long been shaped by debates on diversity and inclusivity (Christie, 1998; de Clercq, 1997; Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2012). These debates intersect with ongoing research into various forms of prejudices including racial, ethnic, gender and other systemic biases. Within this discourse curriculum emerges as a critical arena in which the legacies of colonialism are reproduced or contested. As Chilisa (2019, p. 8) argues, the curriculum is “a significant site of the struggle” for decolonisation, an observation that is particularly relevant to the transformation of TVET college curricula in South Africa.

2.10 Renewed Focus on Decolonisation of HEIs in SA

Although debates on decolonisation in South Africa predate 1994, the *#FeesMustFallCampaign* became the most significant catalyst for renewed attention to decolonisation and fee free education post-apartheid. Discussions have primarily centred on public universities and universities of technology with TVET colleges largely absent from the discourse. Given that TVET colleges are part of the higher education landscape, this study will draw on literature focused on decolonising universities and universities of technology to inform research on TVET spaces, where scholarship remains scarce.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) insightfully notes that the resurgence of the decolonial struggles in South Africa is not merely anticolonial but carries a broader agenda to purge institutions of colonial symbols and legacies. This was evident during the 2015 and 2016 *#FeesMustFall* protests, which saw the destruction of colonial statues and property. Such actions highlight cognitive injustices and call for transcending current frameworks of subjectivity and knowledge. They advocate for an ecology of knowledge which embraces multiple knowledge and envisions a pluriversal university that humanises beyond entrenched racial hierarchies, moving away from the singular, colonial university model (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016).

The colonial system is complex, prompting Ndlovu (2013) to ask: “After years without juridical-administrative colonial and apartheid systems, to what extent did those seeking to dethrone colonial domination understand its complexity?” (p.51). From this perspective, Grosfoguel (2007) critiques anti-colonial struggles that focused solely on overthrowing colonialism as overly simplistic and inadequate for dismantling a heterogenous global system built over 450 years. This critique resonates with South Africa’s renewed call for fee-free, decolonised education. Considering the history of apprenticeships in TVET colleges, one must question how deeply colonial hegemony is embedded in this culture.

The complexity of colonialism is also evident in its intergenerational effects on psychological, educational, cultural, technological, economic, political, mental and physical well-being (Abdi, 2012; Kaunda, 2016; Ndlovu, 2013). Specially, colonial education enforced European language and epistemologies” sovereignty while

subordinating African worldviews and ways of knowing (Abdi, 2012). Thus, a decolonial examination of the educational philosophy underpinning the NCV curriculum is essential, given colonialism's enduring impact on education.

2.10.1 Decolonisation and curriculum

Curricula serve not only as carriers of disciplinary knowledge but also a vehicle for reproducing dominant ideologies. In South Africa, curricula continue to reflect predominantly Eurocentric worldviews that sustain white privilege and epistemic dominance (Heleta, 2016; 2020). The intertwined legacies of colonialism and apartheid have left enduring structural inequalities, racially stratifies schooling and under-resourced black institutions deprived of intellectual and cultural capital (Heleta, 2016; McAteer & Wood, 2018).

Recent scholarship underscores that while educators are striving toward decolonial curriculum transformation, sustained dependence on Western epistemologies and uncertainty about alternative frameworks continue to constrain meaningful change (Le Grange, 2020; Pillay & Swanepoel, 2018). Masenya (2021) underscores the need for curriculum re-curriculation that aligns with South African lived realities rather than colonial legacies. De Vos and Riedel (2023) reveal that, despite progress in linguistics disciplines since the #RhodesMustFall era, language representation and theoretical orientation remain a contested terrain. The Koopman and Koopman (2023), drawing on Ubuntu-currere, call for curricula designed through self-reflection and self-authentication, centering indigenous knowledge and resisting neoliberal epistemic control. Finally, Chikoko's (2024) systematic review differentiates between superficial reforms ("soft") and those that aim to overhaul academic structures ("radical"), advocating for the latter as essential for true decolonisation. Collectively, these insights underscore the urgency of designing decolonial frameworks that are both epistemically plural and pragmatically anchored in local educational contexts.

In South African TVET colleges, the use of English and Afrikaans as dominant languages profoundly influences teaching and learning experiences, reproducing colonial power dynamics and shaping students' realities. Recent research underlies these tensions. Anthonie (2024) highlights the heteroglossic realities in TVET colleges, demonstrating how students' multilingual identities can function as portals for decolonial action through the concept of Linguistic Citizenship. Munyaradzi (2024) offers a critical lens on language policy in higher education, illustrating how entrenched preferences for English and Afrikaans sustains the colonial matrix of power by reinforcing language hierarchies and marginalising indigenous languages despite democratic mandates for linguistic equity. Meanwhile, Taringa and Manyike (2025) expose the gap between aspirations of mother-tongue instruction and the reality of foreign language dominance, revealing how language policy continues to favour colonial languages even as global momentum builds around cultural and linguistic justice.

Together, these contemporary voices vividly underscore that language is not merely a medium of instruction but a critical arena in the struggle for decolonisation, one that can both constrain and empower students depending on how it is positioned within policy and practice. These linguistic struggles intersect with broader debates on knowledge production and curriculum design, raising deeper questions about how colonial legacies continue to shape educational spaces in South Africa.

Extending this argument beyond language, Mbembe (2016) highlights how hegemonic knowledge production has created restrictive scientific and interpretive frameworks that repress alternative ways of thinking and knowing. In response, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) insists that decolonising universities and curricula must go beyond mere compliance and instead be grounded in imaginative processes of genuine transformation. Mbembe further critiques the persistence of colonial and apartheid-era syllabuses in post-apartheid South Africa, describing this continuation as unjust and demeaning. Building on this, Mbembe (2016) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) explain that colonisers used education systems not only to maintain control by

undermining indigenous knowledge but also to keep the colonised dependant and unable to critically reflect on their own realities. Adding to this perspective, Heleta (2020) stresses the urgency of confronting epistemic injustices through diversifying curricula in South Africa universities, while Abdi and Shultz (2013) cautions against the ongoing reliance of the colonised on external representation, a dynamic reinforced by neoliberal and neoconservative ideologies. Collectively, these insights highlight the need to critically examine the NCV curriculum for its inclusion of indigenous and representation of indigenous voices.

For instance, indigenous entrepreneurship, particularly in organic and sustainable farming, plays a vital role in preserving traditional ecological knowledge and adapting it to contemporary market contexts. These practices draw on generations of locally embedded wisdom and aligns closely with environmental conditions and resource availability (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2022). Many indigenous ventures are community-based, and their success contributes not only to individual livelihoods but also to the broader socio-economic development of rural areas (Chilisa, 2019). Higher education institutions have a crucial role in fostering such entrepreneurial ecosystems by promoting research, innovation and curricula that value indigenous knowledge systems (Selelo, 2023). Examples such as the production of marula beer and moringa-based products (powders, soaps and lotions) illustrate how indigenous entrepreneurs blend cultural heritage with sustainable agricultural practices, demonstrating adaptability and resilience in the face of economic and environmental uncertainty (Selelo, 2023; Wilson, 1996).

Furthermore, recent scholarship on decolonising education in South Africa foregrounds the intricate relationship between decolonial practices and social justice, emphasising the need for epistemological transformation and material equity within the educational institutions. Chawaremera (2024) highlights the complexities involved in decolonising higher education curricula, pointing to institutional resistance and the imperative to integrate indigenous knowledge systems to promote inclusivity and social justice. Complementing this, emerging

research on digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, calls for critical approaches that addresses power imbalances and equitable access, positioning technology as both a challenge and an opportunity for advancing social justice in education (Langeveldt & Pietersen, 2024). Further studies emphasise the intersection of material deprivation with epistemic injustices, arguing for a holistic decolonial praxis that attends simultaneously to economic inequalities and the marginalisation of non-western epistemologies (Motala, 2025). The discourse also critically explores tensions between decolonisation and social justice, recognising that while these aims are closely aligned, there are complexities and contradictions that must be navigated to effectively transform South African educational landscapes (Zembylas, 2025). Together, these works advance a nuanced understanding of decolonisation as a dynamic and contested process aimed at fostering equity, inclusion and empowerment through both policy reform and grassroots activism.

However, caution is advised in decolonising curricula. Scholars like Connell (2016), Mbembe (2016), and Mgqwashu (2016) emphasise that decolonisation must be a carefully researched and deliberate process. Connell (2016) cautions that not all knowledge originate from colonial hegemony; some possess universal value and should not be dismissed in the process of decolonisation. Similarly, Mgqwashu (2016) emphasises the need for a precise understanding of what decolonisation entails and a greater clarity regarding who bears the responsibility for advancing it.

Táíwò (2010) offers a nuanced perspective on decolonisation that is particularly relevant for South African institutions. He critiques strands of the decolonial discourse that overemphasise Western domination while underplaying African agency, warning that Africa is often portrayed as a passive recipient of knowledge rather than an active participant. Central to his argument is the recognition of African intellectual agency: Africans do not merely inherit or consume knowledge imposed from outside; they actively interpret, adapt, and produce knowledge within their own cultural and historical contexts. Importantly, Táíwò cautions against the total rejection of Western knowledge or the

romanticisation of indigenous knowledge. Instead, he advocates for critical engagement, encouraging institutions to evaluate knowledge on its merits while foregrounding African perspectives and contributions. For South African universities and colleges, this approach underscores the need to decolonise curricula and institutional practices in ways that empower African agency, rather than adopting simplistic oppositional stances toward Western knowledge.

2.10.2 Significance of lecturers in the decolonial debate

Educators, whether teachers, lecturers or facilitators are central to the project of decolonising knowledge and curriculum. However, scholars question whether educators shaped by colonial education systems can effectively lead this project, given how deeply colonialism may have influenced their social, political and economic worldviews (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). Likewise, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2016) warns that within the current neoliberal context, educators often simplify complex social issues potentially hindering decolonial progress. This may explain the ongoing debates and lack of consensus about how to unpack the decolonial project (Mpofu, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c) .

Conversely, Vorster and Quinn (2017) empathise with academics grappling with these challenges, suggesting that courageous conversations are needed to critically examine epistemological access and selection of knowledge in curricula. They advocate encouraging academics to engage with critiques of their disciplines, recognising the dominance of traditional canons centred on power groups, and to explore previously ignored knowledge. Academic staff development should support educators in reviewing curricula, pedagogy and assessment methods to identify alienating practices and foster inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). This has direct implications for the TVET college lecturers and their implementation of the NCV curriculum.

Returning to the #FeesMustFall Campaign, the central call to decolonise knowledge raised fundamental questions about nature and production of knowledge, and who has the authority to produce it (Kamanzi, 2016). For TVET colleges, these questions are crucial. This study focusing on curriculum foregrounds debates about whether the knowledge offered serves communities effectively and whose knowledge it represents. As Abdi and Shultz (2013) have warned, “language and foundational ideas in policies and curriculum may perpetuate colonialism, patriarchy and an aggressive liberalised capitalism” (p. 30).

2.11 Absence of Decolonial Voices in TVET Colleges

While extensive research exists on TVET colleges focusing on their historical development (Gamble, 2003; Moll et.al, 2005); policy frameworks (Akoojee, 2016; Rasool & Mahembe, 2014; Wedekind, 2016a); vocational skills discourse (Allais, 2014; Baatjes et al., 2014; McGrath et al., 2006; Papier, 2021); employability and industry responsiveness (Akoojee, 2010; Needham & Papier, 2011; Terblanche, 2017); funding (Zungu, 2015); leadership and management (Zungu, 2015; Terblanche, 2017; Akoojee, 2010) and pedagogy (Buthelezi, 2018; Wedekind, 2016b), strategies for curriculum change (Terblanche, 2017); social justice and TVET (Daniels, 2018); experiences of lecturers implementing the NCV curriculum (Kanyane, 2016; Towani, 2010); perceptions on decolonisation and absence of it in TVET (Anthonie, 2019; Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024), there is limited scholarship on decolonisation of TVET curricula and colleges. This gap suggests a scarcity of theory and research addressing decolonial perspectives in this sector.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2018) Call for Papers highlighted the significance of the student-led movements from 2014 to 2019 such as #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch and #FeesMustFall across university campuses framing them as calls for decolonisation and free education. It emphasised that dismantling colonial knowledge hierarchies requires collective, systematic action. As key players in South

Africa's Post School Education and Training system, TVET colleges must actively engage in these debates.

TVET colleges play a vital role in equipping students with technical and vocational skills essential for economic development (White Papers on Education & Training, 1995; 998; 2013). However, focusing solely on employability risks neglecting the dehumanising legacies of colonisation and apartheid affecting students. Curriculum transformation must therefore critically respond to South Africa's complex history, aiming not only to meet industry and community needs but also to humanise students.

A decolonised TVET curriculum would recognise the sector's developmental importance while addressing the holistic "being" of the students, enabling them to contribute socially and economically. This approach counters findings like those from Sepota (2018) study, which revealed that many students struggle to connect lessons with their lived experiences, leading to misunderstanding and high failure rates. Consequently, this study's focus on decolonising TVET curricula is vital for guiding lecturers' pedagogical choices, ensuring they incorporate students' realities to enhance learning and development.

2.12 Related Empirical Studies on TVET College Sector

Although research on decolonising TVET colleges remains limited, some recent empirical studies offer valuable insights.

Manyau (2018) explored the challenges of decolonising the Life Orientation (LO) curriculum in South African TVET colleges, particularly highlighting the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. Although LO policy frameworks advocate learner-centred and socially responsive pedagogies that align with decolonial aims, Manyau's study revealed that teaching practices remained largely teacher-centred and rooted in Eurocentric traditions. This disjuncture limits opportunities for students to engage with contextually relevant, culturally grounded knowledge. The study also noted

limited lecturer training as well as misalignment between policy and practice hindering meaningful transformation.

Anthonie (2019) critically examined why the TVET sector remains largely absent from national decolonisation debates. Through documentary analysis, the study argued that the TVET is marginalised, perceived as neither part of school education reforms nor university transformations. This “missing middle” status calls for greater inclusion of TVET decolonial discourse and policy.

Ngcobo and Khoza (2024) explored academic staff perceptions of curriculum decolonisation at an Eastern Cape TVET college. Their qualitative study found lecturers generally had limited understanding of decolonial concepts and were minimally involved in curriculum reform processes. The authors recommend institutional policies and inclusive committees to actively engage lecturers, students and stakeholders in curriculum transformation.

Anthonie (2024) highlights the role of language in perpetuating colonality within TVET. It suggests embracing diverse linguistic identities and student voices, termed “Linguistic Citizenship” as key pathways to decolonial transformation.

2.13 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to the study, covering South Africa’s education history shaped by colonialism and apartheid, institutional and curriculum reforms in TVET colleges, and the renewed calls for decolonisation in higher education. A common theme throughout is that TVET renewal and decolonial efforts are part of the broader global conversations, not unique to South Africa.

The next chapter outlines the theoretical framework guiding this study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The issues of broader theory remain an important aspect of doctoral research, and as such have been dedicated this chapter for their exploration. Without theory, it would be difficult to see or understand the methodology employed in a study or the phenomenon. As Case and Given (2016) have explained, “paradigms, theories and research methods are intertwined” (p. 218) and therefore, must be fully attended to for research to be cohesive and comprehensive. Mudimbe (1988, p. x) states, “discourses not only have socio-historical origins but also epistemological contexts”. Epistemology as a theory of knowledge, is the starting point on which theoretical assumptions are constructed. These assumptions provide the origins, nature, methods, validity, scope and limits of human knowledge (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Therefore, by making plain the theory for this study, the research sets out the process by which knowledge is acquired, its origins, its nature and ways of validating that knowledge.

Having discussed the resurgence of cries for a decolonised higher education learning space and particularly that of curriculum in the literature review chapter, the research required a tool to help unpack and understand the phenomenon and findings. The kind of tool required is one that would not only help unpack some of the curricula and relational dimensions including power relations between and within people in a learning environment, but one that would offer a language of description of those interactions in the different domains of formality and experience. The language of description enabled complex descriptions of the interaction between curriculum and decolonisation. Therefore, through engagement with several possible theories, the research found that two theories would provide a useful set of tools to carry out the task at hand. This chapter therefore, does not function only as a conceptual discussion of theory but develops an analytic framework that integrates the concept of the “total curriculum” with the coloniality triad (power, knowledge, and being). This framework is operationalised in the analysis

chapters through a set of coding categories and interpretive questions used to examine findings and related policy documents.

These theories are not treated as abstract or descriptive lenses alone but are operationalised as an integrated analytic framework through which the NCV curriculum is examined. Specifically, the concept of “total curriculum” provides a structural lens for analysing curriculum as plan, practice, hidden and null forms, while the coloniality triad (power, knowledge and being) provides a critical lens for interrogating the underlying assumptions, hierarchies and exclusions embedded within these curricular forms.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines curriculum theory as postulated by Moll, Steinberg and Broemann (2005). Curriculum theory by Moll et al. (2005) has been adopted due to its relevance to this study as it is written for a TVET-specific context and has therefore influenced the design and the methodological approach of this study. Curriculum theory is essential to this study in exploring the educational philosophical foundations of the NCV curriculum. The main tenets of the theory will then be discussed which are total curriculum, theoretical knowledge, vocational knowledge and vocational pedagogy.

The second section lays out decoloniality theory. For the purpose of context and ease of reference, the works of Mignolo (2011, 2007) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a, 2016, 2017) have been instrumental in guiding this study to the choice of theory and its main tenets of coloniality of being, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of power. Guided by decolonial theory then, this study interrogates the NCV curriculum’s continued alignment with structures and values inherited from South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past. Such a lens exposes how the curriculum may fail to fully serve the needs of TVET college students, local communities and industry, while reproducing entrenched power relations and systemic inequalities.

It also illuminates the presence of non-indigenous forces and persistent patterns of domination that risk undermining the voices, agency and aspirations of those it is meant to empower. To move beyond critique towards actionable transformation, the works of

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017) offer concrete strategies for embedding decoloniality into institutional practice with strategies that can be adapted to advance decolonisation not only in universities, but in TVET colleges as well.

In combining these two theoretical strands, the study develops a coherent analytic spine that links curriculum structure (total curriculum) with critical interrogation (coloniality triad), enabling a layered analysis of both what is present in the curriculum and what is marginalised or excluded.

The discussion on the theories begins with a rationale for the inclusion of the theory in this study. This is followed by a discussion of the origins of the theory by examining its contextual and theoretical roots, and its key contributors. Such an examination within a critical paradigm as (John, 2009) has argued, allows for the ideological underpinnings of the theory to be uncovered. The main tenets of the theory are then discussed together with the applications of the theory in other studies. Each section ends with a review of the critique of the theory in the literature.

3.2 Section One: Total Curriculum

Barrow and Woods (2006) argue that “curriculum theory concerns itself with abstract inquiry into general principles affecting curriculum and is divisible into areas of development, design, implementation and evaluation” (p. 49). Their emphasis is on the flow of curriculum from development to practice. McCutcheon (1982) broadens this view defining curriculum theory as “an integrated cluster of sets of analyses, interpretations and understandings of curricular phenomena” (p.19). For him curriculum is not only what is explicitly offered but also what students have or do not have the opportunity to learn because of exclusions in curricular design. Kelly (2009) adds that curriculum theory “offers a theoretical model which might be recognised as reflecting more accurately, and thus supporting more constructively, the realities of education practice” (p. 9).

Moll, Steinberg and Broemann (2005), writing with vocational education in mind, describe curriculum as plan, specifically “official documents from a recognised authority that prescribes what should be taught and what should be achieved in the classroom” (p.125). This perspective highlights the authoritative and regulatory function of curriculum, framing it as a structured blueprint for teaching and learning. In this view, curriculum as plan encompasses all prescribed documentation designed to guide and achieve learning, including policy frameworks, syllabuses, lesson plans, textbooks and unit standards. Their contribution underscores how curriculum operates not only as a pedagogical tool but also as an institutional mechanism that standardises educational practice, shapes institutional processes and sets expectations for both lecturers and students.

These definitions illustrate that curriculum has been understood differently depending on the vantage points. Pinar (2019) reminds us that while the idea of curriculum is not new, its interpretation and applications have evolved across contexts and disciplines. However, the perspectives on curriculum converge on one point: curriculum is ultimately about educational experience. It addresses what is to be achieved, what is to be taught and how teaching is to be implemented. The goal of curriculum, therefore, is to ensure that students receive coherent, integrated learning that contributes to their personal, social, academic and professional development, both as individuals and as members of society.

3.2.1 Contextual and theoretical roots and key contributors of curriculum theory

Several scholars have contributed to the development of curriculum theory by highlighting its essential components and functions. Howson et al. (1981) emphasised that curriculum must encompass aims, content, methods and assessment procedures. Marsh and Stafford (1988) extended this view by proposing that curriculum includes aims, objectives, learning experiences and evaluation and that curriculum and instruction are inherently linked. Kelly (2009) contributed by framing curriculum as a process informed by content or objective based approaches, while (Egan, 2003) highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of curriculum encompassing all educational phenomena.

McCutcheon (1982) and Egan (2003) further stressed that curriculum represents the totality of learning experiences, both inside and outside the school. Smith and Lovat (2003) underscored that curriculum is inseparable from teaching and learning, emphasising its role in providing integrated, coherent educational experiences that foster personal, social, academic and professional development. Finally, Moll, et al., (2005) emphasise curriculum as an authoritative plan, captured in official documents that prescribe teaching and learning. Their contribution highlights a regulatory role of curriculum through policy frameworks, syllabuses, lesson plans and unit standards.

3.2.2 Forms of curriculum

Curriculum can be organised into three main categories: overt or explicit curriculum, hidden or implicit curriculum, and null curriculum (Eisner, 1985; Pinar, 1999). The explicit curriculum includes all curricular and co-curricular experiences that are intentionally planned and provided to students by the institution (Pinar, 1999). This encompasses official documents, syllabuses, policy statements, lesson plans, unit standards and textbooks that prescribe what should be taught and achieved (Moll et al., 2005). The explicit curriculum also reflects what institutions publicly declare they will teach Flinders et al. (1986).

The official curriculum, laid down in the syllabus and guidelines, happens at different levels (Moll et al., 2005). Curriculum designers shape policy documents, while lecturers interpret these frameworks and create lesson plans for classroom implementation. What students actually experience, however, may differ. This reality is often referred to as the actual curriculum, which includes the ways in which lecturers implement curriculum and how students experience it (Moll et al., 2005). Curriculum as practice thus goes beyond written documentation to include interpretation, pedagogy, institutional culture and the hidden learning processes.

The hidden curriculum refers to the unintended and often unacknowledged lessons that are conveyed in educational settings (McCutcheon, 1982; Pinar, 1999). It builds on the

foundation of the official curriculum but also reflects the institutional environment, values and expectations that shape the students' experiences without being explicitly planned. Finally, the null curriculum refers to the topics and subject areas deliberately or unintentionally excluded from formal teaching (Eisner, 1985). Since it is impossible to teach everything, choices are always made, and what is omitted can be as significant as what is included (Singh, 2018). A decolonial lens draws attention to the hidden curriculum, that is, the many inexplicit messages of what knowledge and whose knowledge is valued and taught.

Together, these forms illustrate the total curriculum, capturing both what is planned and written, what is experienced in practice, what is unintentionally conveyed and what is excluded. For this study, this comprehensive understanding provides a critical lens for exploring the intentions of curriculum planners, the procedures adopted in implementation, and the lived experiences of students as they engage with the NCV curriculum.

3.2.3 Rationale for inclusion of total curriculum

In relation to this study, the approach to curriculum articulated by Moll, Steinberg and Broemann (2005), namely total curriculum, is both compelling and relevant for two key reasons. Firstly, their work was written specifically with the South African TVET college sector in mind, which makes it contextually appropriate. Importantly, it recognises both curriculum as plan and curriculum as practice, two dimensions central to the NCV that require closer exploration in this study. Secondly, the concept of total curriculum allows for a broader and deeper engagement with the NCV, as it encompasses multiple forms of curriculum. By embracing the perspectives of all stakeholders in the curriculum process, it provides a framework that resonates well with the aims of this research.

Kelly (2009) similarly supports a view of curriculum as total curriculum, cautioning that a narrow understanding of curriculum as merely a document is inadequate. He argues that

such a view disregards both the educational and moral dimensions of schooling. For Kelly, curriculum should be approached holistically:

Schools [including TVET colleges] should plan their curriculum as a whole. The curriculum offered by a school, and the curriculum received by individual pupils, should not be simply a collection of separate subjects. At the very least, the total curriculum must be accorded prior consideration, and a major task that currently faces teachers and curriculum planners is to work out a basis on which some total scheme can be built. Any definition of curriculum, if it is to be practically effective and productive, must offer much more than a statement about the knowledge-content or merely the subjects which schooling is to teach or transmit or deliver. (p.7)

This perspective highlights the importance of moving beyond curriculum as a list of knowledge-content to a deeper consideration of the effects of knowledge on students. Total curriculum therefore recognises all dimensions of educational experience, including the hidden curriculum, the planned and received curriculum.

3.2.4 Theoretical versus vocational knowledge

Debates on vocational curriculum inevitably centre on the issue of knowledge-content (Ernest, 1985; Kennedy & Robinson, 2023; Mawere et al., 2022; Wheelahan, 2012). What students learn, and why it matters, is fundamental. Wheelan (2012) emphasises that questions of what knowledge is considered important and why are critical in education, since knowledge shapes both identity and perception. Kelly (2009) adds that curriculum debates about knowledge are inherently ideological, raising political implications that must be acknowledged. These considerations are crucial for this study, particularly as theorists and scholars alike remind us that all curriculum decisions are underpinned by assumptions about nature and value knowledge (Asea, 2022; Kennedy & Robinson, 2023; Mawere et al., 2022).

Traditionally, theoretical knowledge has been central to curriculum design and is defined as knowledge which is abstract and non-contextualised which allows society to gain access to disciplinary knowledge and can be used in various ways by society. In other words, it is knowledge organised as academic disciplinary knowledge and, as Wheelahan (2012) notes, allows society to transcend individual experience and engage with broader natural and social relations. By contrast, vocational education and training prioritises vocational knowledge, which is contextual, tacit and immediately applicable (Wheelahan, 2012; Moll, Steinberg & Broemann, 2005). Vocational knowledge is often linked to workplace readiness and generic capacities, aligning curricular outcomes to labour market demands. Wheelahan (2012) warns, however, that such tendency risks reducing curriculum to workplace competencies, rather than fostering deeper educational development.

Different philosophical positions within TVET therefore carry significant educational and social implications. Wheelahan (2012) stresses that the underlying epistemologies and philosophies of educators and institutions profoundly shape both pedagogy and broader educational outcomes. It follows that all teaching and learning practices are grounded in these implicit philosophies, a point that is critical for examining the NCV.

3.2.5 Main concepts of total curriculum for this study

To generate workable concepts for analysis, this study adapts the conceptual framework developed by Green and Naidoo (2006), who employed a multi-concept approach in their examination of “Knowledge contents reflected in post-apartheid South African Physical Science curriculum documents”. Their theoretical constructs included a philosophy of knowledge, kinds of discourse, knowledge traditions and ideologies, and kinds of competences and competence complexity. The adapted version for this study will exclude competencies and competence complexity. Adaptation is important because this study has its focus on vocational curriculum.

Additionally, Van Wyk and Higgs (2011) and Asea (2022) advance frameworks for thinking about curriculum in African contexts, which this study also finds useful. They argue that “what should be learnt” and “how knowledge should be organised for teaching” are key questions to be considered in any discussion on the curriculum in an African context. They further emphasise the transformative potential of curriculum when constructed with African perspectives at its core. This study therefore draws on their insights by posing questions such as: What meanings of the curriculum are pertinent to a decolonial discourse? What is the purpose and nature of the curriculum? How is it conceptualised, structured and regulated?

In line with these perspectives, the analysis of total curriculum will focus on the adapted conceptual constructs of a philosophy of knowledge, kinds of discourse and knowledge traditions or ideologies.

3.2.5.1 A philosophy of knowledge

To identify the educational philosophical underpinnings of the NCV curriculum, it is essential to ask: what the curriculum is about, what makes the curriculum different and how students acquire knowledge. The philosophy of knowledge in the NCV is implicit in the beliefs of lecturers, policy documents, subject guidelines, assessment guidelines, classroom practice and student outcomes (Ernest, 1985).

Scholars have categorised knowledge in various ways, including absolutist, empiricist, pragmatist, existentialism, sociological and postmodernist perspectives (Kelly, 2009; Ernest, 1985). Wheelahan (2012) simplifies this into three categories: social constructivist, technical-instrumentalism and conservatism. This classification is particularly useful for this study.

Technical-instrumentalism prioritises context-dependent knowledge designed to “produce knowledge and skills needed in an economy and broader purposes of education are subordinate to this goal” (Wheelahan, 2012, p.5). The focus is on preparing students

for the world of work, emphasising practical exposure and applied learning aligned with the Human Capital Theory. This approach moves away from traditional curricula, which provide decontextualised, disciplinary knowledge (Wheelahan, 2012).

Characteristics of technical-instrumentalist curricula include active construction of meaning by learners, context-dependent and socially mediated learning, emphasis on tacit and applied knowledge, prioritisation for economic participation and a hybrid curriculum with fluid boundaries (Newton & Winch, 2019; Wheelahan, 2012).

Technical instrumentalism has not been without criticism. The failure to put theoretical knowledge at the centre has resulted in a crisis in curriculum theory. For all educational theories are always underpinned by theories of society and knowledge – it is these theories that feed and become the basis for the dominant models or approaches of curriculum theory (Newton & Winch, 2019; Wheelahan, 2012). Critiques of this approach note that insufficient attention to theoretical knowledge can create a crisis in curriculum theory, as all educational practice is underpinned by broader societal and knowledge assumptions (Wheelahan, 2012).

3.2.5.2 Kinds of discourse

Vocational discourse refers to the language, communication and interaction that occurs within a specific profession, workplace or vocational context Newton and Winch (2019). It is shaped by the specific needs, values and practices of a profession or workplace. Understanding vocational discourse is important for vocational pedagogy, which recognises that learning takes place in different ways and in different contexts. Vocational pedagogy refers to teaching and learning approaches used in vocational education and training that focuses on developing the knowledge, skills and competencies required for specific occupations or industries (Newton & Winch, 2019; Wheelahan, 2012). It provides the learner with opportunities to engage in problem-based approaches, collaborative learning, cross-subject work and in using new technologies. In other words, vocational pedagogy links theory to practice by developing knowledge, skills and behaviors in

students which allow them to gain access into a “community of practice” in a particular profession. It therefore requires that students be exposed to rich and varied learning environments including real-life workplaces where mentors are found. Therefore, vocational pedagogy is distinct.

Recent studies suggest that vocational pedagogy can become more effective if it borrows certain pedagogies and modes of assessment from the academic sphere (Majola, 2025; Majola & Geduld, 2025; Vimbelo & Bayaga, 2023). For instance, while Maluleke et al. (2024) discuss the importance of vocational pedagogy, they also emphasise transformative and student-centred approaches more common in academic pedagogies. This kind of shift implies borrowing academic pedagogies (reflection, humanising, dialogical teaching) into vocational settings.

3.2.5.3 Knowledge traditions or ideologies

Curriculum is always influenced by intellectual and political ideologies (Kelly, 2009, Mawere, et. al., 2022). Appointed curriculum developers often embed specific agendas, reflecting governmental or institutional priorities. In the TVET colleges, the NCV curriculum has been shaped by the Department of Education, making it necessary to examine the ideologies embedded within it.

Goodson (2002) identifies three broad ideologies evident in curricula: First, academic which emphasises abstract, theoretical knowledge, aligned with disciplinary traditions. The utilitarian which prepares students for employment and addresses societal needs, and lastly, pedagogic which centres the student, designing curriculum based on their learning needs and processes. Analysing the NCV curriculum through Goodson’s three categories allows this study to assess the ideological assumptions underpinning the curriculum and the knowledge it seeks to transmit.

These constructs are not only conceptual but are used as analytical categories in this study, forming part of the coding framework applied to policy documents and curriculum texts in the analysis chapters.

3.2.6 Similar applications of total curriculum in other studies

Towani, (2010) explored the classroom experiences of lecturers implementing the newly introduced National Certificate-Marketing at FET Colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. The study revealed that lecturers were not adequately prepared for the new curriculum, leading to frustration and challenges in delivery. Similarly, Kanyane (2016) examined lecturers' experiences in implementing the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) in TVET Colleges in South Africa. The findings indicated limited lecturer participation in curriculum design and insufficient preparation for handling the new curriculum.

Terblanche's (2017) focus was on developing a framework for leading curriculum change in South African TVET colleges. While acknowledging that curriculum reform could enhance employability, productivity and graduate success, the study highlighted a need for improved management strategies to support current and future curriculum changes. Daniels (2018) explored how discourses of efficiency and social justice shaped the TVET sector, particularly under neoliberal market-directed policies post 1994. The study questioned whether pursuing efficiency targets and social justice objectives simultaneously was feasible, concluding that the two goals often conflicted.

3.2.7 Criticisms of curriculum theory

A challenge in curriculum theory is the fluidity of the concept, which complicates comparisons across studies and limits consensus on terminology (Kelly, 2009; Wheelahan, 2012). Scholars argue that this conceptual ambiguity weakens the coherence of curriculum theory, making it difficult to establish a unified framework for analysis or application. Moreover, the contested nature of curriculum reflects deeper tensions about whose knowledge is valued, how it should be organised and what

purposes it serves with the education system (Mawere, Stewart Lee, & Tshamano, 2022; Asea, 2022; Kennedy & Robinson, 2023).

3.3 Section Two: Decoloniality

3.3.1 Rationale for the inclusion of decolonial theory in the study

Decoloniality is a theoretical perspective that recognises the pervasive manifestations of coloniality and advances epistemic disobedience as a pathway toward liberating the formerly colonised from global colonial structures. It represents an alternative way of thinking, knowing and doing. Maldonado-Torres (2011) argues that decolonial thinking emerged alongside modern forms of colonisation in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. While a decolonial turn has long existed, the more profound and ongoing shift away from modernity to decoloniality as an unfinished project gained momentum in the twentieth century. This turn does not denote a single theoretical school but rather a constellation of perspectives that view coloniality as a persistent problem of the modern age and decolonisation as an unfinished task (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). Scholars such as Quijano (2000), Grosfoguel (2007), Mignolo (2011), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b), and Mbembe (2016) reinforce this view, emphasising that coloniality explains the enduring presence of domination even after the formal end of colonial administrations in the juridical-political spheres.

3.3.2 Defining decoloniality

To establish a working definition of decoloniality for this study, it is important to first outline related concepts: colonialism, decolonisation and coloniality.

Colonialism refers to the violent domination of one territory by an imperial power, imposing political, economic and administrative systems to extract wealth for the benefit of the coloniser (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2011). Decolonisation, in contrast, denotes the withdrawal of colonial powers and the granting of political and

administrative independence to the formerly colonised territories (Grosfoguel, 2007).

Mignolo (2011, 2009, 2007) frames coloniality as “the darker side of modernity,” sustained through global hierarchies that privilege eurocentric epistemologies and marginalises other ways of knowing. Coloniality captures the enduring patterns of power that outlive formal colonialism. It describes how hierarchies established through colonialism continue to shape culture, labour, social relations, and knowledge production long after colonial administrations ended (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Maldonado-Torres (2007) defines decoloniality as the dismantling of power relations and knowledge systems that sustain racial, gender, and geopolitical hierarchies rooted in the modern/colonial world. Grosfoguel (2007) frames it as a long-standing political and epistemological movement aimed at liberating the previously colonised by transforming ways of thinking, knowing and doing. In the South African context, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2016) and Mbembe (2016) view decoloniality as the removal of dominant, non-indigenous forces within the geographical space, institutions of higher learning and knowledge systems that continue to undermine the colonised. From a social justice perspective, Shultz, (2013) describes decoloniality as a “process of justice and transformation that ... will need to build on justice, compassion and a relational creativity that is lacking in current public spheres” (p.31).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b, 2016, 2017) frames decolonisation of universities as part of a broader struggle for African epistemic freedom, grounded in the recognition of African indigenous knowledge systems as legitimate. He critiques the eurocentric foundations of modern universities, which have perpetuated epistemicides and cultural imperialism by privileging Western epistemologies while marginalising others. Decolonisation, for him, requires a paradigm shift that re-centres Africa as an epistemic base, shifts the geographic and biographical locus of knowledge, and embraces epistemic disobedience

as a form of resistance to imposed intellectual hierarchies. He also stresses the need for decolonial self-re-education to unlearn the deep-seated effects of Western-centric training. This framework is particularly relevant for interrogating the NCV curriculum, as it provides both critiques of epistemic dominance and offers a set of strategies for reclaiming and embedding African knowledge traditions within institutional practices.

De Santos (2017) advances the argument that meaningful decolonisation of universities requires a “deep cognitive justice” which is a restructuring of knowledge systems that goes beyond mere inclusion of marginalised perspectives to fundamentally reframe what counts as valid knowledge. He criticises modern university as a historically Westernised institution that privileges eurocentric epistemologies while systematically excluding, silencing or subordinating knowledge from the Global South. This epistemic hierarchy, he contends, perpetuates colonial patterns of power and limits the transformative potential of higher education.

De Santos calls for an “ecology of knowledges” in which diverse epistemologies including indigenous, local, experiential and scientific coexist on equal terms, enabling richer, more contextually relevant curricula. Such transformation, he argues, is not only an academic imperative but also a political one requiring universities to dismantle entrenched hierarchies of knowledge production and to become spaces of pluralism, dialogue and co-creation with communities they serve. In the context of this study, de Santos’ framework offers a practical orientation for identifying and challenging eurocentric dominance in the NCV curriculum and for envisioning TVET colleges as sites of epistemic plurality and social justice.

From these perspectives, the synthesised definition for this study is as follows:

Decoloniality, in the South African TVET sector, is the intentional process of dismantling colonial patterns of power, knowledge, and being that persist in curricula, pedagogies and institutional cultures. It entails delinking from eurocentric epistemologies, centering indigenous and local knowledges and advancing

pluriversal perspectives. Rooted in social justice, it seeks to create a more equitable, inclusive and contextually relevant TVET system that addresses historical marginalisation and fosters justice, compassion and transformative relationships (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Shultz, 2013; de Santos, 2017).

The above is succinctly summed up as:

Decoloniality in South African TVET sector is the socially just transformation of curricula, knowledge systems and institutional cultures by dismantling colonial legacies, centering local epistemologies and fostering equity and inclusivity.

This definition recognises the distinctive nature of South Africa's colonial history and its enduring influence on education. It does not call for the wholesale removal of Western knowledge systems but rather for the hybrid approach in which beneficial Western knowledge coexists with and complements African indigenous knowledge systems (Heleta, 2016, Táíwò , 2010). Such hybridity allows for critical engagement with the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, linguistic and gender inequalities that decoloniality seeks to address. Importantly, Táíwò (2010) complicates more oppositional readings of decolonisation by cautioning against rejecting knowledge solely on the basis of its origin, instead foregrounding the agency of African actors to critically engage with, reinterpret, and adapt diverse knowledge traditions. Within the total curriculum, this underscores the need to conceptualise knowledge not as fixed or externally imposed, but as dynamically constituted through the interaction between global discourses and local practices.

Aligned with Shultz's (2013) assertion, this definition positions decoloniality as a means of uncovering the historical roots of current social, political and economic exclusions in education, while identifying key points where policy and practice in TVET colleges can be transformed to create inclusive, relevant and socially just learning environments.

3.3.3 *Theoretical roots and key contributors*

Several authors (Barnes, 2018; Chilisa, 2019; Lambert & Lorelei, 2014) have alluded to the importance of reclaiming cultural knowledge as being fundamental to deconstructing ideas of superiority of Western knowledge. The process of deconstructing is an essential element in decolonisation movements among indigenous people (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 1996). The theory of decolonisation, therefore, encompasses several ideas from decolonial movements. It has several contributors including, but not limited to, Fanon et al., (1963) on double consciousness and colonial alienation; wa Thiong'o (1986) on colonial discourse; Mignolo (2007, 2009 & 2011) on the matrix of power and epistemic disobedience; Quijano (2007 & 2000) popularly known for contributing on colonisation of the imagination; Dascal (1991) on colonisation of the mind; Grosfoguel on locus of enunciation and colonisation of knowledge and power; (Gordon, 2013) who called for “shifting the geography of reason” and de Santos (2017) on decolonising the university.

In the South African context, several scholars have advanced the decolonial debate, including Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013c, 2016, 2017); Ndlovu (2013); Mbembe, 2016; Vorster and Quinn (2017); Heleta (2016); Snyman (2015); Christie and McKinney (2017). Collectively, their work shaped the conceptualisation of decoloniality as a lens for this study. Of particular relevance, however are Mignolo (2007, 2009, 2011), Quijano (2000, 2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2011), de Sousa Santos (2017) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a, b, & c, 2016, 2017) whose contributions provide the key conceptual vocabulary employed here.

3.3.4 *Main concepts*

The conceptual triad of coloniality, namely, power, knowledge and being, have been developed by key decolonial scholars. Quijano (2000, 2007) introduced the notion of the coloniality of power, emphasising how colonialism left enduring structures that organise race, labour and authority beyond formal independence. Building on this, Mignolo (2007, 2011) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017) extended the framework to the coloniality

of knowledge, critiquing the universalisation of Eurocentric epistemologies and calling for epistemic disobedience and recognition of plural knowledges. Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2011) further advanced the coloniality of being, drawing on Quijano and Fanon et.al., (1963) to expose how coloniality shapes subjectivity, dehumanisation and existence itself. Together, these scholars provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how colonial logics continue to structure power, thought and lived experience.

In adopting decoloniality as a theoretical lens for this study, the approach by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a) who drew on these concepts in his presentation on “critical reflections on development from a decolonial epistemic perspective” was found particularly useful. The following section explores these concepts in more detail.

3.3.4.1 Coloniality of power

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a) argues that coloniality of power provides a way to examine the roots of the present-day global power inequalities and the constitution of the modern world order. It identifies the “current “global political present” as a racially hierarchised, Euro-American-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, sexist, capitalist, hetero-normative, hegemonic and modern power structure” (p.5). Popularised by Quijano (2007) this concept links European colonial practices and legacies to contemporary social orders and systems of knowledge, as also developed in postcolonial studies and Latin American subaltern studies.

Quijano (2007), described the coloniality of power as operating through three interrelated forms: systems of hierarchies, systems of knowledge and cultural systems. The system of hierarchies is rooted in racial classification, where colonisers and the colonised were positioned in a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority. This deliberate construction secured European dominance, shaping both political and economic control. In South Africa, such hierarchies were entrenched in the apartheid system, where racialised divisions of labour reinforced patterns of exploitation.

The cultural systems of coloniality of power, according to Quijano (2007) and Grosfoguel (2007), emerged alongside European modernity and rationality, which were established and imposed as exclusively European achievements. These systems assumed European cultures as the only truly modern ones, privileging capitalist economies, rationality, neoliberalism and science, while dismissing other non-scientific forms, and enforcing Eurocentric norms through state and economic institutions (Sydney, 2016). In South Africa colonial domination was a successive combination of British and Dutch rule which embedded racial hierarchies and coercive labour control long before apartheid formalised them (Christie & McKinney, 2017).

Research by Christie and McKinney (2017) of “Model C” schools, demonstrates the persistence of these dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. They found that the multiple hierarchies outlined in the colonial power matrix by Mignolo (2011), Quijano (2007) and Grosfoguel (2007), continue to shape social relations. Although the Constitution now recognises twelve official languages, including South African Sign Language which was added in 2023, English and Afrikaans remained dominant after Grade 4, reflecting the continued marginalisation of indigenous languages. Furthermore, these schools remain well-resourced, charge exorbitant school fees and consistently achieve strong results, reproducing privilege and exclusion. The research by Christie and McKinney highlights how the coloniality of power persists along racial and socio-economic lines, a legacy still evident in South Africa's education system. For this study, such insights are important for interrogating how power relations operate within the TVET college sector.

Within the framework of the coloniality of power, total curriculum and hence pedagogy can be understood not merely as a classroom practice but as a site where broader social hierarchies and institutional logics are reproduced. These contribute to the success or failure of learner-centred approaches (Tabulawa, 2013). These conditions include hierarchical authority relations, examination regimes, and resource constraints, all of which reflect enduring configurations of power within education systems.

3.3.4.2 Coloniality of knowledge

Epistemology and methodology are deeply entangled with imperial power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Through the dominance of Eurocentric and American-centric worldviews, knowledge has historically served imperialism by appropriating what was deemed progressive while denigrating indigenous knowledge as inferior (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b; Mporu, 2013). A decolonial epistemology is therefore essential as it provides “a base and backbone ... for ways of approaching knowledge, its production and its justification” (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p.8). This raises critical questions about what knowledge is produced, legitimatised and consumed in higher education, including TVET colleges.

Mporu (2013) emphasises that colonialism distorted African knowledge systems, disfigured self-understanding and displaced Africanity, resulting in what he terms “epistemicides” (p.109). This observation has direct implications for curriculum development in the TVET sector. A curriculum that ignores epistemicides risks not only reproducing the colonial status quo but also furthering the epistemicides. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013c) critiques the reproduction of epistemicides as “Knowledge production designed for equilibrium rather than transformation” (p.6).

Reclaiming the place of African knowledges and indigenous knowledge must therefore be a deliberate priority. At the same time Mporu (2013) cautions against romanticising African knowledge in its so-called pure form, since some African intellectuals themselves participate in producing Eurocentric-influenced discourse. Such sponsored discourse is widely disseminated through global media, education, religious and financial institutions, further entrenching epistemic hierarchies.

Other scholars highlight the persistence of these patterns in post-apartheid education. Le Grange (2020) observes that even when curricula appear to change by incorporating environmental issues, social justice and indigenous knowledge, they often remain iterations of apartheid-era designs. Vorster and Quinn (2017) similarly argue that

university curricula are never neutral, as academics actively choose content, and the bulk of the canon continues to draw from the global North. Knowledge emerging from Africa and the global South remains largely excluded, even where it would be most relevant. For instance, indigenous systems of governance as suggested by Hountondji (1997) (such as community-based decision-making rooted in indigenous practice to guide land reforms), ecological sustainability and technical skill (traditional building, agricultural practices of land preservation), long embedded in African societies, are rarely acknowledged in mainstream curricula or research, which continue to privilege Western theories and models as the universal standard of knowledge (Ndlovu, 2013; wa Thiong'o, 1986). This reliance on Northern epistemologies, Grosfoguel (2007) warns, reproduces hierarchies of superior and inferior knowledge, which in turn reinforce hierarchies of people.

These critiques are echoed in empirical studies. Padayachee, Matimolane, and Ganas (2018), in their study on curriculum decolonisation and education for sustainable development, found that both students and lecturers recognised how curricula perpetuate power relations by conveying hierarchies of knowledge. They called for greater negotiation and critical engagement between students and lecturers to achieve epistemic diversity and contextual relevance. Similarly, Shezi (2016) found that students resisted the “master-slave teaching style” (p.37) prevalent in universities, where lectures were positioned as all-knowing and students as passive recipients.

Across lecturer and student accounts, language emerges not simply as a pedagogical barrier but as a site of epistemic struggle, where access to knowledge, identity formation, and power intersect (Makalela, 2022). Despite efforts to promote multilingualism and inclusivity in post-apartheid education, the coloniality of language continues to influence how students engage with knowledge. Within the curriculum, English retains epistemic dominance as the perceived language of intellect, mobility and global belonging, while indigenous languages remain associated with cultural identity rather than academic or economic advancement. Studies show that students often shun materials written in indigenous languages, perceiving them as less valuable for success in higher education

and the labour market. Sawula (2017) found that university students displayed resistance towards isiXhosa medium materials, citing concerns about their limited prestige and usefulness beyond local contexts. Similarly, Diko and Celliers (2024) observe that both students and educators continue to regard indigenous languages as lacking the symbolic capital associated with English. Makalela (2022) further demonstrates how linguistic hierarchies within universities perpetuate exclusionary practices that shape students' sense of belonging and academic identity. In Namibia, comparable attitudes prevail, where students have been reported to "shun" indigenous languages because they are viewed as "uneconomic" and irrelevant to global progress (Sarkkinen, 2024).

These patterns reveal that linguistic preferences among students are not merely about communication but reflect deep-seated epistemic hierarchies that continue to privilege Western ways of knowing and being, even in spaces ostensibly committed to decolonial transformation.

3.3.4.3 Coloniality of being

Maldonado-Torres (2007) argued that at the core of power structures is the division of the world into a "zone of being" and "zone of non-being". Colonisers positioned themselves as the real existence, "zone of being", while relegating the colonised to objects of non-consequence, "the zone of non-being". In today's terms, the zone of being refers to the Euro-American world, which claims progress, civilisation, modernisation, industrialisation, democracy and human rights, while imposing slave trade, imperialism, capitalism, colonialism and apartheid on the "zone of non-being". In South Africa, this distinction placed British settlers and Afrikaners in the "zone of being" and the native South Africans in the "zone of non-being."

Snyman (2015) addressed the decolonial turn from the perspective of the zone of being, showing that responding to questions of colonality from a position of whiteness and privilege requires a "hermeneutic of epistemic vulnerability" (p. 286). This approach involves openness to not knowing, a willingness to concede error and a preparedness to

be affected. Snyman argued that both those in the zone of being and the zone of non-being must recognise that dismantling coloniality is a collective responsibility.

This concept emphasises the importance of the lived experiences of the colonised and the impact this has on language. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) illustrates that language is not only a medium of communication but also a carrier of culture, identity, history and worldview. For the colonised, using the coloniser's language restricts authentic expression of African history, experiences and imagination, becoming a vehicle of cultural domination. In the TVET colleges, English and Afrikaans remain the main languages of instruction, raising questions about whose lived experiences and mean-making are reflected in the curriculum. Giroux (2005) asserts that meaning within African worlds is produced and rewritten within the ideological and material legacies of imperialism and colonialism, which in the South African context include British imperialism and apartheid.

Maldonado-Torres (2007) further stresses that coloniality of being also highlights the philosophical implications of identity encapsulated in Descartes' (1637) phrase "I think therefore I am" (p. 242), which centres rational thought as the basis of existence and, from a decolonial perspective, marginalises other epistemologies such as African communal worldviews, oral traditions and spiritual forms of knowing that value relationality and collective wisdom over individual rationalism. Colonialism distorts and usurps the identity of the colonised. Mpofu (2013), observes that "... incorporation into the European-dominated society requires injustice against others ... to be incorporated, the other people and their ways must disappear as independent and different in order to exist as incorporated "others" within the Westernised world system" (p.30).

Coloniality of being therefore foregrounds the essence of being African in thought, expression and identity. As scholars have noted, no people want their identity to be erased by a dominant society, denying them the right to be unique and different (Mpofu, 2013; Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007). Fanon et.al., (1963) argue that that decolonisation never occurs unnoticed because it fundamentally transforms the being of the colonised. He explained that:

Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity. Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself (sic) (p.36).

Fanon et. al (op.cit) observation highlights the deep link between decolonisation, language and the reconstitution of identity. Decolonisation is not merely political change but a reordering of existence, where language and knowledge become central to reclaiming humanity and resisting imposed hierarchies.

Drawing on the work of Maldonado-Torres and Fanon et.al., (op.cit), a key insight emerges; that language is central to the articulation of human ideas and to the restructuring of knowledge and power. The way language is used often produces knowledge and social relations that serve to justify existing power structures.

During the height of the #FeesMustFall campaigns in 2015 and 2016, Vorster and Quinn (2017) explored the implications of a decolonial turn on staff development. They found the following:

For black students, curricula and pedagogic processes are often not aligned with who they are as people, and it is not possible to divorce themselves – their being – from what is taught and how it is taught. What they are arguing for is greater recognition that teaching, and learning is not only an epistemological project, but, in essence, also an ontological one. Thus, knowledge is learnt not only for the sake of learning but in order for a student to be(come) a particular kind of person in the world (p.11).

Vorster and Quinn's (2017) findings highlight that the kind of knowledge that shapes the being of students has critical implications for those who select and mediate that knowledge. In the context of the NCV curriculum, lecturers play a key role in determining which knowledge is advanced in the learning environment. For this study, the impact of the NCV curriculum on the students' sense of being is an important area to explore, as epistemological access is closely linked to ontological access (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). As Vorster and Quinn (2017) note, "enabling both epistemological and ontological access to a range of knowledge means paying attention to curricular choices and in particular to pedagogic processes" (p.11).

Maposa (2014) found that South African history textbooks remain a central educational medium that shapes African consciousness, yet they often privilege Eurocentric interpretations of history, thereby constraining decolonial approaches to knowledge and identity formation. In a later publication, Maposa (2020) reaffirmed these findings, showing that representations of the "African being" in contemporary textbooks continue to reproduce colonial hierarchies of knowledge despite curriculum reforms. Similarly, Motumi, van Eeden and Warnich (2022) observed that the revised South African history curriculum still reflects global and national narratives that subtly reinforce Western epistemic dominance such as focusing on European history events and actors. Together, these studies highlight the enduring coloniality embedded in textbook discourse and curriculum design, underscoring the need for educational transformation that genuinely centres African epistemologies and consciousness.

Hlatshwayo (2020) has elaborated on these curriculum issues, noting that textbooks, curricula, and other resource materials constitute the field in which knowledge is produced. Lecturers recontextualise this knowledge as they select, rearrange and transform resources into pedagogic discourses, which are then delivered in classrooms as sites of teaching and learning. This highlights the critical role of lecturers as mediators of content selection and their influence on the pursuit of a decolonised curriculum.

An attempt to respond from the vantage point of the zone-of-being was made in Snyman's (2016) essay in which he demonstrated that responding to the decolonial turn from a position of whiteness and privilege required one to adopt a "hermeneutic of epistemic vulnerability" approach. The essay set out succinct arguments showing the need for those still associated with Western power and apartheid to find credible ways of responding to questions posed by the decolonial turn. For Snyman (2016), epistemic vulnerability entailed "an openness to not knowing, a willingness to concede being wrong and a preparedness to be affected" (p.286). The approach by Snyman (2016) suggested that both those in the zone-of-being and those in the zone-of-non-being need to acknowledge that the responsibility to dismantle coloniality calls for a collective response.

In this study, these three dimensions of coloniality are used as core analytical lenses to interrogate how power, knowledge and identity are structured within the NCV curriculum and related policy documents.

3.3.5 Decoloniality theory and this study

This section presents and justifies the relevance of the decoloniality theory and its application to the study.

3.3.5.1 Relevance of coloniality of power as a concept to this study

The concept of coloniality of power has value in aiding this study in exploring and gaining understanding regarding why the NCV curriculum has been designed in its current form. It also opens possibilities for rethinking and restructuring the curriculum in ways that respond to both industry and society needs within a decolonised context, thereby creating a platform for a more socially just curricula.

3.3.5.2 Relevance of the concept of coloniality of knowledge to this study

The concept of coloniality of knowledge provides a lens for questioning the dominant, non-indigenous forces that may be embedded in the NCV curriculum. It can act as a catalyst for rethinking the relationship between the margin and the centre by interrogating colonial and imperial ideologies that continue to shape curriculum design. A decolonial indigenous approach, as described by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013c, p. 25), challenges Western assumptions about modernity which often frames itself as liberating, rational and progressive, by reinterpreting its “emancipatory rhetoric” through the lens of historically marginalised peoples. Rather than accepting Western modernity as inherently liberating, this approach foregrounds the “cosmologies and epistemologies paradigm of subalterns, using their worldviews and ways of knowing (spiritual and cultural) to redefine what it means to be “modern” or “emancipated”. In essence, it shifts the epistemic centre from the coloniser to the colonised, making indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives foundational in understanding social, political and historical realities.

3.3.5.3 Relevance of the concept of coloniality of being to this study

The concept of coloniality of being enables this study to address questions of identity and existence in relation to students. It provides a framework for examining how curriculum developers shape the views of being embedded in the NCV curriculum, how lecturers help students negotiate their sense of self through the knowledge and language choices they make. This concept also speaks to processes of dehumanisation and rehumanisation, raising the question of whether the NCV curriculum reinforces or challenges these dynamics.

3.3.6 *Challenges with decolonial theory*

The decolonisation project, though widely embraced, faces significant challenges. One concern is that decolonisation cannot be claimed as the sole responsibility of any racial group; rather, it should be a collective process in which both black and white South African

academics, including society at large, participate consciously, deliberately and authentically (Mgqwashu, 2016; Sydney, 2016). Another challenge lies in misconceptions that decolonisation simply involves replacing Western theorists with African ones or treating curriculum as content only. A decolonised curriculum must instead be understood more broadly as product, process, context and content, with the aim of developing knowledge practices that are contextually relevant and responsive (Christie & McKinney, 2017; Sydney, 2016; Mgqwashu, 2016).

Furthermore, Mbembe (2016) has argued that decolonisation is eclectic, drawing on diverse intellectual traditions. This raises the critical task of clarifying what decolonisation means in practice so that it does not remain a vague or rhetorical call. Carr and Thesee (2012) add that challenges emerge when the intricate socio-linguistic, cultural, political, economic and epistemological dimensions of colonialism are underplayed. Without careful attention to these complexities, efforts at decolonisation risk mis-diagnosing the key problems.

3.4 Operationalisation of the Analytical Framework

To ensure that the theoretical framework informs the empirical analysis in a systematic and transparent manner, the key concepts of total curriculum and the coloniality triad are operationalised into a set of coding categories and interpretive questions. These are applied in the analysis chapters to examine the findings and related policy documents. The table below illustrates how the theoretical constructs are translated into analytical tools:

Table 1: Summary of theoretical constructs used as analytical tools

Theoretical concept	Analytical focus	Coding/guiding interpretive questions
Total curriculum (plan, practice, hidden, null)	What is included, enacted and excluded in the curriculum	What knowledge is explicitly prioritised? What is

		practiced vs prescribed? What is omitted?
Philosophy of knowledge	Nature and purpose of knowledge	What forms of knowledge are legitimised (theoretical vs vocational)?
Vocational discourse	Language and pedagogy	What forms of teaching and learning are promoted?
Knowledge ideologies	Underlying assumptions	What ideological positions shape curriculum design?
Coloniality of power	Decision-making and control	Whose interests shape curriculum priorities?
Coloniality of knowledge	Legitimation of knowledge	Which knowledges are valued or marginalised?
Coloniality of being	Identity and subjectivity	How are students positioned in the curriculum?

These guiding questions inform the coding and interpretation of data, ensuring that the analysis chapters are directly grounded in the theoretical framework. Rather than treating theory as descriptive, this approach enables a systematic interrogation of curriculum documents and practices through a decolonial and curriculum-theoretical lens.

3.5 Summary Table of the Theoretical Framework and Relevance to Research Questions

The table below provides a summary of the theoretical framework of this study.

Table 2: Summary of theoretical framework

Theory & relevant concepts	Role in the study	Function in the study	Where it appears strongly in the study	Relevance to key Research Questions

Total curriculum: Philosophy of Knowledge, Kinds of discourse & Knowledge traditions (Moll, Steinberg & Broemann, (2005)	Foundation: Defines what curriculum is	Explains how curriculum is structured and functions	Theoretical framework & Findings	Qn 1: How have agenda(s) that have shaped the transformation of TVET colleges been enacted? Qn 2: What epistemologies influence the philosophical underpinnings of the NCV curriculum? Qn 3: To what extent is knowledge gained by the NCV student deemed responsive and relevant to societal needs? Qn 4: How is the NCV curriculum enacted in the classroom? Qn 5: How have lecturers and students experienced the NCV curriculum?
Decoloniality: Coloniality of power, Coloniality of knowledge & Coloniality of being Maldonado-Torres, (2007); Quijano, (2007); Mignolo (2000) Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013,2016,	Critique: Questions curriculums” epistemic assumptions and provides the analytical framework to answer the “why” and “how” of critique of colonial legacies	Reveals and challenges the colonial and Eurocentric biases within curriculum theory and NCV curriculum	Theoretical Framework, Findings & Theorisation	Qn 1: How have agenda(s) that have shaped transformation of TVET colleges been enacted? Qn 2: What epistemologies influence the philosophical underpinnings of the NCV curriculum? Qn 3: To what extent is knowledge gained by the NCV student deemed responsive and

2017), de Santos (2017)				relevant to societal needs? Qn 4: How is the NCV curriculum enacted in the classroom? Qn 5: How have lecturers and students experienced the NCV curriculum? Qn 6: What might a decolonised TVET NCV curriculum look like?
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3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has established the theoretical foundations for this study, providing an analytical lens, to examine the NCV curriculum in South African TVET colleges. Three theories were explored: curriculum, decoloniality and African Knowledge Systems.

The first section focused on curriculum theory, particularly the total curriculum approach by Moll, Steinberg and Broemann (2005). This framework was selected for its specific applicability to the TVET context and its capacity to capture both curriculum as plan and curriculum as practice. Through this lens, the study examines the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the NCV curriculum.

The second section examined decoloniality theory, drawing extensively conceptual triad of coloniality, namely, coloniality of power by Quijano (2000, 2007); coloniality of knowledge by Mignolo (2000, 2007, 2011) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007, 2014); and coloniality of being by Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2008). A particular focus was paid on the scholarship of Ndlovu-Gatsheni, (2007, 2013, 2016) in the use of the main tenets of the theory in a South African specific context.

Together, these lenses allow for a holistic analysis that not only critiques the coloniality embedded in the NCV curriculum structures but also illuminates possibilities for curriculum renewal grounded in African intellectual traditions signaling a step toward achieving relevance, inclusivity and epistemic justice within the NCV curriculum.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Research questions are the driving force behind the choice of research design. To this, Conrad and Serlin (2011) advise that identifying a study's research design is important because it communicates information about key features of the study. Similarly, Maree (2007) describes research design "as the procedures for conducting a study, and its purpose is to help find appropriate answers to research questions" (p.31). Research design, therefore, reveals not only the ontological assumptions of the researcher but also the epistemological standpoint and the underlying philosophical assumptions in the methodology which in turn influence the choice of data generation methods.

This chapter starts with a discussion on decolonising research methodologies. The discussion is important and has implication for the choice of strategy for the study. The chapter then presents the research paradigm, research design, research methodology, data generation methods, sampling procedure, data analysis and interpretation and the chapter concludes with a declaration and justification of the researcher's positionality.

4.2 Decolonising Research Methodologies and Decolonising Data Generation Methods

When it comes to academic research, decolonisation takes several forms, ranging from mainstream to contentious approaches. Several scholars (Russell, 1999; Chilisa, 2012; Keane, Khupe, & Seehawer, 2017; Keikalame & Swartz, 2019; and Tamale, 2020) have critiqued Euro-Western research methodologies and proposed decolonising alternatives that foreground the concerns, assumptions and worldviews of the colonised. Arguing from a South African vantage point, both Keane and Khupe (2017) and Keikalame and Swartz (2019) emphasise the importance of including indigenous communities in shaping research agendas and ensuring that studies benefit those communities. In a sense, the choice of decolonising research methodology is informed by the goals of the research

and the context in which it is undertaken. Decolonisation thus serves both as a methodological orientation and as a powerful metaphor for critiquing dominant knowledge systems and position of power. Decolonisation research methodologies are approaches that seek to “challenge the Eurocentric research methods that are seen to undermine the local knowledge and experiences of marginalised population groups” (Keikalame & Swartz, 2019, p.1). Keikalame and Swartz further argue that research can only be relevant and transformative if it is driven by indigenous world views, cultural values and languages meaningful to local communities. From this perspective, decolonising research methodologies carry a strong agenda for improving the lives of participants by engaging them on their own terms rather than on those imposed by researchers.

Such methodologies bring together critical, indigenous, liberatory and feminist approaches that collectively strengthen decolonial scholarship (Chilisa, 2012; Keane & Khupe, 2017; Keikalame & Swartz, 2019). At their core lies the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), which are positioned as central to decolonising research. The decolonisation of knowledge therefore contests the dominance of Western epistemologies by affirming IKS as valid and vital ways of knowing (Ritenburg et.al, 2014). In this sense, decolonising research methodologies not only reclaim control over indigenous ways of knowing and being but also re-centre them as foundational to research practices.

Scholars have employed several forms of decolonising research methodologies, including, the African lens (Keikalame & Swartz, 2019), Afrocentrism (Hlela, 2017), African Ecogender Theology (Kaunda, 2016), Community-Based Participatory Research (Stanton, 2014), Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Seehawer, 2018), and Embodiment (Reitenburg et.al., 2014). Despite their differences, these approaches share a common aim: to critique dominant centres of power and to promote emancipation of those being researched. One way to advancing emancipation, as Keikalame and Swartz (2019) argue, is through careful attention to five tensions that shape decolonising research being power, trust, culture and cultural competence, respectful and legitimate research practice and recognition of individual and communities.

However, Barnes (2018) cautions, that while decolonising research methodologies hold significant potential, it is important to remain aware of their limitations. These include the risk of being constrained by paradigm debates that make the methodologies prescriptive, the lack of clarity around the concepts on which they are based, and the possibility of reproducing problematic representations of marginalised groups. Barnes also notes that such methodologies may overstate the extent of researcher choice in adopting a decolonising approach and may fail to address the broader systemic barriers to decolonial scholarship.

Notwithstanding the range of decolonising research methodologies discussed in literature, this study adopts data generation methods that, depending on their application, can serve as instruments of a decolonisation project. Barnes (2018) emphasises that research methods, when applied thoughtfully, can advance the goals of decolonisation and contribute meaningfully to a decolonising research agenda. Similarly, Vannini and Gladue (2008) identify four principles that should guide choice of methods in decolonising research: collaboration, dialogue, reflexivity and reciprocity.

Guided by these principles, the present study sought to address three central questions in the data generation process:

- What will I, as an outsider, take from this research?
- What, and how will I give back to the participants and the TVET community?
- How will I reproduce participants' knowledge and experiences as authentically as possible?

To this end, the active participation and engagement of both the researcher and the participants were prioritised. Therefore, for this study, participation and engagement of both the researcher and the participants was important. The voice of participants, particularly in relation to the NCV Level 4 curriculum, were central. Accordingly, the study employed collages, collaborative storytelling interviews, metaphor drawings, focus groups and documentary reviews, as primary data generation methods.

Building on this choice of data generation methods, it is important to highlight that when applied through decolonial lens, collages, collaborative storytelling interviews, metaphor drawings, focus groups can become powerful tools for exploring indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and interrogating power dynamics in curricula. To ensure that these methods advance the decolonial intent of the study, I draw on tenets of indigenous knowing proposed by Keane and Khupe (2017). These include, acknowledging the energy of the group; being responsible for one's own learning; valuing individual skills and their contribution to the broader world; recognising the value of dissonance and uncertainty; and appreciating the role of encouragement in knowing.

In line with Keane and Khupe's (2017) tenets of indigenous knowing, this study has deliberately designed data generation methods to foster collaborative, reflective, and empowering engagement with participants. The energy of the group is acknowledged through focus groups and participant engagement sessions, where participants interact, build on each other's ideas, and contribute to collective meaning-making. Participants are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by reflecting on insights gained about themselves, their teaching practices, and the NCV curriculum, ensuring that knowledge flows bidirectionally.

Individual skills and contributions are valued by allowing participants to express knowledge through diverse forms, including collages, metaphor drawing, and storytelling, and by recognising the expertise and lived experiences they bring to the study. The research design also recognises the value of dissonance and uncertainty, treating contradictions, tensions, and multiple perspectives as important elements of knowledge creation rather than problems to be resolved. Finally, encouragement plays a central role in knowing, with the researcher creating a supportive environment that validates participants' input, affirms their contributions, and fosters trust, safety, and openness throughout the data generation process. Collectively, these strategies ensure that the study's methods uphold the principles of decolonial research while centering indigenous ways of knowing.

4.3 Research Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) provide a useful classification of research paradigms, identifying four: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism. Their framework, which examines how each paradigm addresses ontology, epistemology, methodology, has enabled this study to situate its philosophical stance within the critical paradigm. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the purpose of the critical paradigm is the critique and transformation of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, often through engagement that may involve confrontation or conflict (p, 114). They acknowledge that multiple theories fall within this paradigm, and Merriam (2015) similarly notes that while critical research goes beyond interpreting people's understandings of their world, its focus encompasses restitution and emancipation.

Building on this, Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) emphasises that researchers should identify paradigms that not only facilitate the analysis of the phenomenon under study but also suggest ways in which the context can be transformed. Usher, et.al., further argue that neither positivist nor interpretivist paradigms inherently seek to change the world in the direction of freedom, justice, and democracy, whereas the critical paradigm explicitly pursues such aims (p. 186). In the context of decolonisation, this paradigm provides a framework for interrogating the gap between what is and what should be, thereby enabling the unmasking of ideologies that have historically maintained the exclusion of indigenous knowledge from the curriculum.

Neuman (2014) indicates that the primary purpose of the research situated in a critical paradigm is not only to study the social world but also to challenge it by “revealing the underlying sources of social control, power relations, and inequality” (p. 111). Accordingly, the goal of the critical paradigm is to uncover unfavourable conditions, empower participants, expose myths, reveal hidden truths, and assist people in improving their lives (Neuman, 2014). In this study, the decolonial exploration of the NCV curriculum is guided by the objectives outlined in Chapter One: to understand the agendas shaping TVET

colleges and the National Certificate Vocational; to explore the histories and epistemologies underlying TVET colleges; to investigate the knowledge formations and economies that influence the NCV curriculum; to examine pedagogical practices that enable or constrain access to these knowledge formations; and to document the experiences of lecturers and students with the NCV curriculum.

Critical paradigm research, as John (2009) explains, seeks to unmask the social, political, and economic values and forces that structure reality, which is historically created and continuously reproduced by people. John further notes that “critical research focuses on the contest, conflict and contradictions in contemporary society and seeks to be emancipatory...in seeking to eliminate causes of alienation and domination” (p. 62). Similarly, Maree (2007) emphasises that critical theory is appropriate for studies that recognise social reality as historically constructed and constrained by social, cultural, and political domination (p. 63). This study aligns with these perspectives, exploring the NCV curriculum through a decolonial lens, which presupposes a history of colonialism. The historical development of TVET colleges within colonial and apartheid ideologies justifies the adoption of the critical paradigm, as it necessitates an examination of the social, economic, and political structures shaping curriculum and access to knowledge.

Maree (2007) further argues that the critical paradigm enables questioning of structures that actively preserve power and perpetuate oppression and hegemony. Positions of power often control others and are rarely relinquished voluntarily. In this study, the critical paradigm provides a framework to problematise oppression, marginalisation, and dehumanisation in relation to colonial and apartheid legacies. It also allows for clear linkages between students’ formal classroom experiences and their lived realities (Carr & Lund, 2007). Importantly, this paradigm creates spaces in which participants can recognise their own agency as critical actors and, where possible, change their circumstances.

By situating the study within a critical paradigm, the researcher acknowledges that knowledge production is never neutral or disinterested. Every knower, including the

researcher, is socially located, and knowledge is always shaped by social interest. Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) note that the growing adoption of critical theory reflects its refusal to separate theory from practice, thereby addressing the question: “What is knowledge for and how can it best be used to not only understand but to change the world?” (p. 187). Adopting a decolonial lens therefore, positions this study within a paradigm that seeks to disrupt colonial legacies of knowledge production and reclaim epistemic agency for historically marginalised voices.

Critics have challenged the critical paradigm for stereotyping participants (Scotland, 2012), claiming it can impose notions of homogenous identity and fail to recognise participants’ varying levels of conscientisation. In this study, the tenets proposed by Keane and Khupe (2017), discussed in the preceding sections, are applied to mitigate these criticisms by foregrounding participants’ diverse experiences, agency, and indigenous ways of knowing.

4.4 Research Design

Mouton (2001) defines research design as a “plan or blueprint” for conducting a study (p. 55), noting that designs are custom-made to address different types of research questions. Similarly, Janesick (2003) asserts that, for qualitative researchers, the starting point in selecting a research design is to clarify what the study aims to achieve. This purpose is inherently linked to methodology, as the choice of design guides how the researcher engages with the social world. Janesick further explains that qualitative research is conducted with real individuals in mind and with the intent of participating in the social setting under study. In this way, the qualitative researcher seeks to “understand the meaning of participants lives in the participants’ own terms” (p. 51)

As Janesick (2003) emphasises, qualitative research designs, while often following established routines, also allow for improvisation, reflecting their elastic and versatile nature. She describes the research design as the “spine and power” of qualitative research, balancing the study through a series of informed design decisions (p. 52).

Conrad and Serlin (2011) caution that the term “research design” may carry different meanings for different researchers; in some studies, it refers to the entire research process from conceptualisation to conclusion, while in others it pertains specifically to methodology, approach, or style. In this study, the term refers to the latter.

Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitative research design. Case and Given (2016) note that qualitative approaches are particularly suitable for exploring phenomena in depth, as they allow researchers to tap into participants lived experiences, perceptions, and understandings. The choice of design is further informed by the research questions and the researcher’s epistemological stance that knowledge is subjective and socially constructed. This social constructivist perspective aligns with the critical paradigm, which asserts that knowledge is both socially and politically shaped. Nieuwenhuis (2007) supports this view, observing that research design is influenced by the researcher’s assumptions, skills, and practices, and that the aim may not necessarily be to generalise findings (p. 70). Moreover, Case and Given (2026) note that qualitative methodologies are predominantly inductive, reflecting the challenges of achieving transferability when studying human experiences and social phenomena (p. 225).

4.5 Research Methodology

Case and Given (2016) define research methodology as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design behind the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p. 229). The choice of case study methodology for this study has been informed by the paradigm, theoretical perspective, and research questions. Specifically, this study employs case study approach situated within a critical paradigm. Nieuwenhuis (2007) and Rule and John (2011) describe a case study as a research methodology. A key characteristic of case study methodology is its aim for a “holistic understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon under study” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 75).

There are various definitions of case study methodology that are relevant to this study. Yin (1984) describes it as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). This definition acknowledges the contextual embeddedness of participants and the phenomenon, supporting the approach of this study, where participants’ experiences are interwoven with the history, social, economic, and political structures of TVET collages, including colonial and apartheid legacies. Such contextualisation enables the problematisation of oppression, marginalisation, and dehumanisation.

Yin (1984) further highlights that case study methodology is the “method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from its context” (p. 4). Similarly, Stake (2003) views case study as “both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry” (p. 136). This study adopts the definition by Rule and John (2011) of a case study as a “systematic and in-depth investigation of a particular instance in its context in order to generate knowledge” (p.4). This definition emphasises systematic inquiry, context boundedness, and the generation of rich, thick data, aligning with the aims of this exploratory study. As Shakir (2002) notes, exploratory case studies are appropriate when the researcher seeks to answer questions of “how” and “why” about a contemporary phenomenon over which they have no control. While decolonisation itself is not new, its investigation in the context of TVET colleges remains scarce, justifying the exploratory nature of this study.

Niewenhuis (2007) also highlights that case study methodology allows for “multiple perspective analysis,” capturing the voices and interactions of different groups of actors (p. 75). Situated within a critical paradigm, this methodology enables the researcher to give voice to participants who are often marginalised or voiceless. It allows for cross-examining values and assumptions revealing hegemonic structures, challenging entrenched social norms, and engaging in social action (Crotty, 1998).

The goal of the critical paradigm, which is emancipation, is therefore closely aligned with the purpose of the study, as the case study methodology allows reality to be critically examined from cultural, historical, and political perspectives.

4.5.1 Choice of form of case study

Case studies can be categorised in several ways, with the choice dependent on the researcher and the study's objectives. Stake (2003) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case study is studied for its own sake, whereas an instrumental case provides insights into a broader issue of interest. Meriam (2009) offers a slightly different categorisation, outlining three types: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic case studies focus on the specific situation, event, program, or phenomenon, valuing both what the case reveals and what it represents about the phenomenon. Descriptive case studies aim to produce a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon (also supported by John 2009), while heuristic case studies illuminate the researchers understanding of the phenomenon, potentially uncovering new meanings or confirming existing knowledge.

While Meriam's (2009) descriptive category aligns with the aims of this study, description alone was insufficient given the decolonial lens adopted. A historical case study as suggested by Bogdan and Mouton (2001, cited in Rule and John, 2011), is better suited to this inquiry because it combines both descriptive and exploratory elements, enabling the study to address not only the "what" but also the "how" questions.

This approach enabled the study to examine the philosophical underpinnings of TVET colleges historically and trace how these underpinnings have evolved and are currently expressed in the NCV curriculum. Rule and John (2011) note that the main advantage of historical case studies is their ability to provide "hindsight" from the position of the present and trace patterns or themes as they emerge (p. 29), supporting the case study inquiry as outlined in the methodology section.

4.5.2 *Identification of the case*

Selecting and defining the case is a critical step in case study research, as not everything qualifies as a case (Stake, 2003; Rule & John, 2011; Rule & John, 2024). A case is understood as a bounded, functioning system with a distinct identity, and careful consideration of what to include or exclude (Rule & John, 2011; Rule & John, 2024). Understanding the boundaries of the case and the complexity of the patterns within it is essential. Rule and John (2024) add that certain features are found within the case boundaries, while others exist outside (p. 135). A case may consist of a single instance or multiple cases (Stake, 2023; Nieuwenhuis, 2007; Rule & John, 2024).

For this study, the case is all NCV programmes at Level 4 at two TVET colleges. The study explores the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the curriculum content of the NCV, investigating the agendas shaping the curriculum and how these underpinnings are experienced by lecturers and students and other stakeholders. The NCV programme spans three levels (2, 3 and 4), with consistent subjects across all levels but increasing in complexity. Level 4 has been selected because it represents the exit of the qualification, making it a typical case that reflects the broader population of NCV levels 2 – 4. It also offers pragmatic advantages as it is the highest qualification level and students at this level are preparing to enter the world of work. Methodologically, NCV level 4 mirrors levels 2 and 3 content, allowing the findings to be relevant to the broader programme. The goal of this study is to explore the NCV curriculum from a decolonial perspective, and the selection of level 4 as the case supports this exploratory aim.

The case study method itself can serve as a vehicle for epistemic change by exposing and contesting the colonial logics that have shaped how knowledge is generated, validated and disseminated. Within this orientation, the case study becomes more than a descriptive tool: it functions as a critical space for re-orienting indigenous and local knowledges, situating lived experiences within their socio-historical context, and challenging dominant narratives that privilege Western epistemologies. This framing aligns with the decolonial imperative to transform both the content and the conduct of

research, ensuring that the process of inquiry contributes to epistemic justice and the broader project of decolonisation.

4.5.3 Advantages and disadvantages of case study as related to this study

The case study research methodology is particularly valuable for this study because it allows for an in-depth, exploratory examination of the NCV curriculum within the context of decolonisation. As John (2009) notes, case studies enable the researchers to “gain an in-depth enquiry which also attempts to reflect a rich and lively reality of the case” (p. 96). The flexibility of the methodology in employing multiple data generation methods further supports its suitability for this study, allowing the researcher to capture complex interactions and perspectives.

However, case study methodology has been criticised for its perceived lack of scientific rigour and limited generalisability. Merriam (2009) cautions that “the issue of generalisability looms larger in case study methodology than with other types of qualitative research” (p. 51). Despite this, the richness and depth of data generated through case studies often outweigh these concerns, particularly in exploratory studies such as this one, where understanding context and complexity takes precedence over broad generalisation.

4.6 Data Generation Methods

Case and Given (2016) emphasise that the choice of research design and methodology has significant implications for “what we can know about the phenomenon we observe” (p. 219). In qualitative research, it is common to use multiple data generation methods to triangulate findings and ensure rich, comprehensive insights (Creswell, 2012). The study employed collaborative storytelling interviews, collage, metaphor drawings, focus group discussions and documentary reviews as its data generation methods. Interviews, as Rule and John (2011) note, “yield a large amount of data suitable for a case study” (p.

66). This study could not undertake classroom observations as initially planned due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

4.6.1 Data generation considerations during COVID-19

COVID-19 was not only a medical crisis but also a profound social event that disrupted social order and revealed structural inequalities (Greeff, 2020; Teti, Schatz & Liebenberg, 2020). The associated restrictions and disruptions relating to TVET colleges constituted closure or limited access to TVET colleges, suspension of practical and workplace learning, suspension of research-related data collection/generation, limited access to lecturers and their classrooms and changes in lecturer timetables essentially affecting how much time they could afford for data generation purposes. Greeff (2020) observes that “COVID-19 is revealing, reinforcing and catalysing new social and cultural relations; laying bare inequalities and anxieties, discrimination and division; but also galvanising solidarities and collective action” (p. 1). The TVET staff and student body have similarly experienced these disruptions, directly impacting the research context.

As a researcher, I faced new challenges related to securing participant engagement and site entry, adherence to new informed consent procedures as imposed by the university, restrictions on travel, and mandatory use of facial masks complicating in-person interactions.

The following section outlines each of the data generation methods demonstrating how they were designed to maintain not only methodological rigour but also to align with the study’s decolonial and critical paradigm objectives.

4.6.2 Document review

Rule and John (2011) recommend that in case study research methodologies, particularly when collaborative storytelling interviews and focus group discussions are included, a useful starting point is document review. For this study, documentary review provided

critical insights into understanding the agendas that have shaped TVET colleges as well as the histories and dominant epistemologies in the NCV curriculum. Additionally, documentary review generated questions and themes that could be further explored during collaborative storytelling interviews and focus group discussions (Rule & John, 2011).

Documentary review involves the systematic examination of existing, reliable documentary sources such as books, policy documents, subject guidelines, and prior research. The selection of this method is informed by a preliminary literature review, which revealed that much information on the trajectory of TVET colleges, as envisaged by government and policymakers, exists predominantly in research and policy documents. Atkinson and Coffey (2011) emphasise that organisations are major producers of documentary material, and yet many researchers fail to explicitly include such material, potentially overlooking critical contextual details. They argue that documentary review provides researchers with a deeper understanding of organisational structures and how people operate within them. Examining the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of the NCV curriculum required substantial engagement with such documentary material and this method was unaffected by COVID-19 restrictions.

Atkinson and Coffey (2011) highlight the dual role of documentary sources in research. Firstly, they act as receptacles, carrying instructions, obligations or guidelines. Secondly, they act as agents in their own right, leaving influence long after their creators are gone and remaining open to reinterpretation by others. Atkinson and Coffey further stress that documents are not neutral reflections of organisational life; instead, they actively construct the realities they describe. Their interpretation depends on the interaction between readers and writers: readers bring prior assumptions and contextual knowledge, while writers encode intentions and norms into the documents.

This study restricted documentary reviews to a carefully selected set of sources, including policy statements, national directives, post-school education and training as well as TVET sector specific policies, reports, subject guidelines, assessment guidelines and press

releases relevant to the NCV curriculum. This distinction ensured clarity between documents used for documentary review and those for the literature review. As Nieuwenhuis (2007) cautions, while there may be overlap between literature review sources and documentary review, researchers must clearly differentiate the two. Moreover, authenticity and accuracy was evaluated before use, particularly given that publicly available commentary on TVET colleges may not necessarily reflect official government position. Restricting the choice of documents enhanced the rigour of this study.

4.6.3 Data generation with lecturers

Two sets of data generation sessions were scheduled with lectures. The first involved collaborative storytelling interviews, which informed the basis of the subsequent photo collage session. Each data session was planned to last approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes.

4.6.3.1 Collaborative storytelling interviews

Roulston and Choi (2018) note that qualitative interviews encompass a range of approaches that vary according to the type of information sought and the cultural context of the study. Traditional interviews are often described as two-way conversations intended to collect participants' ideas, beliefs and behaviours (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). In-depth, semi-structured interviews are appropriate for exploring participants' experiences and perceptions in detail (Case & Given, 2016).

However, conventional interviews have been criticised by postcolonial scholars for reinforcing the researcher as the knower and the participant as the object of study (Chilisa, 2012). Such methods often rely on Western academic concepts, privileging Western epistemologies over indigenous knowledge systems. Tamale (2020) concurs, highlighting the importance of challenging epistemic hierarchies that marginalise non-Western ways of knowing.

Collaborative storytelling interviews, by contrast, are designed to decolonise the research process by promoting participation, dialogue and collaboration. This method is particularly suited for this study, as research in decolonising TVET is limited, and collaborative storytelling provides a means to explore underrepresented voices and experiences.

Stories are powerful tools for meaning making and knowledge transmission. They allow multiple versions of truth to coexist, enabling diverse perspectives to be heard (Russell, 1999). Storytelling has historically been an indigenous practice in Africa, connecting past, present and future generations while transmitting knowledge and values (Russell, 1999; Chilisa, 2012; Derome, 2019). Collaborative storytelling situates the participant as the owner of their narrative, while the researcher facilitates reflection and dialogue (Coutts, Clairemont, Stelzner, 2018). This approach allows participants to reflect on and interpret experiences in their own cultural context and language, thereby legitimising indigenous ways of knowing.

By integrating collaborative storytelling with the tenets proposed by Keane and Khupe (2017), the study ensured that data generation was participatory, reflexive and grounded in the lived realities of the lectures. Stories collected during these sessions were analysed and interpreted and presented to participants before embarking on the collage session. This ensured that the narratives were co-constructed and were an authentic representation of participants' experiences.

4.6.3.2 Piloting the collaborative storytelling schedule

As Scotland (2012) notes, consistent with the critical paradigm, participants can contribute to the formulation and refinement of research questions. Piloting research instruments is often used to assess whether participants will generate the intended data. In this study, the topic of decolonisation was not commonly reported on in the TVET sector. The pilot therefore assisted in determining whether the phenomenon would be easily understood by participants and how questions relating to decolonisation could be better phrased. In this way, the study avoided generating shallow or insufficient data.

4.6.3.3 Facilitating collaborative storytelling interviews

Chilisa (2012) highlights that when storytelling interviews are employed as a data generation strategy, ethical considerations around gaining entry are critical. Negotiating entry extends beyond signing consent forms. It involves establishing a relationship with participants and clarifying their respective roles in the storytelling process. As Connolly and Clandinin (1990) explain, the story is co-constructed with the participant acting as the narrator and the researcher as facilitator. The final story is created through a collaborative process where participant narratives are merged with the researchers' interpretation to produce a joint narrative. What Connolly and Clandinin term "collaborative stories" (p. 12).

During storytelling interviews, the researcher must remain open minded and sensitive to issues that may emerge beyond the planned interview schedule. Chilisa (2012) cautions that in decolonising research "stories as tools of data generation, analysis and interpretation give another side of the story to deficit theorising about the "other" and allow the formally colonised and historically oppressed, to frame and tell their past and present life experiences from their perspectives" (p. 126).

Finally, the narratives generated during the interviews are not considered final until they are presented back to participants. This was done in the collage session. This step ensured that the stories accurately represented the experiences and perspectives of participants, allowing verification, validation, and co-construction of the collective narrative.

4.6.4 *Photo collage*

Photo collage was used to explore the critical experiences, identities and perspectives of lecturers in TVET colleges. Koll, von Wallpach and Kreuzer (2010) define collage as a heterogeneous, multivalent, multidimensional medium which readily produces effects of spontaneity, simultaneity, ephemerality, fantasy and disorientation" (p.3). As Pillay, Ramkelewan and Hiralaal (2019) also note, "the use of collage as inquiry has potential to

make the everyday a critical site for exploring and opening up the personal-professional connectedness in everyday practice” (p. 79). In this study, collage not only enabled access to classroom and college spaces otherwise restricted due to lockdown measures, but also provided a medium for lecturers to communicate their interpretations of political, socio-economic and cultural contexts. By integrating collage with storytelling interviews, participants’ embedded meanings could be accessed in ways that acknowledge complexity, ambiguity and multiplicity of perspectives (Pillay et al., 2019).

Collage, whether conducted face-to-face or online, falls under creative participatory methods, which include drawings, pictures and artefacts assembled to narrate experiences (Koll, et al., 2010; John & Cox, 2019). Collages facilitate creativity, metaphorical thinking and emotional expression, enabling participants to engage with experiences of space, proximity and language in ways that are essential to understanding the NCV curriculum within the historical, cultural and linguistic contexts.

Implementation of the collage method, involved lecturers taking photographs at their TVET college campuses representing positive and negative experiences, belonging and exclusion, achievement and failure, aspects of lecture identity, institutional power and access. These images were sent to me via WhatsApp, printed on A5 paper and provided to the participants during the collaborative storytelling session. Participants then individually created themed collages and wrote brief descriptions of what their compositions represented.

4.7 Data Generation with Student Participants

Two data generation methods were employed with TVET students. These are metaphor drawings and focus group discussions. The metaphor drawing session lasted 30 minutes and the focus group session lasted 40 minutes.

4.7.1 *Metaphor drawings*

This study used metaphor drawings to gain insight into how TVET college students experience, respond to, and/or contest decolonial messages. The method aimed to elicit and represent students' understandings and experiences of the phenomenon of decolonisation. The approach was informed by studies such as Moletsane (2020), who used metaphor drawings to understand rural university students' experiences with the hidden curriculum and Ramsey-Wade (2025), who employed metaphors to explore supervisors' experiences and relationships in postgraduate research supervision.

Metaphor drawings fall within a range of non-textual strategies that are emerging as versatile ways of knowing and exploring experiences. A metaphor is a figure of speech, image, trope, analogy, comparison, or symbol (Ramsey-Wade, 2025).

Historically, psychologists have used drawings for over a century to indicate developmental levels, self-description, clinical assessments and research purposes (Wiersma et.al., 2024). Gellel, Deguara, and Formosa (2024) add that metaphor drawings are highly suitable for research involving youth because they are playful and metaphors do not rely on linguistic proficiency. Such participatory visual methods empower participants by placing agency in their hands while eliciting nuanced depictions of lived realities.

Ethically and practically, metaphor drawings reduce hierarchy between researcher and participant, encouraging inclusivity and allowing participants to frame their realities in expressive, personally meaningful ways. They are also cost effective and easily implemented.

However, challenges include potential difficulty in implementing the method with large groups or when the topic is sensitive. Metaphor drawings could impose complexities in data interpretation depending on the phenomenon. In addition, visual data is inherently more open-ended than text, raising risks of over interpretation. Thus, researchers must

interpret drawings within the cultural context of each participant to avoid culturally neutral assumptions.

4.7.1.1 Facilitating metaphor drawings

Participants were provided with A4 plain sheets, pencils and erasers. They were asked to draw images or symbols representing positive and negative experiences as NCV students; a sense of belonging and non-belonging; a sense of achievement and failure; symbols of student identity; symbols of institutional historical power; and symbols of institutional access. Each drawing was titled, and the images were later discussed during focus group discussion.

4.7.2 *Focus group discussion*

Focus groups are defined as “group discussions exploring a specific set of issues” (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999, p. 4). They generate data through participant interaction and collective dialogue (Rule & John, 2011; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). While focus group discussions may not always be the primary research tool, they can support other methods by producing rich, detailed data.

In this study, focused group discussions were used to explore and corroborate insights from metaphor drawings. According to Sim and Waterfield (2019), focus group discussions encourage a wide range of responses, activate forgotten details, and release inhibitions that may otherwise discourage students. Creswell (2012) and Sim and Waterfield highlight that the richness of focus group discussion data arises from dialogue, interaction and shared social knowledge. Sim and Waterfield stress that both the content of dialogue and the nature of interaction should inform analysis.

Focus groups were particularly useful for uncovering students’ underlying reasons, motivations, emotions, and shared experiences of the NCV curriculum. The peer-

supported non-threatening environment facilitated open discussion thus promoting data richness.

4.8 Potential Pitfalls and Ethical Considerations

Mwilongo, (2025) cautions that focus group discussion can be dominated by certain participants, requiring researcher management to ensure equal voice. Ethical issues include confidentiality and anonymity as participants may share information outside the group (Sim & Waterfield, 2019; Mwilongo, 2025). To mitigate risks, the researcher emphasised consent, confidentiality and anonymity before sessions. The consent form included a clause committing participants to uphold ethical responsibilities toward group members.

4.9. Summary of Research Questions and Corresponding Data Generation Methods

A summary of the data required and how it was generated is provided in the table below:

Table 3: Summary of data requirements and data generation methods

Research question	Data source	Instrument to generate data
How have agenda(s) that have shaped the transformation of TVET colleges been enacted?	• Relevant documents • NCV Level 4 Lecturers	Documentary review Collaborative storytelling interviews Collage
What epistemologies influence the philosophical underpinnings of the NCV curriculum?	• Relevant documents • NCV Level 4 Lecturers	Documentary review Collaborative storytelling interviews Collage

To what extent is knowledge gained by the NCV student deemed responsive and relevant to societal needs?	• Relevant documents • NCV Level 4 Lecturers	Documentary review Collaborative story telling interviews Collage
How is the NCV curriculum enacted in the classroom?	• NCV Level 4 lecturers • NCV Level Students	Collaborative storytelling interviews Collage Metaphor drawings Focus group discussions
How have lecturers and students experienced the NCV curriculum?	• NCV Level 4 lecturers • NCV Level students	Collaborative storytelling interviews Metaphor Drawings Focus group discussions
What might a decolonised TVET (NCV?) curriculum look like?	• NCV Level 4 lecturers • NCV Level students	Collaborative storytelling interviews Metaphor drawings Collage Focus group discussions

4.10 Sampling Procedure

Qualitative research often relies on non-probability sampling, particularly purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2022) note that it is common in qualitative research for participants to be chosen purposefully based on their relevance to the research questions. Given that this study is situated within a qualitative framework, purposive sampling is the overarching sampling strategy.

Out of nine TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal two colleges and their campuses were intentionally selected based on convenience and accessibility. Convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are readily available to the researcher (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). The first college, TVET College A, was selected due to its proximity to

the researcher, which reduced travel costs. The second college, TVET College B, is located approximately 500 kilometres away in a predominantly rural area of KwaZulu-Natal. Both colleges expressed willingness to participate, demonstrating a perceived commitment to the study. Selecting two colleges in distinct contexts allowed for a comparison of perceptions, understandings, and experience regarding the NCV curriculum.

4.10.1 Recruitment of participants and sampling criteria

4.10.1.1 Lecturers

Initial contact was made with Gatekeepers, who are Academic Heads via e-mail and telephonic discussions to build rapport and trust. Face-to-face contact was initially intended but was not feasible due to logistical constraints imposed by COVID-19.

A “Permission to conduct research” form from the Department of Higher Education was then completed in compliance with requirements and submitted to the Academic Head. The Academic Head was responsible for directing the researcher to the relevant Campus Managers where a face-to-face meeting followed with the aim of providing detailed information on the purpose of the study and the proposed sampling of participants.

Campus managers provided a comprehensive list of all NCV Level 4 lecturers. Using purposive sampling, four lecturers were selected by the campus manager on behalf of the researcher, taking into consideration the Covid-19 implications on syllabus coverage by the lecturer and whether the lecturer would be physically present on campus (as others were allowed to work from home due to underlying medical conditions). The selection in each TVET college campus ensured representation across race and gender. The campus manager facilitated the informing of the selected participants and provided the researcher with participants’ contact details for further engagement.

A preliminary telephonic meeting was held with each of the identified participants to arrange suitable dates and times for the interview session. The aim of the research and

the completing of consent forms were also explained. The telephonic meetings also disclosed that interviews would be recorded and participant expectations, including anonymity were discussed. Consent forms were then emailed to participants for completion and sent back to the researcher.

During the initial face-to-face meeting, the researcher explained the data generating process which included collaborative storytelling interviews and collage. The sequence and instructions for the collage were also agreed upon during the initial face-to-face meeting. During the first session, one lecturer participant at TVET college A opted to decline participation due to urgent family commitments that required him to travel back to his family. The number of lecturer participants successfully interviewed was then seven.

4.10.1.2 Students

The selection of student participants was a process assisted by the campus manager. The research and campus manager selected eight students from the class registers of NCV Level 4 students. The purposive sampling process ensured representation of gender as the register showed that all students were African Blacks. These students were then called to the campus manager's office where they were introduced to the researcher and contact details were exchanged.

During this initial meeting in the campus manager's office, the purpose of the research and all other protocols as followed when meeting lecturers were then explained and agreed upon. The deviation with students was encountered when some indicated that they had no transport to come to the college on the day the data generation was set. The researcher thus had to provide transport money. Consent forms were then signed with each participant on the initial day of the meeting and collected by the researcher.

During the day of the data generation, both the instructions for metaphor drawing as well as focus group discussion were then explained in detail and participants asked if they were still willing to continue with the research. At TVET college B, only five students came

for engagement on the day of the data generation. This made the total number of students who participated in the research to be thirteen, with eight from TVET college A and five from TVET college B.

4.10.2 Gender as a prominent criterion in sampling

The inclusion of gender as a key criterion is informed by research demonstrating the role of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality in developing multicultural curricula (Basow, 1995; Tannenbaum & Greaves, 2016).

Basow (1995) found that student perceptions of lecturer expertise were influenced by the interaction of teacher and student gender. Female students taught by female lecturers with strong subject expertise experienced learning advantage and similar effects were observed in the reverse scenario. Tannenbaum and Greaves (2016) further highlighted the importance of gender in influencing decision making, communication and the uptake of interventions in curriculum studies. For this study, emphasis on gender ensured that gender roles, identity and relations are considered as these can influence how the NCV level 4 curriculum is implemented and experienced within TVET colleges.

4.10.3 Sample and sampling technique

Data was collected from a total of twenty (20) participants as summarised in the table below:

Table 4: Data collected from twenty (20) participants

Target group	Nature of sampling	Criteria	Number
NCV lecturer for pilot interview at TVET college A	Purposively	Availability Experience with NCV curriculum and teaching on NCV Level 4	1
NCV lecturers for collaborative storytelling	Purposively	Currently teaching on NCV level 4 programme Minimum 3 years' experience teaching on NCV programmes	7

interviews (TVET college A & B)		Gender Race Syllabus coverage Physical presence on campus	
NCV level 4 students drawn from TVET college A & B	Purposively	Currently studying on NCV level 4 programme Gender Race	13
Total participants less pilot			20

4.11 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Pandey and Pandey (2021) defines data analysis as studying the organised material from as many angles as possible in order to discover the essential facts. Studying data from various angles allows for interpretation, which allows an adequate account of the true meaning of the data presented in terms of purposes of the study being reported. Qualitative data in the form of narratives, stories and textual accounts are rich, full and real (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Rapley (2011) cautions researchers to cultivate a “qualitative analytic attitude” (p. 274), emphasising a hands-on empirical and tacit engagement with the data, as coding alone cannot fully capture its depth. Numerous approaches exist for qualitative data analysis, and the choice depends on the methodology and the researcher competence (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024). To this end, this study adopted thematic analysis and discourse analysis as its data analysis approaches.

4.11.1 *Thematic analysis*

Thematic analysis identifies, examines, and records patterns called themes within qualitative data. (Rapley, 2011; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Braun and Clark, 2006). Themes reflect patterns that are relevant to the research questions. Braun and Clark (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is particularly useful for first-time qualitative researchers, as it can provide core analytical skills applicable to other methods.

Two levels of thematic analysis exist. First, semantic analysis, which focuses on explicit meanings without inferring meanings beyond what participants have said. Second, latent

analysis which delves deeper to uncover underlying ideas, assumptions, and ideologies shaping the phenomenon (Braun & Clark, 2006). This study employed both forms of analysis to explore deeper meanings in participants experiences. The six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) guiding the analysis is: familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming the themes and writing-up.

Thematic analysis is flexible, as it is a method rather than a methodology, making it compatible with various epistemological perspectives (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). A limitation is procedural divergence, which may create confusion between thematic and qualitative content analysis.

4.11.2 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis examines the meaning of spoken and written words and the contexts in which they occur (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). It considers not only “what is said, but how it is said” (Rule & John, 2011, p. 77). Discourse analysis allows researchers to understand language use, metaphors and imagery; explore power, dominance, inequality, and bias; examine historical, political, and social contexts. In this study, this discourse analysis was applied to national education policies and TVET specific documents to identify discourse markers (Rule & John, 2011). These markers answer questions such as: (i) what discourse do the contents reveal? (ii) how do these discourses converge or diverge across documents and between interviews or focus groups? and (iii) do the discourse markers reflect the inclusion or exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems in the NCV curriculum? Discourse analysis thus provided access to “divergent cultures, ideologies and epistemologies” (Rule & John, 2011, p. 79) within TVET colleges.

4.12 Strategy for trustworthiness of data or ensuring rigour

In qualitative research, the concepts of validity and reliability can be reconceptualised through the notion of trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln 1985). Rather than relying on

statistical measures, trustworthiness is established through four criteria: credibility (parallel to internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity). These criteria provide a rigorous framework for ensuring the quality and integrity of qualitative inquiry.

Trustworthiness ensures the quality, credibility and rigour of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024). Rule and John (2011) highlight the trustworthiness promotes “rigour, transparency and professional ethics”, enhancing credibility within the research (p.107). Janesick (2003) warns that no single approach guarantees trustworthiness. The researcher must make contextualised decisions as and when required.

For this study trustworthiness was ensured through systematic and explicitly documented procedures enacted at multiple stages of the research process, including data generation, analysis and interpretation. These strategies, including triangulation across data sources, member checking with participants, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of a comprehensive audit trail enhanced the overall rigour and transparency of the research process. Guba & Lincoln’s (op.cit) criteria for establishing trustworthiness, guided these processes.

Transferability was supported through the provision of thick description, including detailed accounts of the institutional contexts, participant roles, and contextualised TVET environment, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Furthermore, findings were compared with existing literature and similar studies to assess resonance within broader educational and skills development contexts.

Credibility was enacted through prolonged engagement with participants during story-telling interviews and focus groups, as well as through member checking, where preliminary interpretations and summaries of key themes were shared with selected participants for verification and clarification. In addition, peer debriefing was undertaken with academic colleagues and critical reader familiar with TVET research to critically interrogate emerging interpretations and reduce researcher bias.

Dependability was strengthened through maintaining a clear and transparent audit trail, documenting all stages of the research process, including interview protocols, coding decisions, and theme development. In addition, triangulation was achieved by using multiple data generation methods, including document analysis, collaborative storytelling, metaphor drawings and focus groups, allowing for cross-verification of findings across data sources.

Confirmability was ensured using reflexive memos maintained throughout the research process, in which the researcher critically reflected on assumptions, positionality, and potential influences on data interpretation. These reflexive practices were complemented by the audit trail, allowing for external scrutiny of how conclusions were reached. A detailed discussion on positionality is provided at the end of this chapter.

4.13 Anticipated Ethical Matters

Ethical considerations in research are fundamental and must be addressed from the outset (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024). This study adheres to four general ethical principles as guided by Creswell and Creswell, (2022). Transparency and informed consent were ensured by providing participants with clear information about the purpose, procedures and implications of the study, after which written consent was obtained. Do no harm was upheld by safeguarding participants from any form of physical, psychological and emotional risk.

Voluntary participation was maintained by ensuring that participation was entirely free from coercion and deception. Confidentiality was guaranteed through the secure storage and restricted access of all collected data. In addition, the ethical requirements of the University of KwaZulu-Natal were strictly observed. From a decolonial perspective, justice extends beyond procedural ethics. As Chilisa (2012) argues, research framed within a critical and decolonial paradigm carries an ethical obligation to confront and counteract the enduring effects of racism, prejudice, bias and oppression.

4.14 Researcher's Positionality

In qualitative research within the critical paradigm, the researcher is inherently part of the research, and personal experiences, values and assumptions influence data interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2024). My positionality may influence the study in several ways:

Having been a lecturer at one of the TVET colleges teaching on one of the NCV level 4 programmes, my understanding of the responses of the students during the focus group and the collaborative storytelling interview sessions could have influenced the way I interpreted their experiences. Therefore, I had to be aware of my ability to be biased and therefore, engaged in constant self-reflection during data generation, the interpretation and analysis phases.

4.15 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations may have influenced the scope and efficiency of this study. First, closures of college programmes during the data generation process could have affected the lecturer participants' psychological well-being which in turn could have affected the quality of the responses. Second, lecturer availability was limited to college recess periods or examination free periods which prolonged the data generation timeline between the different data generation sessions thus influencing a smooth flow of recalling discussions from the previous session.

Third, as an exploratory qualitative case study involving two TVET colleges, this study does not seek statistical generalisation. Rather, the intention is to provide contextually grounded insights into curriculum practices within specific institutional settings. The relatively small, purposive sample therefore supports depth of understanding rather than breadth of representation. In this sense, the value of the findings lies in their analytical and contextual transferability, where readers may determine the applicability of insights to similar contexts.

An additional limitation relates specifically to Research Question 4, which focuses on the enactment of the curriculum and classroom observations. This study could not include classroom-based observations or direct observation of pedagogical practice due to Covid-19 restrictions. As a result, the analysis of the “enactment” is based primarily on participants’ self-reported accounts and documentary evidence rather than on observed practice. This limits the extent to which claims can be made about how policies and curricula are enacted in real-time teaching and learning environments.

Accordingly, conclusions related to enactment are presented as indicative than definitive, reflecting lecturers’ perspectives and institutional narratives rather than direct evidence of classroom practice. Future research incorporating classroom observations or ethnographic approaches would strengthen the analysis of enactment and provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the NCV curriculum intentions are translated in practice.

Lastly, data interpretation may be influenced by the researcher’s positionality, despite measures to minimise bias. Despite these limitations, the study employed rigorous methodological strategies and ethical safeguards to ensure credible, dependable and meaningful insights.

4.16 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology underpinning the study, with particular emphasis on the intention to generate rich, contextualised data. The approach recognises that the data generation process is not a neutral exercise but a collaborative partnership between the researcher and the participants. Accordingly, careful attention was given to ensuring that the chosen data generation methods align with the principles and recommendations of decolonising methodologies.

The next chapter presents and discusses the findings that emerged from this process.

CHAPTER FIVE: VIEWS OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE NCV CURRICULUM

5.1 Introduction

The central questions guiding the organisation of this chapter and the next two are: What discourses emerge from the data sources? What points of convergence or divergence exist among them? Additionally, this study examines the NCV curriculum through a decolonial lens, as such, the organisation of the chapters consistently questions whether the findings present an opportunity for a decolonial project within TVET colleges. This inquiry remains central throughout the data analysis and is ultimately addressed in Chapter 8, where I present my insights and theorise the findings.

As outlined in Chapter 3 on Research Design and Methodology, this study employed multiple data generation methods to facilitate a decolonial agenda. These methods included collaborative story-telling interviews, photo collages, metaphor drawings, focus group and documentary review. The selected documents provided essential background information, offering both historical context and insights into policy expectations. Additionally, the documentary review helped contextualise participant responses, allowing for a deeper understanding of the conditions that would either constrain or enable curriculum decolonisation (Bowen, 2009; Wills, 2022).

To mitigate the risk of the possibility of not generating the required data, the concept of decolonisation was introduced to lecturer participants during the collaborative story telling interviews. In the photo collage sessions, lecturers were asked to capture images they perceived represented various aspects of decolonisation or coloniality within the college environment. These images were then discussed and cross-referenced with the story-telling interviews. For student participants, decolonisation was introduced during the metaphor drawing exercise, with further discussions taking place during focus group sessions. Here, students connected their drawings to different dimensions of decolonisation. The responses from both lecturers and students were then corroborated with findings from documentary review, leading to the identification of key themes. The

following five (5) sub-themes help to unpack how knowledge is perceived and experienced in the NCV curriculum.

5.2 Sub-themes

5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Purpose of vocational education

Literature highlights a school of thought that views knowledge as a fundamental economic resource surpassing capital, labour and natural resource in importance. When effectively harnessed, knowledge can enhance economic competitiveness and social well-being (Moletsane, 2015; Ondari-Okemwa, 2011). This shift in the centrality of knowledge as a factor of production has implications not only for the quality of knowledge NCV students acquire but also for its practical utility. Consequently, there should be a noticeable shift in how knowledge is acquired, produced, applied and critically examined by both lecturers and students (Moletsane, 2015; Ondari-Okemwa, 2011).

SAQA (2019) further emphasises that while the NCV students gain practical knowledge and skills relevant to specific economic or vocational sectors, their education must prepare them to navigate social, economic and cultural challenges in everyday life. Expanding this view by SAQA (op.cit), knowledge is not only a key driver of economic productivity but also a fundamental tool for livelihoods and the holistic development of individuals and communities. This perspective aligns with critical and transformative education ideologies, which argue that knowledge should serve broader purposes beyond mere economic utility. It should empower individuals, promote social justice, and contribute to sustainable development (Freire, 1970; Nyerere, 1968; Odora Hoppers, 2009; Lebakeng, 2010).

From this standpoint, critical educators see knowledge as a means of equipping students with the skills, values and critical awareness necessary to engage with and transform their realities. Knowledge, in this sense, is deeply connected to lived experiences, cultural identity and community well-being. It extends beyond technical and vocational

competencies to include ethical reasoning, social consciousness and ecological responsibility (Lotz-Sisitka & Raven, 2009; Odora Hoppers, 2009; Shiva, 2005; Giroux, 1988).

This view challenges dominant neoliberal discourses that frame education primarily in terms of economic output and workforce development. Instead, it advocates an approach where knowledge fosters agency, resilience and sustainable ways of living. For instance, Nyerere (1968) proposed an education system centred on education for self-reliance, where knowledge is not only about producing workers for the economy, but also about creating self-sufficient individuals and communities. This philosophy resonates with the critical pedagogy perspectives that view knowledge as a means of liberation (Freire, 1970). Similarly, Mahlatsi (2025) argues that education should contribute to the well-being of people by addressing socio-economic inequalities and fostering community-driven development.

Additionally, the SAQA (2019) document makes it clear that the NCV curriculum is not solely designed to prepare students for domestic employment; rather, it emphasises the acquisition of knowledge that extends beyond South Africa's borders. The curriculum aims to equip students with skills and competencies that align with global standards, ensuring their ability to contribute to both the local and international workforce. As stated in the document, "while the vocational component of the qualification is grounded in the South African context, it also incorporates global imperatives to help the South African economy to compete internationally in terms of such issues as productivity, quality, efficiency and cost effectiveness" (SAQA, 2019, p.2).

In the context of NCV education, this broader perspective suggests that knowledge should not only prepare students for employment but also enable them to navigate and contribute meaningfully to their social, economic and cultural environments. It calls for an educational approach that integrates technical skills with critical thinking, ethical considerations and an awareness of environmental and social justice issues.

Lecturer participants echoed this view, acknowledging the framework within which NCV curriculum is structured and the intended purpose of the knowledge it imparts. The response below illustrates this perspective:

I think government on paper ah they've put it nicely. I mean government is saying on paper like on all the policies that vocational education ... provides a wide learning opportunity to everyone ... and government is saying that it is one of the key things that can reduce unemployment, poverty and inequality ... because when you look at the NDP 2030 vocational education it is one of the pillars (Zenzele, TVET college A).

The response from Zenzele demonstrates an understanding of the intentions of government on paper of positioning vocational education as a key tool for addressing social and economic challenges. The quote also acknowledges government's intention to frame vocational education as inclusive, providing broad learning opportunities for all. The response by Zenzele is supported by the principles underpinning the NCV qualification as outlined in the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA, 2019). These principles are, "social transformation; outcomes-based education; high knowledge and high skills; integration and applied competence; progression, articulation and portability; human rights, inclusivity and environmental and social justice; credibility, quality and efficiency" (SAQA, 2019, p. 2).

The principles outlined above transcend the desire to just provide vocational education to the TVET college student. Rather, the principles seek to address the injustices, inequalities and dehumanisation of the past apartheid regime. The ideological underpinnings of the NCV are important in informing mediation and pedagogy adopted by lecturers in the teaching process. Lecturer participants see some of these principles such as equity being achieved through the NCV curriculum as illustrated in the response below:

Ah government from the way I see it it's a platform for everyone, not necessarily putting class. Hence there is wider access, be it you didn't finish school, be it you want to re-skill

yourself. I mean that's how I see government viewing this program. It is just open for everyone (Bongani TVET college B).

The quote above highlights government's commitment to promoting inclusivity and accessibility in education, ensuring that opportunities are available to all students without discrimination. This is reflected in the NCV qualification's role in providing an alternative pathway for students, as expressed by Zenzele, "it gives an alternative to learners ... I mean say if you're not an academic person ..." (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Furthermore, lecturers recognised that the NCV qualification is designed not only as an alternative educational route but also as a means to prepare students for the workforce. Zenzele's perspective reinforces this understanding, emphasising the qualification's focus on equipping students with the skills needed for employment:

For me vocational education is education that prepares for employment in a skilled craft or a trade. What do I mean by that? For instance, if you want to learn about say, plumbing you will have to go and do vocational education, or like if you interested in being a Nail technician, it's a particular craft. It teaches you manual or practical activities, unlike your traditional academic route which is the opposite of that. In the academic stream, they teach you abstract, theoretical and conceptual knowledge but here it's more of manual sort of labour-intensive skills ah yes. It teaches like procedural knowledge yes yeah that's my understanding of the term. (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Zenzele describes vocational education as training that equips individuals with skills for trades and crafts, emphasising practical and manual learning over abstract or theoretical knowledge. He contrasts it with the academic stream, which he believes focuses more on conceptual learning. His perspective aligns with the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training in South Africa (uMalusi, 2013) which defines vocational education as a blend of academic knowledge, theory, practical skills, and values tailored to specific career fields. For example, at NCV level 2, students are expected to develop the knowledge, practical skills, applied competence and understanding necessary for entry-level employment in a specific trade or occupation

(uMalusi, 2013). At level 3, students are expected to develop the knowledge, practical skills, applied competence and understanding needed for employment at an intermediate level within a specific occupation or trade. By level 4, they should have gained the expertise required for employment in a particular trade or occupation, or a broader class of trades, as well as the qualifications necessary for entry into higher education (uMalusi, 2013).

The NCV qualification consists of two key components. The first is the fundamental learning component, which is essential to the qualification and serves as the foundation for all other learning at each level (uMalusi, 2013). This component forms the academic knowledge base and includes three core subjects: An Official Home Language or First Additional Language, Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, and Life Orientation. These fundamental subjects provide the progression for further learning across all levels (SAQA, 2019; uMalusi, 2013).

The second component is the vocational component which defines the qualification's specific focus. This aspect involves learning experiences that are contextually relevant to a particular vocational field and ensures students acquire specialised knowledge and skills within their chosen trade or profession (uMalusi, 2013). As uMalusi further states, this component provides depth and specialisation within a specific programme. Lecturer participants viewed this vocational specialisation as the defining characteristic of vocational education as illustrated in Sipho's response:

I would say vocational subject is when we prepare the students for the world of work. Because our subjects are more focused on practical. So, I would say 20% of their curriculum is the theory part but the entire 80% is the practical one. That is how I define vocational subject (Sipho, lecturer TVET college B).

Zanele held a similar view to Sipho in her emphasis of what she believed vocational education was about:

Yes, vocational has to do more with practicals, using hands, like we prepare them to be able to know exactly what to do like everything that they learn here we prepare them to be able to know how to do it outside unlike high school or in varsity. Most of the time you find that you can go out and not knowing what to do. But here vocational we make sure that there is more practice even if there can be theory but we practicalise it (Zanele, lecturer TVET college B).

Zanele emphasises the hands-on nature of vocational education highlighting that students are thoroughly prepared to apply their learning in real-world settings where even theoretical concepts are reinforced through practical application. This is unlike graduates from high school or university. This focus on applied learning aligns with SAQA's (2019) framework, which identifies four key epistemological areas which are knowledge, practical skills, applied competence and understanding as essential across all three NCV levels. By the time students reach level 4, they should possess the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to either enter higher education or transition directly into the workplace (SAQA, 2019). Additionally, SAQA (2019) stresses that for students to be job-ready, they must be adequately equipped with practical knowledge and skills relevant to specific economic or vocational sectors. Furthermore, contextualised learning should prepare them to navigate the social, economic and cultural challenges that they may encounter in their professional and personal lives.

The perspective that vocational education should be broader than just providing practical skills carries significant implications for a decolonial discourse within the TVET sector. However, one participant cautioned that while the intended purpose of vocational education may be well articulated in government policies, the true impact is in its implementation:

I would say on paper, if you look at all government policies and all the writings like the White Paper and so and so forth, it is good. But how it is implemented in practice is totally different ... because in order to progress, you have to have time in order to sit down to see what is actually working and what is not working ... this is hardly done. (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A)

The quote from Zenzele suggests a gap between policy and practice in vocational education. While government policies and official documents outline promising frameworks, their actual implementation often falls short also as explained in Chapter two of literature review (Akoobhai, 2023; Creamer, 2025). Zenzele also highlights that real progress requires time for reflection and evaluation in order to assess what works and what does not. In the case of the NCV curriculum, reflection and evaluation have been neglected, despite numerous empirical evidences pointing to the challenges with the curriculum.

It was clear from the interviews that TVET lecturers viewed the primary purpose for vocational education as equipping students with skills for the world of work. Their understanding of vocational education aligns with the objectives outlined in policy documents and subject guidelines and the Human Capital Theory discussed in the literature review chapter, which views education as an investment that enhances individuals' productivity and employability, thereby contributing to economic growth (Almendarez, 2013; Akoojee, 2010). However, this narrow focus risks reducing education to a tool for economic gain, overlooking its broader transformative and social purposes. Zenzele encapsulated the lecturer's roles in skill development stating:

My role is to teach, and probably teaching to me means like developing our students on an academic level, vocationally and in all aspects of life. So, it's developing young minds and preparing them for the future of the world of work (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Zenzele recognises that his role extends beyond ensuring that the NCV student graduate exits with the necessary vocational skills. He alludes to the wider purpose of vocational education.

5.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Awareness of ideological underpinnings

Subject Guidelines for all subjects include a section detailing how the generic outcomes that inform teaching and learning called Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (CCFO) will be

achieved. Each subject is expected to incorporate these outcomes into its curriculum and assessments as outlined in the curriculum statement.

CCFOs are important in education and training as they ensure coherence within the broader NCV curriculum framework. CCFOs define the key competencies that the NQF identifies for student development. While CCFOs are subject specific, the South African Qualifications Authority has also established general CCFOs that are considered essential for fostering lifelong learning. These outcomes serve as a guiding framework for policy makers, curriculum designers, educators and students, shaping a more holistic approach to education and skills development.

Curriculum developers are expected to integrate CCFOs into the standards they propose. Similarly, qualification proposers must ensure that all CCFOs are appropriately addressed at the relevant qualification level. Equally important is that lecturers, who act as mediators of the curriculum fully understand the CCFOs embedded within the curriculum. The CCFOs, among other factors, reflect the philosophy of a curriculum. The NCV curriculum outlines the following summarised generic CCFOs:

- Problem-solving - the NCV student should demonstrate responsible decision-making using critical and creative thinking.
- Collaboration - work effectively as part of a team, group, organisation or community.
- Self-Management - organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively.
- Information Processing - collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
- Communicate – communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in oral and/or written presentation.
- Science and Technology – use science and technology effectively and critically, with awareness of environmental and health impacts.

- Systems Thinking – recognise that problem-solving occurs within interconnected systems rather than in isolation.
- Personal Development - contribute to the holistic development of the learner.

Additionally, SAQA (2019) provides broad principles that must guide the NCV curriculum. These broad principles are summarised as follows: equipping students with competencies and values essential for self-fulfilment and participation as citizens of a free country; equipping students with capabilities to access higher education in a specific vocational sector; facilitating the transition of students from formal education to the workplace; and providing employers with a profile of competent students.

The CCFOs together with the principles serve as a foundational framework guiding the expression of the ideological underpinnings of the government of the day in the NCV curriculum. Further, the first principle defines the essence of a free South African TVET student. It signifies liberation from colonial legacies, the restoration of dignity, and the freedom to shape one's own future. A curriculum that truly fulfils this objective must align with a decolonial agenda, fostering education that is relevant, inclusive and transformative.

Both the Critical Cross Field Outcomes and the principles of the NCV curriculum as outlined in SAQA (2019), highlight that the NCV curriculum is designed to cultivate students who are a patriotic citizen who are fully aware of their rights, holistically developed, and prepared to either pursue higher education or transition directly into the world of work. From a decolonial perspective, the ideological underpinnings expressed through the CCFOs and principles for the NCV curriculum should foster the development of a humanised, emancipated and empowered NCV student. These ideological underpinnings are also expressed through the values espoused in the curriculum. It is essential that both lecturers and students embody these values in practice.

However, when asked about the values that undergird the NCV curriculum, most lecturers indicated a lack of awareness of these values. This suggests that they may not actively

engage with the ideological underpinnings, or values of the curriculum, making it difficult to integrate these into their teaching. Despite multiple times to clarify these concepts through examples of community values, lecturers could relate to the illustrations provided but struggled to articulate the core values underpinning the NCV curriculum. The responses below illustrate this gap in understanding.

You know as it is, I am still confused as to how things are happening. When I first came here, I thought it was vocational. But it confuses me. Hmmm ... that question confuses me as well. Really ... what are the values of the NCV curriculum? (Avame, lecturer TVET college A)

Similarly, when asked, “Are you aware of the values that underpin the NCV curriculum?”, Henrietta responded concisely: “Not really.” (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

The lecturers from TVET college B requested further clarification on the question of values. In response, I explained that values are fundamental principles that shape our attitudes and actions. They define the qualities we strive to embody, influence how we treat ourselves and others, and guide our interactions with the world. In essence, values serve as overarching principles for ethical conduct. However, when asked to identify any values underpinning the NCV curriculum, the group remained silent, a response I documented in my interview as “Silence”. They were unable to articulate any specific values associated with the curriculum.

From the collaborative story-telling interviews with lecturers, it became evident that the responsibility for navigating and communicating the values of the NCV curriculum primarily falls on senior lecturers. The excerpt below highlights their perspective on who holds this responsibility.

It should be a senior lecturer of a particular subject to communicate the values of the curriculum. An expert in that area. So now how are you going to communicate something that you don't know? There are some people probably the last time they've done Math was like in Standard 7, which is Grade 9 right? And then now you are heading ... you are

the subject expert ... (laughs) ... I mean you have to give guidance. So now then, who communicates the values to you? Like I mean the person who was supposed to communicate they don't have the information. How are you going to communicate something that you don't even understand? (Aame, lecturer TVET college A).

From the response above, senior lecturers are unable to effectively communicate or instill the values underpinning various subjects, largely due to the sheer number of subjects they oversee, many of which fall outside their expertise. In some cases, senior lecturers are tasked with supervising disciplines in which they lack subject-specific knowledge. The excerpt below further highlights gaps in institutional arrangements, particularly the misalignment between subject expertise and the roles assigned to senior lecturers:

What I found problematic in the sector is that we have different programs, like the structure, for example at ... campus we've got two NCV programs. There is Office Administration and Tourism. Then for the Office Administration, there are seven subjects. Three fundamentals and four vocational. And obviously for the Tourism there are three fundamentals and four vocational. So now there is one senior lecturer for a program. This shouldn't be the case. There is no way that you could be a specialist for Math Literacy, for Life Orientation, for English, for Office Data Processing, for Business Practice ... like you cannot be a jack of all trades. (Zenzele lecturer TVET college A).

The lack of awareness regarding the values that undergird the NCV curriculum has the potential to impact how the curriculum is mediated and enacted in the classroom. A deep understanding of these foundational principles can either facilitate or hinder access to the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the knowledge intended for the students. Moreover, a firm grasp of these values plays a critical role in guiding curricular decisions and shaping pedagogic practices (Vorster & Quinn, 2017).

The findings of Vorster and Quinn (2017) based on their study conducted during the height of the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015 and 2016, highlight critical misalignments between curricula, pedagogical choices, and the lived experiences of students, especially black students, in higher education. Their research revealed that many academic

programmes failed to acknowledge students' identities, making it difficult for students to separate their sense of self from the content being taught and the methods of instruction (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). For instance, the study found that institutions lacked appropriate pedagogical strategies to induct students into new ways of reading, writing and thinking. As a result, many students felt alienated from their learning environments, struggling to engage with academic culture and discourse. Furthermore, the findings suggest that lecturers may lack the necessary philosophical grounding to effectively teach students in ways that affirm their identities and experiences. This gap can be attributed to the widespread adoption of Western knowledge traditions, which impose a generalised, hierarchical framework that implicitly positions certain knowledge systems, and by extension, certain people as superior or inferior (Grosfoguel, 2007, cited in Vorster & Quinn 2017).

The implication of the findings above from Vorster and Quinn (2017) for TVET college lecturers is that teaching, and learning is not only an epistemological project, but also an ontological one. Thus, knowledge is learnt not only for the sake of learning but for a student to be(come) a particular kind of person in the world. The kind of knowledge that shapes the "being" therefore, has implications for those who select such knowledge and, in this case TVET lecturers. The participation of the lecturers in choosing the kind of knowledge required to advance the holistic development of the TVET student requires a firm understanding of the underpinnings of the foundational principles guiding vocational provision. It is the knowledge of the values of vocational education which would in turn influence the choices of certain knowledge and pedagogic practices.

The findings from Vorster and Quinn (2017) made me reflect on Henrietta's (lecturer TVET college A) comment:

These students (comparing NCV students undertaking Tourism to those undertaking Hospitality) are much the same, little bit different ... mmm ... a little harder to get through to them but ... mmm ... it's always ... been interesting ... it's been fun, and I've learnt a lot.

As I considered this response, I began to question whether Henrietta's response might stem from a lack of understanding of the values of the NCV curriculum which should facilitate pedagogical choices thus enabling students to access the required knowledge.

5.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Lesson planning

While this study engages with issues related to curriculum mediation, it does so cautiously with respect to lesson planning, as it did not include a systematic analysis of lecturers' lesson plans, teaching notes, or prescribed textbook content. This represents a limitation of the study and points to an important area for future research, particularly in strengthening a decolonial analysis of how the enacted curriculum is shaped at the level of classroom practice.

Lesson planning is essential in curriculum delivery because it provides a structured approach to teaching and learning thus ensuring that educational goals are effectively met. Due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 regulations, I was unable to observe classroom teaching. Therefore, to gain insight into the lesson planning process, I requested access to lesson plans and engaged in discussions with lecturers. Two approaches to lesson planning were evident. A centralised approach where standardised templates are shared with lecturers across all campuses and no deviations are permitted, and a decentralised approach where lecturers use a template but have leverage/space to change or adapt the plans to their contexts. Thus, at TVET college A, lesson planning is the sole responsibility of individual lecturers in contrast to TVET college B, where a Subject Committee provides a standardised template.

Regardless of the approach preferred by institutions for lesson planning, research highlights its critical role in effective curriculum delivery. For example, Masenya (2021) emphasises that lesson planning is essential for aligning instruction with curriculum objectives. He further argues that well-structured lesson plans enhance adaptability to evolving educational needs by allowing lecturers to modify their teaching strategies in

response to shifting contexts. This flexibility ensures that learning remains relevant and responsive to students' needs

Additionally, Masenya underscores the role of lesson planning in promoting reflective teaching, as it enables educators to assess their practices, identify successful strategies and pinpoint areas for improvement. Building on this, Seherrie and Mawela (2021) highlight that lesson planning supports differentiated instruction by enabling educators to integrate diverse teaching strategies that accommodate the varied learning needs of students. Additionally, they highlight that well-structured lesson plans enhance time management.

Similarly, Ramnarian and Ramaila (2016) highlight that effective lesson planning facilitates assessment and feedback. By incorporating structured assessment, lesson plans help measure student progress and understanding, enabling educators to provide feedback and make necessary instructional adjustments. In addition to improving assessment, lesson planning also plays a key role in promoting student engagement. Van der Merwe (2022) notes that lesson planning allows educators to design interactive and dynamic learning experiences that foster students' active involvement and deeper understanding. Moreover, effective lesson planning enhances educators' confidence and preparedness. When educators plan their lessons in advance, they approach instruction with greater assurance, leading to more effective and impactful teaching.

Lastly, Smith, Gamede and Uleanya (2019) highlight that standardised lesson planning is essential for ensuring consistency in curriculum delivery across schools or campuses, thereby maintaining quality standards. In educational institutions, particularly in structured programmes like TVET education, uniform lesson planning promotes coherence across campuses, lecturers and departments. This consistency ensures that all students receive the same quality of instruction, fostering equitable learning experiences and upholding institutional standards.

By integrating these various perspectives, it becomes evident that lesson planning is a fundamental component of effective teaching and learning. It not only ensures curriculum alignment and instructional coherence but also enhances adaptability, engagement, and assessment, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes. This was clearly reflected in the experiences of lecturer participants, who were able to outline the lesson planning process in detail. They discussed sources they consult and various factors they consider when designing their lessons; demonstrating the importance of a thoughtful and structured approach to lesson planning. The following responses illustrate the practices of a centralised approach to lesson planning for lecturers:

Our lesson plans are planned by Subject Committees. We use a universal template ... This means that the whole college and not only our campus is using the same lesson plan ... So, when we are having our ISAT (Integrated Summative Assessment Task), it means that the whole college in that subject are doing ISAT. Yeah, and as for the resources, the college provides all the resources needed by all students in all campuses ... (Bongi, Mbali & Sipho, lecturers TVET college B)

When I inquired about the flexibility to change or voice concerns, the following was the response:

But here where I am now at this campus, it is something different. You do what you are told to do. You can't say anything contrary. So, I don't know these are my views ... You can't argue. If you argue, they take you as a difficult person ... (Mbali lecturer TVET college B)

"That's true. Here you follow protocols" (Other lecturers TVET college B).

The responses suggest several implications related to institutional culture, power dynamics and lecturer autonomy that echo the enduring influence of colonial education systems. Under colonial models, education was characterised by hierarchical authority, rigid control and limited space for critical or indigenous perspectives. Similarly, the limited autonomy for lecturers, fear of repercussions for dissent, and exclusion from curriculum

design reflect a continuation of these colonial power structures that prioritises compliance over creativity. This environment marginalises Indigenous Knowledge Systems by maintaining Eurocentric frameworks and discouraging lecturers from integrating local knowledge, community wisdom and culturally relevant pedagogies. Consequently, the lack of flexibility and open communication not only undermines lecturer well-being and professional growth but also restricts opportunities to decolonise the curriculum and make TVET education more contextually meaningful.

For a decentralised approach to lesson planning, lecturers have the flexibility to adapt their teaching strategies based on curriculum requirements, student needs and available resources. This is reflected in the following excerpts.

Zenzele describes how lesson planning begins with an analysis of the Subject Guidelines to understand curriculum expectations. However, the implementation also requires consideration of the learning environment, including students' prior knowledge, educational levels, and social backgrounds. He explains:

So, I'll start by looking at what is intended from the Subject Guidelines. What does the curriculum, the written curriculum say first? But now for me to implement that curriculum, I also have to look at the environment. When I say the environment it's like ... looking at their pre-knowledge of the subject, the different levels of education, and their social background. Depending on what are the actual outcomes and what they learn, I lay out the furniture accordingly. I also decided it is going to be a lecture-centred or student centred. I also have to look at the policies of the college because for instance the medium of instruction is English, I cannot now simply use Afrikaans just because I know Afrikaans and I want to impress ... (Zenzele lecturer TVET college A)

Henrietta supports this perspective by highlighting the dynamic nature of lesson planning. She emphasises the importance of incorporating real-life experiences into lessons to make learning more engaging and relevant to the students' lives:

I always found when I teach ... obviously you've got your lesson plans and whatever you are going to teach for that day but sometimes you can see by how the class is going that I actually bring life experiences within the class to try and make it a bit more interesting so that I can reach them to try to see how they are dealing with their lives and they can at least share and you get to understand where they are coming from better ... mmm (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

For Avame, lesson planning also involves selecting appropriate teaching resources to enhance the learning experience. However, she points out the challenge of resource limitations, which often compel lecturers to rely more on theory than practical applications:

You must have a textbook okay. If it needs a magazine, you get the magazine. If it's a brochure, you collect the brochures. You then use the guidelines of the Assessment Guidelines, but the most important part of it is that you must make sure that there's more practical and less theory. But then no matter how hard you try to include the practical, we do not have the resources to do the practical part of it. So, your lesson plan ended going not the way you intended it to go. It ended up being more theory and less practical because there are no resources (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

These perspectives illustrate how lecturers in a decentralised approach to lesson planning must navigate multiple factors, including curriculum requirements, student needs, teaching methodologies and resource availability. While this flexibility allows for a more student-centred and contextually relevant approach, it is also constrained by institutional policies and resource limitations, which can impact the effectiveness of lesson delivery.

Communicating lesson plans in the classroom was not without challenges. One of the primary difficulties highlighted was students' reluctance to engage in conventional methods of reinforcing learning, which Henrietta referred to as the "3Rs" which are Read, Write and Remember. She observed:

Sometimes there's notes on the board ... you'll see some will take down notes, others will make as if they are writing the notes, and when the lesson is almost done, out comes the phone "click"! They take a picture and leave instead of using the 3Rs (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A)

Another significant challenge was the inability of some students to cope with the demands of the NCV curriculum making it difficult for lecturers to outline their lesson plans strictly according to Subject and Assessment Guidelines. (This issue will be revisited in the section discussing experiences with NCV curriculum). Additionally, the NCV Programme matrix at College A includes three offerings, Tourism, Office Administration and Early Childhood Development all which require substantial theoretical engagement.

We are allowing them (NCV students) to do either Tourism or Office Administration or Early Childhood Development as an alternative to Matric. But if they couldn't cope in an academic school how are they going to cope doing the NCV? (Aname lecturer TVET college A).

Zenzele, further echoed this sentiment, describing the NCV students as academically weak and lacking the necessary inclination for rigorous academic work. These challenges highlight the complexities of delivering lesson plans effectively, particularly in contexts where students engagement with conventional learning methods is limited, and curriculum expectations may not align with students' academic preparedness.

Lecturers proposed that the Department of Higher Education consider innovating and introducing a curriculum that better supports teaching and learning. They emphasised the need for a curriculum that prioritises hands-on, practical skills development rather than relying solely on theoretical assessments. This recommendation is reflected in the following statement:

When it comes to the paper, they can't write. So, if there was something where they could maybe ... it might take a little bit longer, but they could maybe have an exam where it is verbalised or practically, like "please show me how you wash your hands". Let them

practically show you. And if they are doing all the things correct, then it's correct (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

The discussion on lesson planning concluded with a strong call for increased teaching materials and alternative instructional methods that go beyond traditional classroom lectures. Avame highlighted this need, stating, “we should have more teaching materials ... other alternatives to show them (the students) than just sitting in a classroom listening to the teacher talk” (Avame lecturer TVET college A). This call resonates with the principles of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which value experiential, participatory and community-based learning. Incorporating IKS could promote teaching approaches that draw on students' lived experiences, local practices and contextual knowledge, thereby making learning more relevant and engaging. Such pedagogical shifts would challenge the dominance of colonial, lecturer-based methods and foster more inclusive and culturally grounded forms of knowledge transmission.

These insights underscore the necessity for a more skills-oriented curriculum that accommodates diverse learning styles, making education more accessible and effective for students who struggle with conventional academic assessments.

5.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Utility of the NCV qualification: Perceptions of community and industry

This sub-theme emerged from the data from both lecturer and student participants when they were asked to share about what industry and community say about the NCV programme. The discussions centred on how communities perceive vocational education in reference to the NCV programme and how industry also perceives the NCV qualification and whether the NCV graduate is able to find employment. There were two predominant views that were shared; one that communities and industry perceive the NCV qualification and graduates favourably, and the other that there is a negative perception of the NCV qualification and its graduates.

As I explored this sub-theme, I was very cognisant that job-seeking for NCV students does not take place in isolation but within the broader context of an economy that has experienced sluggish economic growth over the past decade, contributing to persistently high unemployment rates. A media release statement by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2025), reported youth unemployment rate as decreased from 46,6% in the second quarter of 2024 to 45,5% in the first quarter of 2025. Despite of the decrease, this statistic still highlights the disproportionate vulnerability of young people in the labour market. The report further indicates that the most affected age group is 15-24 years, which directly aligns with the age range of most NCV students, underscoring the significant challenges they face in securing employment.

When it comes to supply of skills, there is no doubt that the TVET sector remains a crucial player in South Africa's long-term vision of expanding the country's skills base. By producing technically trained workers and artisans, the sector aims to address the persistent mismatches between supply and demand of skills, with the target set at 2.5 million students enrolled by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2020a).

While examining the alignment between NCV graduates' qualifications and skills required by employers is beyond the scope of this thesis, the programme matrix offered by TVET colleges plays a vital role in bridging this gap. As scholars have noted, skills alignment is particularly significant in South Africa, where deep-rooted inequalities in access to higher education, vocational training and the labour market contribute to ongoing skills shortages (OECD, 2023; Reddy & Mncwango, 2021). Therefore, the lower entry requirements at TVET colleges as compared to universities allow for broader access to education as indicated in the response below.

The other reason that the community favours the college I think, is because the entry level in colleges is much lower than the other institutions. Let's say maybe your child wants to do Engineering. The entry level in Varsity or University of Technology can be a bit higher than here. So, yeah (other participants nodding in agreement) it is much easier for them to study at TVET colleges (Mbali Lecturer TVET college B).

The response above shows that preference to study at a TVET college may be motivated by the lower entry requirements which most students can attain unlike a university where the entry requirements are much higher. From a decolonial perspective, the perception that TVET colleges are preferred because of their lower entry requirements reflects the enduring hierarchies of value that privilege university education over vocational pathways. While accessibility is important, reducing TVET appeal to ease of entry reinforces its marginal status within the broader post-school system.

Enabling accessibility has also been enhanced by availability of funding for NCV students. Most students enrolled at TVET Colleges (and particularly TVET college B in this study) are funded by National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). NSFAS provides financial assistance to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, making higher education more accessible. In practice, TVET college B in this study prioritises students with NSFAS or other forms of funding, while self-funded students are often placed on a waiting list until all the funded students have been accommodated. The preference for funded students is also a strategic decision by the College as it ensures financial stability, allowing the institution to operate effectively and continue serving its students.

Furthermore, TVET college B has benefited from its strategic geographical location near industries, which has positively influenced employment opportunities for NCV graduates. When industries hire NCV graduates, it signals the perceived value and relevance of the qualification. However, the response does not specify which qualifications are most preferred by employers or whether formal partnership agreements exist between the college and industry. Nonetheless, it is evidence that NCV qualification is viewed favourable by employers. The excerpt below illustrates this point:

With me from my experience, I have never heard anything, but I have seen like you know where I come from and where I studied teaching for FET college there are a lot of industries around there. So, the students would go out to do the practicals and when they

finished especially the level 4, they would go get hired there. So, I think they preferred them more than those who were coming from the universities. Because most of the times the students from the universities they know more like ... theory but with the colleges it showed they could see that they work more. So, most of the students would get hired. I remember when I would meet them, they would say I am now working at ... (place omitted in order to secure identity). So, I think they liked those who are coming from the TVET college (Zanele. Lecturer TVET college B).

The College's strong engagement with community leaders has further strengthened its approval and integration with the local community. In addressing the question of community perceptions of vocational education, participants shared the following insights.

I would say that the community ... the way the community send their kids here, I would say that they've received the vocational education well because I can judge from the number of kids that we receive each and every year in terms of registration. We get a lot of students even though our campus is too small, but we have a big number. So, I will also indicate that the way they perceive vocational training ... uhm ... uhm ... I have now forgotten my point (laughs) ... Eish! My point has just gone away (Sipho, lecturer TVET college B).

Mbali further elaborated, stating:

I believe that the college has received approval from the communities around here since they can see that the college has brought about change in the community as a whole by grooming their youth and taking them off the streets. They know that their kids are busy at the college and that the college is stimulating growth and has brought about change. And we also have a good working relationship with the community. If there are events like ... we are now busy with the ISAT exams, the community comes to our college at the hall and they prefer coming here because this is like home to them (Mbali, lecturer TVET college B).

The response above goes to show that TVET colleges have not only been recognised for offering education that equips youth with skills but also steers them away from the social

challenges associated with street life, such as crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancies. Mbali's response underscores the significant impact that TVET colleges and the NCV curriculum have had on the community. By fostering growth and driving positive change, these institutions play a crucial role in both human and economic development, ultimately contributing to a more stable and empowered society.

However, for the other TVET college represented in the study, community and industry perceptions of the NCV curriculum have been less favourable as highlighted in the following response:

It's just that they (referring to community and industry) don't think that maybe they are the good quality calibre (referring to the NCV students). Ultimately, those ones that eventually make it, are the only ones that actually have good results because they've stuck it through from Level 2 and they are the ones that have really deserve it ... (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

Henrietta's statement highlights a critical perception challenge surrounding the NCV curriculum and its graduates. It suggests that both community and industry may not view NCV students as highly competent or meeting industry standards. These views may stem from concerns about the curriculum's rigor, the quality of instruction or the preparedness of the graduates for the workplace. Recent empirical research supports concerns about NCV graduate employability, barriers to labour market and higher education progression.

For instance, multiple small-scale studies report perceptions of limited curriculum responsiveness, gaps in practical training and employability (Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022). Further, a national estimate from the TVET Baseline Study (Rogan & Papier, 2020) showed that only 50.5% of N6 Business and 46.7% Engineering graduates managed to obtain employment, with a much lower employment rate for NCV Level 4 streams (actual percentage not mentioned). Similarly, in studies of Engineering NCV graduates in Gauteng, many reported being unemployed and feeling underprepared by the curriculum (Ndlovu, 2025). There seems to be limited recent data offering a precise national employment rate for all NCV graduates (as many studies are sectoral) immediately post-

qualification suggesting a gap in recent empirical data. Similarly, there seems to be a gap on empirical data on how many NCV graduates manage to progress to universities.

Henrietta's comment, however, also acknowledges that those who persist through the levels and successfully complete the programme prove their dedication and capability. This implies that while some students may struggle, those who endure demonstrate resilience and academic growth. This raises important questions about whether the issue lies in the curriculum itself, how it is delivered, or broader societal biases toward vocational education.

One key issue that emerged during the focus group discussion with students from TVET college A was their concern that the syllabus they were studying was outdated and no longer aligned with the demands of the job market as indicated in the response below.

I think we should add the issue of relevant course. First because in curriculum or what we are studying currently, it's like a waste of time in such a way that we are going to be frustrated in getting our certificates and we are going to be frustrated in getting in-service training. What then does this that tell us? That thing tells us that we are not relevant in the job market. Then it's the issue of the curriculum which should be reviewed and to be in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution. Currently, I think all of us in here are studying Office Administration, but according to my tool of analysis in the real world, it's telling me that office employment is getting low, for example, everything is happening digitally nowadays. You've got Apps ... those kinds of things. So, automatically, it's telling me that administration work ... eeeh ... it's been cut off. So, in the TVET sector I think, we should introduce the relevant courses so that we don't find ourselves wasting the entire three years here in the college and find yourself not being employed. (Student 6. TVET college A).

The above quote demonstrated how students believed that the outdated syllabus would hinder their ability to secure employment after completing their studies. Of reference was the Office Administration curriculum, stating that much of the content was either outdated or insufficient to provide them with a strong foundation for employment or further studies in higher education. The response below highlights these concerns.

The student participants collectively agreed that the Office Administration programme required significant updating to ensure it covered relevant content, particularly in integrating current technological advancements aligned with the demands of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). While they expressed confidence in their ability to perform practical office administration tasks, arguing that their hands-on training gave them an advantage over students from universities, they remained concerned about the syllabus. Specifically, they questioned whether its content met both domestic industry standards and, more critically, international benchmarks.

This concern aligns with findings from the *Report on Tracer Study of the Transition of NCV Students from TVET Colleges to the Labour Market* (2016 there seems to be no recent tracer report to this one) (hereafter referred to as Tracer report). This study aimed to track the career and employment progression of 18,131 NCV students randomly selected from 30 TVET colleges in 2010. However, by its conclusion in 2015, approximately 2,898 participants remained (many non-respondents and other listed as “unknown”). The findings underscored the high levels of unemployment experienced by NCV graduates, raising questions about the relevance and applicability of the competencies they had acquired in relation to labour market demands.

In 2015, a total of 1,104 participants (38.1% of all surveyed) reported being either unemployed or engaged in volunteer work with nearly all (90%) actively seeking employment. Among the reasons cited for their unemployment, 39.1% attributed it to not attaining a high enough level of education, 24.3% pointed to a lack of job opportunities, and 23.3% felt they lacked the necessary skills. Other factors included company closures, employer unfamiliarity with the NCV programmes and industry preference for candidates with work experience.

Additionally, students expressed concerns that their TVET colleges had not adequately prepared them for employment. The Tracer Report revealed that colleges were rated poorly in facilitating job connections with industry particularly with arranging interviews

with employers (59.9% of participants); “inviting employers to speak to students at colleges (52.2%) and assisting participants to contact employers (50.4%)” (p. 14). Furthermore, the report highlighted persistently high unemployment rates among NCV graduates, regardless of whether they had completed their qualifications or dropped out.

By 2011, at least 21.3% of NCV graduates were unemployed and this figure had risen sharply to 38.1% by 2015. These findings align with broader trends of youth unemployment in South Africa over the past decade, further underscoring the challenges faced by NCV graduates in securing stable employment. However, no similar large NCV tracer of this type has been released since, indicating a gap in updated longitudinal data.

The study by Buthelezi (2018) also found that “students produced by TVET colleges do not easily find employment and very few are entrepreneurial” (p. 15). A key factor contributing to this challenge is the “non-acceptance of the NCV by industries who are the potential employers of the TVET college product” (p. 15). Several reasons contribute to this reluctance, including inadequate communication about the NCV curriculum changes, industry unfamiliarity with the programme and scepticism about its graduates’ capabilities, as well as a general decline in confidence regarding the quality of skills training provided by TVET colleges.

The Minister for Higher Education and Training acknowledged the employment challenge faced by NCV graduates, attributing it to a lack of industry partnerships and inconsistencies in TVET programme offerings, which often fail to produce skills aligned with industry needs (Nthako & Khumalo, 2025; Winberg & Nomgauza, 2023). In response, the Minister launched the “Adopt-A-TVET Initiative” in 2015 (sanews.gov.za, 2015. 2022) to foster collaboration between industries and TVET colleges, with the goal of enhancing the employability of NCV graduates. While there is little evidence of systematic follow-up or evaluation of the Adopt-A-TVET initiative, ongoing media reports and government statements continue to emphasise the importance of industry partnerships in the TVET sector. For instance, a 2022 summit at the Cape Town Convention Centre aimed to strengthen partnerships, expand workplace-based learning

(WBL), and clarify the respective roles of industry and colleges. One outcome was the inclusion of industry collaboration as a Key Performance Indicator in college principals' performance agreements.

Similarly, the Minister of Higher Education has repeatedly underscored the need for greater industry involvement in curriculum review processes to enhance the quality and relevance of TVET programmes (Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation Conference, 2023). However, from a decolonial perspective, these efforts remain focused on industry linkages only, with little attention given to partnerships with local communities or Indigenous Knowledge experts.

To further enhance the employment prospects of TVET college graduates, research highlights the need for a well-structured and properly regulated Workplace-Based learning (WPBL) (Blom, 2015; Van Straden, 2015). The significant expansion of the PSET system in the recent years further underscores the urgency of formalising and streamlining WPBL to improve young people's access to meaningful employment. Blom (2015) emphasises this need attributing it to the persistent concerns of employers that graduates of with the NCV qualification are not adequately prepared for the workplace.

Recent empirical studies confirm the urgency of formalising and regulating workplace-based learning (WBL/WIL) in TVET. In rural KwaZulu-Natal, NCV graduates reported that curriculum misalignment and lack of institutional support impede access to meaningful WIL placements (Ngubane, Mncube & Ajani, 2024). Similarly, a study of lecturers in several colleges found that while WIL offers opportunities for technical upskilling, many lecturers lack adequate supervision exposure, exposure to up-to-date equipment, and strong industry induction processes (Mesuwini et.al., 2022).

Among NCV Engineering students and staff, there is widespread concern that too much of the training remains theoretical with insufficient practical engagement and weak industry-TVET collaboration (Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022). These findings support Blom (2015) and Van Straden (2015) in arguing that employers perceive NCV graduates as

underprepared, and they highlight that expansion of the PSET system must be matched with robust WPBL structures.

Willis (2020) argues that NCV students can improve their employment prospects by carefully selecting their courses and actively seeking job opportunities. He highlights several factors that enhance NCV graduates' employability, including the technical nature of most TVET college courses, which are crucial for industrial growth; the employability skills NCV students acquire, making them workplace-ready; and the availability of substantial funding that allows businesses to hire TVET students for work-experience placements at minimal cost. Recent government led initiatives show that substantial funding is indeed committed: millions of rand have been allocated via SETAS and NSF for TVET placements and WIL; and grant schemes reimburse employers or underwrite stipends (CATHSSETA, FASSET, NSF) (CareerDrive, 2025; DHET, 2022). These help businesses take on more NCV students with reduced financial burden.

The discussion above highlights that there is no straightforward answer to whether the knowledge and skills acquired by NCV graduates directly leads to employability as multiple structural and contextual factors shape this outcome. From a decolonial perspective, employability should not be viewed solely through the lens of market responsiveness, but also through how TVET programmes reflect and serve local realities. Thus, the programme matrix a college chooses should not only align with industry needs but also with social, economic, cultural and ecological contexts of the surrounding community. A curriculum that integrates IKS and community-based innovation can produce NCV graduates who are not just employable, but who also contribute to local development and can be self-reliant.

5.2.5 Sub-theme 5: Can NCV students easily articulate into HEIs?

Students voiced concerns about the lack of a clear and seamless articulation pathway into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Several factors contribute to these difficulties,

including low grades and high failure rates among NCV students. However, students may be unaware of these barriers. One student expressed their frustration stating:

Also, if I have finished my Level 4, as I am doing Level 4 now, I also think that there should be a linking process to universities and universities of technology or example, if I was studying Office Administration, and now I want to do Business Management or Public Management, automatically I have basic understanding on what is happening in the office. So, the system is going to treat me as a new student which means I am going to study 5 years and 6 months to get a diploma at a university of technology. So, I think then that DHET minister as the head, should have a linking process so that the system won't treat you as if you were a newcomer and you don't understand while you have been spending three years studying and you understand almost more than 50% on what is happening in that particular field. So, I think there should be a linking process. (Student 8. TVET college A).

The response above suggests that NCV students are discouraged by the conditions governing access to HEIs. They feel that after completing Level 4, they should not be treated as new students without prior knowledge of the course content. The responses further imply that the foundational knowledge NCV students acquire should afford them some form of recognition or time-advantage in the qualification they choose to pursue; otherwise, the system appears unjust, as they are effectively required to study for 6-years (counting the 3 years of NCV plus 3 years of the university qualification) for a 3-year programme. However, the NCV remains a basic education qualification, equivalent to the academic exit qualification of Grade 12 Matric certification. Both are positioned at NQF Level 4, meaning that any additional higher education qualification must be completed within the prescribed duration, regardless of how many years were spent specialising in a related field at the basic education level.

SAQA (2019) emphasises the need for NCV students to have access to multiple career pathways and a streamlined transition into HEIs if they choose to further their studies. The SAQA (op.cit) guidelines explicitly outline the articulation process for NCV graduates seeking admission to universities or universities of technology. These recommendations

should be considered alongside university entrance requirements for students holding an NCV qualification.

A desktop search on the entry requirements for NCV graduates wishing to enrol in universities revealed that most institutions have set minimum statutory requirements for students holding an NCV Level 4 qualification. Generally, university websites indicate that candidates must meet the minimum statutory requirements outlined in Government Gazette no. 32743 of 26 November 2006, in order to be eligible for admission to a higher certificate, diploma or bachelor's degree. Additionally, HEIs emphasise that according to Section 37 (i) of the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997), the decision to admit a student to higher education is at the discretion of that institution. This means that individual institutions may impose additional admission criteria for specific programmes. To illustrate these extra requirements, two examples from Central University of Technology (CUT) and the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) website are provided below.

For CUT, the statutory requirements and additional requirements for NCV 4 are set out as follows respectively, 40% in English; 30% in either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy; 40% Life Orientation; and 50% in other four vocational subjects. Further requirements state that:

- Since NC(V) programmes are highly specialised, such applicants will only be considered for admission into programmes of similar specialisation, for example NC(V): Tourism applicants will be considered for the Diploma: Tourism Management only, and no other specialisation, regardless of their performance in the NC(V) examinations. Admission to a particular programme is subject to the requirements of that programme.
- NC(V) 4 applicants are eligible for university admission only if they have obtained a full qualification. No applicant will be admitted based on the completion of certain subjects in a qualification.
- Life Orientation forms part of the final score, with a maximum value of one.

- NC(V) candidates are expected to possess a minimum level of proficiency in English, since this is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at CUT. A minimum mark of 50% for English as Home Language (vernacular) or First Additional Language is therefore considered to be sufficient, although any proof of proficiency in the English language will also be taken into consideration.
(Source: <https://www.cut.ac.za/fet-students>)

The second example is for the University of Witwatersrand where the additional requirements for applicants from the NCV programme who wish to study towards a Bachelor's degree programme are as follows:

- Three (3) fundamental subjects between 60 - 69% (including English as the language of learning and teaching at Wits)
- Three (3) vocational subjects from the designated list between 70 - 79%
(Source: <https://www.wits.ac.za/undergraduate/entry-requirements/national-certificate-vocational-ncv-guidelines>)

The two examples demonstrate that universities have acknowledged and made provision for applicants with the NCV qualification. However, it was not the focus of this study to determine how many NCV graduates are accepted into HEIs. Nonetheless, when this information is considered alongside the data on low pass rates and throughput of NCV graduates (which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter), a plausible inference can be made. Based on the low throughput of NCV students presented in this thesis, it can be proposed that fewer NCV graduates are successfully articulating into HEIs.

When the responses from student participants is juxtaposed with university entry requirements, they reveal a misconception that articulation into universities should be seamless and that some subjects completed in the NCV programme should be credited. This misunderstanding appears to extend to the belief that the workload and conceptual demands of the 3-year NCV programme are equivalent to those of tertiary studies,

overlooking the higher levels of cognitive complexity, academic rigour and disciplinary depth required at university level.

Additionally, there seems to be uncertainty about where TVET colleges fit within the NQF framework. This lack of clarity is reflected in the following comment from Sipho:

I believe that even though the TVET falls within the band like other HEIs, they follow Basic Education policies. Because at high school, teachers come and teach and stay for the duration of the day until time to clock out. But at university, there is more flexibility. Lecturers come in at the time they are scheduled to lecture and then can leave at any time (Sipho, lecturer TVET college B).

Bongi further expressed:

I feel that we are not lecturers but teachers. We actually teach at TVET college and not lecture. So, the name and status of TVET college is that of Higher Education but the practice is that of Basic Education. So, we are in between Higher education and Basic education and that can be confusing. The title of lecturer is also very confusing (Bongi, lecturer TVET college B).

The above perspectives highlight the ambiguity TVET lecturers and perhaps students experience regarding their roles and the positioning of TVET colleges within the education system and could explain the misconception in respect of NCV students articulating from TVET college into universities.

Although some scholarly work has been conducted on the articulation of NCV students into higher education institutions and several policy documents exist to guide the process, further research is needed to determine the percentage of NCV students who successfully transition to universities and the qualifications they pursue.

Moreover, when the challenges of articulation are considered alongside the low employment rates among NCV graduates, the frustration experienced by these students,

as reflected in the data becomes more apparent. This aligns with Buthelezi's (2018) observation on TVET reform that, "the non-employability of the NCV student is in contradiction with what the reform was designed to achieve and is indicative of unanticipated effects of the reform" (p. 15).

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the theme of views of knowledge in the NCV curriculum. The findings suggest that post-apartheid TVET colleges have been restructuring their curricula to equip students with skills and knowledge needed in the 21st century. However, the findings also highlight the presence of specific ideological underpinnings within the NCV curriculum which lecturers may not be aware of, potentially limiting the effectiveness of their pedagogical approaches. While the NCV curriculum aims to prepare students for the world of work, high unemployment rates among NCV graduates persist. Additionally, the expectation that this qualification will provide a seamless transition into higher education does not always align with the lived realities of the students. These challenges point to the need for more reflective and context-responsive lesson planning that not only addresses curriculum goals but also critically engages with the socio-political and economic realities students face. Strengthening lesson planning can help lecturers mediate ideological tensions within the curriculum, foster more inclusive pedagogies and better support student readiness for both employment and further study.

The next chapter presents findings on the theme of how the NCV curriculum is enacted and experienced.

CHAPTER SIX: HOW THE NCV CURRICULUM IS ENACTED AND EXPERIENCED

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings related to the theme knowledge on the NCV curriculum. This chapter shifts focus to how the NCV Curriculum is understood, enacted and experienced in practice. This theme is constructed around five interrelated sub-themes that together provide a comprehensive understanding of how the NCV is enacted and experienced within the TVET context. The first sub-theme, lecturers' lack of vocational specific qualification, highlights the mismatch between teaching expertise and the technical demands of the curriculum. The second, feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment: lecturers' standpoint, captures the emotional and professional strain lecturers experience as a result of systemic and institutional constraints. The third sub-theme, lecturer agency - a conundrum, explores the tensions lecturers face in exercising autonomy within rigid curricula and administrative frameworks. The fourth, student participants' experiences of the NCV curriculum, sheds light on how students engage with, and are affected by, the structure and delivery of the curriculum. Finally, the fifth sub-theme, language and learner identity, examines how language practices intersect with students' sense of belonging and identity within the learning environment. Together, these sub-themes illustrate the complex and layered realities shaping teaching and learning.

The theoretical framework for this study emphasises the critical role of vocational knowledge in understanding the NCV curriculum. Vocational knowledge has been defined as tacit, contextual and immediately applicable expertise (Wheelahan, 2012; Moll, Steinberg & Broemann, 2005). From a decolonial perspective, the characterisation of vocational knowledge as stated above requires further interrogation, as it risks positioning vocational knowledge as merely functional rather than epistemically legitimate (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). This type of knowledge is not only directly relevant to the workplace, enabling productivity and practical problem-solving in real-world contexts, but it is also socially produced and historically marginalised within colonial hierarchies of knowledge

that privilege abstract, academic forms (Mbembe, 2016, Wheelahan, 2012). In the TVET sector, both subject content and learning outcomes are designed to align closely with workplace demands, ensuring that students graduate with skills needed for employment (Wheelahan, 2012). This underscores the necessity for lecturers to possess professional vocational qualifications, as they play a key role in bridging academic learning with industry expectations.

6.2 Sub-Themes

6.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Lecturers lack vocational specific qualifications

For lecturers in TVET colleges to effectively navigate, mediate and deliver the NCV curriculum, the *Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training* (2013) outlines the necessary professional qualifications required for teaching in this sector. The policy specifies that:

Lecturers are central to the educational activity in institutions that offer TVET. Sufficient, appropriately qualified and competent lecturers, who understand and have expertise in both the academic and work-related dimensions of TVET, are needed if the institutions that offer TVET programmes are to make the critical contribution expected of them (p. 3).

The policy identifies the following professional qualifications for lecturers in TVET colleges:

- Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching at NQF level 6.
- Bachelor of Education in Technical and Vocational Teaching at NQF level 7.
- Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching at NQF level 7.

Additionally, the policy emphasises the importance of higher formal qualifications as part of ongoing professional development for TVET lecturers. The goal is to “enhance and deepen their subject content knowledge and/or prepare them for career advancement in

specialist fields such as subject/discipline leadership, assessment, college leadership and management, workplace learning and special needs education” (p. 12). These advanced qualifications are:

- Advanced Certificate in Technical and Vocational Education and Training at NQF level 6.
- Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Education and Training at NQF level 7.
- Postgraduate Diploma in Technical and Vocational Education and Training at NQF level 8.

The policy provision emphasises that TVET lecturers should not only hold academic qualifications (referred to as general courses in the policy) but also possess professional or technical/vocational qualifications to teach effectively in the TVET sector. Professional qualifications equip lecturers with the ability to bridge the gap between academic and vocational learning, as well as between theoretical knowledge and practical, work-related skills essential for effective teaching. The findings in this study found the following:

Table 5: Profile of lecturer participants

TVET college pseudonym	Participant pseudonym	Qualification	Years of teaching experience on NCV	Race	Industry experience (except previous teaching job)	Gender	Estimated age at the time of interview
College A	Zenzele	Master of Commerce	13 years	African	None	Male	Late 30s
	Henrietta	Trade Test: Beauty Technician	12 years	White	None	Female	Early 50s

	Avame	Dip in Tourism Management	12 years	African	None	Female	Late 30s
College B	Sipho	Bachelor of Accounting	10 years	African	None	Male	Mid 50s
	Zanele	Bachelor of Education: FET Phase	8 years	African	None	Female	Mid 30s
	Bongi	Dip in Civil Engineering	4 years	African	None	Female	Late 20s
	Mbali	Bachelor's in Child and Youth Development	13 years	African	None	Female	Late 30s

The data presented in the table indicates an uneven distribution of lecturer competencies across pedagogical, disciplinary, and vocational domains within the NCV context. While lecturers generally demonstrate strong alignment with their subject specialisations, holding qualifications in fields such as commerce, tourism, and engineering, there is limited evidence of formal pedagogical training, with only one participant possessing a recognised teaching qualification. Although many lecturers have accumulated substantial teaching experience, this does not necessarily equate to a robust grounding in pedagogical theory and practice. More significantly, the complete absence of industry experience across participants points to a critical vocational gap, which undermines the practice-oriented mandate of TVET.

As scholars such as McGrath (2012) and Allais (2014) argue, effective vocational education requires an integration of disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical competence, and industry-relevant expertise. The imbalance evident in this data where disciplinary knowledge is prioritised at the expense of pedagogical depth and industry exposure suggests a structural limitation that may constrain the ability of lecturers to deliver

contextually relevant, practice-based learning and to adequately prepare students for the labour market.

The consistent reports and studies reveal a persistent and systematic challenge in the professional qualification profile of TVET lecturers (Majola, 2025; Wedekind & Russon, 2024; Papier, 2020; Buthelezi, 2018). The findings also align closely with previous national reports that have consistently highlighted the lack of professional qualifications among TVET lecturers (DHET, 2022). Despite policy reforms and the introduction of new qualification pathways, most lecturers remain either professionally unqualified or hold school-sector teaching qualifications that are ill-suited to the vocational context (Wedekind & Russon, 2024; Papier, 2020). From a decolonial perspective, this trend exposes how the professional development of TVET lecturers continues to be shaped by Eurocentric and school-based models of pedagogy (Mbembe, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021), which historically positioned vocational knowledge as inferior to academic knowledge within colonial education systems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Allias, 2014).

The slow progress in establishing a distinct, contextually grounded professional identity for TVET lecturers mirrors the broader epistemic marginalisation of vocational education within postcolonial education hierarchy. Further, it reflects the colonality of knowledge, where, what counts as legitimate teaching expertise is narrowly defined through formal, academic credentials rather than workplace-based or indigenous forms of knowing (Mbembe, 2016; Mignolo, 2007). This lack of transformation not only undermines the quality and relevance of teaching (Wedekind et.al., 2024) but also sustains colonial divisions between “academic” and “technical” knowledge. The repeated findings across these reports therefore highlight the urgent need for a decolonised approach to lecturer professionalisation, one that values workplace-based expertise, integrates indigenous and local knowledges and situates vocational education as a legitimate and autonomous field within South Africa's post-school sector.

Notably, also is that most lecturer participants were unaware of the existence of TVET colleges before joining the sector. This lack of awareness may have been due to limited

publicity and visibility of TVET colleges at that time. The responses that follow illustrates this lack of awareness of the TVET sector on entry to the sector.

First and foremost, I didn't know about it (talking about the TVET college sector). I knew about this sector by that time it was called FET college. I knew that, but even before that I knew that they were called technical colleges, but I never like ... I was never even interested about it. Cause I was an academic person. I knew that from high school you go to varsity then work. But it was a sector which was there but I never even ... it sounded like it never existed while it was there ... so, I did not have a clue or anything of TVET college (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Zanele echoed similar sentiments indicating:

When I was doing my degree, I focused on what was called FET ... Further Education and Training but the way I understood it ... because honestly speaking I did not know that there were FET colleges. I just knew that you finish Grade 12, and you go to varsity (Zanele, lecturer TVET college B).

Similarly, Henrietta described her entry into the sector as purely accidental; "I had no clue that FET colleges existed ... I found myself teaching at the TVET by chance" (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

The one exception was Bongi who was familiar with the sector because she had studied there. She was employed as a lecturer immediately after completing her diploma. In her own words:

But I knew about the TVET college because I studied at TVET college. I started with N1 and did up to N6 (all the other participants were surprised that Bongi was a former TVET college student and nodded their heads acknowledging her comments with "hmm" sounds). Then I fell in love with Civil Engineering and that's where it started and then when I completed, I became a lecturer (Bongi, lecturer TVET college B)

The findings in this sub-theme point to a broader crisis in the TVET sector concerning lecturers' professional qualifications and their ability to effectively teach the NCV curriculum, particularly in vocational subjects. This is echoed by Avame who candidly described her experience adjusting to life as a TVET college lecturer:

You know as it is, I am still confused as to how things are happening. When I first came here, I thought it was vocational. But it confuses me ... (laughs), slowly but surely ... (laughs) ... I was squeezing ... you know when you squeeze yourself to fit in because there's no space? ... and no! Nobody takes you through the Subject and Assessment Guidelines. You just need to take yourself through ... I was just ... you know when they say, "Avame, these are the SAGs for this subject". And that's it ... You master it and teach it! (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

From the above responses, most lecturer participants admitted to having no awareness of the TEVT college sector prior to entry, suggesting not merely a lack of exposure but a systematic invisibilisation of vocational education within the broader education imaginary (Wedekind, 2010). This invisibility can be interpreted through the lens of coloniality of being, where vocational pathways are constructed as lesser forms of educational identity, thereby shaping how lecturers come to understand their roles and status within the sector (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

These findings are consistent with prior research (Buthelezi, 2018; Papier 2020; DHET, 2022), which shows that while the majority of TVET college lecturers hold academically related qualifications, they often lack formal professional or vocational training. Experienced lecturers typically combine artisanal or industry-specific training with years of practical facilitation experience, whereas newer entrants frequently come directly from academia with diploma- or degree-level qualifications. For these newer lecturers, their academic background alone is often insufficient, particularly in the context of the NCV, where integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application is central to vocational education. As noted by Buthelezi (2014), many new lecturers feel inadequately prepared to navigate this dual expectation, highlighting a persistent gap between academic qualifications and vocational teaching competence.

In addition to possessing the right professional qualifications, TVET college lecturers should have relevant industry experience before or while lecturing. Such experience allows lecturers to teach from a vantage point of industry-specific knowledge, provide practical insight and stay updated with industry advancements (Hugo & Mokoena, 2023). Oosthuizen, Spencer and Chigano (2022) found that lecturers without workplace experience struggled to connect course content with industry needs, making it difficult to bridge theory and practice. This lack of experience can result in students being ill-prepared for the workplace.

The need for industry experience among TVET lecturers is not unique to South Africa. Amedorme and Fiagbe (2013) highlighted similar concerns in Ghana, where many technical and vocational educators lacked hands-on industry experience, with some having never worked in the field before teaching. This gap hindered their ability to effectively deliver practical skills to students.

The *Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (2013)* as indicated in earlier paragraphs established a framework to support TVET lecturers in becoming professionally qualified educators, rather than solely relying on academic or industry-based qualifications. However, lecturers feel that colleges have not done enough to advance this professionalisation. One lecturer expressed his frustrations thus:

What I would like to add on this is that when you look at TVET colleges and you look at DUT, these are all higher education institutions. So, why are we (TVET) not treated the same? So, lecturers from universities ... before they conduct any lesson or teach anything they go for training, while here, everything is just thrown at us? You know when somebody is thrown something to say, "You will see for yourself, find your way out?", that's how things are happening here (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

This quote highlights a perceived disparity in how TVET colleges are treated compared to universities such as the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Avame expresses

frustration over the lack of structured training and support for TVET lecturers, believing that university lecturers are better supported in developing their teaching. However, this perception is somewhat misguided, as very few lecturers at DUT or other universities have formal training in teaching at a tertiary level. This misconception underscores a broader issue of equity in higher education and not necessarily in the availability of training, but in how support and professional development are structured across different institutions. The response nevertheless points to an important need for TVET colleges to strengthen policy implementation and invest in continuous professional development to enhance the pedagogical competence of their lecturers and elevate the status of teaching and learning.

The above findings suggest that, despite the long history of vocational education in South Africa, there may not have been a compulsory requirement for lecturers entering the sector to hold specific vocational qualifications. While academic qualifications equip lecturers with the ability to manage the curriculum, vocational qualifications are essential for effectively teaching specialised vocational subjects. Furthermore, the absence of a vocational qualification may hinder a lecturer's ability to successfully and meaningfully facilitate students' epistemological access to the vocational curriculum.

The findings in this sub-theme align with those from the previous chapter on ideological underpinnings, which revealed that lecturers were unaware of the ideological foundations of the NCV curriculum. If lecturers lack the necessary vocational qualifications to teach a vocational program, it is unrealistic to expect them to grasp the ideological principles underpinning the curriculum.

There is however, a renewed effort to strengthen the implementation of the qualifications outlined in the Policy on Professional Qualifications for the TVET sector. A webinar hosted by Mail & Guardian (2020), sponsored by the Department of Higher Education and the European Union, highlighted significant progress in developing and implementing the first initial TVET lecturer qualification programme aligned with this policy. During the

discussion, several key aspects of this qualification and the broader professionalisation of TVET colleges were explored.

Prof. W. Hugo from the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal emphasised the importance of recognising the unique context of South Africa's TVET landscape compared to other countries. He raised a critical question: *Should vocational pedagogy evolve gradually or undergo a radical transformation?* Hugo acknowledged that upskilling lecturers cannot happen overnight. He explained that effective vocational pedagogy requires lecturers to master the essential components of “know how, know that, and know it” (Mail & Guardian, 2020), thoroughly in order to pass on this knowledge to students. The “know how” represents practical skills while “know that” and “know it” refer to the theoretical foundations necessary for effectively imparting knowledge to students.

The above not only highlights the distinction between academic and vocational education but also underscores the essential competencies required of lecturers in the TVET sector. Furthermore, a desktop review of universities offering this qualification revealed several institutions have already introduced the *Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching*. Among these are University of Witwatersrand, the University of Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

6.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment: lecturers' standpoint

The findings on how lecturers enact the NCV curriculum highlighted several concerns, particularly feelings of disempowerment and in some cases, disillusionment. The evidence suggests that the very design of the NCV curriculum may be the source of the systemic injustices. One key issue is that some lecturers are assigned to teach subjects for which they are not adequately qualified. This challenge was exemplified by Bongi (lecturer, TVET college B) who expressed frustration over the Plant Equipment subject in Civil Engineering. She explained how the subject imposes pedagogical limitations on her

as a lecturer, ultimately affecting how students engage with and benefit from the teaching-learning process. She described this challenge as follows:

Can I say something. We have Civil Engineering as a course. There are subjects that we feel they are not fitting very well on the content. For instance, there is a subject called Plant and Equipment at Level 3. This subject talks about the engine of a car. It talks about how to change a tyre on the car. Plant and Equipment is not suitable for Civil Engineering students ... it's difficult for the lecturers like who don't have a mechanical background like me ... It was very difficult because I don't have the background, and the college doesn't have power to change the subject as it is. So, we must just teach it as it is. We are required to use the very same syllabus coming from the department and we are not allowed to be flexible and so the college had to hire someone who had a mechanical background to help me teach the subject. So, now it's like it's a Civil "Mechanical" Engineering and this is also very confusing for the students because they ask you how will it help them as a Civil Engineering student to know the engine of the car whereas I need to know the plant as it is? You see, so it's some of the things that we are forced to do whereas we can see that ... aha! this one will not benefit the student (Bongi, lecturer TVET college B).

For the lecturers to effectively mediate the curriculum, they must have a strong understanding of the subject matter and be proficient in its delivery. The statement above may suggest that a lecturer's ability to facilitate learning is not only pedagogically constrained but also epistemically undermined, as they are required to teach content outside their domain of knowledge. This reflects Bernstein's notion of weak classification and framing, where control over knowledge selection is removed from the teacher (Bernstein, 2000), and from a decolonial perspective, it illustrates how power over curriculum remains centrally controlled and detached from context (Mignolo, 2007).

Several other factors contribute to lecturers' feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment, further complicating their ability to deliver the NCV curriculum effectively. These include students' lack of exposure, difficulty in navigating "sensitive" topics, lack of curriculum contextualisation, and a "highly pitched" NCV curriculum.

6.2.2.1 Students' lack exposure

A significant challenge is that many NCV students enter TVET colleges without prior exposure to fundamental concepts often taken for granted. This lack of foundational knowledge can make teaching certain subjects particularly difficult. Unlike students in general academic education, where subjects and concepts are scaffolded from Grade 1 onward, vocational education lacks lower grade foundational subjects. As a result, NCV students encounter vocational terminology in Grade 10 for the first time, creating a steep learning curve. Zanele illustrated this challenge in the context of teaching Computer Practice:

With me I teach computers, and my subject is very practical and most of the students come without any background. Honestly because as black children from the rural areas they don't have computers until they see them at college. So, most of them when they get here it's when they start learning computers from the beginning ... yes because they know nothing (Zanele, lecturer TVET college B).

Henrietta from TVET College A echoed similar concerns regarding students' lack of exposure.

Ultimately, they've never been on a holiday. Some of them have never been to the beach. So, it's very difficult ... especially with the Tourism side, they've never been on a holiday ... how can you ask them to plan someone else's holiday?

When these challenges are considered alongside the issue of lecturers being assigned to teach vocational subjects for which they are not adequately qualified, the depth of the injustice imposed on both lecturers and students becomes evident (Hugo & Mokoena, 2023). Lecturers are constrained both pedagogically and epistemically, unable to fully mediate the curriculum due to a lack of subject-specific expertise (Hugo & Mokoena 2024), while students are left to grapple with unfamiliar content that assumes prior knowledge they do not possess.

While little can be done to change the backgrounds of students enrolling in TVET colleges, institutions can take proactive steps to better support both lecturers and students. By ensuring that lecturers receive the necessary training and access to relevant resources, colleges can strengthen the implementation of NCV programmes and improve learning outcomes for students.

6.2.2.2 Difficulty in navigating “sensitive” topics

Another challenge contributing to lecturers’ feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment was the difficulty of navigating “sensitive” topics in the curriculum. This issue was particularly evident in the subject of Life Orientation, where certain topics are considered taboo in some communities due to cultural beliefs. Mbali, a Life Orientation lecturer, emphasised the crucial role that cultural context plays in how curriculum content is delivered and received. For example, the topic on sexual orientation often proved sensitive for students from specific cultural backgrounds. Given that lecturers are still regarded as authoritative figures whose teachings hold considerable weight, the content covered in the classroom carries profound significance. Mbali expressed this concern stating:

My subject is easy. It only becomes difficult when I am approaching certain topics because we are in a rural area. You can’t just talk freely about sexual orientation, so I just have to be careful when I present it so that they don’t seem to think that I am forcing them to have sex or to have a different sexual orientation. I have to be careful when dealing with these topics. I don’t want the students to go home and tell their parents that Miss “Mbali” is teaching us how to do intercourse ... and even in this topic, they even struggle with the language ... In addition, some of them are married and so they go home and tell their husbands that Miss Mbali was teaching us about sex. So, I have to tread carefully (Mbali. Lecturer TVET B).

While sex education is widely accepted as a standard component of 21st century education, some communities remain deeply conservative, viewing such teachings as taboo and contrary to their cultural values. This resistance is not merely a preference but

reflects an epistemic clash between Western liberal curriculum assumptions and indigenous knowledge systems and moral frameworks (Le Grange, 2018, Chilisa, 2012). From a decolonial perspective, this tension highlights the colonality of knowledge and being, where certain worldviews are legitimised in the curriculum while others are marginalised or rendered invisible (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

6.2.2.3 Lack of curriculum contextualisation

Closely linked to the challenge addressing “sensitive” topics in Life Orientation, is the broader concern that the NCV curriculum fails to consider students’ lived experiences. Lecturers highlighted that textbook content often lacks relevance to the realities of their students, making it difficult to engage them meaningfully. Interestingly, while most lecturers agreed that the curriculum lacks contextualisation, Henrietta, a white lecturer, held a different view. She argued that the textbooks do, in fact, reflect students’ lived experiences. Here is her perspective:

Look, the examples ... the textbook ... my book has changed quite a lot to ...
mmm ... and even some of the exam papers where the scenarios, stories and you’ve got to answer the question that follow – all are pertaining to their background. Mmmm ... There is nothing about ... you know ... not that I’m white ... but there’s no sort of ... just separation that this is white peoples’ things ... it’s not ... It’s all their own stories. The stories that are within the textbook are relatable because it uses names that they can understand ... “if you are going to plan a holiday for Mr Mkhize and Mrs. Mkhize, they are going on a holiday with their 4 children ... and now you must plan a holiday that is going to accommodate their various needs ... this one is in a wheelchair, find a hotel that is wheelchair friendly. Find activities that will accommodate a person in a wheelchair. And it’s using that type of thing and it’s not Mr and Mrs. Smith. (Henrietta. Lecturer TVET A)

While the inclusion of culturally familiar names may suggest surface-level contextualisation, this does not necessarily constitute epistemic transformation. Scholars caution against conflating representation with relevance, noting that true curriculum transformation requires the integration of indigenous epistemologies, not merely the

substitution of names within existing Eurocentric frameworks (Le Grange, 2018; Dei, 2011).

From a decolonisation lens therefore, Henrietta's argument raises important questions about what genuine contextualisation and representation mean in education. As a white lecturer, her belief that curriculum reflects students' backgrounds by including familiar names and local examples while retaining a eurocentric framework, reveals a limited understanding of decolonisation and how positionality shapes one's perception of transformation. This interpretation risks reducing decolonisation to tokenistic gestures that merely give the illusion of inclusivity without disrupting deeper epistemic hierarchies. In this sense, Henrietta's view reflects how whiteness, as a social construct, can normalise eurocentric knowledge systems and make them appear universal, even when attempts are made to localise content. The implication is that colonial power relations and Western epistemic dominance remain intact, while indigenous knowledge systems continue to be marginalised. True decolonisation goes beyond surface-level representation; it requires a fundamental rethinking of what counts as valid knowledge, whose experiences are prioritised, and how curricula can be reconstructed to reflect multiple epistemic traditions. Henrietta's misunderstanding therefore illustrates a broader challenge in the decolonial project, where inclusion is mistaken for transformation, and representational changes serve to maintain, rather than dismantle, coloniality in education.

Avame, who teaches the same subject at the same college, strongly disagreed with the notion that textbooks are adequately contextualised. She argued that the recommended materials still fail to reflect the lived experiences and realities of Black students. Expressing her frustration, Avame stated:

Textbooks still favour whites! The curriculum has nothing to do with the Black child, nothing to do with the township where they come from. Because when you look at Tourism, Tourism is now more about developing townships ... but there's nothing there that says to students "what can be done for your community to be a Tourist attraction site? And exposing the student to some of the aspects referred to in the curriculum becomes difficult as the college ... there are no resources (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

Avame's critique points to a deeper epistemic exclusion, where students' communities are positioned as objects of development rather than sources of knowledge. This aligns with decolonial critiques of curriculum that argue that African contexts are often included only as sites of intervention rather than as legitimate sites of knowledge production (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Mbembe, 2016).

Similarly, Mbali, a lecturer from TVET College B voiced strong critique of the Life Orientation curriculum, stating:

In this curriculum of Life Orientation, it has the threads of colonialism ... the modern colonialism because they don't consider our beliefs and cultures ... Another topic that brings confusion is one on the Gender Roles. The students come from a culture where they believe that certain roles are performed by girls only and others by boys only. But the textbook comes and contradicts that belief system. The curriculum is taking them out of their culture (Mbali, lecturer TVET college B).

Avame emphasised the importance of contextualising content to enhance student engagement and comprehension. She explained, "students respond better when you give them the context that they understand. But if you are going to take it from the textbook it confuses them" (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

The response by Avame underscores the critical need for curriculum contextualisation. Without it, students struggle to reconcile their lived experiences with the knowledge presented in the classroom, leading to disengagement and resistance to learning.

6.2.2.4 A "highly pitched" NCV curriculum

Another issue relating to lecturer frustration and disillusionment in the NCV curriculum is its perceived difficulty level. Many lecturers believe that the curriculum is pitched too high, making it inaccessible to most NCV students. This concern was echoed by both lecturers

and students, highlighting a widespread perception that the curriculum does not align with the students' cognitive levels. Zenzele, a lecturer explained:

When you look at the NCV curriculum, it is highly pitched for a person who's got Grade 9 and as a result, if you look at the national pass rate for NCV, it is not good ... it is not good ... it is like the worst performing program out of them all here in the college we had... we had like Information Technology program which is computer related. Then it involved advanced programming and so on and so forth. Then like some of the lecturers ... who were teaching the subject were saying some of this stuff when they were teaching NCV level 2, that they learnt it in 2nd year at varsity" (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

A curriculum that is overly advanced for its intended audience creates significant barriers to learning. When knowledge is not properly scaffolded, it becomes inaccessible, ultimately disadvantaging students rather than empowering them. Additionally, this places immense pressure on lecturers, who must bridge the gap between the curriculum and students' understanding, often without having received proper training in vocational education delivery. Avame elaborated on this challenge stating, "it put on me as a lecturer without any support and who has not been trained to facilitate that particular curriculum under a lot of pressure and stress" (Avame. Lecturer TVET college A)

In illustrating the demanding nature of the NCV curriculum, Zenzele compares its complexity to that of first- or second-year level at a University of Technology. This perception of the NCV curriculum as comparable to first- or second-year university level may, in part, reflect lecturers' own educational background and prior experiences as a student. Lecturers often assess new curricula through the lens of the learning environments and content they themselves encountered, and for those whose training was rooted in traditional academic or school-based programmes, the competency-based and integrated design of the NCV curriculum can feel unusually demanding. This perception highlights a mismatch between lecturers' epistemic framework and the pedagogical demands of vocational education. From a decolonial perspective, it also underscores how societal hierarchies of knowledge privilege academic forms of learning over vocational knowledge, contributing to a perception that high school-level vocational

curricula are less rigorous or, conversely, overwhelming when approached through a university-oriented mindset. The resulting stress and pressure experienced by lecturers like Avame are therefore not only practical but also epistemic, reflecting broader structural and ideological biases that continue to shape TVET teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, when what lecturers have reported in this study about high pitched curriculum content is considered with the demographic profile of the TVET students in mind, as previously discussed (i.e. students who may have failed Grade 12 multiple times, teaching and learning barrier arising from the use of English, rurality etc.), the challenges could also be attributed to a possible misalignment between the curriculum and its intended audience. From a decolonial perspective, the misalignment between the NCV curriculum and its intended audience can be understood as a continuation of colonial and Eurocentric assumptions embedded within South Africa's education system. The curriculum appears to have been constructed around ideals and pedagogical expectations inherited from the formal schooling system which privileges abstract, text-based and English-medium learning rather than drawing on the contextual, practical and multilingual realities of the students it serves. Many TVET students come from under-resourced schools, rural areas and linguistically diverse communities, where knowledge is often transmitted through oral and experiential modes. When a curriculum built on Eurocentric notions of cognitive development and academic literacy is imposed on this cohort, it advertently reproduces exclusion and epistemic injustice. In this sense, the challenge is not merely pedagogical but structural: it reflects the colonality of knowledge that continues to shape curriculum design, prioritising Western academic standards over the epistemic and cultural resources of local students.

Vocational education aims to equip as many students as possible with practical skills that enable meaningful participation in the economy. However, when the curriculum is pitched too high, it creates a barrier to success, making it difficult for students to progress and ultimately defeating the purpose of accessible, skills-based education.

This study has also recorded concerns of lecturers about the high rate of absenteeism and dropout rates at the TVET college. A key factor contributing to this issue may be the overly challenging nature of the curriculum, which can act as barrier to student success. When students struggle to grasp subject matter or feel disconnected from the curriculum, they are more likely to disengage, either by avoiding certain subjects or dropping out entirely (FundiConnect, 2023).

The findings of Vorster and Quinn's (2017) study may offer valuable insight into the root causes of the NCV curriculum's high academic demands and lack of contextualisation. Their research suggests that many academics, having been schooled in Western traditions, continue to perceive university spaces (*including TVET*) as aligned with their epistemological values, beliefs and practices. As a result, "they perhaps have not felt the need to change the structural and cultural conditions in universities (*TVET colleges*), including how curricula, pedagogy and assessment are structured" (Vorster & Quinn, 2017, p. 37). This entrenched perspective may contribute to the persistence of a curriculum that does not fully account for the lived realities and learning needs of TVET students.

Lecturers' responses suggest that the NCV curriculum may, paradoxically, be restricting students' access to the very knowledge meant to empower them. This misalignment can also be understood through the concept of epistemological access (Morrow, 2009), where formal education does not guarantee meaningful access to knowledge. From a decolonial perspective, this suggests that the curriculum's level and structure may reproduce epistemic exclusion by assuming prior forms of literacy and knowledge that many students have historically been denied (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Compounding this issue is the uncertainty among lecturers regarding the beliefs and values that underpin the NCV curriculum. Without a clear understanding of its foundational principles, effective knowledge mediation becomes even more challenging. Additionally, the students lived contexts play a crucial role in the scaffolding process that facilitates epistemological access. However, this respect appears to be insufficiently considered in the curriculum design, further hindering meaningful learning.

Effective learning is determined in part by the pedagogical methods that lecturers use in the classroom. But the use of effective pedagogy depends on several factors, including the specific subject matter being taught, the diverse learner needs, backgrounds, interests of learners and the specific conditions within the classroom environment. The pedagogical approaches adopted by lecturers shapes their actions, judgement, and other teaching strategies. To this, Hlatshwayo (2020), underscores the critical role that lecturers play in mediating curriculum and subject content emphasising that textbooks, curricula, and other resources serve as the foundation for knowledge production. Hlatshwayo (op.cit) asserts that lecturers actively recontextualise knowledge by selecting, reorganising and transforming these resources into pedagogic discourses.

Consequently, classrooms become dynamic spaces where these discourses are consumed, shaping students' learning experiences. In the context of this study, the role of lecturers as mediators of pedagogic discourse is particularly significant in advancing the decolonisation of the NCV curriculum. Their ability to critically engage with and adapt curricular content has direct implications for ensuring that knowledge is not only accessible but also relevant and reflective of students' lived experiences.

6.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Lecturer agency - a conundrum

Lecturer agency refers to the extent to which lecturers feel empowered and equipped to take ownership of their teaching practices and professional development. This involves not only guiding students effectively but also fostering student agency by providing them with choices in how they learn. When lecturers have agency over their professional growth, they can select development opportunities that align with their interests and enhance their teaching effectiveness. Additionally, agency allows them some control over the learning pace, structure and environment, which are critical factors for creating a meaningful educational experience. Agency is essential for any learner as it is for lecturers.

According to Min and Nelson (2024) several factors influence a lecturer's level of agency including their own willingness to learn and develop, motivations for professional growth, the institutional structures supporting professional development, and the degree of involvement they have in shaping their learning experiences. In the TVET college context, lecturer agency is particularly significant. However, findings suggest that this agency is often constrained, creating a complex challenge. On one hand management appears to provide limited support for lecturers, restricting their ability to exercise autonomy in their roles. On the other hand, students may not always engage in the teaching-learning process as expected, further complicating lecturers' ability to implement effective pedagogical strategies (Hugo & Mokoena, 2023). This tension underscores the need for systemic changes that address both structural constraints and epistemic disempowerment, as lecturer agency is not merely an individual attribute but is shaped by institutional power relations and knowledge hierarchies (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). From a decolonial perspective, limited agency reflects the persistence of top-down curriculum control rooted in colonial governance structures (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

In sub-theme 1 above, the findings revealed that all but one lecturer were unaware of technical and vocational education colleges before applying for positions at TVET colleges. The lecturers expected an induction process led by the college management or at the very least the campus manager. However, they perceived a lack of management involvement in helping new lecturers transition into their roles as NCV lecturers. One participant shared their experience:

So, it ... mmm ... when I started there, I was completely new ... the chap that was in charge was Mr ... He went and downloaded all the SAGS [acronym for Subject and Assessment Guidelines] and everything for me and helped me put my file together. But I wasn't now specifically taken through like this is what the subject is about, this is what you must do. I was literally given, and I had to stand and teach. (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A)

Lecturers were left to navigate an unfamiliar curriculum in an environment they had never encountered before. The data further revealed that formal professional development and support were rarely provided. Additionally, the findings highlighted that lecturers'

perceived a lack of sufficient support and effort from both senior lecturers and college management in fostering professional development and providing classroom support. This absence of structured development and guidance could significantly impact how lecturers interpret and implement the curriculum, as reflected in the following statement:

Like there's no proper development of the lecturer. So, it is up to the individual ... to probably enroll for further education and read further on the sector. And so now whenever you ... administer the curriculum or implement the curriculum, it will be different (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Furthermore, the findings revealed that lecturers faced a shortage of essential resources, including budgets for excursions, transportation, internet connectivity and data. These limitations hindered effective implementation of the NCV curriculum and contributed to negative experiences with its delivery. Hugo and Mokoena (2023) and Van der Bijl and Oosthuizen (2019), observe that not only do many lecturers lack the necessary qualifications, but also that TVET colleges suffer from a shortage of teaching resources which are critical for effective instruction. Supporting this, Avame her experience:

No matter how hard you try to include the practical, we do not have the resources to do the practical part of it. So, your lesson plan ends up going not the way you intended it to go. It ends up being more theory and less practical because there are no resources...because there's not even a Sim Room... there's another side ... when you go to where our officers are, there is Wi-Fi that side but when you come to this side where my classroom is as a Tourism lecturer, there's no Wi-Fi (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

These findings align with Alsubaie (2016), who emphasised that teachers require targeted training and professional development workshops to effectively contribute to both curriculum design and implementation.

Other factors contribute to lecturer agency which include absenteeism, dropout and low throughput and the use of Illicit substance and drugs by students.

6.2.3.1 Absenteeism, dropout and low throughput

Another critical challenge faced by NCV lecturers impacting on agency is the high absenteeism and dropout rates which significantly impact student progression and overall throughput. The findings revealed a steadily increasing dropout rate among NCV students, ultimately affecting completion rates at the exit level. Data showed that when the programme begins at Level 2, classrooms are typically at full capacity. However, attendance gradually declines within a few months. By the time Level 2 students progress to Level 3, numbers have dwindled even further, exacerbated by a high failure rate. As a result, only a small fraction of Level 2 students successfully advance to Level 3. The following excerpts from Henrietta and Avame highlight the alarming pattern of student attrition within the NCV programme:

It's sometimes difficult because you get in Level 2 and for the first term they are in class, mmm, they are interested, they are eager to learn and after the Easter Holidays you lose them...you lose them, and you try to get them back and you say "But why aren't you coming?" And unfortunately, you get to sometimes think ... because of NSFAS they just want the money. So ... it then gets progressively worse when you come to Level 4. You have your Level 2 and 3 dedicated students that want to be in class and now you've trimmed ... (Silence) ... down from two classes of Level 3 to one class of Level 4 of between 12 to 14 students. And maybe out of that class you may have 4 or 5 that are there every single day. The rest just can't care (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

Avame reinforces this issue,

This will never work (referring to the NCV programme). No matter how hard you try, throw yourself wherever, this will never ever work. Remember *ukuthi* when you enrol for Level 2 you've got like 3 classes of Level 2. You are teaching three classes. There will be dropouts, right? In Level 3 you have 20 students out of 60, in Level 4, you have 10 students. I've got 10 students in level 4! (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

Both lecturers emphasise that despite their best efforts, student retention remains a major challenge, raising concerns about the programme's long-term viability. The findings suggest that one possible reason for the high dropout rate is that students may perceive the three-year NCV program as too long. The student cohort includes, among others, those who recently failed Grade 12 in the academic stream and are now attempting to obtain their matric certificate, as well as those who failed matric years ago and, after a period of inactivity, have decided to return to complete their qualification. For both groups starting at Level 2 and committing to an additional three years in the system to earn a matric certificate may feel like an extended and discouraging process. As a result, their motivation may decline over time. In response to this challenge, Henrietta offered the following proposal:

I think that there should be a separation ... a person for instance who did their matric but only failed 1 or 2 subjects does not need to do the NCV ... We can then separate the people who really need this (meaning NCV). We need to help those who really need to start in 9. Those students need the help. They need the NCV course because they have not been able to be successful at school. But those students that have ... maybe missed their matric or didn't make their Grade 11 and didn't want the stigma of going back to repeat ... they should have a different concept for them ... They should be some sort of separation that you've only just failed matric then they should be this course available to those students and not put them now where they are going to do 3 years to do something they would have done in 1 year. Then you will have more motivation (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

The impact of low pass rates and poor throughput in NCV programmes is deeply felt by lecturers often leading to moments of sheer frustration as they struggle to identify the root causes. This frustration can cause them to question their teaching abilities. One lecturer expressed this frustration, stating, "And you get frustrated sometimes because you'll see your marks ... and you wonder if this is a reflection of your teaching ..." (Henrietta, lecturer TVET A).

Additionally, the persistently low success rates have prompted some colleges to phase out certain programmes that fail to meet the needs of their target market. As a result, lecturers are reassigned to other programmes based on institutional needs rather than their qualifications or expertise. Avame, a lecturer expressed concern that these deployments often disregard lecturers' subject knowledge, placing them in roles simply where vacancies exist. This, in turn, perpetuates the cycle of lecturers teaching subjects they may be unprepared or unqualified for. Avame expressed her frustration with the sudden phasing out of programmes, particularly Tourism, saying:

Right now, they're closing down Tourism ... I don't know if it's already closed or what. But next year we are only having Level 3s and 4s. They will give me whatever! (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

She further explained that management made these deployment decisions without consulting lecturers, which only added to their frustration.

Before you do the allocation, come to Avame ... would you be able to? ... And look at my academic record and say... can you do this? Eish! You feel there's no sense of ... You feel like you're just here to earn a living. You know when you wake up in the morning, and you say hee! let me just wake up so that I can be able to buy bread and butter for my kids to put on the table (Avame, op.cit)

Evidence from South African TVET settings indicates that workload manageability and the quality of managerial support are significant predictors of lecturers' morale and motivation (Nikisi, Mashologu, & Bwowe, 2022). Furthermore, research on occupational stress among TVET lecturers shows that excessive workloads and weak support systems contribute to high stress levels and job dissatisfaction (Marufu, 2022). National research on TVET lecturer quality also highlights the complex and multifaceted demands placed on lecturers, with managerial practices influencing their ability to navigate classroom, administrative, and external responsibilities (DHET, 2024).

6.2.3.2 Illicit substance and drugs

The photo collage session with lecturers provided deeper insight into another significant factor contributing to student abscondment, absenteeism and dropout rates. This is the use of addictive substances and drugs by students. Discussions centred around images of numerous taverns and bars surrounding the campus, which are frequently visited by students. Additionally, a photo depicting drugs left in the boys' restroom was highlighted the severity of the issue.

Lecturers shared that it was not uncommon to witness students returning to class after breaks smelling of alcohol or displaying heightened activity due to substance use. In response to this growing concern, one campus participating in this study has introduced a health and wellness booth offering programmes including substance and drug abuse awareness initiatives. The following photos illustrate these challenges:

Figure 1: Photo showing taverns outside TVET college



Figure 2: Photo showing Illicit substance in boys' toilet



Research by Rich (2017) confirmed that drug abuse among youth (including children and adolescents) is on the increase, and the survey conducted at High Schools in South Africa revealed that almost 50% of grade 8-11 learners had used alcohol, and 13% had indulged in cannabis use in their lifetime (Rich, 2017). For the TVET colleges, it signals a nationwide challenge which an already stigmatised sector must deal with.

The sub-theme and supporting quotes from participants highlight the lived experiences of lecturers working with the NCV curriculum. While the NCV is designed as a prestigious programme aimed at equipping students with 21st century skills for meaningful social and economic participation, both locally and internationally, the reality has been far more complex.

Unintended consequences such as high failure and dropout rates, absenteeism and phasing out of underperforming programmes have created significant frustrations for both students and lecturers. As class sizes shrink and pass rates remain low, colleges are forced to close certain programmes, ultimately jeopardising lecturer placements and job security. As a result, the role of the lecturer has become a paradox. On one hand, lecturers are essential to the successful implementation of the NCV curriculum. On the other hand, their significance is undermined by inadequate training, lack of induction,

student absenteeism, high failure and dropout rates, and the uncertainty surrounding the closure of NCV programmes.

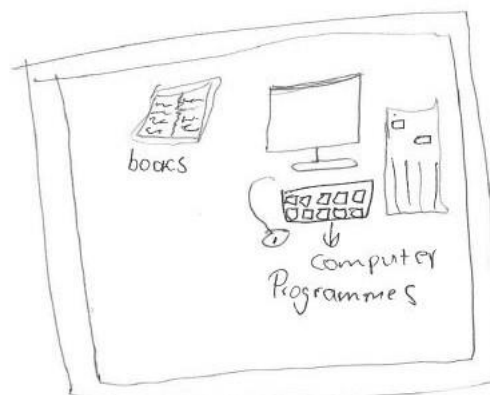
6.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Student participants' experiences of the NCV curriculum

When examining students' perspectives, their experiences with the NCV curriculum revolved around two key aspects: the curriculum itself and the teacher-student relationship. One positive aspect that many students acknowledged was the valuable skills gained through exposure to the Computer Practice subject. This sentiment is reflected in the following statement:

Mine is a positive experience. Since I have been exposed to office data processing, I have experienced more learning like creating folders and work with the computer properly. So, I love this part of my learning (student 12. TVET college B).

Additionally, during the metaphor drawing exercise, a student illustrated a computer as a symbol of positive experiences gained through the NCV programme. This representation highlights the valuable skills students have acquired, particularly in computer literacy. One student shared the drawing is shown hereunder.

Figure 3: Illustration of metaphor drawing on positive experiences on NCV



I have drawn a picture of a computer. As I started in NCV, I didn't know much about computers. So, in Office Administration there is a subject called Office Data processing, and it deals with the computer. Then on top of it, there is LO book. Both the computer and LO teach us about things which are practical. So, after I started NCV, I now know a lot. I can do the CV. I can do almost anything, and this is a positive experience for me because in the past when I applied for a job, I must go to the café to have my CV done and pay for it. Now, I can do it for myself and I'm good at it (student 11. TVET college B)

Overall, there is a strong sense of positivity, confidence and satisfaction among students regarding their access to computers and the valuable skills they have acquired.

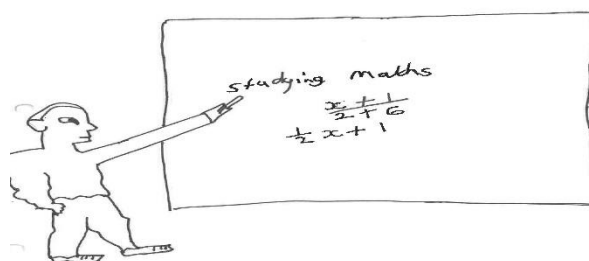
The negative experiences reported by students centred on the perceived power dynamics in the lecturer-student relationship. The data suggests that in some cases, teaching and learning practices at TVET colleges have remained largely unchanged, resembling the traditional “banking” method of education (Freire, 1970). In this model, the lecturer is viewed as the sole possessor of knowledge, while students are treated as passive vessels. When pedagogy is framed in this way, it creates an imbalanced power dynamic between lecturers and students. The following excerpts illustrates these concerns.

For me, I think it's the way that we are taught where there is a teacher holding a chalk and there is a chalkboard. I thought that in college a lecturer would get in class and stand in front and talk to you about the topic, this is what I used to see in movies when you talk about a university. But when I came here, I experienced a similar thing to primary school and high school. The teachers are always there following you up, they want to make sure that you pass just like they do in high school. So, I think there is a lot of teaching and not necessarily lecturing. I think for me this is like colonisation, but I just can't explain it properly (Student 9. TVET college B).

The above response is an expression of disappointment with the teaching methods at the college, highlighting how they resembled traditional schooling rather than the more independent learning environment they had expected. Similar sentiments were echoed by student participants at TVET college A. They described the teaching approach,

particularly in Mathematical Literacy, as a colonial way of instruction. They felt that lecturer's methods made them feel belittled rather than empowered in their learning. This perception was visually represented in the metaphor drawing below, which depicted a teacher holding a chalk and pointing at a board. The image symbolised the rigid, one-directional flow of knowledge, reinforcing students' feelings of being passive recipients rather than active participants in their education.

Figure 4: Illustration of metaphor drawing of teacher holding chalk and pointing at a board

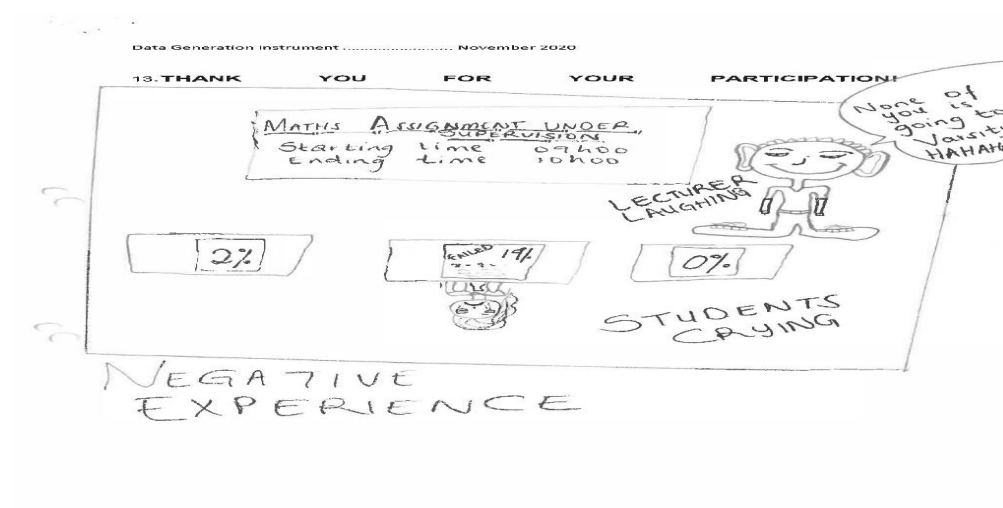


The above sentiment was reinforced through several metaphor drawings created by students during the data generation process. In drawing 7 (below), a student illustrated a classroom scene where students were preparing to write a Math test. Open books lay in front of them, displaying marks ranging from 0% to 19%. The drawing also depicted students crying while the lecturer laughed, declaring that none of them would ever make it to university. During the focus group discussion, students provided further insight into the meaning behind the drawing, explaining their experiences and feelings of discouragement within the learning environment:

Ma'am that is a classroom for Math Literacy. There is a lecturer who makes us write assignments in the classroom under supervision, so it's not easy for us to pass those assignments. At the end if we fail, he laughs and tells us we will never go to varsity. So, now the students are crying because of those comments. So, it is a very negative experience for NCV students (Student 8. TVET college A).

The drawing below vividly illustrates the power dynamics in the classroom and highlights how certain teaching practices, whether intentional or not, can discourage students and diminish their confidence in their academic abilities. It underscores the need for a more supportive and constructive learning approach to help students succeed rather than feeling defeated.

Figure 5: Illustration of metaphor drawing of teacher laughing at students for failing maths



The sentiments expressed in the above metaphor drawing strongly align with the concerns raised by Student 1 captured below. The drawing illustrates a clear power imbalance in the lecturer-student relationship, with students depicted as struggling and emotionally distressed while the lecturer appears indifferent, even mocking their performance. This visual representation mirrors the student's argument that decolonisation must begin with those in power, meaning lecturers, who shape the learning environment.

Ma'am ... eehh ... I think ... on that one if we are to decolonise, first and foremost, I think the first step is that we must decolonize eehh... people in power and their capacity as teachers. Because being in power and being employed, and giving them the responsibility to teach us, doesn't mean that we are failures. So, once we start having that tendency which means that their mind needs to be decolonized (Student 1. TVET college A).

This insight from the student directly engages in the decoloniality of being, as it calls for the transformation of lecturer subjectivities and attitudes, not merely curriculum content. It suggests that decolonisation must occur at the level of consciousness and relational power, where authority is reconfigured from domination to facilitation (Freire, 1970; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). The student further suggests that the colonial mindset embedded in some teaching approaches where authority is exercised through intimidation rather than support needs to be dismantled. The drawing above also vividly captures this struggle, illustrating how students feel disempowered by the system that should be equipping them with knowledge and confidence. The response also highlights the urgent need for a shift towards a more student-centred and empowering pedagogical approach.

During the focus group with student participants, I observed a strong sense of anxiety and frustration regarding their experiences with certain lecturers' teaching methods. This frustration appeared to contribute to feelings of demotivation and discouragement in their studies. Additionally, it may play a role in the high absenteeism rates that lecturers expressed concern about during their interviews.

Another response that highlighted students' dissatisfaction with the perceived power dynamics in the classroom was the notion that lecturers were "gambling with students' lives". This sentiment reflects the deep discontent students feel about the way their education is being handled, further reinforcing the need for a more supportive and empowering learning environment. This dissatisfaction is expressed by Student 6 thus:

We have found that those in power act as Alpha and Omega even if there are some documents which are written in black and white to guide or to instruct them on what should be done on the part of education. Let me engage more on that one on how they are conducting Math Literacy because it's an academic issue and it's in conflict with the institution. So, on that issue, this is the 2nd year we are engaging with it and the lecturer has been doing one and the same thing. There is a document and those people who are in power, they don't want to even read the document. Then there is a crisis ma'am, if we

have an institution of higher learning with managers that don't want to read then there is a problem, and they don't want to obey the instruction that is written in black and white. Hence, they are gambling with students' lives ... (Student 6. TVET college A).

The response was reinforced by the metaphor drawing below, which visually represents the misuse of power by those in authority over the students. The drawing of a male teacher serves as a symbol of dominance and control, reflecting the students' perception that lecturers hold unchecked power in the classroom. This illustration aligns with students' frustrations about how some lecturers exert authority in ways that discourage rather than support learning. Their concerns about feeling powerless and undervalued in the education process further highlight the need for a shift toward a more inclusive and student-centred approach.

Figure 6: Illustration of metaphor drawing of a male teacher as a symbol of power



The above response raises concerns about good governance and accountability by those in power, including lecturers and campus management. Students feel undermined and neglected, believing that lecturers do not adhere to the principles outlined in institutional policies. As a result, many students become hesitant to challenge or confront lecturers they find unapproachable, fearing victimisation. This climate of fear ultimately contributes to a disempowered student body.

Additionally, the metaphor drawings illustrate the dehumanisation of students who struggle to pass their math test. This sense of dehumanisation not only affects their confidence and motivation but also reinforces colonial-era power dynamics within the classroom. Such an environment hinders student empowerment and contradicts efforts to create inclusive and supportive learning experiences.

6.2.5 Sub-theme 5: Language and learner Identity

The language used in the classroom has been a longstanding debate in South Africa. The Constitution upholds the right to language choice, and schools are expected to follow the Language Policy set by the Department of Education. While several African languages have been incorporated into school curricula, this inclusivity has not extended to TVET colleges. As highlighted in the Literature Review chapter, every NCV programme mandates English or Afrikaans, alongside with Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation leaving no room for other language options. This lack of linguistic diversity creates a significant barrier to learning, limiting students' ability to access and engage with course content effectively. The exclusion of additional languages not only restricts comprehension but also impacts students' sense of identity and belonging in the academic space.

The excerpt from Avame, a lecturer highlights how the students' backgrounds, contexts and lived experiences shape their ability to engage meaningfully in the classroom when English is used as a medium of instruction.

Most of my NCV students come from rural areas and some of them from townships. But there is one group of students that comes from Bulwer. At first, when they came here, they were clueless ... when you are not exposed and you can't write English, you can't read, and you can't even understand a single word of English. When you can't comprehend, you can't interpret ... you can't do nothing (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

Avame's reflection underscores the deep challenges faced by NCV students, particularly those from rural areas and townships in adapting to an English-medium learning

environment. Her account highlights how a lack of exposure to English can severely limit students' ability to engage with their coursework, interpret instructions and express themselves academically.

While these students demonstrate commitment by attending classes despite their struggles, the lack of adequate linguistic support places them at a disadvantage. It also raises questions about whether the NCV curriculum is truly inclusive or if it inadvertently reinforces existing inequalities by not accommodating multilingual learning strategies.

Zenzele's perspective below highlights the rigid structure of the NCV curriculum, which enforces English as the sole medium of instruction, often at the expense of student comprehension. He explains thus:

It is the curriculum - that is how it is set. The medium of instruction is English. So, now it means sometimes, in order to explain some of the concepts, you must code switch. Because if the class is predominantly Zulu, you must explain some of the concepts in isiZulu. Those are the problems that we sometimes encounter. And so, you have language barriers because you get like most learners they cannot speak or express themselves in English (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

The necessity of code switching, as pointed out by Zenzele above, reflects an attempt by lecturers to bridge the gap while students adapt to the linguistic realities of the NCV programme. However, this is not a formalised solution but rather an improvised strategy, revealing a disconnect between policy and practice. If the NCV curriculum does not promote multilingual instruction, it risks alienating a significant portion of students who struggle to express themselves in English.

Sipho's response below highlights the disconnect between language policy and classroom realities, particularly when African lecturers teach predominantly African students using English or Afrikaans. Sipho expresses this frustration by stating, "You find that in the classroom, these are Africans (referring to students) but the lecturer will use either Afrikaans or English (Sipho, Lecturer TVET college B).

His statement suggests an expectation for lecturers to code switch, acknowledging the linguistic backgrounds of their students rather than rigidly adhering to the prescribed medium of instruction. It almost as though he expects them to code switch and not use the prescribed language. Sipho's sentiment underscores the absence of African languages in instruction which can create barriers to learning engagement and comprehension.

Student 8 directly connects the use of English as a medium of instruction to the broader concept of decolonisation. The student argued that being forced to learn and communicate in English is a remnant of colonial imposition, limiting their ability to fully engage with their education in a way that feels natural and effective. Expressing this frustration as follows:

We are forced to learn in English and it's a language that we are forced to use here in Africa and which we are using right now. So, we have to decolonize so we can do what we think is good for us and not what someone else thinks is good for us ... I think learning in Zulu would have been better for us as NCV students because what I have found is that even though we are learning English and we are reading and also writing in English, but then I think I have learned English for 10 years now. But even my vocabulary is still not good. So, I think IsiZulu would have been better (Student 8. TVET college A).

The response reflects the ongoing debates about language as a tool of empowerment or oppression in education (Makalela, 2022; Rakgogo, 2024). In addition, it reflects what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) describes as the "colonisation of the mind", where language functions not only as a medium of instruction but as a carrier of cultural domination. The continued privileging of English in the NCV curriculum therefore reproduces epistemic dependency and limits students' ability to think, learn and express themselves within their own linguistic and cultural frameworks. While English continues to be positioned as a gateway to economic opportunities (Bhorat & Mayet, 2013; Rakgogo, 2024; Taringa & Manyike, 2025), it simultaneously creates barriers for students who struggle with it as a second language. Student 8's perspective underscores the need for a more inclusive and

contextually relevant approach to language policy in TVET colleges. Perhaps what is needed is a language policy that values indigenous languages and enhances comprehension, rather than one that reinforces systemic disadvantages and perpetuates linguistic exclusion.

Some lecturers believe that the predominant use of English as a language of instruction may be a significant factor contributing to the high failure rate among NCV students. Avame illustrated this concern by pointing to students' low performance on assessments, "Using English ... That's why they don't make it. If you look at their scripts one of them, I'm gonna show you now ... (pulls out a script) ... they can get like 27%, and the other has 35%" (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

Bongi, another lecturer reinforced this perspective by emphasising the impact of language barriers on student comprehension. She noted that when engaging with students in isiZulu, their understanding of the material becomes clearer, "If you speak to them one-on-one, you can speak to them in IsiZulu and then you realise that these students understand what you have taught them (other lecturer participants nod in agreement) (Bongi, lecturer TVET college B).

This exchange, met with agreement from other participants, underscores a critical issue within the NCV curriculum, that of the misalignment between the prescribed language of instruction and the linguistic realities of students. While English may be the official medium, it often serves as a barrier rather than a bridge to learning. The lecturers' observation highlights the need for a more flexible and inclusive approach, one that acknowledges and integrates students' home languages to enhance understanding and academic success.

The need to accommodate students more effectively in TVET colleges is a pressing issue especially considering the language barrier that hinders their ability to respond to written assessments. Henrietta, highlighted how some students struggle with written work despite having a solid verbal understanding of the subject matter:

If you can see the child ... she completely cannot cope with the written work, but she can do verbally, there should be opportunity... mmm... for them to be able to do their test verbally mmm ... or to have a curriculum that is more practically minded and less on the theory (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A)

Zenzele further emphasised that true accommodation means rethinking how knowledge is acquired and assessed. He pointed out that the continued reliance on English and Afrikaans as the only languages of examination reflects lingering colonial influences:

Accommodating them (referring to NCV students) better means that the nation must become independent regarding how they acquire knowledge. Because I mean the current state, like there are so many influences. Looking at the Grade 12 paper, it is only written in English and Afrikaans. Why don't we have like a physical paper in IsiZulu, in Xhosa, right? So, how we acquire knowledge, it is still like its still got those traces of the colonists (Zenzele. Lecturer TVET college A).

These perspectives suggest that a more inclusive and contextually relevant curriculum, one that integrates verbal assessments and multilingual examination options could improve student performance and engagement. By recognising the linguistic realities of students, TVET colleges can create an environment that fosters success rather than reinforcing systemic barriers.

Students were vocal about the challenges they faced using English as the primary medium of instruction. Student 12 expressed the difficulty clearly, "For me It's the language that we use in class which is English. Some of us we don't understand English properly and therefore, sometimes it's very difficult to understand the subject." (Student 12. TVET college B).

While students recognised the problem, they struggled to find a viable solution. The lack of alternatives left them feeling trapped in a system that did not fully accommodate their linguistic needs. This frustration was evident in a discussion where students reflected

on their limited agency in addressing the issue. Student 1 captured this sentiment, “We do worry about the language. But we ask ourselves and we also answer ourselves because we feel like there is no one who will answer those questions for us” (Student 1. TVET college A).

This exchange underscores a broader concern that students are aware of the language barrier’s impact on their learning, yet they feel unheard and powerless to effect change. The absence of institutional solutions only deepens their sense of exclusion and reinforces the need for more inclusive language policies in TVET colleges.

Student 8’s perspective reflects a pragmatic acceptance of English as a necessary tool for career advancement; despite the challenges it presents in learning. She expressed it as, “I’m saying, let’s just continue with English because it’s a language that is being used and it’s a language that we want to use at work” (Student 8. TVET A). Her resignation to continuing with English underscores the tension between decolonisation efforts and the reality of global professional environments, where English remains dominant. This suggests that while students may recognise the systemic barriers imposed by language, they also acknowledge the practical benefits of proficiency in English for employment and mobility.

Student 8’s statement further raises important questions of: should educational institutions such as TVET colleges prioritise indigenous languages to promote inclusivity, or should they focus on strengthening students’ English proficiency to enhance their career prospects? Perhaps a balanced approach where students receive support in their home languages while also mastering English may be a more effective solution.

Sipho” perspective aligns with Student 8’s resigned acceptance of English as the primary medium of instruction, reinforcing the notion that students have little choice in the matter. His observations also highlight a significant challenge that while English is necessary for academic and professional success, it also serves as a barrier to student confidence and effective communication.

I would say ma'am they don't have a choice, but they have to learn in English, but you can see from the way they present their answers that their answers are not well presented due to the language ... (at this point the other participants echoed 'yes' in agreement). And you find that when they do presentations, they are not confident to stand before other kids. They will feel shy you know (Sipho, lecturer TVET college B).

Students connected the dominance of English in education to broader issues of decolonisation and other external influences. Student 9 pointed out the inherent disadvantage faced by Black students compared to their counterparts:

The problem is that with White people they are comfortable with English, it is their mother tongue, but for Black people, English is not our mother tongue. Therefore, we have to learn and adapt to the English language and that is now not a 50/50 situation and it's not fair (Student 9. TVET B).

The sentiment was echoed by Student 11 who blamed social media for reinforcing the use of English, "But also, through social media we see how other people dress and do things, and the language they use is English. So, we have the influence of speaking English" (student 11. TVET B).

Building on this discussion, Student 3 advocated for an alternative approach, one that prioritises African languages for instruction rather than continuing to rely on English:

I think on my side ma'am as Africans ... I think on that as Africans, we should move out that language which is English and find a pure African language because I think we are forced to use the language which is not our mother tongue. So, we should find at least a pure African language which subjects, or studies can be conducted in. So, I think we can find that pure African language (Student 3. TVET A).

These reflections reveal a deep awareness among students of the historical and systemic forces shaping language use in education. While English remains a dominant force due

to colonial legacies and global influences, students recognise the need for a more equitable linguistic framework, one that acknowledges and integrates African languages into formal education. This proposal resonates with Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) who advocated for linguistic decolonisation arguing that the dominance of English in education and society is a continuation of colonial control, which marginalises African languages and cultures. He asserts that language is not just a means of communication but a carrier of culture and identity.

For Student 6, the issue of language in education was a complex matter that required careful consideration and long-term planning. While Student 6 acknowledged the importance of decolonising English, he emphasised the need for linguistic unity across South Africa and the African continent:

I think on the decolonisation process of the language, we must make sure that in as much as we are decolonising English, we have something that unites us as South African people or as Africa as a whole. I understand that it will be a long process but also for our forefathers it was a long process for them to learn English. And some even died without learning English crystal clear. And even for us it will be the same. So, it will be a process, but it would be a good process because we're going to learn an African language. So, we mustn't view it as a waste of time, but we must view it as an opportunity to unite the African continent (Student 6. TVET college A).

The above response highlights the tension between linguistic decolonisation and the practical challenges of multilingualism (Ndhlovu & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2024; Dlamini & Kamwendo, 2018). While there is a strong desire to move away from English, students also recognise the need for a unifying African language to facilitate communication and foster a sense of continental solidarity.

This sub-theme on language and learner identity highlights the critical and ongoing debate about the language of instruction in South African education. While discussions around language policy are prevalent in higher education and schools, the situation in TVET colleges is particularly concerning, as students have no option other than English

or Afrikaans as primary mediums of instruction (Maluti TVET college, 2022; Powell, Muronda & Thini, 2024). The rigid structure creates barriers to learning, affecting comprehension, participation, and overall student confidence.

Given the vital role TVET colleges play in skills development and employability, addressing language inclusivity is urgent. A more flexible approach, whether multilingual support, formalised code-switching strategies, or gradual integration of African languages, could enhance accessibility and foster a more equitable learning environment. Without such reforms, language will remain an obstacle rather than a tool for empowerment, limiting the potential of many students who are eager to learn but are constrained by linguistic challenges.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings related to how the NCV curriculum is enacted and experienced, presenting insights from both lecturers and students. The discussion has been framed around five key themes, highlighting the complexities and challenges of implementing the curriculum. While some positive experiences emerged, significant concerns remain, particularly regarding the language of instruction, which requires serious attention to enhance accessibility and inclusivity.

The next chapter presents findings on the theme Transformation in TVET colleges.

CHAPTER SEVEN: TRANSFORMATION OF TVET COLLEGES

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is the final of three that present the findings of this study. It focuses on the transformation of TVET colleges, organised around four sub-themes: aspects of the TVET system identified for transformation, changes in lecturer profiles, the role of TVET colleges as allocators of “second-chance” opportunities, and lingering colonial artefacts.

This analysis is explicitly framed by the study’s research questions:

- Research Question 1: How have the agendas that shape TVET colleges been enacted in practice?
- Research Question 2: How have the epistemologies underpinning TVET colleges influenced the NCV curriculum?

By aligning the sub-themes with these research questions, the chapter examines both the structural and epistemic dimensions of transformation, highlighting the interplay between policy, institutional practice, and lecturer experiences within the NCV context.

Educational transformation is a broad concept with multiple definitions. In this study, the definition that emerged from documentary review describes transformation as systemic changes to the prevailing educational model (Menendez, 2021). In the South African context, the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013) emphasises the transformation of TVET colleges to better serve students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. This transformation focuses on reforming and realigning policies and practices to improve student equity, access to education and the quality of vocational training.

The documentary review process revealed that political, social and economic factors have been the primary drivers of transformation in the TVET college sector. Technical, vocational and occupational training in South has been profoundly influenced by its

colonial and apartheid past, leaving lasting legacies (Badroodien 2004; Kraak, 2004), as discussed in the literature review. Addressing the deep-seated racial inequalities that once defined the vocational education landscape became an urgent priority. Consequently, new education policies were needed to guide the transition to a more equitable system. As Needham (2019) explains, a range of policies and reforms were introduced to transform and modernise the TVET sector.

Furthermore, the documentary review revealed that the initial conceptualisation of the TVET college sector post-apartheid, was centred on developing the intermediate skills required for economic growth. As a key component of post-school education, the TVET sector serves as a crucial mechanism for equipping individuals with work-ready skills that have a significant impact on national development in a developing context (Akoojee, 2008). Additionally, the sector holds the potential to address the lifelong learning needs of a diverse post-school and pre-employed population, particularly the youth.

However, from a decolonial perspective, transformation cannot be reduced to policy reform or institutional restructuring alone. It must also involve a fundamental reconfiguration of power relations, knowledge systems and identities within the sector (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This implies that transformation should not only address access and redress but also interrogate whose knowledge is legitimised, whose identities are affirmed, and how institutional cultures reproduce or disrupt colonial continuities.

The following four (4) sub-themes help to unpack the theme of transformation in TVET colleges.

7.2 Sub-themes

7.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Aspects of the TVET system identified for transformation

The need to transform TVET colleges to ensure that their programmes effectively address the socio-economic needs of citizens was clearly outlined in key national policies, including the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) (1994), Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) (1996) and Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) (2006). These strategies emphasised the critical role of individual skills development in uplifting communities and driving economic growth. Post-1994, the imperative for the TVET sector to contribute to the country's social and economic transformation became evident. As such, TVET provisioning is not only essential for poverty reduction in a developing context (Akoojee, 2005, 2008; Akoojee & McGrath, 2007), but also serves as a platform for expanding access, promoting equity and addressing historical inequalities. While these policy frameworks foreground economic growth and skills development, a decolonial reading suggests that they remain largely embedded within global neoliberal discourses that prioritise market responsiveness over epistemic transformation (Allais, 2014; McGrath, 2012). As such, the transformation agenda risks reinforcing the coloniality of knowledge by valuing instrumental and market-driven forms of learning while marginalising indigenous and contextually grounded knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2007).

The White Paper on Post-School Education (2013) outlined the essential steps needed to transform the higher education landscape in the post-1994 era. This policy made it clear that transformation was not optional but imperative. It emphasised that the potential of higher education institutions, including TVET colleges, lay in their ability to reform key structures such as governance, values and culture. Notably, the White Paper highlighted the critical role of governance transformation as a catalyst for broader systemic change within the post-school education and training (PSET) sector. This foundational shift also set the stage for further transformation across the TVET landscape. Reinforcing this stance, the White Paper explicitly states that:

The transformation of the structures, values and culture of governance is a necessity, not an option, for South African higher education. Higher education institutions are vital participants in the massive changes which our society is undergoing, and in the

intellectual, economic and cultural challenges of the new world order. The transformation of governance in the national system and its institutions is therefore a fundamental policy commitment of the Ministry of Education (White Paper on Post-school education, 2013, p.29)

While the quote above emphasises the necessity of governance transformation, it also highlights the integral role of higher education institutions in driving societal change and responding to global challenges. Additionally, transformation of the PSET, for TVET colleges, was beyond governance but extended to institutional effectiveness and student access while addressing historical inequalities, improving the quality and relevance of vocational education, and making TVET institutions inclusive, accessible, and aligned with the country's socio-economic and developmental goals.

Therefore, the transformation of the TVET sector began with the merger and consolidation of 150 technical colleges into 50 multi-sited campus institutions, creating accessible learning opportunities for all students, regardless of race, class, gender, disability or religion. These mergers not only expanded access but brought together lecturers from diverse racial, cultural and professional backgrounds fostering a more inclusive and integrated educational environment (Kraak, Paterson & Boka 2016).

The key focus areas of TVET transformation are well documented and can be grouped into several critical clusters as suggested below:

7.2.1.1 Equity and Inclusivity

One of the core elements of TVET transformation is redressing the historical inequalities that have shaped South Africa's educational system. Policies and strategies that remove barriers to entry for disadvantaged groups became necessary in order to achieve the goals of equity and inclusivity; however, access alone does not guarantee epistemic justice, as inclusion into unchanged institutional cultures may reproduce rather than disrupt colonial hierarchies (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

7.2.1.2 Social and economic redress

Many authors write of how TVET colleges are poised as institutions for the alleviation of poverty, unemployment and inequalities. TVET is therefore, a tool to reduce poverty and unemployment, particularly among youth. TVET is also seen as a vehicle to fostering self-employment through entrepreneurial training and incubation hubs within colleges. The attempts at social redress was also seen in the widening of access to TVET colleges by increasing the geographic reach by expanding TVET infrastructure to underserved rural and peri-urban areas. New TVET colleges have been built, and new campuses have been added to already existing colleges thus allowing for students in far flung rural areas to access vocational education and training (e.g. Hugo & Mokoena, 2024; Nhlumayo & Shandu; 2023; Gamble, 2021; Akoojee, 2008 & 2010).

7.2.1.3 Institutional transformation including enhancing the image and status of TVET

Institutional transformation calls for leadership diversity which ensures that management and staff reflect South Africa's demographics in both colour and gender. Improved institutional governance was also key in order to ensure accountability, transparency, and efficiency of colleges (e.g. Wedekind et.al., 2024; Makola et.al., 2023; Tlapana & Myeki, 2020).

7.2.1.4 Curriculum relevance

TVET curriculum should be aligned with the needs of the local and global economy. The curriculum must be relevant to current economic and socio demands. Current curriculum proposals include incorporating technical and soft skills that prepare students for real-world challenges and designed in a way that integrates both technical skills and broader competencies such as problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking. This will enable students to thrive in a dynamic, globalized labour market (e.g. Vimbelo & Bayaga, 2023; Nkwanyane et.al., 2020; Gamede & Uleanya, 2019). From a decolonial

perspective, the notion of “relevance” must extend beyond alignment with labour market needs to include cultural and epistemic relevance, where curricula reflect local histories, languages and ways of knowing rather than privileging globalised, Eurocentric knowledge systems (Le Grange, 2018; Dei, 2011).

7.2.1.5 Alignment with industry needs

TVET programs must align with the needs of local and global industries. By strengthening partnerships between TVET institutions and employers, training can become more industry-relevant, which would enhance employability and reduce the gap between education and labour market requirements. This means updating the curriculum to include skills relevant to emerging industries and aligning it with labour market demands including a focus on critical sectors like Information and Communication Technology, manufacturing, renewable energy, and agriculture (Nthako & Khumalo, 2025; Magadza, & Mampane, 2024; Hugo & Mokoena, 2024; Gamble, 2021; Rogan & Papier, 2020). However, an overemphasis on industry alignment may inadvertently reproduce dependency on existing economic structures, which themselves are shaped by colonial and global inequalities, thereby limiting the transformative potential of TVET (McGrath, 2012; Allais, 2014).

7.2.1.6 Skills development for economic growth and workplace readiness

TVET is intended to serve as a bridge between education and the workplace. TVET should focus on equipping students with the skills necessary for effective participation in the workplace. Both workplace placements in the form of work-integrated learning opportunities, apprenticeships, internships, experiential learning and in-service training must be encouraged for students to develop a vocational identity (e.g. Ngubane et.al., 2024; Hugo & Mokoena, 2023; Mabunda & Frick, 2022; Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022; Akoojee, 2010).

7.2.1.7 Quality assurance and standardisation

Ensuring the quality of education in TVET is crucial for its transformation. Emphasis has been placed on the importance of creating and adhering to robust quality assurance frameworks and mechanisms to ensure that TVET qualifications are recognised and respected within both the national and international labour markets. This would also ensure the maintenance of high standards in both teaching and learning and assessment and thus ensuring that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies for the workplace and for articulation (e.g. Wedekind et al., 2024; Gaffoor & van der Bijl, 2019; Buthelezi, 2018).

7.2.1.8 Institutional strengthening through capacity building

Calls have been made to strengthen TVET institutions by improving teaching quality through continuous professional development, enhancing teaching and learning quality through capacity building, and regular curriculum updates. Several universities have heeded this call and have commenced with offering qualifications in vocational education professionalisation thus enhancing the quality of education and training and contribute to making TVET colleges more effective and responsive to the needs of students and the economy (e.g. Wedekind et al., 2024; Buthelezi, 2018; Allais, 2014).

7.2.1.9 A new funding system

Full bursary funding is provided to students studying at TVET colleges especially those undertaking the NCV programme. This funding aims to enable students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to access to vocational education. Social and economic redress efforts have also focused on expanding financial support through initiatives such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to make education more equitable and accessible (Powell, Muronda, & Tini, 2024; Gaffer, 2022).

7.2.1.10 Digital and infrastructure development

Recent proposals on reforms call for TVET to invest in modern facilities, ICT tools, and blended learning methods to enhance the teaching and learning environment. Curriculum should also align with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) by preparing students for digital transformation through training in advanced technologies such as automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence (e.g. Mesuwini & Mokoena, 2024; Teis & Els, 2021).

7.2.1.11 Decolonisation of education

Recently, there have been increasing calls for TVET colleges to decolonise by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, languages and practices to ensure that the curriculum reflects local realities and cultural heritage. However, this area of scholarship remains emergent and often under-theorised within vocational education (Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024; Anthonie, 2019; Manyau, 2018).

The expansive nature of these reforms underscores the magnitude of the intended transformation for the TVET sector. Although notable strides have been made in selected domains, as outlined earlier, the sector has yet to demonstrate the deep structural and systemic transformation necessary for its comprehensive reconfiguration. As the literature review suggests, achieving meaningful change in vocational education systems necessitates not only policy realignment but also foundational shifts in institutional structures, governance and pedagogical practices (McGrath, 2002; DHET, 2013b).

The remainder of this chapter presents the findings drawn from the perspectives of lecturer and student participants, offering insight into how some of these reforms have been experienced on the ground.

7.2.2 *Infrastructure upgrades*

Evidence from participant-provided photos and metaphor drawings highlights significant improvements in TVET college infrastructure, including both upgrades to existing facilities and the addition of new resources. A key area of development has been the introduction

of modern computer classrooms (shown in Figure 7 below), enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. While these investments have been widely welcomed, data also revealed that the number of computer labs remains insufficient to meet student demand. The importance of digital access was a recurring theme in photo collage sessions at both TVET colleges, with student participants expressing satisfaction that they now have the opportunity to learn using computers. Zanele, a lecturer, highlighted the transformation of computer labs, noting a shift towards modern, well-equipped facilities:

I took a picture of a computer room whereby it shows that we are now in another era because our computer labs are much more modern now. We have everything that we need in order to teach. The students have also been provided with comfortable chairs. Chairs which previously could only be used in the office area but now they can sit in these adjustable chairs and be comfortable. So, the learning environment has been made to be a comfortable one (Zanele, lecturer from TVET college B).

Figure 7: Photograph showing refurbished computer lab at a TVET college



Echoing this sentiment, Sipho, another lecturer, emphasised the role of digital access in bridging historical educational gaps:

Previously you would find that our students were not used to computers, so computers are a thing that was primarily used in a traditional office. And the Accounting I teach which

is Pastel Accounting uses computers. Our students come from high schools where there are no computers. So, when they are here, they are exposed in terms of using computers and I think that this is good in terms of decolonisation (Sipho, lecturer, TVET college B).

These reflections highlight how infrastructure upgrades, particularly in digital access, have not only modernised TEVT colleges but have also played a crucial role in improving student engagement, accessibility, and the overall learning experience. While Sipho interprets access to computers as “decolonisation,” this claim requires critical interrogation. Access to digital tools, although important, does not in itself constitute decolonisation, as it may simply extend access to globally dominant (and often Western-centric) knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2007). From a decolonial perspective, the key question is not only who has access to technology, but what kinds of knowledge are produced, accessed and legitimised through these technologies.

As part of the broader transformation agenda, TVET colleges have increasingly prioritised student well-being by implementing Health and Wellness Centres to address social challenges such as alcohol and substance abuse. Institutions like TVET college A have embraced this initiative, reflecting the growing global recognition of health and wellness as integral to student success. Additionally, student counselling centres have been established to provide academic and psychosocial support, reinforcing a well-rounded approach to student development. The significance of these support structures was evident in interviews at both TVET College A and B, where the role of Student Liaison Officers and the assistance they provide featured prominently in the data. These enhancements to infrastructure and student services signal a strong commitment to holistic student development as a key component of the transformation process. Regarding the impact of the Wellness Centre, Zenzele from TVET College A shared the following perspective and photo:

On a positive note, the college has introduced a Health and Wellness Center and has employed some nurses who provide services including dealing with issues of HIV, TB and those students can get health services within the education institution. This was

recently introduced so I mean the college needs to be applauded (Zenzele, lecturer, TVET college A).

Figure 8: Photograph showing a Health and Wellness Centre in College A



These developments can be interpreted through the lens of the colonality of being, as they begin to address the lived realities and psychosocial conditions of students whose subjectivities have historically been marginalised within formal education systems (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

7.2.3 *A new funding system*

Another important feature of a transformed TVET sector is a funding system with the aim of providing an important lever for a system change. The Education White Paper (1998) affirmed that a transformed, high-quality, responsive TVET system was an important investment in the future of the country and all the people. In so doing, the human resource needs which focus on social, civic and economic development would be attended to. This new funding system was the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (NSFAS, 2016; De Villiers, 2023). NSFAS was and is crucial as it enables students without financial means to access higher education. In light of the NSFAS key funding criteria, previously

disadvantaged households, I sought to understand what the profile of the typical NCV student is.

The data revealed that the profile of a typical TVET college student is diverse in terms of age and previous study level but similar in terms of indigent status. The profile as provided by lecturers comprises students who left the schooling system because of poor performance; those expelled from the schooling system because of behavioural problems; some of them, fell pregnant while attending school and now their parents have opted to bring them to the TVET college; some had dropped out of school and had to stay at home to take care of a family member as they could not cope with studying and looking after a loved one; most of the students come from rural areas and in most cases could not write, read or understand English well; then there are those who failed Grade 10 multiple times or failed Grade 12. Henrietta (lecturer, TVET college A) explained it this way, “So, it’s ... there are some that have sad cases. They’ve got no parents ... they’ve had to take care of all their siblings. Or it’s only their *gogo* at home ... there’s no money and they struggle.”

The NSFAS funding is therefore critical as most students solely depend on this funding to survive schooling in the TVET college. The NSFAS funding not only assists the student to provide for their day-to-day needs but also finds its way into the support of families of these students. As some student participants so boldly expressed, “we are coming from poor backgrounds. That is why we are here. We need assistance from NSFAS because we cannot support ourselves” (Student 6. TVET college A). To this, Student 2 (TVET college A) also agreed, “I am coming from a background where I could not have afforded school fees, that NSFAS is allowing me access by providing money.” The role that NSFAS plays in the lives of these students, therefore, cannot be underestimated. The past inequalities still express themselves as present realities. To some students, NSFAS has become a symbol of power in the current dispensation as “... it has enabled us to get into the TVET sector. It enables us to have transport, to have accommodation” (Student 4 TVET college A).

The importance of NSFAS in TVET college transformation is therefore seen as contributing to the transformation of TVET colleges in the following ways. Firstly, NSFAS plays a role in promoting educational equity. NSFAS helps level the playing field by providing financial assistance to needy black young South Africans most of whom come from poor families. The support bridges the gap caused by historical socio and economic inequalities (Powell, Muronda, & Tini, 2024). It is no wonder that one student took notice that most NSFAS recipients are black youth in his response, "... we don't see any whites receiving NSFAS and we don't see them striking if there is no NSFAS" (student 9 TVET college B)

Secondly, NSFAS is important as it mitigates the financial barrier to education. Most students who attend tertiary education in South Africa cannot afford the cost of tuition fees, accommodation, books and meals as charged by most higher education institutions and by vendors. NSFAS covers these costs thus reducing the financial burden on the students and their families (Powell et al., 2024).

Another role that NSFAS plays in transformation which is closely related to the previous point is encouraging academic performance. By paying for study materials such as laptops and books, NSFAS not only empowers students with tools to enable them to study but also provides motivation to study (Powell et al., 2024). Lastly, NSFAS fosters national development by increasing access to education. By providing financial support, NSFAS contributes to building a skilled workforce which is essential for South Africa's socio-economic agenda of economic growth (Powell et al., 2024).

It is also important to mention that while NSFAS funding was initially a loan to students studying at Universities and Universities of Technology, this was never the case for students studying at TVET colleges (Powell et al., 2024; De Villiers, 2023). NSFAS has been and continues to be a bursary for students studying at TVET colleges. This has, by and large, encouraged many students to enrol at TVET colleges.

While NSFAS plays a critical redistributive role, a decolonial analysis reveals a paradox: access is expanded within a system that may still reproduce epistemic and structural inequalities. In this sense, NSFAS as a mechanism can be seen as addressing the material effects of inequality without necessarily transforming the underlying colonial logics of the education system (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

Therefore, like any other social funding scheme, NSFAS funding has not gone without criticism. This criticism emanates from the students for whom the funds are provided. The first comment of interest was one from a student from TVET college B who expressed that,

For me I can see that some other students are here for the money and not getting knowledge. They apply for NSFAS and when they get it, they don't come to school anymore. But when it's time to strike, they are there destroying the school (student 10 TVET college B)

For student 11 though, the concern was that sometimes students utilise the NSFAS allowances on luxury items as noted herein, "...they'll start dressing in expensive clothes but at the end of the day they don't pass and NSFAS is canceled" (student 11, TVET college A).

A final observation from a lecturer's point of view was that students enrol at TVET colleges because of the funding. The funding acts as a "crowd puller" which then encourages students to prefer studying at TVET colleges. She argued that:

I feel that the students are taking the NCV so that they could get into TVET college and not necessarily that they are interested in the course that they have chosen. It's just that they come and get it because they'll get the bursary. And then when you ask them ... what do you like to do? What you've chosen, is that gonna help you in the end? What is your bigger picture? What is your long-term goal or end goal? What are you wanting to see? And they can't answer! (Henrietta, Lecturer, TVET college A).

While the negative sentiments towards NSFAS funding exist (Herald Live, 2024; Moneyweb, 2024), it cannot be denied that NSFAS continues to open and provide opportunities to previously disadvantaged students who would otherwise have had no funding nor access to higher education. NSFAS prioritises students from previously disadvantaged groups thus empowering them to change their socio-economic conditions and contributes to a more inclusive society.

However, it is important to recognise that in a country still burdened by high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality, access to NSFAS funding often serves as a primary motivator for student enrolment in TVET colleges. As suggested in Henrietta's account above, the prevalence of dropout and absenteeism among NCV students may, in part, be linked to enrolment decisions driven more by financial incentives than by educational or vocational aspirations. These tensions point to the complex interplay between material need and educational purpose, where survival imperatives may take precedence over academic engagement. This underscores the importance of situating student behaviour within broader socio-economic conditions rather than individual deficit explanations (Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

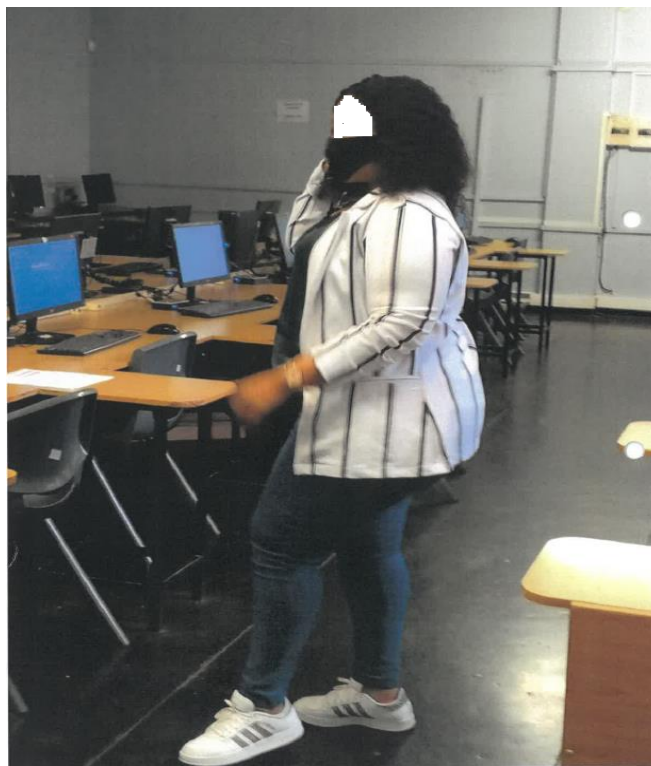
7.3 Sub-theme 2: Change in Lecturer Profile

During the photo collage session, a photo of a young Black female lecturer was the focus of the discussion. Lecturers felt that this photo was a representation of "a symbol of lecturer identity" in the light of decolonisation. The lecturer participant explained that the photo was of a young female lecturer who was standing in front of her computer class. She was dressed in blue denim jeans and takkies.

According to the discussions, there has been a shift in the profile of lecturers who are employed in TVET colleges. One of the most significant shifts is the employment of young Black people as was seen in the case of the photo presented of the young Black female lecturer. This change signals transformation in the staff profile and inclusivity of black lecturers, especially females on the TVET payroll. It was mentioned that the dress code

has also changed significantly. The dress code of the current cohort of lecturers also indicated the taste of the new generation and identifies with the cohort of youth studying at TVET colleges. According to discussions, this was a positive move from the colonial dictates of formal wear which included formal shirts and pants for men and dresses or suits for women as explained by lecturer participants. It was also believed that the youth who attended at TVET colleges were better able to identify with the new cohort of younger Black African lecturers. See the photo below:

Figure 9: Photograph showing female lecturer in denim jeans and takkies



I took a picture of an NCV lecturer. Why an NCV lecturer? This is a young lady wearing sneakers, jeans and coat. She seems comfortable and relaxed but, yet decent so the students can also relate. It's not like teachers in the 1950s where they had a tie and a jacket and sometimes you could even wonder how they taught because the clothing would make them stiff. So, for me now, this symbolises the identity of an NCV lecturer ... like the dress code that is what came to my mind. The dressing is very different to what they would dress in the colonial era if there were teachers. The tie and jacket are an idea of the colonial masters and symbol of authority. (Zenzele a lecturer at TVET college A)

The data above is corroborated by the discussions during the metaphor session where students believed that a major transformation contributing to change and identity in the TVET colleges was the number of young female Black lecturers employed. These lecturers not only taught the traditional courses like English but also were teaching Electrical Engineering and Mechanics. The drawing below illustrates.

Figure 10: Metaphor drawing showing a female lecturer as a symbol of lecturer transformation



This shift in lecturer identity can be read as a disruption of the colonality of being, where authority is no longer solely embodied in older, racially homogeneous figures but is reconstituted through younger, diverse and more relatable identities (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). However, symbolic change in representation does not automatically translate into shifts in epistemic authority or curriculum control, which may remain structurally constrained (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

In TVET College B, the discussion of transformation centred on the cordial relations that students now have with their lecturers. In the photo, a female lecturer (one of the

participants) was standing outside her classroom with her students enjoying a light conversation with them. Bongi explained it this way:

I'm not too sure whether I can use this one (pointing to the picture). But it's students who are standing with me and if you look, I am young, and I look like them. Before then the class teacher used to really look like a class teacher ... much older. After class there would be no need to go and engage with him/her. You can see in this picture I was just joking with my students, unlike before a class teacher was a person who you were scared to approach after the lessons. So, here we were joking with my students laughing about things have changed, and I think this speaks to decolonisation. (Bongi a lecturer at TVET college B)

Figure 11: Photograph showing lecturer-student relationships



This reconfiguration of lecturer-student relationships suggests a shift in pedagogical power from hierarchical to more relational forms, aligning with Freire's (1970) critique of authoritarian education. From a decolonial perspective, such shifts are significant in transforming not only what is taught but how knowledge and authority are experienced.

Lecturer participants also stressed the importance of the inclusion of female students in previously male-dominated courses and careers. This was in reference to a photo showing females engaging in some plumbing tasks during their practical lesson. (I could not share the picture in this study as requested by the participant).

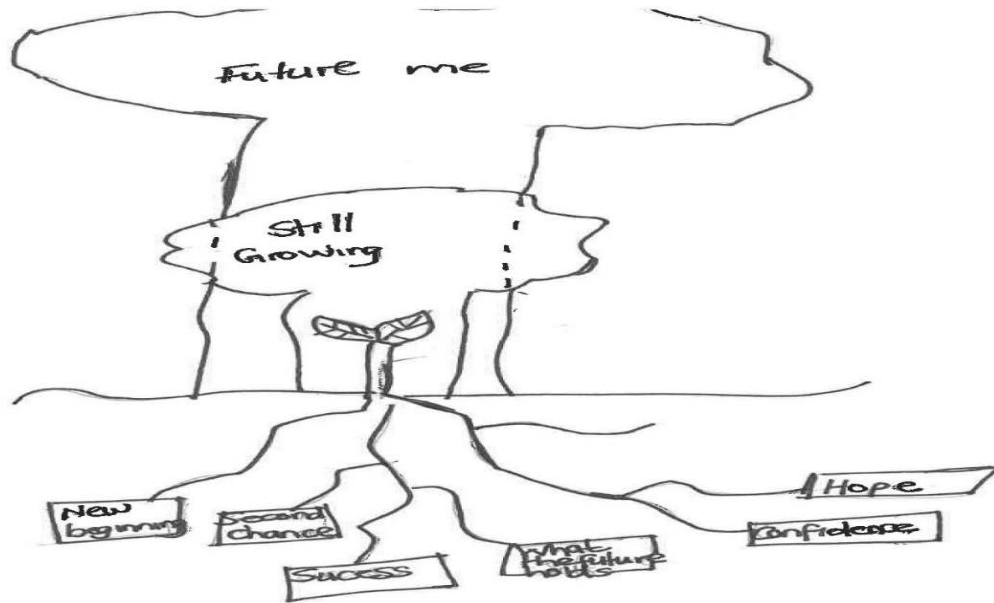
This picture shows girls doing plumbing and this means that now we have access as women to do jobs which were previously designed for men because before then plumbing used to be only a job for men. Nowadays, everyone can do what he or she wants to do. The picture shows these ladies installing a geyser. (Bongi lecturer TVET college B).

The new TVET system has thus seen the evolving identity of the TVET lecturer, the lecturer-student relationship and the kind of courses that female students can now enroll for. In some cases, the lecturer, though still highly respected, can relate and associate with students and not convey the air of supremacy as in the colonial set-up. The widening and inclusion of careers that women are now able to choose from at TVET colleges mirrors the trends in the country and world-over. Careers which were previously male dominated are now accessible to female students. This is seen as a step in the right direction. Both aspects of young lecturers employed at TVET colleges and more female students accessing previously male dominated courses are important in the discussion of a decolonised TVET college.

7.4 Sub-theme 3: The Role of TVET Colleges as Allocators of Second Life Chances

Transformation of TVET colleges has several features as outlined in sub-theme 1. In the eyes of student participants, they see the role of TVET colleges as “allocators of second life chances” as an important aspect of transformation. As such, it provides both initial and second-chance opportunities to young people and adults. The comments by participants as depicted in the drawing below shows that TVET colleges offer a new beginning, second chances, hope, confidence, success and has potential to provide a future to young adults who are still growing.

Figure 12: Metaphor drawing depicting TVET colleges as a place of second chances



The response from student 2 was as follows.

(She laughed. The whole group laughed along). It's a plant and it has roots and each root has a label ... like of the things I wanted before I came here and these are success, new beginnings, what the future holds, confidence and hope. So, I didn't have much hope before I came here but then, coming here gave me back that hope that I can still have a second chance to do something else with my life. So, the tree started small but now it's growing, and it shows that it's still growing and indicates a bright future for me on the very top of the grown tree. (Student 2, TVET college A)

This narrative of “second chances” reflects the restorative dimension of TVET, where education functions as a site of social re-entry. However, from a decolonial perspective, it also raises questions about why certain groups are systematically positioned as needing “second chances” in the first place, pointing to enduring structural inequalities rooted in colonial and apartheid legacies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a).

The view of TVET college as an allocator of second chances is supported by the Education White Paper (1998) which indicates that it was envisaged that when the TVET college system was fully developed it would provide access to high-quality education and training within a differentiated system, which would in turn offer a wider range of learning options to a diverse range of learners, including school-going young people, out-of-school youth, young adults and the broader adult population.

Further, student 5 believed that TVET education not only provides a second chance at life but also prepares students for a strong vocational career, a thing which is lacking in the schooling system. This clearly shows that students see the difference between academic education and vocational education. The idea of preparing students in vocational education for the world of work is appreciated by the students. The quote below by student 5 demonstrated this:

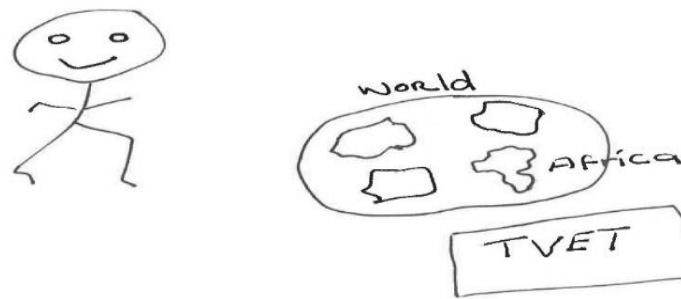
One thing that I would like to say about TVET is that it's far much better than high school because in high school, you are just learning all those subjects and you don't have a choice. You have to pass all those subjects, but you don't even know what you are learning to become, what you want to be in the future. But, here at TVET sector there are courses whereby you know that if I'm doing computer, I will be the Admin Clerk. But at high school, you pass Grade 12 and then you decide after you've passed Grade 12 that means it will be 12 years of wasted time than if you come here at TVET sector (student 5, TVET college A).

Sentiments of the TVET college being a new world for students were also shared by student 8 (TVET college A) who said, "On my paper I drew Me and the world and the TVET College next to the world. So, when I first came to the TVET college, I found that I have come to a new world now, and I have to be serious with what I have come to do here" (The group applauded).

Indeed, the goal of transformation in TVET colleges has been to improve access, equity and quality in vocational education provisioning. This "new" face of TVET provisioning could feel like a "new world" for some students. When a new environment provides

students with another opportunity at education and at bettering one's future, it will feel like a new world all altogether. The drawing below illustrates this.

Figure 13: Metaphor drawing representing TVET college as a new world



A new world could imply a new place, new hope, new qualifications, or new experiences that have potential to transform one's life. However, students also agreed that there is still much that can be done to push TVET transformation further. For example, student 7 from TVET College A whose aunt was a former student at one of the TVET colleges and now works for a prestigious motor vehicle company expressed the need for further transformation to take place in TVET colleges. This was the expression.

When I came here ... actually, I was encouraged by my aunt who is one of the Engineers at Toyota. She studied at one of the TVET colleges in eThekweni. So, after failing Matric, she told me about the TVET sector and when I came, especially to ... what I found is not what I was thinking of. I still believe that there's a lot that still must be changed (student 7 TVET college A).

From the responses provided in sub-theme 1 through 3, it is evident that the wave of transformation has indeed been seen and felt in the TVET sector. The transformation agenda is still ongoing although there has been a reduction in the funding allocated to

continue transforming TVET colleges due to the allocation of funds to the fee free education initiative (Powell, Muronda & Tini, 2024).

7.5 Sub-theme 4: Lingerinɡ Colonial Artefacts

Although transformation is ongoing in TVET colleges, participants identified several practices and structures that continue to reflect colonial and apartheid legacies. These include elements of vocational education that remain hierarchical and centralized, perpetuating power imbalances within curriculum and decision-making processes. The implications of these findings will be explored further in the next chapter, where the data are theorised. At the institutional level, colonial artefacts such as rigid curricula, centralized administrative control, and persistent top-down decision-making remain visible. Responsibility for these legacies is distributed: the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) establishes policies, standards, and resource allocations, while college leadership implements and mediates these mandates locally. College management does not always have the mandate to alter these structures independently, meaning that lecturers' experiences of these artefacts could be shaped by systemic constraints beyond the college's immediate control.

7.5.1 Wall of Honor

The first photo that was discussed was that of the Wall of Honour which showed the achievements of white students as far back as 1969. The Wall of Honour did not record any black students with the latest entries of white students being in 1982. The Wall of honour is a prominent feature in the main campus hall of this campus. Lecturer participants complained that the message the campus is unintentionally sending out by keeping the Wall of honour is that black students' achievements are not worth celebrating and thus not worth being on the wall. I have used a rather lengthy quote below to demonstrate the point.

Moving to the Symbol of TVET college historical power. I took a picture of a board - you know like that board with the Wall of fame. If you look at that board from 1969 to 1982 ...can you see like the years here? There is not even one African name ... not even one African name. And to make matters worse, the Wall of fame is still there and has not been removed. And because it hasn't been removed ... like the current students don't get the recognition as ... like other students in this era. The board is showing like ... where the student has done well, and they've been posted. Rather, we still have the names from the colonial days some of them I can't even pronounce them and its mostly Afrikaners. And this is a TVET college historical power. So, for management not to remove the Wall of fame it's like they don't see the importance ... because if you decide to keep it then update it with current recognition of current students (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).



Figure 14: Photograph depicting Wall of Honour

Avame analysed this photo of the Wall of Honour by asking several questions grounded in a firm understanding of what that object (wall) says even without saying a word.

It has kept the history for the college but then what I don't understand is what about the new things? What about the current things which are happening now? What about the students who have achieved after the other students? Why are we not displaying the new students? Are those students not important and those ones in the colonial days are important? What are we displaying to the students as a college? Are we displaying that the olden days were better than today? If you achieved that time you were a best student, but if you achieve now it's not important? And if you look at the names, all of these are white people's names, meaning that the name of the black child is not worth to be on this wall of fame. So, you can be in our registers, you can pass with high marks, but you can't be on the wall of fame - because the wall of fame was only meant for the white people? For me this means we are still stuck in the colonial days. It's either the college moves this wall of fame all starts to add other layers of wall of fame so that they can motivate the black child. (Avame, lecturer TVET college A)

The Wall of Honour functions as what decolonial scholars describe as a “symbolic archive of power,” where recognition is historically racialised and selectively preserved (Mbembe, 2016). Its continued presence without reinterpretation or contextualisation reinforces the colonality of memory, where certain histories are legitimised while others are erased.

7.5.2 *Buildings*

A photo of old buildings and signage that was still written in Afrikaans and says “(name of college) FET College” (I could not share the photo of the signage as it bore the college name and logo) was shared. “The signage in the college still says FET college when we are now called TVET college and it's been like 10 years already since the change. And this is in the language of predominantly apartheid regime” (Zenzele. Lecturer TVET college A).

The continued use of Afrikaans-only signage in the colleges reflects a broader reluctance to embrace transformation and highlights the coloniality of language. Such linguistic hierarchies, established during apartheid, remain embedded in institutional practices and serve to marginalise other linguistic and cultural identities (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). Importantly, historical accuracy must be maintained in relation to Zenzele's comment: the term "FET College" emerged post-1998, whereas during apartheid, these institutions were formally known as "Technical Colleges."

Zenzele continued to express distaste of the TVET college buildings as follows.

The status quo remains. Nothing has changed. Look at the building! It's just that... and I don't think that it would change anytime soon. Because what are we doing as Black people? We are not coming up with our own things, our own institutions, our own way of doing things ... take for instance, what are we good at? It is just that we want to take what the white people have done, or the colonizers have done and then try to make changes. But the problem is that if we don't want to develop our own systems, our own way of doing things, which will suit us so that everything will be in order. But right now, like I mean, we still do the same ... (Zenzele, lecturer – TVET college A).

The photo below of a stairway and that of a wooden double-door were shared as part of the buildings whose status quo remains. The buildings have been described as "the structure of the building is also still very colonial ... like the architecture it's like it's a European institution. There is no Africanness ... if there is a word like that ... or anything that shows our identity" (Zenzele. Lecturer – TVET college A).

Figure 15: Photograph depicting a stairway as a symbol of colonial power



Figure 16: Photograph showing heavy wooden doors as colonial architecture and a symbol of colonial power



Further, participants felt that they could not identify with the colonial architecture of the College and that this robbed them of the sense of belonging.

It doesn't bring a sense of ownership (the buildings). It is so old in the colonial that both the students and lecturers we cannot identify with it ... you can't say I belong here. But when it comes to things like the infrastructure itself, there is a problem (Aname. Lecturer – TVET college A).

The heavy wooden doors, as symbols of colonial power, embody how physical spaces can reflect and perpetuate historical hierarchies of dominance and exclusion. Colonial architecture often conveys authority, control and separation, reinforcing who is seen as belonging within institutional spaces (Domingos, 2015). In this context, the participants' inability to identify with the college's colonial design reflects how spatial aesthetics can sustain the colonality of space, where built environments continue to privilege colonial heritage over local cultural expression. This dissonance produces alienation and undermines a sense of belonging, showing that decolonisation must extend beyond curriculum reform to include the transformation of institutional spaces and material symbols that reproduce colonial power relations.

Figure 17: Photograph showing a high tower clock as a symbol of colonial power



The Tower Wall Clock is an artefact that still reminds the college of colonial rule. It can be seen as a symbol of colonality because it represents how colonial powers imposed control not only over people and resources but also over time, order and discipline. In

colonial institutions, such clocks often symbolised the regulation of daily life according to Western notions of punctuality, productivity and efficiency. Hirji (2024), explains that colonial powers used clocktowers and related chronometric technologies to regulate social life, enforce discipline, assert authority and restructure indigenous conceptions of time. The clock tower's elevated and central position signifies surveillance and authority, reinforcing hierarchical power structures. Within the college context, its continued presence serves as a reminder of how colonialism shaped educational spaces to enforce conformity and obedience.

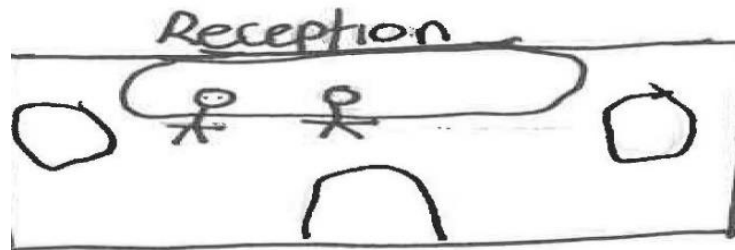
These reflections highlight how colonality is not only embedded in curriculum but also materialised in space. The persistence of colonial architecture can be understood as part of the colonality of being, where individuals experience alienation within spaces that do not reflect their identities or histories (Fanon et.al., 1963; Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

7.5.3 The reception area

The metaphor drawing session indicated how students perceived the reception area as a symbol of power capable of supporting or destroying students' lives.

“... For me it is a symbol of power as those people have serious documents that hold our lives like certificates. If they lose the certificate, my life is dead.” (The other students were in full agreement with this and expressed their approval by loud a “Yebo”) (student 1. TVET college A).

Figure 18: Metaphor drawing of the reception area as a symbol of power



I did not probe this aspect with the students during the metaphor and focus group session as it was corroborated by data generated during the photo collage session I had earlier with lecturers. The photo of the reception showed that the reception area was a medium-sized enclosed area with walls painted in a lusterless colour which takes away from the liveliness of the reception area (see photo 7). In Avame's words she described it as:

The front reception is still very colonial. There's no life there and it just kills the image of the college just from day one when you enter the campus. You can never have a positive attitude towards this area, and you can never think that this is a college. You will ask yourself whether you will be able to pass at this college and you wonder if the people at the front desk will be able to keep your results and other important documents. (Avame. Lecturer. TVET college A).

Figure 19: Photograph showing reception area as a symbol of power



Within the NCV and broader TVET context in South Africa, the symbolism of colour and shape can be read as a continuation of colonial visual and cultural codes that still shape the institutional and pedagogical environments. The persistent use of sterile institutional colours (such as grey and white), rigid layouts, and dominance in linear, Eurocentric structures reflect aesthetics rooted in colonial nations or order, discipline and control (Mitchell, 2024; Lefebvre, 2014;). These spatial and visual configurations often contrast sharply with African cultural expressions that favour organic forms and vibrant colours.

The built environments in TVET colleges, alongside the symbolic elements of design subtly reinforce hierarchical thinking and exclusion aligning with what Fanon et.al., (1963) describes as the internalisation and colonial order through visual and spatial codes. Such elements become part of what Mudimbe (1998) calls the “colonial library”: a system that organises knowledge and aesthetics in ways that marginalise indigenous worldviews. A decolonial reimagining of the NCV curriculum, therefore, must go beyond content revision and critically interrogate the visual, spatial and symbolic infrastructure that continue to naturalise colonial logics within the TVET space.

In addition, the assertion that reception personnel held a form of power over critical documents is in line with coloniality. The reception area continues to validate the story of

the coloniser. The reception area continues to intimidate and convey an air of supremacy. The comment by student 1 “... if they lose the certificates, my life is dead” clearly shows this position of power that the reception area holds. The response from other students of “Yho! That’s powerful” as though they’ve just been hit by a moment of true realisation of how serious the reception area is, underscores the symbol of power which is colonial power that both lecturers and students perceive the reception area to be.

The reception area, as described by both students and lecturers, operates as a micro-site of institutional power where bureaucratic control over student records translates into existential control over students’ futures. From a decolonial perspective, this reflects the colonality of power, where administrative systems reproduce hierarchical relations and dependency (Quijano, 2000). The perception that “my life is dead” if documents are lost illustrates how institutional processes are experienced not as neutral systems but as sites of vulnerability and domination.

7.6 Conclusion

True transformation must go beyond policy shifts and institutional mergers; it must include the reimagining of physical spaces, cultural symbols, and pedagogical practices to reflect the identities, histories and aspirations of indigenous and previously marginalised communities. From a decolonial perspective, this entails dismantling the interconnected logics of colonality of power, knowledge and being that continue to shape the TVET sector. Without such fundamental shifts, transformation risks remaining superficial, addressing access and representation while leaving underlying epistemic and structural inequalities intact (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Mignolo, 2007).

This chapter presented data under the theme of the transformation of TVET colleges, illustrating the trajectory of change since 1994. While substantial reforms have taken place and that some level of transformation is being tangibly experienced, the findings also reveal that these efforts remain incomplete. The persistence of colonial-era infrastructures, symbols and epistemologies underscores the urgent need for a more

intentional decolonial agenda. True transformation must go beyond policy shifts and institutional mergers; it must include the reimagining of physical spaces, cultural symbols, and pedagogical practices to reflect the identities, histories and aspirations of indigenous and previously marginalised communities. As such, the chapter argues that a decolonial project is not just desirable but essential in accelerating meaning transformation in TVET colleges.

The next chapter engages in the theorisation of these findings, drawing on decolonial scholarship to interpret the data and propose a path forward.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THEORISING POWER, KNOWLEDGE, BEING AND SPACE IN TVET COLLEGES

“To move forward, we have to understand where we have come from, and at what cost”
(Annette Furo, 2018)

8.1 Introduction

This study engaged in a decolonial exploration of the NCV curriculum in two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal. The study used curriculum theory and decolonial theories as lens to work with the findings that were generated thematically. The three key themes generated from the datasets were: Views of knowledge in the NCV curriculum; Experiences of lecturers and students of the NCV curriculum and Transformation of TVET colleges. The findings were presented and discussed as themes in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The inductive theorising process drew heavily on Curriculum theory which enabled me to engage with the data for interpreting and analysing, and for relating the data generated to literature. Curriculum theory thus supplied the language for the naming, labelling, categorisation and analysis of the data. The outcomes of these processes were shared in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The aim of this chapter is to extend the theorisation of the findings by subjecting the findings to a deductive theorising process using decolonial theories. Deductive theorisation allows the study to illustrate and tell a story of coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of space, which supports the argument made in this chapter for the NCV curriculum to be decolonised.

Theorising involves making convincing inferences to explanations grounded in data, such that it becomes a process of abstraction by the researcher which provides the capacity to frame understanding and interpretation of findings for others (Spender, 2024; Cornelissen & Durand, 2014). Theorising occurs when a study not only presents its data but also interprets its significance in relation to the theoretical frameworks guiding the research. It

further involves extending existing theories or generating new theoretical insights and propositions. Ashworth, McDermott and Currie (2019) indicate that “decisions on data analysis and presentation in the form of “showing” (which involves quotes, tables, photos etc) and “telling” are critical in underpinning the “conceptual leap” between research data and theoretical contribution ...” (p. 320). This chapter attempts such conceptual leaps. The findings were analysed with a decolonial lens taking care to blend rigor with richness in order to facilitate effective theorization. This is also referred to as the “top down” approach to theorising.

This chapter moves beyond description to offer a theoretically grounded analysis of the findings through the lens of the decolonial triad of power, knowledge, and being. In doing so, it seeks not only to explain the persistence of curricular and institutional challenges within the NCV programme, but also to demonstrate how these challenges are structurally embedded within enduring logics of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Mignolo, 2007). The analysis is further informed by Tabulawa’s (2013) insights on why educational reforms often fail, as well as Táíwò’s (2010) caution against romanticising indigenous knowledge or rejecting ideas solely because they are Western.

The table below presents a summary of the analysis of the findings using both curriculum theories and decolonial theories. The table indicates the theoretical framework, the concepts which I used as analytical tools, and the last column indicates concepts which emerged during the inductive analysis and were not accounted for in the theoretical framework.

Table 6: Summary of analysis process

Theoretical Framework	Deductive Analysis	Inductive Analysis		
	Concept Analytical Tool	Themes	Sub-themes	Concepts not in Theoretical

		Covered in chapters 5 through 7 of the Findings		Framework arising from data analysis
Curriculum: Total Curriculum	Philosophy of Knowledge	Views of Knowledge in the NCV curriculum	• Purpose of vocational education • Lecturers not aware of NCV ideological underpinnings • Mediating Learning • Community and Industry perceptions of the utility of the NCV qualification • Vocational education stigma	
	Kinds of discourse	Experiences of lecturers and students with the NCV curriculum	• Lecturers lack vocational specific qualifications • Lecturer Agency – a conundrum • Student participants experience of the NCV curriculum • Unintended effects of the NCV curriculum • Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL)	
	Knowledge traditions	Transformation of TVET colleges	• Overall TVET sector transformation • Change in lecturer profile	

			• Allocator of life second chances • Lingering colonial artefacts	
Decoloniality	Coloniality of Knowledge	Views of Knowledge in the NCV curriculum	• Purpose of vocational education • Lecturers not aware of NCV ideological underpinnings • Community and Industry perceptions of the utility of the NCV qualification • Mediating Learning	Epistemic Injustice
	Coloniality of Being	Experience of lecturers and students with NCV Curriculum	• Influences of the Hidden Curriculum • Feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment • Language of teaching and learning • Lecturer agency: a conundrum • Vocational education stigma	Stigmatisation
	Coloniality of Power	Transformation of TVET colleges	• Overall TVET sector transformation • Change in lecturer profile • Allocator of life second chances	Neoliberalism Coloniality of Space

			• Lingering colonial artefacts	
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This chapter is structured as follows; section one theorises the findings using the concept coloniality of knowledge; then section two theorises using coloniality of being; section three theorises using coloniality of power; and section four theorises using coloniality of space. The chapter then concludes by synthesising these theoretical strands.

8.2 Section One: Coloniality of Knowledge

This section argues that there is evidence of coloniality of knowledge in the NCV curriculum. The aim of transforming TVET colleges into 21st century world-class institutions capable of producing students who can compete both at home and abroad and further modernise the sector is steeped in neoliberal ideologies (Govender & Naidoo, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 2016; Mbembe, 2016) which, as argued in this section are a form of modern colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Mbembe, 2016). Neoliberalism prioritises market supremacy, individualism, and competition over social justice and equity. It promotes privatisation, deregulation and global economic integration, reinforcing dependency on the Global North and reproducing colonial hierarchies.

Within education, neoliberalism values efficiency and employability over transformation, positioning learning primarily as an economic tool. This logic privileges Western-centric epistemologies such as outcomes-based and standardised models. In contrast, a decolonised vision for the NCV curriculum would prioritise epistemic justice, relevance to local contexts, and the affirmation of indigenous and community-based knowledges. Rather than measuring success by global competitiveness or alignment with Western modernity, decolonised aims would seek to empower students to address local socio-economic challenges, value African ways of knowing, and advance humanising forms of education that restore cultural identity (Majola, 2025; Le Grange, 2018).

Some decolonial thinkers have argued that coloniality and modernity are bedfellows and as such modernity is predicated upon coloniality (Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2011). For this reason, decolonial thinkers are critical of how, historically, knowledge has been colonised and centralised by Europe in ways that continues to validate only one form of knowledge. This is not only by de-legitimatising the knowledges of others but also undermining the very conditions for epistemic life (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, 2016; Mpofu, 2013; Mbembe, 2016).

This coloniality of knowledge manifests in curricula that remain disconnected from local contexts and continue to privilege Eurocentric perspectives while undermining indigenous epistemologies. The student protests of 2015 – 2017 across South African campuses highlighted this discontent, as students demanded curricula that were relevant to their lived experiences and socio-political realities. Their calls for knowledge that fosters active citizenship and addresses local challenges reinforce the critique that the current educational framework remains steeped in coloniality (Luckett, Morreira, Khumalo & Ramgotra, 2020). Students through protests tabled deep-seated challenges to institutional symbols, cultures and practices, including the call to decolonise curriculum and pedagogy. Both students and academics criticised universities for the content of curricula and for “institutional cultures and pedagogic practices that perpetuated the attainment gap and exclusion” (Morreira, 2017, p. 7).

In the theoretical framework chapter, I outlined that one of the forms of coloniality of power is systems of knowledge. It is knowledge which has assisted colonialism and imperialism to imprint Eurocentric and American-centric epistemology appropriating what is considered progressive on knowledge systems while treating with disdain indigenous knowledges (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a; Mpofu, 2013). It is therefore, acknowledged that epistemology and methodology are inextricably intertwined with imperial power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a). Further, Manathunga (2018) has explained that coloniality exists in the realms of power, knowledge and being; with coloniality of knowledge referring to the way Eurocentric knowledge systems are privileged over other knowledges to the extent that knowledges outside the confines of Western modernity are often ignored, marginalised

or repressed. Manathunga (2018) has extrapolated that to this end, “our very own understanding of the social world remains largely colonised without us even being aware of it” (p. 96). Western knowledge therefore remains common sense and hegemonic with our ways of being, speaking, listening, knowing, relating and seeing still rooted in Euro-American ideals informed by Western knowledge systems (Manathunga, 2018).

The findings illustrate the presence of coloniality of knowledge expressed through the Eurocentric and American-centric ideologies of outcomes-based education, Human Capital–Technical instrumentalist and Humanistic theories evident in the NCV curriculum.

8.2.1 Purpose of vocational education

The findings revealed that the majority of the NCV lecturers in the study had held a clear but narrow view understanding of the purpose of vocational education. Their perspectives were largely shaped by a strong emphasis on co and practical skills development. For instance, Sipho described vocational education primarily in terms of its function in preparing students for employment, stating, “I would say vocational education is when we prepare the students for the world of work” (Sipho, lecturer, TVET college B). Similarly, Zanele also from TVET college B associated vocational education with hands-on learning, noting that for others “vocational education ... has to do more with practicals ...” (Zanele, lecturer, TVET college B).

These responses illustrate a dominant framing of vocational education as being primarily instrumental (narrow and utilitarian) and geared toward immediate job readiness rather than encompassing broader educational, personal or transformative goals. While “work-readiness” focuses narrowly on producing employable graduates who can quickly adapt to labour market demands, a decolonised and transformative vision of vocational education seeks to go beyond mere job preparation. It aims to cultivate critical, socially conscious and empowered individuals who can challenge structural inequalities and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Such an approach values indigenous and contextually relevant knowledges (for instance, incorporating indigenous construction

techniques of traditional earth-bricks or thatch-building methods into curriculum alongside modern engineering practices), fosters personal and collective agency and redefines success beyond employability toward human flourishing (Le Grange, 2018; Heleta, 2016; Majola, 2025). In a sense, decolonised vocational education resists neoliberal notions of human capital formation and instead promotes education as a process of liberation and social transformation (Govender & Naidoo, 2023).

In contrast to the predominantly narrow views expressed by many lecturers, only one lecturer demonstrated a more holistic understanding of the purpose of vocational education. This lecturer recognised that the development of NCV students should extend beyond technical training to include student academic, vocational and personal growth. As Zenzele articulated, “My role is to teach, and probably teaching to me means like developing our students on an academic level, vocationally and in all aspects of life ...” (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A). His perspective reflects a more expansive and human-centred understanding of teaching, one that acknowledges the multiple dimensions of student development necessary for meaningful participation in society and the world of work. Yet, while Zenzele’s response appears holistic, it remains framed within a Western-centric conception of education, grounded in humanist ideologies that have shaped much of Western educational thought since the 1980s.

The aim of vocational pedagogy is the linking of theory to practice by developing knowledge, skills and behaviours which allow students to gain access into a “community of practice” in a profession. Therefore, vocational pedagogy recognizes that learning takes place in different ways and in different contexts fitting in with the assertion that there are several different potential purposes for vocational education. These include but are not limited to the formation of an occupational identity, as well as subsequent progression within that occupation.

Vocational pedagogy, therefore, requires that students be exposed to rich and varied learning environments including real-life workplaces where mentorship can also be provided. It is the combination of the various aspects of vocational pedagogy which in

turn enhances the students' professional identity. Understanding the purpose of vocational education, therefore, significantly influences pedagogy by shaping instructional strategies, curriculum design and assessment methods. It is thus expected that lecturers can design a teaching approach that is not only engaging and practical but one that is directly relevant to the needs of the workplace. However, the preceding assertion may not be the case as lecturers indicated that:

On paper, if you look at all government policies ... it is good. But how it is implemented in practice is totally different ... because in order to progress, you have to have time in order to sit down to see what is actually working and what is not working ...this is hardly done (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

What Zenzele is highlighting here is the gap between the government's intention of the NCV programme or policy design and the actual Implementation of the programme. Government policies, when written, often seem well structured, logical and beneficial with clear strategic objectives. However, in practice the implementation may not go as intended due to factors such as limited resources. This is affirmed by Avame as she outlined the challenge faced in her Tourism programme,

Practically they've never been to the airport before, they've never been to the hotel before, they've never been to a BnB before ... as there are no resources and funding from the college. The curriculum allows because it says expose them, take them to airports, take them to BnB's. I think the problem is with the funding and resources. (Avame, lecturer TVET college A)

The assertion of Newton and Winch (2019) is that the gap between policy and implementation extends beyond the issue of limited resources. They argue that the lack of robust and sustained engagement on the purpose of vocational education has produced conceptual ambiguity, with many providers treating vocational education as secondary to general education and prioritising delivery over foundational reflection. This lack of consensus not only obscures the purpose of vocational education but also contributes to the perception of a system in constant reform and instability. From a South

African perspective, the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (HRDC) has repeatedly highlighted the structural under-resourcing of the TVET sector, positioning it as a critical constraint to system effectiveness. However, when read alongside Newton and Winch (2019), the “resource problem” can be further problematised: it is not only about material shortages, but also about how the marginal status of TVET within the broader education and skills system shapes patterns of investment, policy attention, and institutional prioritisation. In this sense, the resource constraints facing TVET are both material and symbolic, reflecting deeper uncertainties about its purpose and value within the post-school education and training landscape.

From a decolonial perspective, partnering with community-based guesthouses, local homestays, lodges or eco-tourism initiatives that operate within rural or township settings are alternative avenues through which colleges can form partnerships. These environments would still allow students to learn hospitality management, customer service and business operations but in ways that reflect local economies, cultural practices and community values.

Vocational education, therefore, while incorporating practical skills development is in essence an educational pathway which seeks to integrate theory and practice. The Newton and Winch (2019) adds that practical skills must develop practical intelligence underpinned by theoretical knowledge and transferable skills. Vocational pedagogy employed by NCV lecturers should, therefore, acknowledge that vocational education has a much wider purpose than just practical skills. This view is supported by the Human Resource Development Council Report (2021) on the Purpose of TVET colleges in South Africa which has broaden the definition of vocational education by combining assumptions of the human development theory, human capabilities theory and productivity approach to assert the purpose of TVET provisioning. The report argues that,

TVET college policy should be aligned with several goals, including national, social and economic goals such as economic growth and development, poverty reduction, employment creation, unequal income distribution, sustainable livelihoods, youth

development, innovation and industrial advancement by providing high quality education and training programmes in the democratic developmental state (HRDC, 2021).

The implication for a decolonial project is that many government policies in post-colonial states continue to be modelled on Western frameworks, as illustrated by the OBE-based curriculum discussed in the literature review chapter, and may therefore ignore local contextual realities. This disconnect can lead to well-intentioned policies failing in practice because they do not sufficiently consider indigenous knowledge, lived experiences, or contextual challenges. Tabulawa (2013) further explains that such failures are often reinforced by rigid, top-down bureaucratic structures that leave little room for reflection or adaptation, highlighting how reforms may falter when they treat teaching as a technical rather than a socio-cultural practice.

Bureaucracy as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) and Mbembe (2016) agree, is a hallmark of colonial governance where decision-making is centralised and may sometimes be disconnected from the implementers of curriculum. Therefore, policies may fail if they do not incorporate indigenous ways of governance, problem-solving and participation. A decolonial project requires that policies are co-created with the communities that the policies are for or at the very least with the lecturers undertaking implementation (Russell, 1999; Chilisa, 2012). This approach allows for meaningful dialogue and adaptation of the curriculum based on the needs of the local community. Policy production is a potent site for coloniality of power and knowledge. When policies are not adjusted to reflect real-life challenges, it aligns with the decolonial critique of “who has the power to define what is a good policy?”. If the answer is “only policymakers”, then there is a greater leverage for globalised Westernised perspectives which may minimise local realities in the process (Ahmed, 2025).

Further for a decolonial project, Sathorar and Geduld (2019) have strongly argued that who is teaching the curriculum is just as important as the one drafting the curriculum. They argue that “decolonising the curriculum includes a fundamental reconsideration of who is teaching, what the subject matter is, and how it is being taught” (p. 4). To this I

would also add, who is being taught and the context of the teaching. Sathorar and Geduld (op.cit) continue to argue that decolonisation therefore calls for a consideration of how the disposition and identity of lecturers shape their perspectives.

The disposition and identity of lecturers call into question issues relating to how the design of the lecturer's modules entails narrating stories and knowledges which then requires that lecturers reflect critically on how these stories are told and knowledges shared; which actors are privileged and placed at the centre of teaching and learning; and whose voices are authoritative and considered part of the core teaching while others are left at the margins (Battiste, 2013). This requires that NCV lecturers interrogate their own dispositions and identities in the quest for appreciating the wider purposes of vocational education.

For this reason, Sathorar and Geduld (op.cit) propose that lecturers should engage in an "ongoing process of becoming, unlearning, and relearning of who they are, and of taking responsibility for curriculum design and what students learn" (p. 4). This proposal resonates with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2015) step four of the decolonising process outlined in the theoretical chapter, which requires African academics to "... consistently open themselves up to the painstaking but decolonial process of "learning to unlearn" in order to re-learn" (p. 77).

8.2.2 Lecturers not being aware of the values of the NCV curriculum

The ideology and values that a country embraces at a given time which is considered to meet the emerging demands of the society determines the ideology and values adopted by the education system and in turn curricula (Baatjes, Baduza & Sibiya, 2014; Vimbelo & Bayaga 2023). For example, South Africa's apartheid government embraced Afrikaner christian national philosophy and values which underpinned racial segregation and separate but unequal development of different race groups. This translated into unequal education for different race groups and curricula which prepared black learners to be no more than labourers in the white-owned economy. Ideology thus dictates what subjects,

activities and experiences should be included in a curriculum. Through the curriculum, desired behavioural changes are sought to be achieved which in turn influence the achievement of economic and social goals as determined by that philosophy.

The developmental agenda adopted by the post-apartheid South African government is well articulated in the chapter on literature review of this study. With this said, it then means that the ideology expressed through values espoused for vocational education in South Africa is also conveyed in the NCV curriculum, in this case referred to as the ideological underpinnings of the NCV curriculum. Ideological underpinnings shape the values espoused by both the curriculum and the lecturers. For instance, a decolonial ideology may underpin values of cultural inclusivity and indigenous knowledge recognition. Lecturer participants in this study indicated that they were not aware of the values espoused in the NCV curriculum. For instance, one response recorded was, “No. Not really. I don’t know them” (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

From a decolonial point of view, the values shaped by the ideological orientation conveyed through the knowledge gained on the NCV should reflect the development of a humanised, emancipated and empowered student. Lecturers and students alike should be able to clearly embody and practice these values. Some lecturers even expressed confusion at how things were happening in their colleges as shown in this response, “You know as it is, I am still confused as to how things are happening. Really ... what are the values of the NCV curriculum?” (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

The ideological underpinnings of the NCV curriculum help guide the goals and objectives of vocational education including the purpose of the NCV curriculum. Goodlad (1984) further explains that ideological underpinnings help curriculum developers to answer questions such as, what subjects are of value; how do students learn; what teaching styles to adopt; what sources of data to use; what workbooks, handbooks, or other cognitive and non-cognitive tasks to use and how to use them; how to assess students and how to use the assessment results in providing feedback to students; what courses and subject matter to emphasise; and also provides lecturers with a baseline for making

choices about the whole teaching and learning interaction. In other words, ideological underpinnings influence pedagogy. Therefore, if Avame and other lecturer participants feel confused and unsure about what the values of the NCV curriculum are, it raises concerns regarding the mediation and implementation of the curriculum.

Understanding values espoused in a curriculum gives meaning to the decisions and actions of lecturer which are reflected in their pedagogy. Coupled with the understanding of values, are the life experiences, common sense, social and economic background, education, and general beliefs about people that lecturers hold that are also brought into and reflected through their pedagogy (Luckett, et.al, 2020). A good understanding of values by lecturers could help influence the NCV curriculum by making it more flexible, accommodating and context specific to the students thus affirming the decolonial ideology of indigenous context.

While lecturers understanding of values is important, equally important, as mentioned in the previous sub-theme, is the lecturers' dispositions and identities which in turn determine their approach to students. Dispositions and identities are influenced by the knowledge and experiences that lecturers have acquired or not acquired during previous experiences and actions in the different social fields of their education and training, colonial context or from professional interactions with diverse students (Sathorar & Geduld, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Sathorar and Geduld (2019) have indicated that these dispositions are incorporated into lecturers' daily practices and guide their pedagogical choices for the education of students in their classrooms (p. 5). It therefore follows that "changing the curriculum without changing the curriculum maker is especially difficult under conditions of radical social transformation" (Jansen, 2009, p. 179). Jansen (op.cit) also indicates that "changing the curriculum too far ahead of the teachers (also TVET college lecturers) who must implement it, is unlikely to rearrange the epistemological order of things in the classroom" (p. 179). It is thus, important to ensure that those who implement a new curriculum have the necessary understandings and disposition to bring about the envisaged transformative goals of the curriculum.

Speaking within the context of decolonisation, Vorster and Quinn (2017) caution that lecturers select and value knowledge associated with their past experiences, which they then reproduce in their teaching and learning practices. These approaches are often shaped by lecturers' own training and professional socialisation, much of which prioritises the Western canon at the expense of alternative pedagogical traditions (Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Heleta, 2016). However, as Táíwò (2010) cautions, addressing this imbalance should not entail a wholesale rejection of Western knowledge or an uncritical valorisation of the indigenous; rather, it requires critical engagement that foregrounds African agency in the selection, interpretation, and production of knowledge. If the decolonisation of the NCV curriculum is to succeed, lecturers must be at the coalface of this process. Heleta (2020) argues that the current higher education system requires a fundamental overhaul of its epistemological foundations to meaningfully advance the decolonial project.

The discussion above upholds the renewed calls to decolonise universities that saw protesting “students demanding emancipatory curricula that were responsive to their local contexts, identities and ambitions” (Luckett et.al, 2020, p. 6). This call was not a demand to decolonise university curricula only but pedagogy as well. Luckett, Morreira and Baijnath (2019) contend that the decolonisation of higher learning asks of lecturers (and in this case TVET college lecturers) to think through ways of applying decolonisation to their teaching practices. For NCV lecturers to apply the concept of decolonisation to teaching, lecturers must be aware and understand the current values that inform the NCV curriculum.

8.2.3 Community and Industry perceptions of the utility and value of the NCV qualification

The reform debate in South Africa has centred on the discourse that TVET colleges are at the centre of solving many economic and social problems and especially the unemployment crisis (Wedekind, 2014). Therefore, the underpinning ideologies for TVET provisioning underlie the messages that both governments, TVET colleges and media communicate (or not) to those wanting to study at TVET colleges. The citizens see and hear these messages and form a perception about how TVET could be or not be, of

benefit to them. However, as established in the literature review, scholars have argued that there is no direct correlation between the assumption that improving education and training (especially in TVET colleges) automatically generates new jobs or guarantees employability (Ashton & Green, 1996; Crouch, Finegold & Sako, 1999). This suggests that community perceptions of the value of TVET are shaped not only by the promise of employability but also by broader social, economic and cultural factors. Consequently, the reform debate has important implications for theorising the findings, particularly in understanding o how communities and industry perceive the utility of the NCV qualification and how these perceptions intersect with the goals of the decolonial agenda.

Gaffer (2022) in his study on how parental involvement influences the choice of study at TVET college for their children, found several socio-economic factors that play a significant role. These include parent educational level, level of income, cost of vocational education and parental occupational influences. When these reasons are juxtaposed against the colonial and apartheid legacies of Black people and the profile of students who attend at TVET colleges, the colonial matrix of power becomes evident as demonstrated in enduring systemic and intergenerational poverty (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013c, 2015).

The findings by Gaffer (2022) on parental involvement, which stated that socio-economic factors were largely responsible for parents allowing their children to enrol at TVET colleges are supported by those of this study which showed that most students who are studying at TVET colleges are from indigent homes. The response by Avame refers, “It is black students most of the time from poor backgrounds who come to TVET. Many of them are supported by NSFAS, and many are supported by their grannies’ pensions (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

The promise to secure employment opportunities after the completion of the NCV qualification, therefore, remains the greatest motivator for TVET college students to desire to study at a TVET college (Makola, Dube & Tabane, 2023). It is then disheartening to find that one major dissatisfaction in the NCV programme, found among staff and

students was the frustrations around work placement and industry collaboration (Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022). Students expect to be placed on job training and be workplace ready by the time they complete the NCV programme and this, the programme is failing to deliver.

I argue that the lack of delivery of government promises as espoused when advocating for the NCV programme have influenced how both community and industry perceive the utility of the NCV qualification as expressed here, “Government is saying it cannot hire everybody. Let people work for themselves. Let them be hands on. Government is even failing to support them” (Avame, lecturer TVET college B).

The socio-economic factors influencing parental involvement and student enrolment in TVET colleges cannot be separated from the enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid, which have entrenched structural inequalities. The historical marginalisation of Black communities has resulted in a lack of access to quality education and economic opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and hence valorising the colonial matrix of power. Thus, notwithstanding that the NCV curriculum stands as an example of a qualification that is far broader than all qualifications prior to it as it embraces the broader purposes and kinds of TVET that exist, it has not received the welcome handshake from both industry and community that it was expected to receive.

The literature indicates that employers were unfamiliar with the programme causing doubts on the product that the system would produce and as a result, graduates have been left unemployed (Mabunda & Frick, 2022; Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022). As Wedekind (2018) noted, the challenges faced by the NCV programme were both internal and external. Internal, as colleges did not have the capacity to deliver the programme as the curriculum designers had intended; and external because the students who enrolled for the programmes were mainly high school drop-outs/push-outs or high school graduates with no access to other study or work opportunities. The response below demonstrates this:

Most of the NCV students are drop-outs. They have been pushed into doing NCV because people out there believe that it is practically oriented and that there is no theory. But there is theory, and so ... like the students have been given ... what's the word ... a false hope ... if I can put it that way that they will learn practical stuff (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

This false hope could also be linked to the philosophy of instrumentalist vocational education. In the literature review chapter, I indicated how Baatjes, Baduza and Sibiya (2014) have criticised the notion of instrumentalist vocational education for its promise to address poverty, inequalities and unemployment when deeply rooted complexities of economic systems are underpinned by the ideology of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has created political economic frameworks, which privilege strong private property rights, free markets and trade and this has impacted and reshaped higher education in South Africa (Baatjes, Baduza & Sibiya, 2014).

Neoliberalism has been extensively criticised by scholars of higher education for the ways in which it is submerged in economic imperatives, Western rationality, silencing complex inequalities and power relations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Gyamera & Burke, 2017, Akala, 2021). TVET curriculum, like university curriculum has been “bedevilled by neoliberal influences, which does not encourage differentiation of the curriculum, de-emphasises indigenous education and undermines local languages” (Gyamera & Burke, 2017, p. 3).

The over-emphasis of the market created by the hegemony of neoliberalism has led institutions of higher learning to include in their curriculum issues of internationalisation, innovation and standards to compete in the “global market” and form partnerships with business and industry (SAQA, 2019, World TVET Database South Africa, 2014). The tenets of neoliberalism are also dominant in the discourse of TVET provisioning in South Africa (White Paper on PSET, 2013; SAQA, 2019) and are reflected in curricular reforms that aim to attract students and position TVET college students to compete internationally (White Paper on PSET, 2013; SAQA, 2019). The language of international competitiveness and the promise of employability tied to the NCV qualification reflects a

neoliberal approach to education that prioritises skills for market demands (Gyamera & Burke, 2017; Akala, 2021).

From a decolonial perspective, it is important to approach the concept of employability with analytical precision rather than treating it as inherently colonial. While employability is often positioned as a key outcome of vocational education, particular forms of employability discourse, especially those rooted in Anglo-Saxon, neoliberal traditions and underpinned by human capital theory tend to prioritise individual responsibility, labour market responsiveness, and global competitiveness. These approaches can reproduce colonial logics by privileging market-oriented skills and narrow economic outcomes over locally grounded knowledge systems, social forms of learning, and contextually relevant capabilities. However, this does not suggest that employability itself is problematic; rather, it is the dominance of specific, externally derived constructions of employability that may marginalise alternative ways of knowing and being. A decolonial approach therefore calls for a reimagining of employability that is contextually responsive, socially embedded, and attentive to the lived realities and aspirations of students within the South African TVET sector.

The failure by the system to deliver on employment promises exacerbates the disillusionment of both marginalised communities, NCV students and lecturers leading to perceptions that the NCV qualification does not have utility. This sentiment is echoed thus, “I think we should introduce the relevant courses so that we don’t find ourselves wasting the entire three years here in the college and find yourself not being employed” (Student 6, TVET college A).

Further, while the curriculum plays an important role in shaping students’ knowledge and skills, its influence on labour market outcomes must be understood within broader structural constraints. Employment outcomes are shaped by domestic macroeconomic conditions, including economic growth, industrial capacity, and job availability, which extend beyond the scope of the curriculum (McGrath, 2012; Allais, 2014; Bhorat et al., 2013). Although participants linked curriculum relevance to employability, attributing

labour market challenges solely to the NCV curriculum risks oversimplifying a complex issue.

Rather, the curriculum should be understood as one element within a wider political economy shaped by historical and contemporary inequalities. While it may contribute to skills mismatches, it operates within systemic conditions of limited job creation and persistent inequality. A decolonial analysis therefore requires attention to both epistemic transformation and structural change, recognising that curriculum reform alone cannot resolve systemic unemployment (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; McGrath, 2012).

The above response reflects a broader colonial legacy where systematic inequality continues to undermine the capacity of marginalised groups to achieve social mobility and participate meaningfully in the economy. The challenges faced by the NCV programme reinforce educational stratification ideals where TVET colleges are still perceived as “second tier” institutions in a hierarchical education system rooted in colonial models, which continues to valorise general education over technical and vocational training, sometimes by the NCV students themselves. The response below shows how the student thought he/she was enrolling in a programme much easier than what he/she was doing in the general education stream.

One of the students was telling me that he came to TVET because he wanted to do plumbing and that he thought it was easier than Physics. He didn't know that he would be doing Mathematics and Engineering Science ... it's actually tougher than in school because it is applied information ... (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A)

In addition, the lack of workplace readiness and limited industry collaborations further marginalises TVET graduates, reinforcing stereotypes of TVET qualifications as inferior (Mabunda & Frick, 2020). This devaluation echoes colonial practices on undermining indigenous knowledge systems and labour-oriented education, relegating vocational pathways to a lesser status (Mabunda & Frick, 2020; Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022). And if the status quo of the NCV curriculum and TVET college does not change, the response

will continue to echo for years to come that, “It’s just that they (referring to community and industry) don’t think that maybe they are the good quality calibre (referring to the NCV students)” (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

8.2.4 Lecturers’ mediation of learning

Lesson planning provides the lecturer with an opportunity to mediate the curriculum meaningfully by grasping the complexities of the curriculum and thus preparing for impactful lecturing (Bhat, 2021). In other words, lesson planning is how lecturers synthesize the curriculum goals with pedagogy and knowledge of their specific teaching context and students. The importance of lesson planning thus, is that it bridges the curriculum’s intent with the daily teaching and learning in a classroom.

Lesson plans that incorporate African knowledge systems have potential to offer alternatives to assess the untapped skills that could be useful to individuals (Mthembu, 2019; Bhat, 2021). Embracing of indigenous knowledge in curriculum expressed through lesson plans have significant benefits for both lecturer and student. The response below shows this.

I actually bring life experiences within the class to try and make it a bit more interesting so that I can reach them to try to see how they are dealing with their lives and they can at least share and you get to understand where they are coming from better (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A)

In terms of decolonisation, Bhat (2021) proposes that students’ own cultural knowledge and worldviews can be promoted by supportive lesson plans which “deliberately de-centres whiteness as the “default” for how our students navigate curriculum” (p. 32). What Bhat is referring to here is a conscious effort made by lecturers to attend to Eurocentric and American-centric discourse and pedagogy in their lesson plans. Banks and Banks (1995 cited in Bhat 2021) underpins the responsibility of lecturers in lesson planning by categorically stating that for students to flourish in classrooms, there is need to “practice

equity pedagogy, where instructors adapt their teaching styles and lesson plans in order to include students' exploration and growth toward using multiple perspectives to examine the world" (p. 32).

The multiple perspectives refer not only to Eurocentric or American-centric worldviews but more importantly, African-centric worldviews. Hence, when applying a decolonial perspective to curriculum, lecturers are expected to also expose the NCV student to the knowledge canon originating from the South. One vital reconsideration in proposing the decolonial project in TVET colleges should be "who is teaching, what the subject matter is and how it's being taught" (Fomunyam, 2023, p. 1266). The important role that lecturers play in disrupting Eurocentric and/or American-centric hegemony in the NCV curriculum cannot be overemphasised.

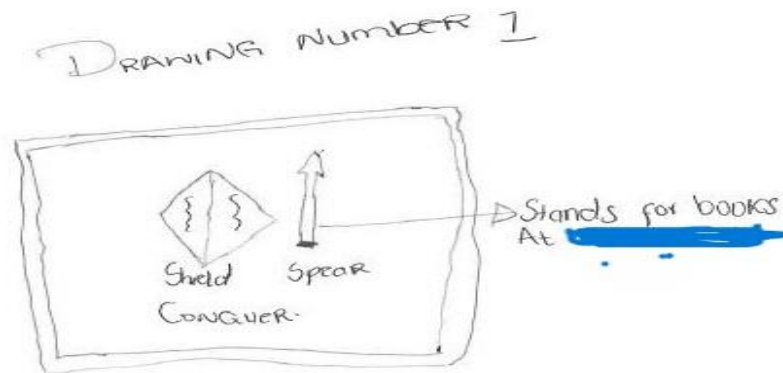
A well-thought-out contextualised lesson plan as Furo (2018) postulates, aids student success and good behaviour as students are more likely to be actively engaged with the lesson. It is such a lesson that could facilitate the meeting of unique student educational needs. Given the profile of the NCV student, the legacy of colonisation and apartheid, and the history of TVET colleges, it is imperative that lesson planning reflects the appropriate context for the NCV student.

Kirkness (1999) advocates for curriculum that works for the indigenous people and not that which alienates the indigenous students. Such curricula according to Kirkness is one that incorporates indigenous perspectives and contexts in a classroom which further embodies traditional values such as respect, humility, courage and kindness. The point here is supported by Furo (2018) who postulates that when indigenous people learn, learning is never decontextualized; it happens in context and in connection to overarching values. This is what lesson planning by TVET college lecturers should seek to achieve.

I refer to the metaphor drawing by one student representing, what for her is a symbol of identity and belonging as an NCV student. The drawing, of a shield and spear can be considered cultural and hence contextual. In her worldview this is what comes close to

representing her sense of identity and belonging and the relationship she has with her lecturers and the college. Her exact response was, “I have drawn a picture of the spear and the shield. The shield represents the lecturers and this campus. The spear is me who is taking the information in this college so that I can conquer” (Student 10, TVET college B).

Figure 20: Metaphor drawing representing contextualisation of teaching and learning



Such metaphor as presented in the drawing above is relatable to the student and demonstrates the importance of contextualising teaching and learning. Thus, as Furo (2018) opined, incorporating indigenous philosophies of education not only relates to pedagogies but lecturers must also understand the historical and contemporary realities of indigenous peoples, as well as the dominant epistemologies that shape the way education is organised, administered and practiced, that is, the ideological underpinnings of the NCV curriculum.

Consequently, understanding Indigenous perspectives in education and the colonial reality of the present is much more than just passing on knowledge. It is using one's traditions and teachings of one's culture to approach the challenging social realities to (re)affirm and (re)generate cultural identities, practices and ways of knowing (Battiste,1995). This is to say that education becomes progressive for indigenous peoples when it is connected to the past, to the community, and to what it means to be an indigenous person (Battiste,1995). Lesson plans must therefore address the realities of

the present by staying connected to the teachings of the past and must continue to be centred in community contexts rather than controlled by a centralised and sometimes non-Indigenous body of curriculum developers.

However, such an orientation necessitates a critical stance. A decolonial approach requires engagement with Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that goes beyond uncritical valorisation, recognising that not all forms of IKS are inherently emancipatory and may, in some instances, reproduce patriarchal, hierarchical, or exclusionary practices. The integration of IKS into the curriculum must therefore be guided by principles of social justice, inclusivity, and critical reflection, ensuring that these knowledge systems are mobilised in ways that challenge, rather than reinforce, existing forms of domination (Chilisa, 2012; Taiwo, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

Within the NCV context, the findings further point to the need for a clearer articulation of what constitutes decolonial pedagogy. Such a pedagogy extends beyond the inclusion of local examples or experiential activities, requiring instead a fundamental shift in epistemic authority in which knowledge is co-constructed, critically interrogated, and situated within learners' historical and cultural contexts (Freire, 1970; Dei, 2011). This entails questioning dominant knowledge hierarchies, validating multiple ways of knowing, and fostering pedagogical spaces that cultivate critical consciousness rather than passive absorption of content.

To this, Grande (2009) advocates for critical approaches to education that are relevant to Indigenous “students and educators and their need for pedagogies of disruption, intervention, affirmative action, hope, and possibility” (p. 26). Borrowing from Grande (op.cit), it could be asserted that developing critical approaches among NCV students has the potential of allowing them to form new engagements that acknowledge that the TVET space “as a site of struggle offers great potential for indigenous peoples to work toward pedagogies for self-determination” (p. 26).

Effective lesson planning for this study is therefore, one that takes decolonisation into account, and which contributes to the lecturer's own success and well-being as well as taking the students lived experiences and context into account. When NCV lecturers are mediating and preparing lesson plans, there should be a purposeful intent and method to illustrate different types of knowledge from diverse communities. Incorporating indigenous pedagogical practices, such as storytelling, oral traditions, experiential learning and community-based knowledge, can enrich the learning experience and connect content to students lived realities. In this process lecturers will become aware of whose voices they privilege while acknowledging the power that certain voices have over others.

Using indigenous frameworks for knowledge validation and collective problem-solving can foster deeper engagement and respect for multiple epistemologies. This will promote a classroom environment where critical conversations about different types of knowledge can occur, and traditionally underrepresented students could be encouraged to think from their own heritage. By centering these diverse ways of knowing in lesson plans, both lecturers and students begin to understand that whiteness is not a default for curriculum (Bhat, 2021).

Manathung's (2020) assertion that "decolonising higher education involves carefully interrogating our own (*lecturers'*) entangled histories, geographies, and cultural knowledge" (p. 6) remains highly relevant. This process is essential for uncovering new meanings, pathways and approaches that contribute towards the development of students who are already critically aware of their education and its intended purpose as witnessed in the 2015 - 2017 protests. Thus, a decolonial TVET project calls for lecturers to engage in such an interrogation for mediation that supports a decolonial project.

Chiumbu (2017) argues that decolonising education requires deconstructing the colonality of knowledge wherein "Western or Eurocentric knowledge is so privileged and dominant over other epistemes to the extent that it becomes common sense, normal, ideal, universal and hegemonic" (p. 9). This colonality legitimises Western or Eurocentric

knowledge as neutral and universal, while marginalising alternative epistemologies as inferior, localised or irrelevant (Chiumbu, op.cit). In this context, decolonising becomes imperative for recentering marginalised perspectives and amplifying alternative ways of knowing that have long been side-lined in favour of Eurocentric frameworks (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Chiumbu, 2017).

The choice of prescribed or recommended textbooks or reading material have also been implicated in this study as a site to decolonise. Textbooks and study materials are still dominated by non-indigenous authors. In Avame's words, "The system is stuck. It still favours the past ... textbook authors ... still favours the white!" (Avame, lecturer, TVET college A). To this, Muldoon (2019) argues that decolonising knowledge must consider the reading lists which are privileged in the curriculum as most lists are representative of white authors. Muldoon (op.cit) espouses that such lists "introduce a systematic distortion of the material and ignores excellent scholarship" (p. 4) produced by indigenous authors. The textbooks disseminated for NCV studies must undergo thorough scrutiny to assess them for white hegemony. As Muldoon (op.cit) asserts, "when we offer white-dominated reading lists we also teach students the wrong lessons about who is an intellectual authority and deserves our attention" (p. 4).

The NCV curriculum must also challenge long-standing series of assumptions that may perpetuate biases and omissions that limit how students understand politics and society as well as broadening the intellectual vision that includes a wider range of epistemological perspectives. The point made is underscored by Ramgotra (2015) who argues that:

Decolonising knowledge in educational systems and curricula is linked to shifting systems of power, of social and political rule. Hence, the silencing and marginalizing of certain voices from curricula and canons of thought or conversely the selection of particular voices as authoritative is a political act that underpins our understanding and perceptions of whom we see as authoritative and to whom we are willing to give authority (p. 6).

In this section, I have examined a number of interrelated themes that critically shape the discourse, policy direction and lived experience of vocational education within two TVET

colleges in South Africa. Central to this examination is an analysis of the intended purpose of vocational education, which is often articulated to equip students with practical skills for the labour market yet is frequently misaligned with the structural realities of both the education system and the economy. This misalignment is further compounded by a general lack of awareness among lecturers regarding the foundational values of the National Vocational Certificate curriculum. As a result, implementation tends to be technical and compliance-oriented, rather than transformative or contextually responsive.

Moreover, both communities and industry perceptions of the NCV qualification reveal a deep-seated ambivalence about its value and relevance. While policy discourse positions the NCV as a strategic intervention to address youth unemployment and to provide meaningful pathways into work or further education, stakeholders on the ground often express scepticism. These perceptions are influenced by broader societal hierarchies that privilege academic education over vocational education, as well as the persistent failure of the system to deliver on the promise of employability for the NCV graduates

Lecturers' mediation of learning within this context is often shaped by epistemological frameworks and pedagogical approaches that are inherited rather than consciously chosen. These frameworks tend to reproduce hierarchies of knowledge that position vocational education as inferior, technical and apolitical. Consequently, lecturers are frequently caught in a system that limits their professional agency and reduces them to implementers of externally imposed curricula, rather than transformative educators capable of reimagining learning in ways that affirm student identities and lived realities.

Compounding the colonial legacy is the pervasive influence of neoliberalism, which increasingly shapes the policy and practice of TVET in South Africa. The NCV qualification, in particular, is situated within a globalised policy discourse that prioritises economic efficiency, employability and international competitiveness. Curricular reforms and institutional goals are often framed in terms of global benchmarking and alignment with market demands. While such reforms are intended to modernise the sector and make

it more responsive to global economic trends, they often do so at expense of equity, contextual relevance and social justice.

This emphasis on employability, framed through a neoliberal lens, tends to obscure the structural inequalities and socio-economic constraints that many TVET students face. For students from marginalised communities, the promise of vocational education as a vehicle for upward mobility is frequently unmet. The labour market remains highly stratified and exclusionary, and the quality of education received at TVET colleges often fails to provide the kind of critical, flexible and holistic skill set required to navigate complex employment landscapes. As a result, both students and lecturers experience a growing sense of disillusionment with the NCV qualification, perceiving it increasingly as a symbolic credential with limited transformative potential.

The disjunction between the intended goals of vocational education and its real-world outcomes underscore the urgency of rethinking the epistemological, pedagogical and ideological foundations upon which TVET in South Africa is built. It calls for a shift from instrumentalist and market-driven models toward a more contextually grounded, socially responsive and epistemologically pluralist approach to vocational education, one that recognises and affirms the diverse identities, knowledges and aspirations of the communities it seeks to serve.

The next section discusses sub-themes via the theoretical lens of coloniality of being.

8.3 Section Two: Coloniality of Being

Beyond curriculum content, the findings point to the coloniality of being, where both students and lecturers experience forms of marginalisation that shape their identities and sense of belonging (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Students' struggles with language, feelings of inadequacy, and perceptions of exclusion reflect deeper ontological dimensions of coloniality, where individuals are positioned as deficient in relation to

dominant norms. Similarly, lecturers' lack of confidence and limited agency point to constrained professional identities shaped by structural conditions.

The concept of coloniality of being makes primary reference to the lived experiences of the colonised and the impact this has on their being. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) affirmed that at the centre of the construction of power structures is the demarcation of the world into imaginary lines of “zone of being” and “zone of non-being”. This is where the colonisers consider themselves as the real existence referred to as “zone of being” and the colonised as the non-existent, the zone of non-being”. The “zone of being” in the current world as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) has argued refers to the Euro-American world with its influence on discourse and identity. The NCV curriculum was found to perpetuate coloniality of being as argued below.

The NCV curriculum was introduced in TVET colleges to address the shortcomings and gaps in the curriculum that existed in the previous NATED 101 curriculum (DHET Minister Address, 2023). Specifically, the new curriculum was poised to solve problems of poor-quality programmes, lack of relevance of those programmes to the economy, as well as the low technical and cognitive skills of TVET graduates. Efforts to enhance the relevance of the TVET college curricula and hence push transformation to higher levels and to reposition the TVET college sector as a key provider of intermediate skills have been noted through many programmes introduced by the Department of Higher Education such as “the Decade of the Artisan” (DHET, 2014); and “TVET Centres of Specialisation (DHET, 2018).

However, while these are notable innovations aimed at enhancing the employability of NCV students and to improve the image of the NCV programmes, findings show that there is still more that requires to be done on the NCV to promote human dignity, humanisation and social justice. In the following sections I expand this assertion of coloniality of being and the NCV curriculum.

8.3.1 *Influences of the hidden curriculum*

The findings showed that most negative experiences that student participants recorded were emanating from the hidden curriculum. Authors and academic scholars refer to the hidden curriculum as the unspoken lessons, messages, norms, values, and perspectives that students learn through their school experiences (Kelly, 2009; Le Grange, 2018; Campbell & El Galad, 2023). The hidden curriculum, therefore, as expressed in the experiences of NCV lecturers and student participants pointed to the latent aspects of the curriculum. The lessons conveyed via the hidden curriculum are often implied and not explicitly taught and perhaps lecturers are unaware that the hidden curriculum can influence students' experiences and outcomes on the NCV programme just as much as the formal taught curriculum.

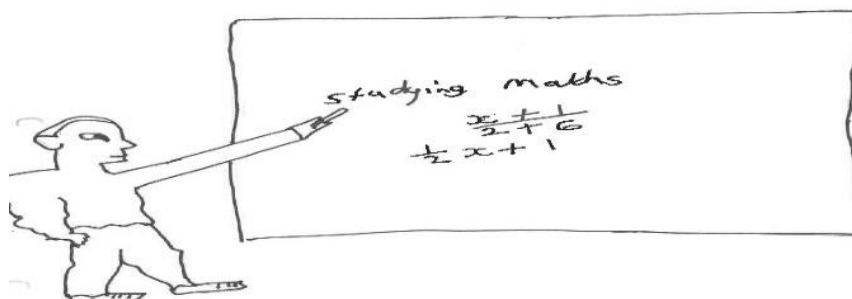
In the theoretical framework, I problematised the aspect of hidden curriculum indicating that the consideration of the hidden curriculum is especially important when curriculum is designed and imposed by government. In arguing that NCV students have experienced a hidden curriculum which could have undermined their human dignity, I refer to the drawing below by a student participant and the students' explanation of the drawing.

The drawing depicts the way some lecturers teach Math to the NCV students: using the banking method of education (Freire, 1970). This traditional, authoritarian approach positions student as passive recipients of knowledge, much like empty vessels into which teachers simply "deposit" information. Such a method not only limits critical engagement but also perpetuates the coloniality of the mind, sustaining a colonial agenda that continues to shape education. Colonial pedagogies were intentionally designed to disempower and dehumanise the colonised, and the banking method remains one of its enduring legacies.

This perception is vividly captured in the drawing below and is further echoed by a student's reflection: "For me, I think it's the way that we are taught where there is a teacher

holding a chalk and there is a chalkboard. I think for me this is like colonisation, but I just can't explain it properly" (Student 9. TVET college B).

Figure 21: Metaphor drawing showing the impact of the education system



The statement by Student 9 underscores the deep-seated impact of an education system that prioritises rote learning over critical thinking, reinforcing structures of control rather than fostering intellectual empowerment, which may be perpetuated by the inertia of those currently in positions of power, effectively sealing these practices into the system. This concern is echoed in research by Vimbelo and Bayaga (2023) who examined the implementation of a humanising pedagogy in teaching Mathematics at a TVET college in South Africa and found that Mathematics classrooms remain largely dehumanised.

Despite efforts towards education reform, disempowerment and dehumanisation persist, particularly affecting learners from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Mathematics continues to be taught in "isolation from social issues and not linked to students' lived experiences" (Op.cit, p. 633). Similarly, Chaka, Lephalala and Ngesi (2017) found that student engagement in TVET classrooms remains minimal as these environments continue to reflect the "banking" method of teaching, limiting meaningful interaction and critical thinking.

In the context of the colonality of being, these experiences highlight fundamental questions of ontology. When curriculum mediators undermine students during the teaching process, the issue extends beyond epistemic injustice, where students are denied recognition as contributors to knowledge, to ontological injustice. Ontological injustice occurs when lecturers implicitly convey that students' very existence is devalued thus undermining their identity, dignity and role in the process of learning. This also reinforces the idea that one of the greatest impediments to decolonisation are the very people (lecturers) who are supposed to lead the decolonial struggle yet remain products of the colonial system themselves (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). The decolonial project thus calls for lecturers to decolonise the mind before thinking of curriculum decolonisation.

A drawing by a student below depicting colonality of power also highlights the role of lecturers in perpetuating patriarchy and colonality of power. As Student 6 explains, the lecturer disregards policy guidelines when engaging with students, leaving them feeling as though their lives are being recklessly gambled with.

Figure 22: Metaphor drawing representing a colonality of power



We have found that those in power act as Alpha and Omega ... those people who are in power, they don't want to even read the document ... hence, they are gambling with students' lives (Student 6, TVET college A).

The finding suggests that students may not only begin to develop fear towards such lecturers but also may feel disempowered as lecturers continue to strip students of their worth and human dignity. Over time students may begin to associate learning with fear instead of growth and empowerment. This is dehumanisation, a tactic reminiscent with colonialism, which used such methods to sustain domination and control. Akinmolayan, et al., (2024), argue that many Black students still encounter the effects of coloniality through current educational policies and practices. Heleta (2016) further asserts that Eurocentric epistemologies remain deeply entrenched in South African education institutions often leading to disempowerment, loss of identity, inequalities and inferiority in the students. It is crucial for lecturers to engage in what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) describes as “learning to unlearn” in order to re-learn (p. 77). Similarly, Badat (2022) emphasises the need to decolonise, deracialise, demasculinise and de-gender intellectual spaces. From a total curriculum perspective, this suggests that curriculum cannot be reduced to formal content alone but must include the pedagogical relations and institutional practices through which knowledge is mediated. In this sense, the persistence of teacher-centred practices may not simply be a matter of resistance or deficit, but an expression of historically embedded power relations that continue to structure educational practice (Tabulawa, 2013).

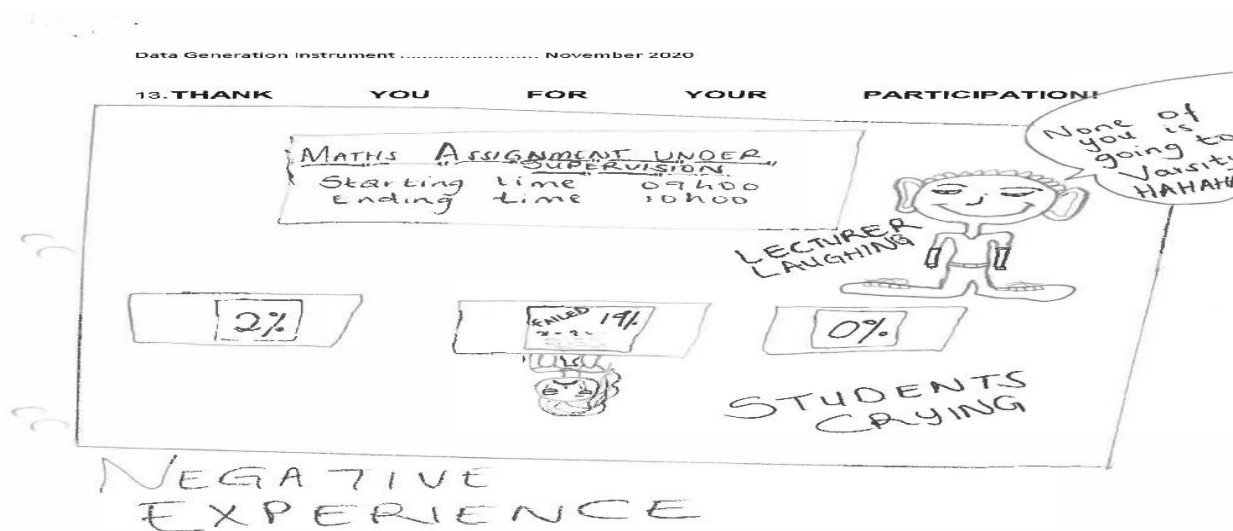
For NCV lecturers the hidden curriculum carries significant implications, as unspoken expectations shape their teaching approaches, interaction with students, and engagement with the curriculum. These implicit influences also reflect and reinforce lecturers’ academic culture. A decolonial perspective, however, challenges these unacknowledged practices, rejecting experiences that ultimately exclude the student for whom the curriculum is intended.

From an indigenous knowledge standpoint, education is holistic, relational and value-based, seeking to develop moral character, communal responsibility and harmony between students and their environment. However, the hidden curriculum in formal education often reinforces Eurocentric and neoliberal values such as individual competition, hierarchy, and epistemic superiority of Western knowledge. This undermines

indigenous worldviews that privilege ubuntu, interdependence and collective well-being. The negative classroom experiences of the NCV students with Maths confirm this undermining of indigenous knowledges.

Another drawing, while not directly connected to the hidden curriculum, depicted the teaching of Mathematics and revealed both ineffective instructional practices and troubling behaviours among some lecturers, illustrating how these issues can negatively affect students' learning experiences and engagement. A Math Literacy lecturer requires students to write supervised assignments in class. When students fail, he mocks them and says they will never get into university. This has caused distress among NCV students (Student 8, TVET college A).

Figure 23: Metaphor drawing of ineffective instructional practices as perceived by the students



From a decolonial perspective, teaching of Math Literacy to NCV students, as illustrated above, not only undermines their human dignity but also reproduces colonial hierarchies of knowledge. The instructional approach implicitly conveys that these students are incapable of fully grasping Math Literacy, reinforcing their marginalisation within the education system. As a result, classroom experiences sustain a division between the “zone of being”, occupied by those, including the lecturer, who are perceived as legitimate

knowers, and the “zone of non-being,” where NCV students are positioned as outsiders, excluded from the valued spaces of advanced mathematical and academic knowledge. This dynamic illustrates how colonial patterns of inclusion and exclusion continue to shape educational practices and limit the transformative potential of TVET education.

8.3.2 Feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment: lecturers’ standpoint

The findings showed that there are several instances when lecturers have felt disempowered and disillusioned in the process of implementing the NCV curriculum. Feelings of disempowerment emanate from the inability to change aspects of the curriculum which they find problematic in the process of implementation. The responses from Bongi (TVET college B) on the unsuitability of the content of a level 3 subject Plant and Equipment which focuses on car engines and is irrelevant to civil engineering showed how lecturers without mechanical expertise struggle to teach it. Yet, the college has no authority to adjust the curriculum, leaving them with no flexibility.

Bongi highlights two key issues within the NCV Plant Engineering Programme. Firstly, there is a clear curriculum misalignment, as the content is not only unsuitable for students but also beyond lecturers’ expertise. Secondly, the lack of institutional autonomy prevents the college from modifying or adapting the curriculum to better reflect students’ needs or lecturers’ competencies. From a decolonial perspective, this underscores the importance of contextualising and localising the curriculum, ensuring that teaching and learning are relevant to the local context, draw on community knowledge, and empower both the students and lecturers to engage meaningfully with the subject matter.

The National Policy on Curriculum Development (2017) standardises the curriculum across all TVET colleges to ensure consistency, while the Further Education and Training College Act (2006a) mandates that TVET colleges deliver nationally approved programmes without unauthorised modifications. However, while a TVET college may request curriculum adjustments for specific programmes, any changes must be approved

by the Department of Higher Education, and the process is often slowed by bureaucracy hurdles.

Another response reflecting similar frustration and feelings of disempowerment due to programme closures comes from Avame. In this case, the lecturer expresses a lack of control over their deployment process thus highlighting the absence of agency in the decision-making process. This is evident in Avame's response: "Right now, the college is closing the Tourism Programme ... They will give me whatever!" (Avame, lecturer TVET college A).

When an unsettling and potentially traumatic move happens such as closing a programme and lecturers being re-deployed, a form of consultation process should be held with the lecturer(s) affected. Consultation is central to decoloniality couched in IKS as it embodies collective wisdom and community consensus. It ensures decisions are inclusive, contextually grounded and culturally legitimate. Through dialogue with "elders" (Campus managers) and "knowledge holders" (College Principals), diverse perspectives are valued and harmonised. This process further upholds ubuntu and sustains intergenerational knowledge transmission. When this does not happen, lecturers feel disempowered and disillusioned as shown in this response:

Before you do the allocation, come to Avame ... And look at my academic record and say ... can you do this? You feel like you're just here to earn a living. You know when you wake up in the morning and you say hee! let me just wake up so that I can be able to buy bread and butter for my kids (Avame, op.cit)

Another source of disillusionment arises from the challenges lecturers face when navigating topics deemed "sensitive" by the community but mandated in the Life Orientation curriculum. As Mbali explains, "You can't just talk freely about sexual orientation, so I just have to be careful when I present it so that they don't seem to think that I am forcing them to have sex or to have a different sexual orientation" (Mbali, lecturer TVET college B).

The content of certain subjects remains contentious in some communities (as a result of Eurocentric epistemologies). Curriculum extends beyond personal development; it also shapes how students engage with their environments and communities. Scholars have cautioned that colonisation as a system of political, economic, religious and cultural domination and subjugation, established power relations that shaped indigenous discourses were interpreted, and this was often a deliberate strategy to disempower the colonised by distorting their narratives (Swart, Meda & Mashiyi (2020); Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024). Therefore, decolonisation of TVET colleges in South Africa must be approached as a comprehensive and intentional effort that acknowledges the complexities involved.

I interpret these findings on disempowerment and disillusionment through the lens of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice refers to unfair treatment related to “knowledge, understanding, and participation in communicative practices” (Kidd, Medina, & Pohlhaus, 2017, p. 1). It includes the dismissal, undervaluing or outright ignoring of a person’s voice, particularly their ability to articulate their lived experiences or perspectives. Within the context of the NCV curriculum, it may seem that lecturers have been denied their rightful place within the exchange of knowledge and decision-making processes. The NCV curriculum itself becomes a potential site for power struggles, oppression, prejudice and discrimination. Furthermore, epistemic injustice is evident in the deployment process where lecturers’ contributions are undermined due to their positionality in the college hierarchy, therefore, reinforcing their marginalisation.

Notwithstanding that the Department of Higher Education desires standardisation in the content of the curriculum of the NCV programmes, delays or bureaucratic processes that are interpreted as refusal to modify the curriculum, reflect another instance of epistemic injustice. Both the college and lecturer voices are undervalued and disregarded even though they engage directly with the curriculum and possess first-hand knowledge of its limitations through lived experience. As mediators of the curriculum, their insights should be recognised and given due consideration.

Another issue concerns the “locatedness” and “situatedness” of the curriculum (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). Mbali’s response suggests that the NCV curriculum does not accommodate indigenous beliefs and cultures as show here: “My subject has modern colonialism because they don’t consider our beliefs and cultures.” (Mbali, lecturer TVET college B).

Neglecting the beliefs and cultures of NCV students in a curriculum constitutes an epistemic injustice. This form of injustice arises when specific knowledge systems, cultural practices and perspectives are excluded, undervalued or de-legitimatised in favour of dominant worldviews which are often grounded in colonial, Western and/or elitist frameworks. Manyau’s (2018) study on incorporating Indigenous Knowledge in Life Orientation at TVET colleges, emphasised the importance of a curriculum that fosters meaningful pedagogy rooted in indigenous culture and context. Such an approach would allow students to cognitively engage by connecting their home-based knowledge with what they are learning in educational contexts. In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a, 2016, 2017, 2021) has repeatedly highlighted the colonial objective of using education as a tool to maintain control and undermine indigenous people’s culture and knowledge.

8.3.3 Language of Teaching and Learning (LoTL)

Ntombela (2020) in his chapter on “The Dislocated Rural Student: Calls for decolonisation” highlights the struggles faced by rural student in universities, particularly regarding the dominance of English and Afrikaans as the primary languages of instruction. Ntombela argues that while the discourse decolonisation has been extensively debated, it often remains metaphorical rather than translating into tangible action. Ntombela further critiques how student’s demands for decolonising universities and curricula have been “unpacked, defined and redefined by scholars following the intellectual tradition ... yet students on the other hand continue to be spoken about in forms that sometimes reduce them into hooligans and ungrateful spoiled brats” (p. 84-85).

His chapter paints a vivid picture of a typical rural student who enters the university and is faced by numerous obstacles including alienation caused by the language barrier. The findings of my study align with Ntombela's insights as reflected in the response: "Most NCV students come from a rural area of Bulwer. They can't write English, they can't read, and they can't even understand a single word of English. When you can't comprehend, you can't interpret" (Avame. lecturer TVET college A).

Despite research demonstrating that students learn more effectively in their mother tongue, institutions of higher learning including TVET colleges in South Africa continue to use only English and Afrikaans as primary languages of instruction. Both these languages are languages of the colonisers (Chaka, Lephahala & Ngesi, 2017; Omidire, 2019). Ntombela (2020) refers to this as the "linguistic exclusion of the masses" (p. 89).

Student 8 directly linked the dominant use of English in TVET colleges to colonisation stating, "We are forced to learn in English and it's a language that we are forced to use here in Africa and which we are using right now. So, we have to decolonise" (Student 8, TVET college A). Ntombela (2020) further argues that some lecturers continue to teach exclusively in English failing to recognise the systemic inequality it perpetuates, and dismissing calls for "education in indigenous languages to a neurosis" (p. 89). This sentiment resonates with Siphosho who finds it troubling that, "... you find that in the classroom, these are Africans (referring to students) but the lecturer (Black lecturers) will use either Afrikaans or English." (Siphosho, lecturer TVET college B)

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) long highlighted the oppression faced by the colonised when forced to articulate their history, experiences and imaginations in non-indigenous languages. Language remains a powerful instrument of coloniality and cultural domination. The response from Bongani further illustrates how students' abilities are often misjudged due to the dominance of English in instruction. The exclusive use of English and Afrikaans as mediums of instruction in TVET colleges for the NCV curriculum creates a significant barrier to effective learning. As Bongani observes, "... if you speak to them (the

NCV students) one-on-one, you can speak to them in IsiZulu and then you realise that these students understand what you have taught them” (Bongi, lecturer TVET college B). English presents a significant language barrier particularly in how students express themselves in written examinations. Henrietta, describes this challenge, stating, “If you can see the child ... she completely cannot cope with the written work, but she can do verbally, there should be opportunity ... mmm ... for them to be able to do their test verbally mmm ...” (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A). Supporting this concern, Omidires” (2019) findings showed that one of the most common challenges students faced is their “limited expressive and receptive skills in English” (p. 2). This language deficiency not only impacts their academic performance but also the “lack of language proficiency hindered their career aspirations and life beyond school” (Omidire, 2019, p. 2).

The discussion above aligns with the arguments of decolonial scholars, who emphasise that language plays a crucial role in shaping one’s sense of “being” and identity (Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, 1986; Vorster & Quinn 2017; Omidire, 2019). Language is not merely a tool for communication, but it is the medium through which history, experiences and meaning are conveyed. If NCV students continue to be restricted to English and Afrikaans as the sole languages of teaching and learning, it raises critical questions: Whose lived experiences are being represented? Whose worldview is being validated? As Siphso aptly observed, “Their culture is changed as well” when students are compelled to adopt a language that is not their own. (Siphso, lecturer TVET B college). This enforced linguistic shift not only marginalises indigenous knowledge systems but also erodes cultural identity, reinforcing the dominance of colonial languages and perspectives in education.

Some lecturers have linked high absenteeism, dropout and low pass rates among NCV students to the use of English as the primary language of instruction. They argue that English creates a barrier, making the NCV curriculum increasingly inaccessible and discouraging students from fully engaging in their studies. Avame highlights this issue, stating, “Using English ... that’s why they don’t make it. If you look at their scripts ... I’m

gonna show you now ... (pulls out a script) ... they can get like 27%, and the other has 35%" (Aame, lecturer TVET college A).

What impact do high failure and absenteeism do to the “being” of the NCV student? These challenges reinforce colonial narratives that question the capabilities of Black students. The dominance of English in the NCV curriculum further compounds existing barriers to student success, adding to a range of factors such as food insecurity, dysfunctional or disintegrated family structures, illness such as HIV/AIDS, age, feeling undervalued in the classroom, inappropriate curriculum, poverty and parental engagement (Powell, Muronda, & Tini, 2024) already identified as obstacles in TVET colleges. Moreover, high failure rates affect not only students but also lecturers as reflected in Henrietta’s illustration: “And you get frustrated sometimes because you’ll see your marks ... and you wonder if this is a reflection of your teaching ...” (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

The low throughput of NCV students has been widely documented (Gamede & Uleanya, 2019; Olowoyo, Ramaila, & Mavuru, 2020) and remains a significant concern. The findings in this study align the existing research, confirming that NCV programmes have consistently struggled with low completion rates over the years. As Olowoyo et al., (2020) note, “lecturers were particularly concerned about the high dropout rate due to students’ inability to cope with the cognitive demands of their studies ...” (p. 61).

The above discussion demonstrates how language emerges not merely as a pedagogical challenge but as a central site of epistemic control, where English functions as a gatekeeper to knowledge and academic success (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1986). This reinforces broader patterns of linguistic domination, limiting students’ ability to engage meaningfully with the curriculum and reproduce knowledge in ways that reflect their own cultural contexts.

8.3.4 Lecturer agency: a conundrum

In the past decade, there has been a renewed focus on the central role of lecturers in educational activities, including curriculum development, highlighting the need for their involvement and empowerment in the curriculum design process (DHET, 2013b; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). This shift is applauded as rigid, highly prescriptive curricula have often been identified as a key factor in the deprofessionalisation of lecturers. Priestley et al. (2015) introduce the concept of lecturer agency as a way of understanding how lecturers navigate practice and engage with policy. Lecturer agency provides an alternative to both highly prescribed, top-down curriculum implementation and a down-up approach where lecturers possess full autonomy. Therefore, Priestley et al. (2015) argue that lecturer agency is a sociological concept shaped by the “ecological conditions through which it is enacted” (p. 3). This means that lecturer agency is not an inherent trait, but rather an action that is facilitated by the specific environment in which the lecturer operates.

Exercising lecturer agency requires the provision of resources such as professional development opportunities to support its effective implementation. However, the cultural and structural conditions required to enable lecturer agency are often lacking, leaving lecturers disempowered (Priestley et al., 2015). One lecturer response highlights the gap between the ideal supportive environment needed for lecturer agency to thrive and the reality of its limited implementation. This disconnect is often linked to the inadequate support or induction provided to lecturers upon their employment. Henrietta’s experience exemplifies this challenge: “When I started there ... I wasn’t specifically taken through like this is what the subject is about, this is what you must do. I was literally given a file, and I had to stand and teach” (Henrietta, lecturer TVET college A).

All lecturer participants in my study entered the TVET college sector without any vocational qualifications, a trend also reported by Nhlumayo and Shandu (2023). Even after years of teaching in TVET colleges, they had not acquired the specific vocational qualifications recommended in the sector. While these lecturers are academically qualified, they lack the professional qualifications required, highlighting the need for induction, mentoring, and ongoing professional development supported by college

management (Nhlumayo & Shandu, 2023). This absence of vocational qualifications reflects a deeper tension related to perceptions of lecturer agency. As Zenzele put it:

There's no proper development of the lecturer. So, it is up to the individual ... to probably enroll for further education and read further on the sector. And so, now whenever you administer the curriculum or implement the curriculum, it will be different (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Zenzele points to a disconnect between the development of the lecturer who act as mediators of the NCV curriculum and the way the curriculum is implemented. In response, Hlatshwayo (2023) has argued that teaching and learning were, and continue to be, central to the decolonisation efforts embodied in the #RhodesMustFall student protests of 2015–2016. If lecturers are not adequately prepared to understand and grow within the sector, how can a decolonial project in the TVET college succeed? This study critically examines the NCV curriculum as a potential site for decolonisation focusing on “the kinds of knowledge(s) that are still being valued, legitimated, taught and institutionalised” (Hlatshwayo, 2023, p. 107). However, without lecturer agency the decolonisation of the NCV curriculum would remain an unfulfilled project.

When lecturers perceive their agency to be a conundrum, it undermines their ability to implement the curriculum effectively. This aligns with the argument made by Matabane, Matabane, Moloi, and Sibaya (2022), who suggest that while a lecturer may possess expertise in quality teaching and learning, the system itself often prevents them from “being productive as s/he is not in a position of power and therefore cannot implement what s/he regards as best practice (p. 60). By disempowering lecturer’s agency, this situation reinforces the argument that coloniality of being remains deeply entrenched in educational institutions, where colonial traditions of teaching and learning continue to dominate.

Even though TVET colleges aim to build a team of qualified lecturers, reports indicate that there has been a tendency to prioritise lower educational qualifications in order to attract and accommodate industry experts (Matabane et al., 2022). The consequence of

this approach is that lecturers with strong pedagogical skills are often excluded from positions of power that influence teaching practices. Instead, industry experts, who may lack pedagogical expertise, are placed in positions of authority. As a result, academically qualified lecturers often become frustrated by the instructions of industry-based lecturers, as they understand the most effective teaching methods to enhance learning (Matabane et al., 2022). This creates a significant conundrum, where the expertise needed to improve pedagogy is undermined by the power dynamics within the institution.

Thus, lecturers at TVET colleges often face confusing and challenging experiences from the moment they are hired, and these difficulties can persist throughout their tenure. As they mediate the NCV curriculum, their identities and life experiences are often put to the test, creating what can be described as a conundrum. This is due to lecturers reporting that their agency in curriculum design and its implementation is often unclear, and in some cases, lacks a clear sense of direction (Mashiyi, Meda & Stewart, 2020). Curriculum change must be driven by lecturers, whose agency is crucial for the success of decolonisation efforts. De Sousa Santos (2017) identifies teaching and learning methods as a critical area for decolonisation in institutions of higher learning. Lecturer agency plays a central role in this process, as lecturers are the ones who implement the curriculum. The content they choose to include in their teaching materials and the pedagogical approaches they adopt can either perpetuate or challenge colonial practices, making their agency a powerful force for decolonisation.

Lecturer agency is thus, both enabled and constrained by structural conditions. While some lecturers demonstrate adaptive strategies, their capacity to transform the curriculum remains limited by institutional and policy frameworks. This aligns with Priestley et al. (2015), who argue that agency is ecologically situated rather than individually determined. From a decolonial perspective, restricted agency reflects ongoing colonial patterns of control over knowledge production and dissemination.

8.3.5 Vocational education stigma

Stigma is an attribute that reinforces negative stereotypes and devalues those associated with it (Clair, 2018). In this study vocational education was presented as a form of stigma for the students. This was evident from the very beginning of the interviews with lecturers and continued to surface in metaphor drawings and focus group discussions with students. A prevailing belief within the communities where participants live is that vocational education, and by extension, TVET colleges is meant for students perceived as less intellectually capable, focusing primarily on practical skills rather than academic rigor. This societal perception leads to lack of confidence in TVET graduates, both within communities and among businesses. Community members often view TVET graduates as less competent while businesses perceive the system as failing to provide adequately skilled workers, judging by the quality of graduates entering the workforce (Mabunda & Frick, 2020). One striking response came from a student participant who recalled the stigma reinforced by her high school teachers:

I always had that in the back of my mind that TVET sector is for us failures at life. We don't have any future ... I got it from my high school teachers because they were coming from universities and then they said if we don't want to learn, we will end up in TVET college. And then I started assuming that oh! It's a school for those who are not able to read and write (Student 1, TVET A college).

The stigmatisation of TVET education has long been a topic of discussion, not only among communities and businesses but also at the political level. However, a clear solution to this issue remains elusive. Kruger (2020) explores the factors contributing to the stigma surrounding vocational education and advocates for its removal. The persistence of this stigma has significant consequences, particularly for young people who, despite the potential benefits of vocational training, choose to enrol in universities or universities of technology instead. This is largely due to a poor understanding of the purpose and value of vocational education, as well as the negative perceptions associated with it (Tlapana & Myeki, 2020; Du Plooy & Du Preez, 2022; Makola, Dube & Tabane, 2023). Addressing this stigma is crucial for ensuring that TVET colleges are recognised as viable and respected pathways to skilled employment and to making an economic contribution.

The historical perception of technical and vocational education as a rehabilitative and remedial pathway initially for poor white males surfaced as early as 1910 and has persisted for decades, continuing to shape how TVET colleges are viewed today. As a result, vocational education has long been seen as inferior to university study, a stigma that still lingers in the present (Makola, Dube & Tabane, 2023). A lecturer participant reinforces this entrenched stigma, stating, “I knew that there was like technical colleges like I mean if you ... not inclined academically you go the other route yeah” (implying vocational education) (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

The response highlights a broader misunderstanding of vocational education’s purpose and value. Defining vocational education on the perceived academic ability of those who pursue it reinforces damaging stereotypes and misconceptions (Newton & Winch, 2019). Newton and Winch (op.cit) further argues that these stereotypes could be dismantled if stakeholders reached a clear, positive consensus on the unique nature, context, and purpose of vocational education. By shifting the narratives away from outdated labels and focusing on the real-world skills and career pathways TVET education offers, it may be possible to reshape public perception and elevate its status within the broader education system.

Another significant factor contributing to the stigma surrounding vocational education beyond its historical context and the widespread misunderstanding of its purpose, is the perception that TVET colleges fail to cultivate a strong occupational identity alongside essential knowledge and skills. Instead, TVET provisioning is often criticised for offering “an attenuated bundle of skills and competences that fits the person for a specific low-paid, dead-end entry level job” (Newton & Winch, 2019, p. 4). This issue arises because vocational qualifications remain task-focused, fragmented, and lacking in-depth theoretical or critical knowledge (Newton & Winch, 2019). As a result, rather than being viewed as a robust educational pathway leading to career progression, TVET education is often seen as merely equipping students with basic competencies for immediate but

limited employment opportunities. This reinforces the stigma that continues to hinder the rightful recognition of TVET education.

The Department of Higher Education has expressed ongoing concern about the persistent stigma surrounding vocational education, particularly as this sector is crucial for bridging the intermediate skills gap necessary for economic growth. In response, the Department outlined several strategies to address this issue in its 2020 presentation, “Removing the Stigma of Vocational Skills Training” (Kruger, 2020). Key proposals included, among others, grading TVET colleges and making this information publicly available to enhance transparency and credibility and developing industry-responsive programmes and curricula that can be rapidly adapted to align with evolving industry and economic needs.

By implementing these measures, the Department aims to elevate the status of vocational education thus ensuring it is recognised as a valuable and respected pathway to skilled employment and economic contribution. In its recent 2023/2024 Annual Report, the Department of Higher Education and Training confirmed that it is actively monitoring TVET performance, investing in infrastructure and lecturer development and tracking industry-linkage indicators. However, the report also acknowledged that many of the set targets were “not fully met” indicating that significant work remains to be done (DHET Annual Report, 2024).

Stigma is a widely recognised social phenomenon, extensively explored in both medical and social sciences. Medical practitioners have examined how stigma and discrimination are interlinked and how these in turn influence the cognitive dimensions and the processes through which they shape micro-level social interactions (Abbey et al., 2011; Ay, Save & Fidanoglu, 2006). Stigma has been described as an inherent aspect of social life that complicates everyday interactions, as individuals must possess a socially accredited identity to be fully accepted in the community (Abbey et.al., 2011; Ay et.al., 2006). For those who are stigmatised this social acceptance can lead to feelings of being different, devalued and to diminished self-identity. Over time, stigma not only shapes how

individuals are perceived but also how they perceive themselves, potentially leading them to conform to societal expectations of their perceived inferiority. In this sub-theme I argue that stigmatised NCV students are subjected to discrimination, loss of self-identity and self-worth which reinforces coloniality of being.

Additionally, stigma fosters discrimination, which in turn leads to “othering”, a process that Maldonado-Torres (2007) conceptualised as the “zone of non-being”. NCV students often come from historically marginalised backgrounds, sometimes carrying deep-rooted stigmas associated with poverty, race and rurality. The stigma attached to their TVET education further compounds their marginalisation, reinforcing societal perceptions of their inferiority and exclusion. As communities and businesses reinforce these social boundaries, TVET college students are burdened with the label of “not being good enough”. The narrative strips them of dignity, agency and opportunity. This ongoing stigmatisation perpetuates educational injustice, dehumanisation and a profound loss of identity which in turn undermines the transformative potential of vocational education as a pathway to empowerment and socio-economic mobility.

A decolonial-based solution to the stigma surrounding vocational education would centre on restoring communal respect for skilled work through indigenous values of ubuntu which emphasises interconnectedness, compassion and collective humanity; *ukwazi* which signifies embodied, lived and experiential understanding gained through observing and participating in community life; and hand-based wisdom (Gumbo, 2024; Madlela & Ngakane, 2025). In many African traditions, craftsmanship, farming and technical skills were honoured as vital to community survival and dignity. Reviving this ethos in TVET contexts, by integrating storytelling, mentorship from local artisans and community ceremonies that celebrate technical achievement can reframe vocational education as a path of service, identity and collective upliftment, rather than as a less academic option (Madlela & Ngakane, 2025). This could be achieved by integrating community knowledge into the NCV curriculum such as herbal processing, sustainable building and environment preservation; inviting local elders and/or local crafts people as co-educators or guest mentors to validate vocational knowledge as community wisdom and not merely as

technical training; and by the use of indigenous languages and oral traditions to frame vocational knowledge as knowledge for life, breaking away from Eurocentric hierarchies that privilege theoretical over practical learning (Gumbo, 2024; Madlela & Ngakane, 2025).

These examples, while valuable, should not be assumed to be inherently decolonial, as the inclusion of Indigenous or local content can risk functioning as an “add-on” to an otherwise unchanged curriculum. Rather, decolonial pedagogy requires a deeper epistemic shift in which Indigenous Knowledge Systems are engaged as legitimate, dynamic, and critical knowledge systems, not merely as supplementary illustrations (Dei, 2011; Le Grange, 2018). Within the NCV context, this entails moving beyond the use of local examples or experiential activities towards a reconfiguration of epistemic authority, where knowledge is co-constructed, critically interrogated, and situated within learners’ historical and cultural contexts (Freire, 1970; Dei, 2011). Such an approach involves questioning dominant knowledge hierarchies, validating multiple ways of knowing, and fostering pedagogical spaces that cultivate critical consciousness rather than passive absorption of content.

Through the sub-themes presented in this section the study has illustrated how coloniality of being is not an abstract concept, but a lived reality that shapes identity, aspiration and experience within vocational education. Addressing these issues requires a critical reimagining of vocational education that foregrounds decolonial thinking, linguistic justice and the empowerment of lecturers as transformative intellectuals. An important part of this is addressing the stigma associated with the TVET system and qualifications.

The next section discusses sub-themes via the theoretical lens of coloniality of space.

8.4 Section Three: Coloniality of Space

The removal of the statue of colonial imperialist Cecil John Rhodes on April 9, 2015 during the #FeesMustFall protests stands as a powerful reminder of the need to decolonise

spaces. This moment has become a historical landmark in the broader decolonial movement, highlighting the importance of reclaiming spaces from colonial influence. Across South Africa, colonial-era designs, artefacts, symbols and statues remain embedded in the urban landscape, serving as tangible reminders of the country's history under colonialism and apartheid. As Axel & Arsuaga, (2025) explain, these remnants represent a complex legacy on the one hand as they symbolise the historical oppression and domination, while on the other hand, they have been repurposed as functional and cultural spaces in post-apartheid society. This repurposing is particularly evident in educational institutions such as TVET colleges.

As shown in the findings, TVET spaces remain saturated with colonial artefacts, which participants described as unwelcome and as persistent reminders of apartheid (Aname, lecture TVET college A). To the participants these artefacts were not merely relics of the past but ongoing symbols of colonial power. The following artefacts identified by participants illustrate this enduring presence.

The persistence of colonial artefacts such as buildings, signage and symbolic representations illustrates that colonality operates not only at the level of curriculum but also through institutional environments. These artefacts function as everyday reminders of historical power relations, shaping how individuals experience and navigate educational spaces (Mbembe, 2016).

8.4.1 Colonial architecture: A tool of colonial domination

Sioli and Awan (2024) emphasises that architecture has the power to embody identity reflecting the values and worldviews of society. In this case, the unchanged colonial-era buildings at this TVET college continue to buttress the dominance of the past rather than the aspirations of a decolonised institution. Participants further articulated a sense of detachment from their learning environment, arguing that the absence of spatial transformation has hindered their sense of ownership and belonging within the institution. Pimblott (2020) refers to such architectural relics as symbols of “historical amnesia”,

where institutions maintain colonial infrastructure without critically engaging with its implications. This disconnection reinforces the argument that decolonising TVET spaces requires not only a pedagogical reform but also the reclamation and redesigning of physical environments to reflect post-colonial identities and aspirations.

The decolonisation of TVET spaces and other sites of knowledge production, must go beyond curriculum reform to dismantle the lingering injustices of colonial and apartheid rule both in the physical and virtual spaces. This includes reimagining and repurposing institutional infrastructure to reflect the identities and ownership of previously colonised people, thereby removing the stigma of coloniality embedded in spaces. Sioli & Awan, 2024) supports this view, arguing that Western structures, whether architectural, spatial, or procedural permeate all aspects of life, shaping the world through Western ideologies. However, these ideologies are not immutable, they can be challenged and reimagined. The real challenge, as Zenzele contends, lies in the application of transformation:

It is just that we want to take what the white people have done, or the colonizers have done and then try to make changes. But the problem is that if we don't want to develop our own systems, our own way of doing things (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

Zenzele's perspective highlights a critical issue in the decolonial project which is the tendency to modify existing colonial structures rather than create independent, contextually relevant alternatives. True decolonisation requires more than superficial changes; it demands a fundamental shift toward indigenous systems, epistemologies, and ways of structuring educational spaces.

It is essential to recognise that colonial powers deliberately used architecture as a means of asserting cultural, political and economic dominance. The built environment carries enduring legacy of colonialism, not only as a reflection of historical injustices but also as an active participant in contemporary cultural and political discourses (Axel & Arsuaga, 2025). The decision by TVET college management to leave colonial-era buildings

unchanged effectively signifies a continued attachment—to an invisible yet pervasive colonial power, one symbolises the subjugation of indigenous peoples. In this regard, Oelofsen (2015) argues that decolonising the “intellectual landscape” which includes universities, TVET colleges, and other centres of knowledge production, is fundamental to decolonising the mind. By reimagining and repurposing these spaces, institutions can move beyond the remnants of colonial authority and foster environments that affirm indigenous identity, knowledge and agency.

8.4.2 Wall of honour: a legacy of exclusion

The Wall of Honour, located at the main student hall was heavily criticised for perpetuating the notion that Black students’ achievements are neither valued nor celebrated (Avame, lecturer TVET college A). Historically, this wall has served as a symbolic stronghold of the TVET’s college legacy of power, recognising only the achievements of former students of Afrikaner descent. The practice of adding names was discontinued in 1996, yet the boards remain intact with on one having the initiative to remove them. Their continued presence, and absence of African names, reinforces both the colonality of being and the colonality of space, sending a silent yet powerful message of exclusion. Lecturers found it striking that, “not even one African name” was included, with Zenzele emphasising that “this wall of honour speaks volumes without speaking a word, it tells current students that they do not deserve the recognition!” and are thus rendered invisible (Zenzele, lecturer TVET college A).

While the Wall of Honour has traditionally been a record of vocational academic excellence, it also stands as a symbol of inequality, explicitly validating historical segregation and reinforcing social hierarchies within the institution. As Avame questioned, “It has kept the history for the college but then what I don’t understand is what about the new things? Are these students not important and those ones in the colonial days are important?” (Avame, lecturer TVET college A). This continued erasure of Black student accomplishment underscores the urgent need for transformation, not just in policy but in the very symbols and spaces that define institutional identity. Without deliberate efforts to

acknowledge and celebrate the successes of all students, the Wall of Honour remains a relic of exclusion, rather than a testament to progress and inclusivity.

The meanings and experiences that both TVET college students and lecturers associate with the Wall of Honour are deeply tied to their sense of space and belonging. Tuan (1997) explains that what we recognise as a “place” emerges from “space” imbued with human experiences, meanings and objectives. In this sense, space is not neutral. It carries the weight of historical and social significance based on the interactions and sentiments of those who occupy it. As a result, negative sentiments surrounding the Wall of Honour are not incidental but rather an inevitable consequence of its exclusionary legacy.

Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2020) highlight that universities and colleges are more than just educational institutions; they are spaces where students attach deep personal meaning, particularly through their learning experiences. These institutional spaces became key sites for the decolonisation movement especially in the wake of the #FeesMustFall protests. The Wall of Honour, as a symbol of academic recognition, is therefore not just a physical structure but a marker of whose achievements are deemed worthy of remembrance. The exclusion of Black students from this space reinforces the coloniality of being, shaping the identities and self-perception of both lecturers and NCV students. Avame captured this sentiment powerfully:

And if you look at the names, all of these are White people's names, meaning that the name of the Black child is not worth to be on this Wall of Honour. So, you can be in our registers, you can pass with high marks, but you can't be on the Wall of Honour because the Wall of Honour was only meant for the White people?
(Avame, lecturer TVET college A)

This ongoing erasure serves as a painful reminder that colonial legacies persist in the very structures meant to celebrate academic excellence. Without intentional efforts to transform such spaces, institutions risk perpetuating historical injustices and denying Black students the recognition and belonging they deserve. College stakeholders,

particularly management and students should engage in dialogue about meaningful ways to decolonise these spaces. Drawing from the example of the #FeesMustFall, the decolonising of symbolic artefacts such as the Wall of Honour could involve either dismantling them entirely, as was done with the statue of Cecil Rhodes, or repurposing and extending them to honour the achievements of indigenous and marginalised students. Such transformation must go beyond symbolic gestures; it requires a deliberate commitment to confronting historical injustices and addressing their enduring impact on current and future generations. on South African buildings.

Originally designed within racially segregated frameworks, these campuses retain spatial arrangements, architectural styles and institutional symbols that reinforce historical exclusion and hierarchy. Older college buildings often follow colonial-era designs that emphasise rigid authority structures with large, imposing administrative buildings, hierarchical classroom layouts, and institutional spaces that uphold top-down control. On some campuses, the stark contrast between well-resourced administrative offices and under-resourced learning spaces further mirrors colonial power dynamics in education. Additionally, certain TVET institutions still feature colonial or apartheid-era statues, plaques and dedications that honour figures linked to exclusionary policies. While universities have engaged in significant debates about such symbols, similar discussions remain largely absent in TVET spaces. Addressing these remnants of coloniality is essential in creating more inclusive and representative learning environments. The absence of debate may be attributed to the historically marginalised status of TVET colleges within the higher education hierarchy, where issues of equity and transformation have often been overshadowed by more pressing concerns such as funding, employability and institutional stability. Consequently, symbolic and epistemic transformation has not received the same level of critical engagement as in universities.

The next section provides a theoretical framing of the concept of coloniality of power, exploring its relevance within the context of the TVET sector and the NCV curriculum.

8.5 Section Four: Coloniality of Power

In chapter seven, I categorised the key areas of reform as follows: equity and inclusivity; social and economic redress; institutional transformation including enhancing the image and status of TVET; curriculum relevance; alignment with industry needs; skills development for economic growth and workplace readiness; quality assurance and standardisation; institutional strengthening through capacity building; digital and infrastructure development; new funding system; and more recently decolonisation of TVET education. The discourse on vocational education transformation in South Africa is not new; it has evolved alongside systemic changes over the past three decades (Kraak, Paterson & Boka, 2016). I, however, argue in this section that while numerous reforms have been introduced since 1994 to improve the TVET sector, these have often fallen short of deep transformation required to disrupt the colonial foundations embedded in its curriculum, institutional cultures and governance structures. As noted in chapter 7, the findings presented were based on documentary reviews; therefore, this section does not include direct quotes from respondents.

In this section, I theorise this set of findings through the lens of coloniality of power influenced by the concepts of modernity and neoliberalism. Scholars argue that neoliberalism alongside with globalisation and privatisation, which have been marketed as pathways toward economic growth and stability, have primarily functioned as modern forms of mass economic exploitation reinforcing new forms of imperialism (Gorski, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Modernity is often presented as a universal project of progress and rationality, but it is deeply intertwined with colonial histories. It has been fuelled by colonial exploitation and the imposition of Eurocentric epistemologies, which continue to shape state institutions and governance models. These colonial legacies persist, often failing to address local socio-cultural contexts. In modernity, Eurocentric knowledge systems remain privileged, marginalising indigenous and non-Western epistemologies.

Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on free-market policies, deregulation, and privatisation, extends colonial structures by exacerbating economic inequalities and maintaining

Western hegemony. The commodification of knowledge and education reflects a Western-centric model of development that suppresses alternative frameworks rooted in indigenous and local knowledge systems. The reforms in TVET colleges reflect this dual influence. Efforts to modernise the sector aimed to align it with 21st century skills demand and global competitiveness. Increased institutional autonomy and a market-led delivery model emerged under pressure from multinational corporations and policy lobbyists, who increasingly shaped legislative frameworks and access to education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). These neo-liberal reforms manifested in explicit performance metrics, output controls, heightened competition, and the adoption of private sector management styles (Kraak, Paterson & Boka, 2016). Kraak et al., (op.cit) describes the “obsession with establishing performance indicators” (p. 5) as the most destructive change introduced into the TVET system.

However, market-led approaches soon stood in conflict with the government’s agenda of redress, access, and equity (Gewe, 2016) given the colonial and apartheid legacy of TVET colleges. Kraak et.al., (2016) provide a compelling analysis of institutional change in TVET colleges, raising critical questions of: What interventions should have been college-led? Which should have been externally driven? And in what sequence should they have been implemented? The questions highlight the challenges in TVET transformation, which, despite extensive reforms; including mergers, recapitalisation, rearticulation, expansion and migration under the auspices of DHET, have struggled with institutional instability (Kraak et.al., 2016; Needham, 2019; Allais & Wedekind, 2020).

The lack of a coherent, long-term strategy in government interventions has led to what Kraak et.al (2016) describes as mixed policy signals, resulting in considerable uncertainty across the TVET sector. The mixed signals manifest in various ways including shifting mandates that oscillate between employability, academic progression and entrepreneurship; frequent changes in programme focus (such as the instability surrounding the NCV and NATED qualifications); and a broader confusion about the role of TVET within the post-school system. Despite rhetoric about skills for the Fourth industrial Revolution and inclusive development, the absence of alignment between the

national planning, institutional capabilities and the labour market needs leaves colleges unsure of how to position themselves in meeting South Africa's evolving skills demands (National Planning Commission, 2020).

The DHET continues to emphasise TVET's role in the post-school education sector, particularly for youth who have left school early, performed poorly in matric, or seek vocational skills for sustainable livelihoods (Khuluvhe, Netshifhefhe, & Gwantshu, 2024). To this end, by 2030, TVET colleges are expected to enroll and graduate 2.5 million young people in various intermediate skills. However, over the past decade, reduced funding of the TVET sector has contributed to declined enrolments relative to university admissions (Powell, Muronda & Tini, 2024), a trend referred to as an "inverse pyramid" (National Planning Commission, 2020; Cross & Govender, 2021). Cross and Govender (2021) further argue that "the investment pattern that generates this inverse pyramid is counter-productive to economic growth and skills needs and continues to feed misplaced demand" and could potentially undermine the National Development Plan's growth target of 2.5 million (p. 22). Therefore, the high expectations for TVET's contribution to national planning may be unrealistic (Kraak, Peterson & Boka, 2016; Magadza & Mampane, 2024) given budget constraints and declining student enrolments since 2016, as a result of government-imposed caps and financial reallocations favouring the support of all university students from low-income families at universities after the #FeesMustFall protests (Powell et al., 2024).

Other factors contributing to the decrease in TVET college enrolments was the high cost associated with expanding the TVET college system calling for an "additional R50 billion in the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework to achieve the participation growth target" (Khuluvhe et.al 2024). In addition, concerns persist that uncontrolled numerical growth of the TVET college student populace impacts student success negatively by straining infrastructure and increasing student-teacher ratios (Powell et al., 2024).

South Africa's TVET reforms align with global vocational education trends (Allais & Wedekind, 2020; Kraak, Paterson & Boka, 2016). Internationally TVET is recognised as

essential for economic and social development, realisation of human rights, and developing the productive capacity of the workforce (Allais & Wedekind, 2020 Kraak et.al, 2016). However, the influence of Western-centric discourse shaped by international agencies has influenced South Africa's TVET transformation through the imposition of participation growth targets (Allais & Wedekind, 2020 Kraak et.al, 2016). While expanding TVET is widely endorsed as a solution to skills shortage and youth unemployment, high-level international targets fail to account for local complexities. These targets also do not consider the complex relationships that education systems have in different countries.

This has been very damaging for TVET systems, especially those in poorer countries, and where formal TVET systems have historically been very weak (Allais & Wedekind, 2020). Thus, in South Africa, the quest to meet international targets has focussed primarily on widening access and spatial expansion of TVET provision leading to increased enrolments while undermining quality and completion rates (Allais & Wedekind, 2020; Powell, Muronda & Tini, 2024). Crucially, increased enrolments have not translated into employment opportunities for graduates, particularly those completing NCV programs (Mabunda & Frick, 2020).

Allais and Wedekind (2020) caution that international targets often fail to align with national TVET systems, potentially undermining rather than enhancing them. They argue that those countries adhering to these international targets frequently replicate organisational structures and regulatory policies to regulate educational processes often designed for different contexts. Adequate consideration is not given to the receiving country's historical influences including colonial or neo-colonial legacies. This mimicry manifests in various ways, such as the adoption of symbolic policies that signal broad intentions without clear procedural or resource frameworks, the transfer of policies and strategies, or an emphasis of structural form over functional effectiveness and scale over quality (Allais & Wedekind, 2020).

A notable example is South Africa's adoption of the UK's TVET framework, which failed to address South Africa's unique post-apartheid challenges (Akoojee, 2016). Thus,

despite the UK's best practices in financial management and institutional restructuring, these measures had minimal impact on the transformation of the TVET sector in South Africa, largely due to the sector's instability and the reception of these insights with scepticism (Kraak, Peterson & Boka, 2016).

The quality, timing, impact, and outcomes of government policies on TVET transformation are crucial within the context of the TVET decolonial discourse. As Cross and Govender (2021) have highlighted, the epistemological and methodological trends in research on student access and success are often shaped by global theoretical frameworks that overlook local realities. This disconnect underscores the need for decolonial approaches that not only promote social justice but also acknowledge the unique agency and lived experiences of students. I argue that externally imposed, neoliberal-driven targets represent a modern form of colonialism, reinforcing standardised measures and economic dependency.

The emphasis on imposing and meeting quantitative targets on an already complex, fragmented and unstable South African TVET landscape, risks perpetuating systemic economic exploitation. This can manifest through persistent unemployment among NCV graduates, discrimination, stigmatisation, and other forms of oppression, ultimately reinforcing colonial influences in vocational education. The concept of coloniality of power illustrates how historical structures of domination persist beyond formal colonialism, shaping contemporary economic, political and social relations. Through modernity and neoliberalism, these colonial legacies continue to entrench global inequalities, sustaining economic dependency and limiting genuine transformation.

Thus, both modernity and neoliberalism serve as vehicles for the continuation of coloniality by maintaining structural dependencies, epistemic hierarchies, and socio-economic inequalities. This suggests that decolonisation efforts must critically address not only historical injustices but also the ongoing manifestations of colonial power in contemporary global structures.

To drive meaningful transformation of TVET colleges, as well as within the NCV curriculum and vocational education, a fundamental process of decolonisation must be undertaken. This section argues that, despite numerous reform initiatives aimed at reforming key areas of the sector, the actual progress of TVET transformation has remained slow and uneven (Wedekind et.al, 2024; Buthelezi, 2018; Akoojee, 2016). The challenges facing TVET transformation are multifaceted, deeply rooted in historical influences that continue to shape the system. These include a lack of clear positionality within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Allais & Wedekind, 2020; Gewer, 2016; Kraa et.al, 2016) and the pervasive impact of global forces such as modernity and neoliberalism. These factors have contributed to the sector's marginalisation, reinforcing inequalities and limiting its ability to fully integrate into the broader educational and economic landscape.

A critical step in accelerating transformation is to interrogate the historical foundations of vocational education in TVET colleges. Addressing the systemic inequalities inherited from the past, alongside dismantling the entrenched stigma attached to vocational education, is essential for repositioning the sector. By resolving these deep-seated issues, TVET colleges can play a more central role in South Africa's skills development agenda and economic growth. When TVET colleges play a central role, it will ensure that vocational education is not only aligned with local knowledge systems but is also responsive to the country's unique socio-economic realities. A truly decolonised TVET system should empower students with contextually relevant skills, foster innovation rooted in indigenous knowledge and break free from outdated, externally imposed educational models that do not serve the nation's interest.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the NCV curriculum is not merely in need of reform but may require fundamental rethinking (Heleta, 2016). The interconnected nature of power, knowledge and being means that isolated interventions, whether in curriculum design, lecturer training or student support, are unlikely to produce meaningful transformation unless they address the underlying logics of coloniality that structure the system.

8.6 Section E: The Current State of the NCV and the TVET Sector in Metaphor: A Ship Navigating a Foggy, Colonial Sea

In this section, I intend to synthesise the data presentation and the theorisation chapters by way of a metaphor. I return to the concern that stayed with me throughout the process of data presentation and argue that the TVET college sector still lacks significant stability. The image it suggests is that of a ship navigating a foggy and turbulent sea. This image for me captures the current status quo of the NCV curriculum and the TVET sector. A sector with great potential for empowering youth and fostering economic growth yet a sector most unstable among its “peers”.

8.6.1 Setting the Scene: The ship and its journey

The TVET sector is like a ship embarking on a crucial voyage toward desired destinations, transformation, empowerment and relevance in a postcolonial world. I deliberately invoke the metaphor of a ship not only as a symbol of movement and transition, but also as an unsettling reminder of the transatlantic slave trade, where ships were instruments of displacement, violence and exploitation. In this framing, the ship becomes a paradox: it signifies the potential for forward motion, yet it also echoes the historical modes of domination through which colonial powers first penetrated Africa. The metaphor invites reflection on whether the current path of transformation in TVET colleges is adequately disrupting inherited colonial logics, or merely continuing them under a different guise.

The crew on the ship are the management and lecturers who are responsible for operating and maintaining the ship. The students are passengers all aboard with hopes of gaining valuable experiences from the voyage and eventually reaching new shores of opportunity. Some waters are safe and charted, representing accessible educational spaces. Others are dangerous or restricted, reflecting partial inequalities and barriers inherited from colonial times. The sea the ship sails is also thick with fog, shaped by centuries-old colonial tides that obscure vision and complicate navigation. These are the invisible forces

that feed and shape the entire TVET system. They are strong, deeply embedded and hidden from casual view but they determine everything on the ship. These forces symbolise how current curricula predominantly draws on Eurocentric knowledge systems and pedagogies.

8.6.2 Coloniality of power: The ship's old rudder and sails

The ship's steering system, the rudder and sails are relics from colonial shipbuilders. These instruments were designed to maintain control and keep the ship on predetermined routes. Coloniality of power expresses itself in control over governance, curriculum policy and development, certification structures and international standards requirements for quantity verses quality models. Thus, coloniality of power reveals itself in who gets to decide what knowledge matters and how it should be delivered, typically by policymakers and technocrats sometimes far removed from the lived experiences of students and lecturers.

Today, the crew struggles to change course because the rudder is stiff, and the sails catch only certain winds. The overall TVET sector transformation is like trying to steer toward new horizons but being constrained by the ship's old design. The change in lecturer profile is akin to new crew members coming aboard, eager to navigate fresh waters but limited by the ship's colonial architecture. The ship's allocator of life second chances is represented by the limited lifeboats and supplies, which are unequally distributed, offering hope to some but leaving others vulnerable.

8.6.3 Coloniality of being: The crew and passenger's hidden burdens

Below the deck, the crew battle heavy seas and storm clouds which represents feelings of disempowerment and disillusionment for the lecturers which batters their morale, making it difficult for them to feel confident or hopeful. Lecturer agency being in a conundrum reflects the crew's struggle to take initiative when the ship's controls are limited and the fog obscures their path. The language spoken on the ship is a foreign

tongue representing the language of teaching and learning. The language makes communication difficult and isolates many passengers.

Coloniality of being is felt in how students are expected to detach from their language, culture, histories to succeed in the system. This detachment weighs heavily in the passengers spirits resulting in the distortion of students' identity and self-worth. The students also bear the consequences of the disjuncture as their lived experiences are neglected. Some students have found ways to thrive, but many wither. Disengagement, alienation and dropout are not just the signs of student's individual failure, but also symptoms of a system that does not see the fullness of who these students are or could be.

The hidden curriculum is like the fog itself, unseen but pervasive, shaping how the crew thinks and acts without their full awareness. The vocational education stigma is like the crew's reputation among other ships, where the ship and its crew are seen as lesser or unworthy, which affects morale and external support. And so, the outcomes of the curriculum intended to contribute to national development often fall short. Instead of the ship successfully carrying a generation that can meaningfully participate in transforming society, the current NCV often reproduces economic exclusion and social inequality.

8.6.4 Coloniality of knowledge: The ships' maps and charts

The ships' navigation depends on maps and charts that guide its course, but these, though revised and modernised, are difficult to read and to understand leaving the crew to navigate using stars. The maps represent the rigid curriculum structure, one-size fits all vocational training, bureaucratic, top-down education model, lack of contextual responsiveness, underfunding, mismatched skills and language barriers. The maps and charts are also representative of dominance of Eurocentric, technocratic knowledge and the exclusion of indigenous epistemologies. It is a curriculum built on control, not connection. It serves the machinery of the economy, not the complexity of human growth.

The reliance on code-switching to make sure students understand is like navigating using the stars, which is an ancient skilled practice but one which requires ideal conditions such as clear skies and timing. I borrow Dr Mamphela Ramphele's 2002 book title "Steering by the Stars" to argue metaphorically that navigation by stars is akin to relying on distant and impersonal guidance instead of grounded, accessible systems. The education system and particularly policymakers are the mapmakers who try to update the maps and charts which represent the changes in curricula. But the maps still reflect colonial perspectives, ignoring indigenous knowledge and realities.

Lecturers not being aware of ideological underpinnings are like navigators who do not fully understand the symbols and legends on the map, possibly leading to misinterpretation and misdirection. Community and industry perceptions of the utility of the NCV qualification are the winds and currents that either aid or hinder the ship's progress, sometimes pushing it off course or questioning the value of the voyage. Lecturers mediating of learning is akin to adjusting the sails amidst uncertainty. The crew must develop new skills to interpret the signs beyond the colonial fog. This requires resilience, critical awareness and collaboration to find new pathways. Thus, mediating learning becomes the act of collectively steering the ship despite limited visibility, using both old knowledge and new insights.

8.6.5 Coloniality of space: The sea's hidden depths and boundaries

Coloniality of space represented by the sea's hidden depths and boundaries acknowledges the overall environment within which the NCV curriculum is situated in a context of social and economic pressures. It also acknowledges the marginalisation of learning environments, sometimes poor infrastructure and peripheral geography. It reinforces this marginality by locating TVET colleges in the peripheries, both geographically and symbolically. The lingering colonial artefacts are the barnacles and rust on the ship's hull which are visible signs of past dominations that slow progress and requires constant maintenance.

The NCV curriculum exists within broader societal struggles. Attempts at transformation are present but not fully realised. The hidden depths also represent unemployment, inequality and poverty. The ship must navigate these hidden depths carefully to avoid running aground or becoming trapped in confined waters. The seabed is characterised by graduates with limited adaptability, focus on narrow job readiness, exclusion from real economic participation and lack of critical and civic engagement

8.6.6 Toward a new horizon

The current horizon represents the final output. This is what the curriculum produces for the economy and the country whether intended or unintended. Economic outputs, employment outcomes which are sometimes absent, sometimes there. Barriers still exist between the NCV learners and full access to higher education or dignified work. This is characterised by unfulfilled promises of employment and transformation; mismatch with real community and national needs; continued inequality and marginalisation; unemployment; blocked or limited access to universities; limited recognition by industry and continued stigmatisation of the sector.

Thus, as the TVET sector's ship sails through a foggy neo colonial sea, burdened by old rudders, hidden fog, outdated maps and uneven waters, the crew's determination to learn, adapt and reclaim their agency offers hope. By critically engaging with the legacies of coloniality, updating their navigation tools, and courageously charting new course, they can steer toward clearer skies and new shores where transformation, empowerment and equitable opportunity await. Transformation requires more than reforms in the nature of policy adjustments or curriculum revisions. It calls for a radical rethinking of what knowledge is, who vocational education is for, and how it is delivered.

8.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that while significant strides have been made in expanding access to TVET education, the deeper structures of coloniality remain largely

intact. Transformation efforts have tended to focus on material and institutional dimensions, with less attention to epistemic and ontological change. As a result, the NCV curriculum continues to reproduce inequalities even as it seeks to address them. A genuinely decolonial approach would require a holistic transformation that simultaneously addresses the colonality of power, knowledge and being, thereby creating an education system that is not only accessible but also just, relevant and affirming of diverse identities and ways of knowing (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

These insights also caution against both the overextension and under-specification of decolonial claims. On the one hand, not all pedagogical innovations such as experiential learning can be assumed to be decolonial. On the other hand, decolonisation cannot be reduced to the inclusion of indigenous content without deeper epistemic transformation. Similarly, while the curriculum is a critical site of intervention, it must be understood in relation to broader structural constraints that shape educational and labour market outcomes.

Consequently, the decolonial perspective is not merely a critique but a call to action, demanding transformative change in how knowledge is produced, validated and shared within the NCV and the broader TVET landscape. It highlights the need to develop contextually relevant, socially responsive and epistemically just education practices that can contribute to the ability and effectiveness of the TVET sector. Thus, understanding the “seeming instability” of the sector necessitates an engagement with its historical and systemic foundations, particularly the lingering effects of the colonial and apartheid-era policies and frameworks.

The next chapter proposes strategies to accelerate the decolonial discourse and agenda within TVET colleges. It also presents recommendations based on the overall thesis and demonstrates how the research questions have been addressed.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS - TOWARDS DECOLONISING THE NCV AND TVET SECTOR

“But what if I’m wearing a lens that does not accommodate the student?”

(Avame. Lecturer TVET college A)

9.1 Opening Provocation: Avame’s Reflective Question

This chapter opens with a poignant and thought-provoking question posed by Avame, a lecturer from TVET college A. Her inquiry encapsulates the epistemic tension experienced by some lecturers whose formative years and professional training were deeply embedded in colonial and apartheid educational paradigms. She asks, “But, what if I am wearing a lens that does not accommodate the student?”

This question is not merely rhetorical; it strikes at the core of the decolonisation debate in education. It reflects the internal conflict of lecturers, who, knowingly or unknowingly, perpetuate a worldview that marginalises the lived experiences and knowledge systems of their students. The “lens” to which Avame refers is emblematic of a broader epistemological orientation, one shaped by Eurocentric values, pedagogical norms and curricular frameworks that have historically devalued African epistemologies.

Avame’s question thus serves as a narrative and philosophical entry point into this final chapter, foregrounding the deep psychological entrenchments that complicate decolonial efforts. It highlights the lived contradictions of lecturers who may aspire toward inclusive and transformative practices but find themselves constrained by the very ideas and systems that shaped their educational worldview. This reflective moment calls for a process of unlearning and reorientation, a deconstruction of inherited pedagogical assumptions and a reconstitution of self in relation to the student and the broader community.

Such a reorientation requires more than curricular reforms; it necessitates a radical epistemic shift that confronts the colonial logic embedded in institutional cultures, language policies, assessment standards and lecturer development programmes. Avame's reflection underscores the urgent need for dialogical spaces within the TVET sector where lecturers can engage in critical self-reflection, collective inquiry and praxis-oriented transformation.

9.2 Structure of the Chapter

Engaging in this research marked a transformative and, at times, unsettling journey characterised by disruption, a profound shift in consciousness, and an intense, often disquieting confrontation with the self within a broader collective context and as such I can identify with the opening quote from Avame as stated in the preceding section. The study was guided by the lens of decoloniality, which served as the central ideological and theoretical framework. As is customary in doctoral research, the final chapter serves to synthesise the preceding chapters through a comprehensive discussion and to present the overarching conclusions drawn from the study. This chapter will attempt to achieve this task.

To aid coherence, this chapter has been organised into sections. Section one provides a brief reflection across the literature review, decolonial scholarship and the study findings before engaging with implications this has for the TVET college. Section two demonstrates how the six research questions that drove the study have been answered. Each question is revisited showing how the question has been addressed, drawing on data collected through documentary review, collaborative story-telling interviews, collages, metaphor drawings and focus group discussions. This section not only demonstrates how the research objectives have been met but also elucidates the interconnectedness of these questions with the broader goals of decolonial transformation.

Section three presents the central claims of this thesis with reference to the findings and theorisation chapters while chapter four proposes a framework for attempting a decolonial project in the TVET sector. Section five then poses the critical question: “Will the TVET college dare to decolonise?”. The TVET sector now stands at a crossroad, where the path it chooses to follow will profoundly shape/continue to shape the futures of the very students it is meant to serve

Section six identifies and elaborates on the anticipated challenges and barriers that may confront the implementation of a decolonial project within the TVET sector. These challenges are both systemic and ideological in nature, encompassing issues such as institutional inertia, resistance from stakeholders, the entrenchment of colonial logic in administrative structures and the psychological impact of long-standing educational indoctrination.

Finally, the chapter draws to a close with section seven providing a synthesis of key insights and a concluding reflection on the implications of this study for future scholarship and practice within the TVET sector. In doing so, it offers not only a critique but also a hopeful re-imagining of what a truly decolonised vocational education landscape might entail.

9.3 Section One: Reflections on Literature Review and the Need for a Decolonial Scholarship in the TVET Sector

The study has examined the multiple layers through which coloniality continues to permeate the structure, content and implementation of the NCV curriculum within two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The literature review chapter provided an in-depth discussion of scholarship advancing the agenda of vocational education, the broader project of decolonising the higher education landscape, and the notable scarcity of decolonial scholarships specific to the TVET sector. This paucity of focused research highlights a significant gap, underscoring the need for more sustainable and critical

inquiry into various dimensions of decolonisation within TVET. A gap which this study seeks to address.

Further, through documentary reviews as outlined in Chapter 7, I provided a comprehensive overview of the significant areas where reforms have been undertaken in the TVET sector. Literature on vocational education reveals both the depth of structural inequalities embedded in the system and the ongoing challenges of transformation in a democratic era. This reflective overview critically acknowledges key scholarly and policy literature which traces the evolution of vocational education, examines its purpose, and interrogates its efficacy in responding to socio-economic needs.

While the findings in this study resonate with the literature review in many ways, this study introduces a decolonial perspective which provides a practical expression of thought in vocational education allowing the NCV curriculum to become a site of resistance and reconstruction rather than reproduction of coloniality. The angle that a decolonial perspective brings to the TVET sector and particularly to the NCV is a call to consider the coloniality of the TVET sector as one of the major contributing factors to its seeming instability and inability to deliver according to national development plans.

Decolonial scholarship has emerged as a critical intellectual and political response to enduring legacies of colonialism, especially in the global South. In the South African context, it challenges the continued dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies in education and development, advocating for the recognition and integration of indigenous knowledge systems, local histories and alternative ways of knowing. This has significant implications for TVET colleges, which despite numerous post-apartheids reforms, remains shaped by colonial structures and neoliberal economic imperatives.

It was thus emphatically posited that the South African TVET sector was historically designed to serve colonial and apartheid economies, producing a stratified labour force where Black South Africans were largely relegated to unskilled or semi-skilled labour. Educational and training opportunities were racially segregated and deeply unequal, with

African learners denied access to quality vocational education. While access to education has been increased, and despite numerous policy reforms, such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) and the National Development Plan (2020), the TVET sector still suffers from curriculum models rooted in Eurocentric industrial frameworks; poor linkages between education and training and lived realities of students and communities; limited recognition of indigenous knowledges and local innovation; and a persistent association of TVET with second-rate education.

Linked to the theorisation of the study, a decolonial scholarship thus has implications for the TVET sector in the following critical areas:

9.3.1 Curriculum transformation

Decolonial scholarship demands a critical reassessment of what counts as knowledge in the TVET curriculum. This implies integrating indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), such as traditional methods, into formal training programmes; contextualising content to reflect local socio-economic realities, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas.; and including African philosophies, languages and histories to build cultural confidence and epistemic justice.

9.3.2 Pedagogical innovation

Decolonial pedagogy moves beyond content to address how knowledge is taught and generated, and whose voice is heard. In the TVET context, this would include learner-centred and participatory teaching methods that recognise students as co-creators of knowledge; the use of multilingual instruction, especially African languages, to improve comprehension and cultural relevance; and repositioning lecturers not as gatekeepers of Western knowledge, but as facilitators of learning embedded in local and global realities.

Coloniality is not only epistemic but also institutional. TVET colleges must rethink leadership structures to be more democratic and inclusive, particularly in decision-making

processes; strengthen existing and build new partnerships with community leaders, traditional authorities and local entrepreneurs; and foster environments where diverse identities and perspectives are respected and affirmed.

9.3.3 Redefining success and employability

Mainstream TVET models often measure success through formal employment in industry or further academic progression of students. Decolonial approaches challenge this narrow view by recognising alternative livelihoods, such as self-employment and informal sector work, as valid outcomes; promoting community-based economies and innovation models; and valuing social empowerment and cultural sustainability alongside economic metrics.

The above review leads to how the research questions have been addressed.

9.4 Section Two: How the Research Questions Have Been Addressed

9.4.1 Research Question 1: Understanding how the agendas that shape the TVET colleges have been enacted

In responding to the question of what agendas have shaped TVET colleges, this thesis engages critically with literature that spans colonial and post-apartheid trajectories. The literature review traced how the colonial and apartheid foundations of technical and vocational education were premised on racialised labour market segmentation, which positioned TVET as a mechanism for social control and economic exploitation (Papier, 2021; Powell & McGrath, 2019; McGrath & Akoojee, 2007; Akoojee, 2010). These historical agendas continue to reverberate in the current structure of the sector, especially through the persistent stigma associated with the TVET colleges as second-tier institutions, as highlighted in Mabunda & Frick, 2020 and Tlapana & Myeki, 2020.

Post-1994, the democratic government's commitment to redress and skills development has been increasingly mediated by neoliberal economic logics, particularly through the prioritisation of employability, narrow vocationalism and standardisation. Drawing both on empirical data and theoretical frameworks grounded in decolonial scholarship, the study has illuminated how these agendas are not only embedded in policy text such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013a) and the Department of Higher Education National Development Plan alignments, but also enacted through institutional cultures, pedagogical practices, and curriculum design, especially within the National Certificate Vocational programme. In addition, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013a), which, while progressive in tone, reinforces instrumentalist goals that subordinate broader humanising and contextually grounded educational purposes. The Department of Education and Training (2020) reports further expose the disjuncture between national curriculum prescriptions and local college contexts.

Through these insights, the literature reveals that the enactment of shaping agendas occurs both structurally and pedagogically. Agendas are embedded in curriculum frameworks such as the NCV, where lecturers must balance compliance with standardised assessment protocols and the realities of diverse student populations. The marginalisation of African languages, the “quantity over quality” tension in performance reporting, and the cultural alienation experienced by students collectively underscore how colonial, neoliberal and state-driven agendas are reproduced in subtle yet powerful ways within college environments (Needham, 2019; Allais & Wedekind, 2020). Thus, these agendas are not merely historical artefacts but active forces shaping pedagogical practice, institutional identity and student experience in South Africa's TVET system today.

9.4.2 Research Question 2: Exploring the epistemologies of TVET colleges and how these have shaped the NCV curriculum

This thesis responds to the question of epistemologies in the TVET sector by critically exploring the dominant knowledge systems that underpin the NCV curriculum. Drawing from decolonial theorists such as Maldonado-Torres (2007), Mignolo (2011) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a, b & c), the study reveals that the epistemic architecture of South Africa's TVET system is still shaped by Eurocentric and technicist knowledge traditions. These traditions are rooted in the colonial and Apartheid legacies that defined vocational education as narrowly skills-based and racially stratified (Motala & Vally, 2014; McGrath & Akoojee, 2007; Allias, 2014), with limited space for critical, contextual or indigenous knowledges (Anthonie, 2024; Manyau, 2018).

The NCV curriculum, despite being introduced as part of post-apartheid transformation, reflects this epistemological inheritance. As outlined in the work of Needham and Papier (2011) and Allias (2014) the NCV is framed around a competency-based model driven by outcomes, efficiency and standardisation. The result is a curriculum that heavily leans toward technical knowledge while marginalising the affective, ethical and contextual dimensions of learning that are essential for holistic human development. The dominance of English as a medium of instruction (Cele, 2021; Maluti TVET college, 2022), the exclusion of African knowledge systems and the lack of responsiveness to local economic and cultural contexts, all contribute to the perpetuation of an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western modes of knowing (Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024; Anthonie 2019).

The literature further highlights how the NCV curriculum creates an artificial separation between academic and vocational streams, a dualism that reflects global North epistemologies rather than addressing the complex socio-economic realities of South African youth. Lecturers, as noted in the studies by Wedekind and Mutereko (2016) and Buthelezi (2018), often feel constrained by rigid syllabi and centralised assessments, which leaves little room to innovate or adapt content meaningfully to students' lived experiences. This points to an institutional culture that reproduces epistemic alienation, echoing the insights of Fanon et.al (1963) about education systems that disconnect the colonised subject from their cultural and intellectual roots.

Thus, the question of epistemologies in TVET has been addressed by showing how the NCV curriculum continues to be shaped by globalised, decontextualised and depoliticised knowledge frameworks. Rather than challenging coloniality, the system often reinforces it by failing to engage with alternative epistemic traditions that value relational, community-oriented and historically situated ways of knowing. The thesis therefore argues for an epistemic reconstitution of the NCV curriculum, one that moves beyond employability to embrace transformation, justice and decolonial knowledge production.

9.4.3 Research Question 3: Critiquing the reification of knowledge gained by the NCV student

This thesis critiques the reification of knowledge in the NCV curriculum by engaging both theoretical insights and empirical findings to demonstrate how knowledge is treated as decontextualised, instrumental and technicist. Reification, in this context, refers to the treatment of knowledge as static, depersonalised content which is delivered, memorised and reproduced rather than as dynamic, contested and socially situated (Russell, 1999; Mignolo, 2011; Quinn & Vorster, 2017; Hlatshwayo, 2020). The literature, lived experiences of lecturers and students revealed that the NCV curriculum tends to present knowledge as neutral, universal, and largely technical, aligned with the logic of performativity and market-readiness, rather than critical consciousness, social agency or epistemic diversity (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024; Mbembe, 2016).

From the findings, it became clear that students often engage with the NCV curriculum in a mechanistic and transactional manner, many reported that their learning felt irrelevant to their lived realities and aspirations, stating that the content is overly theoretical and divorced from practical and contextual applications.

Drawing on decolonial scholarship (Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, b & c), the thesis exposes how this reification perpetuates epistemic injustice. The NCV student is positioned as a passive recipient of content rather than as an active participant in the knowledge construction. This approach aligns with the instrumentalist rationale of

neoliberal education systems that prioritise employability and economic productivity over personal and communal transformation (Tikly, 2019; Allias & Wedekind, 2020). As such, the value of knowledge is measured in narrow utilitarian terms, what it can produce in the marketplace, or how it can enable the student to articulate to universities rather than how it relates to students' identities, cultural contexts or broader societal needs.

Moreover, students often experience alienation from the knowledge they are expected to absorb. This is exacerbated by the exclusive use of English as a medium of instruction, the absence of African knowledge systems, and the erasure of students' socio-cultural experiences from the learning environment. These findings resonate with decolonial theorists such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who argues that the legacy of colonial epistemologies continues to position African students as recipients of knowledge reproduced elsewhere, for purposes defined elsewhere.

In my proposed decolonial framework for TVET below, I argue that such reification can be disrupted by centring epistemic justice and rehumanising pedagogy. The framework suggests the adoption of pedagogical strategies that are dialogical, reflective and responsive to context. For example, integrating students' lived experiences, local economic practices, indigenous knowledge systems and African languages into the curriculum not only validates the student as a knower but also restores relevance and resonance to the content. This aligns with the call for an education that is liberatory from both Fanon et.al., (1963) and wa Thiong'o (1986). This is the education that enables the formerly colonised to speak, create and act from their own centre.

Lecturers in the study also expressed a desire for curriculum autonomy and for professional development that would empower them to teach in ways that are culturally sustaining and pedagogically flexible. One lecturer said, "we follow the curriculum as it is" (Bongi TVET college B). This call is taken up in the decolonial framework through the inclusion of curriculum contextualisation, localised assessment strategies and lecturer empowerment as pillars of transformation.

9.4.4 Research Question 4: How has the NCV been enacted in the classroom?

This study explored the enactment of the NCV curriculum indirectly through participant accounts and documentary analysis, rather than through direct classroom observation. As such, the findings presented here should be understood as perceptions and reported practices, which offer valuable insight into classroom realities but do not constitute direct evidence of pedagogical enactment.

The findings suggest that the NCV has been enacted in ways that reveal both its aspirations for modernisation and the persistent tensions rooted in South Africa's colonial and apartheid educational legacy. At face value, the NCV curriculum was introduced as a progressive reform aimed at aligning vocational education with national development priorities, bridging the gap between schooling and the labour market, and offering a credible alternative to the academic Grade 12 pathway. However, participants' accounts point to contradictions between policy intentions and lived pedagogical realities.

Reported classroom practices appear to be shaped by several factors, including the preparedness and professional development of lecturers, language and literacy challenges among students, and broader sociocultural dynamics within TVET colleges. Participants indicated that lecturers, often recruited from industry without formal pedagogical training, may experience difficulty adapting to the demands of outcomes-based education. This may contribute to the continued reliance on more traditional teaching and assessment practices, potentially limiting engagement with the critical thinking and applied learning outcomes envisaged in the NCV.

In addition, participant narratives suggest that classroom practices may, at times, reproduce hierarchical and discipline-centred orientations associated with historically dominant curricular traditions. There were indications that teaching to the examination remains prevalent (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016; Vimbelo & Bayaga, 2023), with curriculum interpretation often prioritising technical competencies over broader contextual, critical and locally grounded forms of knowledge.

Language also emerged as a significant mediating factor. The use of English as the primary language of instruction may present challenges for students whose first language differs, potentially affecting comprehension and participation. Furthermore, participants highlighted limited flexibility in adapting the curriculum to local contexts (DHET Review of TVET colleges, 2018), which may constrain opportunities for culturally responsive pedagogy and the integration of indigenous knowledge systems.

While these insights point to important trends, it is important to reiterate that the absence of direct classroom observation limits the extent to which definitive claims can be made about actual pedagogical practices. Rather, the findings highlight perceived patterns of enactment, which are consistent with broader literature (Majola, 2025; Maluleke et al., 2024; Vimbelo & Bayaga, 2023) suggesting that vocational education in South Africa often prioritises economic over social and epistemic goals.

Taken together, the findings suggest that although the NCV curriculum aspires to be transformative, its reported enactment may continue to reflect enduring structural and epistemic constraints. These insights should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive, pointing to the need for future research incorporating classroom-based observations to more fully understand curriculum enactment in practice.

9.4.5 Research Question 5: How have lecturers and students experienced the NCV curriculum?

The experiences of lecturers and students with the NCV curriculum reveal a range of complex, often contradictory realities that expose deep structural challenges within South Africa's post-school education and training system. Empirical evidence demonstrates that while the NCV was envisioned as a progressive intervention to equip students with vocational skills and improve access to further education and employment, its implementation has reproduced mixed outcomes.

9.4.5.1 Lecturers' experiences

Lecturers have reported considerable difficulties in delivering the NCV curriculum due to limited pedagogical support, lack of subject-specific training, and inadequate teaching resources. Lecturers in the study also indicated being recruited based on their technical expertise rather than teaching qualifications (also confirmed in the DHET Report on the Evaluation of the NCV Qualification, 2013c; Buthelezi, 2018). This mismatch has left lecturers feeling ill-prepared to navigate the curriculum design, assessment frameworks and student-centred pedagogies.

Lecturers also reported feelings of disillusionment compounded by bureaucratic accountability measures that prioritise throughput over genuine learning. This causes lecturers to feel alienated from the curriculum design process resulting in the perception that the curriculum is imposed rather than co-constructed. Lecturers have expressed a desire for more autonomy, training and contextual flexibility to adapt the curriculum to their students' needs.

9.4.5.2 Students experiences

Student experiences reflect deep inequalities in access, comprehension and participation. For students, particularly those from marginalised or under-resourced backgrounds, the NCV curriculum has been difficult to engage with due to its language of delivery, abstract content and lack of contextual relevance.

The Report on Tracer Study of the Transition of NCV Students from TVET Colleges to the Labour Market (2016) revealed that students often find the curriculum disconnected from their lived realities and aspirations. Practical components such as simulated work experience or excursions are inconsistently implemented, leading to a gap between theoretical learning and real-world skills development. This contributes to the high drop out and low completion rates observed in many colleges (Kanyane, 2016; Matabane et.al., 2022; Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024).

Further, the study found that many students experience a form of symbolic stigma within the NCV stream, particularly when compared to their peers in traditional academic routes. This is exacerbated by a lack of social recognition for vocational education in general, which leads to diminished motivation and low self-esteem among students. Language as shown in other sections continues to be a significant barrier contributing to poor performance and poor retention (Kanyane, 2016; Matabane et.al., 2022; Ngcobo & Khoza, 2024).

9.4.6 Research Question 6: To create a space where the beginning of a decolonised TVET curriculum could be envisioned

This study undertook the task of creating an exploratory and dialogic space in which the beginnings of a decolonised TVET curriculum could be envisioned. It is important to note, however, that this process was not designed as a systematic curriculum design exercise, but rather as an interpretive and generative engagement with participants' perspectives. As such, the insights presented here should be understood as emergent, partial and indicative, rather than as a fully developed or empirically validated model of a decolonised curriculum.

Rather than proposing a definitive alternative, the study adopted a generative stance that invites imagination, provokes critical reflection, and challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning the current NCV framework. The intention was not only to critique the colonial residues within the curriculum, but to begin opening up a space for curricular rethinking grounded in the lived realities, cultural knowledge systems and historical contexts of South African communities.

Through engagements with lecturers and students, the study surfaced widespread dissatisfaction with the curriculum's perceived technicist orientation, centralised control and limited relevance. While these engagements were not structured as formal co-design processes, they nonetheless offered tentative insights into what participants value in a

more responsive curriculum. Lecturers expressed a desire for greater pedagogical autonomy, flexibility and the inclusion of local knowledge and languages. Students highlighted the importance of relevance, cultural affirmation and opportunities to engage with content that resonates with their identities and aspirations.

Framed within the decolonial turn, as articulated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, this thesis positions itself not only as critique but as a provisional contribution toward ongoing debates on curriculum transformation. In response to the patterns identified, the study tentatively advances a conceptual orientation towards relevance and relational pedagogy. This emerging framework is not presented as complete, but as a heuristic device to guide further thinking, dialogue and empirical work. It draws on principles such as:

- Curriculum contextualisation that responds to local histories and community knowledge;
- Linguistic and cultural inclusivity that affirms student identities;
- Dialogic pedagogies that support co-construction of knowledge; and
- Transformative aims that link vocational learning to social agency, alongside employment.

While these principles provide a useful starting point, it must be emphasised that participants were not systematically supported with structured design tools, models or iterative feedback processes, which may have limited the depth and coherence of the envisioned alternatives. Consequently, the framework presented here should be regarded as exploratory and incomplete, requiring further development through more participatory and design-oriented research approaches.

Beyond the reform of existing institutional arrangements, a more radical line of inquiry raises the question of whether meaningful decolonisation can occur within the current TVET college framework at all. This perspective invites consideration of alternative institutional forms, including community-based vocational learning centres, cooperative training models, and hybrid systems that integrate production, indigenous knowledge and

social development. Such possibilities challenge the dominance of formalised, state-regulated college systems and open space for reimagining vocational education as a more socially embedded and contextually grounded practice. While this study does not empirically explore these alternatives, their inclusion underscores the possibility that curriculum reform alone may be insufficient without broader structural transformation.

In this way, the thesis contributes to the growing field of decolonial curriculum studies within TVET by offering a tentative opening rather than a final blueprint. It creates a space of possibility in which policymakers, educators, students and communities might begin to imagine alternative futures for vocational education. This aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's call to move from epistemological enclosure toward epistemological freedom, while recognising that such a transition is necessarily iterative, contested and ongoing.

The next section presents the central arguments of this study.

9.5 Section Three: Central Argument – Coloniality in the NCV Curriculum and TVET College Sector

This thesis makes the following five central arguments:

9.5.1 Stigmatisation of TVET pathways founded on coloniality of being

The enduring stigma attached to TVET provisioning pathways remains one of the most significant barriers to the sector's transformation and legitimacy. TVET colleges are frequently perceived as inferior to universities, attracting students who are viewed as having "failed" to access the more prestigious academic track. This perception is not incidental, it reflects a colonial legacy that privileges abstract, theoretical and academic forms of knowledge over practical, embodied and technical skills. Within this worldview, manual and vocational work was historically relegated to the margins, often racialised and devalued. Academic education on the other hand, was constructed as the pathway to intellectual and social legitimacy and superiority.

The hierarchical structuring of knowledge continues to shape the South African education system today reinforcing the divide between “thinking” and “doing” as mutually exclusive categories. The result is a systemic marginalisation of TVET institutions and their students, whose skills are vital to the economy but who are nonetheless treated as second-class citizens within the broader post-school education and training landscape. The stigma also impacts student morale, enrolment patterns and even resource allocation as universities continue to receive greater recognition and funding.

In my view, addressing this deeply rooted stigma requires a multi-pronged and sustained effort from all stakeholders including government, industry, communities and educational institutions themselves. It calls for a redefinition of success in post-school education, one that values diverse intelligences, affirms vocational pathways and recognises the social and economic contributions of skilled work. A decolonial response would not only involve elevating the status of TVET through public messaging and policy but would also include reimagining the epistemologies that underpin vocational education. These include centring African knowledge systems, community needs and the lived realities of students. Only through such a concerted and contextually grounded effort can TVET colleges become the pivotal institutions that government policy envisions them to be, which is agents of transformation, inclusion and socio-economic justice in a postcolonial South Africa.

9.5.2 Continued dominance of colonial language practices among lecturers and students

The continued dominance of colonial languages as the primary medium of instruction presents a significant barrier to learning for NCV students who are more proficient in indigenous languages as shown in the findings. This linguistic hegemony reinforces colonial power dynamics, alienates students from their cultural and linguistic identities, and limits their capacity to fully engage with educational content. It is my view that indigenous languages could be officially recognised and used as mediums of instruction

especially in foundational or conceptual subjects. Further, code-switching could also be officially encouraged as well as translanguaging as legitimate pedagogical strategies and not just as fallback options as was seen in the findings and in literature review. Lastly, TVET colleges could establish language access units to support translation, interpretation and bilingual learning materials.

9.5.3 Tension between access and quality: affirming Eurocentric measures of success

The expansion of access to TVET education in the post-apartheid era has often been celebrated as a marker of progress. However, this increased enrolment has brought to the fore a critical tension between access and quality. While more students are entering the system, concerns have emerged regarding the depth, relevance and overall quality of the education that students receive. This reflects a deeper contradiction, one that prioritises quantitative growth, measured through enrolment figures and certification rates which may occur at the expense of transformative and contextually grounded learning experiences. Such an approach is rooted in colonial logic where development is equated with numerical expansion rather than with meaningful change. In this logic, success is measured by metrics rather than by empowerment, critical consciousness or socio-economic mobility. A decolonial lens challenges this framing, arguing instead for a reimagining of both access and quality as interdependent goals, not competing ones. It insists that expanding participation must go hand in hand with investing in culturally responsive pedagogy, lecturer development and curriculum transformation so that what students gain access to is not only education, but education that dignifies, empowers and transforms.

9.5.4 Continued lack of robust lecturer development and appropriate deployments

One of the most urgent and under-addressed challenges facing the TVET sector is the professional development and deployment of lecturers, who are often expected to drive institutional transformation without the necessary support, training or autonomy. Many

TVET lecturers report feelings of disillusionment and frustration, rooted in a combination of factors including inadequate professional development opportunities, limited institutional support and the lack of pedagogical freedom. These frustrations are not merely anecdotal, but they signal a systemic failure to invest in the people who are central to student success and institutional credibility.

At the heart of this issue may be a deeply embedded managerial approach, inherited from colonial and apartheid-era education systems, that emphasises standardisation, compliance and bureaucratic control over teacher agency, pedagogical innovation and professional empowerment. Lecturers are frequently treated as passive implementers of curriculum rather than as active participants in knowledge creation or curriculum transformation. Many are deployed to teach programmes without adequate orientation, mentorship and sometimes with no alignment to their areas of expertise.

From a decolonial perspective, this replicates a logic in which lecturers are mechanical deliverers of prescribed knowledge, rather than critical facilitators of contextually relevant, student-centred learning. It also reinforces hierarchies between academic and vocational educators thus privileging university-trained professionals while vocational educators are left behind. This not only affects the quality of teaching and learning but also undermines the transformative potential of the TVET sector.

Addressing these issues requires an upscaling of the number of TVET college lecturers enrolled in different professional qualifications as recommended in the National Policy on the Professional Development of Lecturers in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DHET, 2013b). This also calls for more universities to offer these qualifications on both full-time and part-time basis, thereby widening access and accommodating the diverse needs of in-service lecturers.

9.5.5 Lack of curriculum contextualisation and the erosion of cultural identity due to colonial foundations

The TVET curriculum frequently remains disconnected from local contexts and lived realities, prioritising Western epistemologies, industrial models and globalised labour market demands at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems and community-based ways of knowing. This lack of contextual relevance not only diminishes the educational experience of the NCV student but also contributes to a broader process of cultural erasure and epistemic marginalisation. The persistence of a Eurocentric curriculum signals more than curricular conservatism; it underscores the coloniality embedded within TVET education, where knowledge hierarchies continue to privilege the “universal” over the local, the abstract over experiential, and the imported over the indigenous. In a society still grappling with the legacies of apartheid and colonialism, this curricular disconnect poses a significant barrier to transformation, social justice, epistemic justice and the decolonisation of post-school education.

Addressing the disconnect between the TVET curriculum and local realities requires a systemic reimagining of what counts as valid knowledge within vocational education. It will require that curriculum development processes intentionally include a collaboration with local artisans, elders, industry partners and indigenous knowledge holders to ensure the curriculum reflects the cultural, economic and social contexts in which students live and will eventually work. Further, the Department of Higher Education and Training could consider decentralising curriculum authority where individual TVET colleges could adapt national frameworks in ways that respond to specific needs and histories of their communities.

The central arguments presented above form the basis for proposing a framework through which a decolonial project in the TVET sector might be conceptualised and advanced.

9.6 Section Four: A Proposed Framework for Decolonising the NCV Curriculum and TVET Sector

The proposal for a framework to decolonise the NCV curriculum and by implication the TVET college sector presented in this study is grounded in the empirical findings generated through lecturer interviews and student focus group discussions, particularly their responses to the question: “If you had the power to change anything in the NCV curriculum to make it align more closely with a decolonial agenda, what would it be?” The responses to this question, coupled with my own critical reflections as a researcher and the decolonial concepts adopted for this study formed the basis for the conceptual model developed in this final chapter.

The first insight centred on the need to reimagine lecturer training and reform management structures within the TVET colleges. Participants pointed to the disconnect between those who teach and those who lead, highlighting that meaningful curriculum transformation requires both pedagogical empowerment and visionary leadership. As one participant explained: “Number one, I would look at the curriculum and how do we train our lecturers? Number two, I would look at management - how the TVET colleges are managed.” (Zenzele, lecturer, TVET college A).

The second insight comes from participants’ responses which relates to the structure and design of the NCV programme itself, particularly the misalignment between student needs and programme expectations. Lecturers expressed concern about structural gaps that have persisted in the curriculum, despite the NCV being in operation for over 15 years. These gaps, while perhaps unintended at inception, continue to undermine the potential impact of the programme.

... design it (the NCV) so that its more user friendly ... there are big gaps. The gaps in the system may have been unintentionally created but after running the programme for over 15 years, these gaps should now be closed if the NCV is to make the required impact on a large scale. (Henrietta, lecturer, TVET college A).

Henrietta’s reflections draw attention to a critical tension within the NCV. It attempts to cater to a broad and diverse student body without sufficiently differentiating pathways or

scaffolding support. From a decolonial perspective, this suggests a need to rethink the one-size-fits all model, and instead create flexible, learner-responsive structures.

A third important insight that shaped the proposed framework relates to the need for the NCV curriculum to be culturally grounded and affirming of indigenous belief systems and worldviews. One of the underlying critiques offered by participants was that the current curriculum imposes a narrow, Western-centred worldview, often at the expense of students' and lecturers' cultural identities and belief systems. This form of epistemic exclusion echoes colonial-era education practices that sought to erase or delegitimise indigenous knowledge in favour of so-called universal truths. One participant explained it thus: "Being forced to do whatever you're being taught to do and forget your beliefs and stick to what you been taught do ... you are not allowed to make your beliefs be number one." (Bongi, lecturer, TVET college B).

The quote highlights the invisible violence of epistemic marginalisation, where the indigenous ways of knowing, being and believing are relegated to the periphery of the educational experience. From a decolonial standpoint, this is a call to re-centre indigenous belief systems, cultural practices, and philosophies of traditions within the NCV curriculum. Doing so would not only enhance the relevance of the curriculum for students but also contribute to the broader project of epistemic justice.

The fourth insight from participant responses dealt with the lingering psychological and cultural effects of colonisation on TVET curriculum and the broader educational experience. Participants reflected on how colonial legacies continues to shape not only what is taught, but how knowledge is constructed and valued within the NCV programme. This includes the internalisation of foreign standards, values and epistemologies, which are often positioned as superior to indigenous knowing. This response was stated: "It's being changed from who you are to whoever is colonising you ... the colonised have to forget what they grew up being taught and focus on what the British are teaching them." (Zanele, lecturer, TVET college B).

The quote also speaks to a profound identity rupture of a forced erasure of culture memory and inherited knowledge that occurs when education is framed through a Eurocentric lens. Again, Zanele's words signals the urgent need to reclaim African voices, histories and pedagogies as central to the curriculum.

The fifth insight is drawn from responses from two students. When asked about their understanding of decolonisation and what they would change in the NCV, the students expressed strong views on the continued dominance of English in TVET institutions and how it shapes their educational experiences. Their responses reveal how language functions not only as a medium of instruction but also a site of inequality and exclusion. For instance, Student 8 stated:

Yes. I know that word. It means we have to take away the things that we were forced to do, for example, we are forced to learn in English and it's a language that we are forced to use here in Africa and which we are using right now. So, we have to decolonise so we can do what we think is good for us and not what someone else thinks is good for us.
(Student 8, TVET college A)

Similarly, Student 9 explained:

The problem is that with white people they are comfortable with English, it is their mother tongue, but for black people English is not our mother tongue. Therefore, we have to learn and adapt to the English language and that is now not a 50/50 situation and it's not fair.
(Student 9, TVET college B)

These reflections illustrate how students conceptualise decolonisation as a struggle for linguistic and cultural imposition within the education system. Student 8 highlights the coercive nature of English as a medium of instruction, framing decolonisation as reclaiming agency and the right to determine educational practices that align with local realities. Student 9 extends this critique by pointing to the inequities embedded in language use, emphasising that English privileges white students while placing additional burdens on black students who must adapt to a foreign linguistic framework. Taken

together, these insights foreground language as a site of colonial residue and underscore the urgent need for decolonial strategies that restore fairness, linguistic justice and cultural relevance within the TVET sector.

The final insight highlighted by participants introduced a more hopeful and forward-looking perspective, positioning decolonisation as not only a critique of colonial residue, but also as a liberatory practice of reclaiming voice, agency and choice within the education system representing a transformation of mindset, participation and ownership. This reflection speaks to the emerging democratic consciousness within the TVET sector, where both lecturers and students are beginning to question inherited practices, assert their perspectives, and imagine alternatives that are aligned with their values and lived experiences. Mbali captured this shift in tone:

Maybe this is where we can change the narrative from being colonised so that we can de-clutter now that we are living in a democratic country. We have a voice now. We can just say no! ... I believe that it's something that could define decolonisation. (Mbali, lecturer, TVET college B).

The quote above frames decolonisation as a continuous and collective process and not something imposed from above, but something that emerges through daily acts of resistance, negotiation and reimagination. It reinforces the importance of creating institutional cultures where lecturers and students alike feel empowered to question, contribute and reshape the education they are part of.

As I reflected on the insights shared by lecturers alongside my own observations, I was drawn to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), de Sousa Santos (2017) and Mignolo's (2009) conceptualisations as offered in the theoretical framework chapter. The proposed decolonial framework draws strength from the converging insights of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), de Sousa Santos (2017) and Mignolo (2009).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's principles offer not only a critical lens for understanding the entrenched coloniality within the South African education landscape but also a sense of epistemic and political grounding for advancing a decolonial agenda. This framing became important in shaping my thinking, as it introduced a measure of methodological and ideological clarity, what one might call a form of intellectual safety, amidst the complexity of proposing structural change. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017, p.77) proposes four key considerations for "doing decolonial change," which served as guiding principles for developing the framework proposed in this study.

Firstly, he argues that Africa must be recognised and affirmed as a legitimate epistemic base from which to view and interpret the world. This entails validating indigenous ways of knowing and positioning them as central rather than peripheral. Secondly, there is a pressing need for African scholars to disrupt the dominant geography and biology of knowledge production. The so-called "global knowledge" is, in fact, often rooted in a Eurocentric and North American epistemic centre that marginalises other knowledge systems: this centre must be reoriented to privilege Africa-centred epistemologies. Thirdly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls for African academia to engage in "re-thinking thinking itself" by embracing the principle that all human beings are born into valid and functional knowledge systems. This act of embracing diverse epistemologies forms part of what he terms epistemic disobedience, a deliberate departure from Eurocentric intellectual norms. Finally, he emphasises the importance of African scholars recognising their own formation within the "Westernised" institutions and undertaking the difficult yet necessary journey of "learning to unlearn" to re-learn in ways that are grounded in decolonial consciousness. These imperatives are central to any authentic and transformative reimagining of the curriculum and pedagogical practices within the TVET sector. Ndlovu-Gatsheni therefore emphasises the reclaiming of Africa as an epistemic base, shifting the locus of knowledge, and practising epistemic disobedience as anchors for decolonisation in the continent's struggles for epistemic freedom.

Santos calls for "deep cognitive justice" and an ecology of knowledges thus challenging the Eurocentric hierarchies embedded in higher education. By cognitive justice, de Sousa

Santos (2017) refers to the equitable recognition of diverse ways of knowing, including those historically marginalised or rendered invisible by colonial and Western-centric epistemologies. The notion of an ecology of knowledges resists the monopoly of modern science as the sole valid form of knowledge, instead fostering dialogue between scientific, indigenous, local and experiential knowledges. This approach contests the epistemicides, that is, the systematic destruction of alternative knowledges that is perpetuated through the global spread of Western education models. In the context of higher education, it demands the dismantling of curricula, pedagogies and institutional cultures that privilege Euro-American theories and methodologies, thereby creating space for pluriversity, intercultural translations and reciprocal learning. In South Africa, these ideas resonate strongly with ongoing debates on decolonising the curriculum, as they foreground the need to value African epistemologies alongside global knowledge systems rather than merely “adding” them into an unchanged, Eurocentric framework.

Complementing these perspectives, Mignolo’s concept of the colonial matrix of power reveals how coloniality operates across domains the economy, authority, gender and sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity thereby exposing the interlocking systems that sustain inequality within the curricula and institutional cultures. In the TVET sector, this is evident in programme offerings and assessment standards that remain tied to Eurocentric occupational frameworks from the apartheid era, rather than local contexts and labour market needs. Gendered divisions in trades and the privileging of Western knowledge over indigenous and experiential knowledges further entrench these inequalities. A decolonial TVET project therefore requires rethinking both the content and purpose of vocational training so that it advances social justice and local development.

Together, these theoretical insights provide both the critical lens and the practical orientation for a decolonial framework capable of confronting entrenched colonial patterns in the NCV curriculum and reimagining the TVET sector as a site of epistemic plurality, justice and transformation.

9.6.1 Returning to the definition of decoloniality

To ground the proposed framework within a clear conceptual foundation, it is necessary to return to the definition of decoloniality that underpins this study. While the initial theoretical framing of this study drew on a conception of decoloniality that emphasised epistemic delinking and the centring of indigenous knowledge systems, engagement with a broader body of scholarship during the course of the research prompted a critical re-evaluation of this position. In particular, the work of Táíwò (2010) has highlighted the risks of epistemic nativism and the uncritical rejection of knowledge on the basis of its origins.

As a result, this study adopts a more nuanced understanding of decoloniality, one that foregrounds the dismantling of colonial power structures while also recognising the value of critically engaging with diverse knowledge traditions. Establishing this definition ensures that the framework is anchored in the specific historical, epistemic and socio-political realities of South Africa's TVET sector. By clarifying what decoloniality means in this context, the framework can be explicitly aligned with the broader scholarly discourse while remaining sensitive to local conditions. This definition serves as both a guiding principle and a touchstone for the strategies, actions and outcomes envisioned in the proposed decolonial framework.

The revisited definition of decoloniality is thus:

Decoloniality, in the South African TVET sector, is the intentional process of dismantling colonial patterns of power, knowledge, and being that persist in curricula, pedagogies and institutional cultures. It involves critically interrogating and transforming Eurocentric epistemic dominance, while remaining open to the selective and contextually relevant use of diverse knowledge traditions. In this sense, decoloniality does not require the wholesale rejection of Western knowledge, but rather its reconfiguration alongside indigenous and local knowledges within a pluriversal framework. Rooted in social justice,

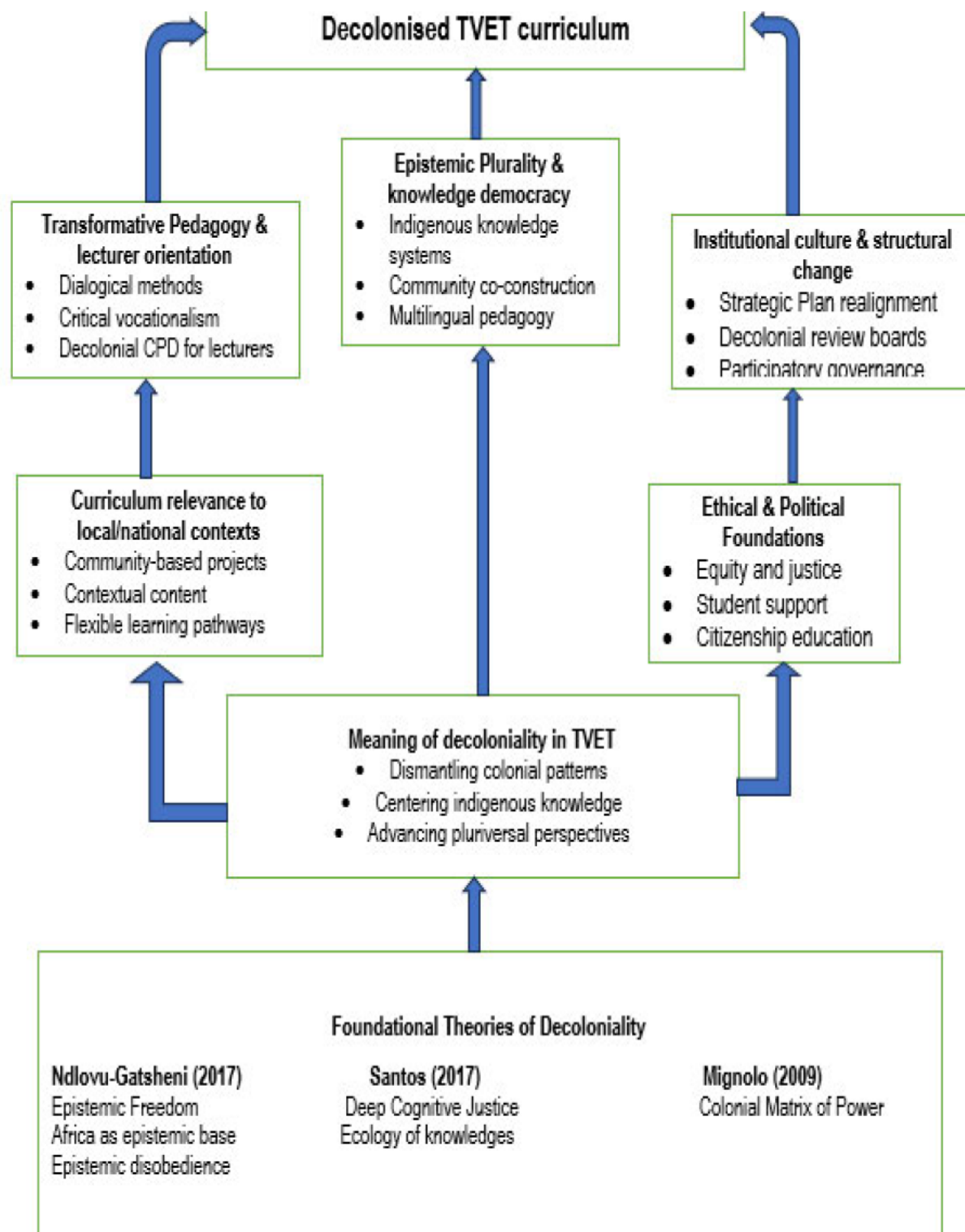
it seeks to create a more equitable, inclusive and contextually relevant TVET system that addresses historical marginalisation and fosters justice, compassion and transformative relationships. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Shultz, 2013, Táíwò, 2010)

The following is the framework grounded in the insights from lecturer and student participants, my own reflection and the imperatives provided by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), de Sousa Santos (2017) and Mignolo (2009). The framework shows a decolonised NCV curriculum at the centre, supported by five interrelated components:

- a) Epistemic Plurality and knowledge democracy
- b) Transformative pedagogy and lecturer reorientation
- c) Curriculum relevance to local/national contexts
- d) Institutional culture and structural change
- e) Ethical and political foundations

Each component is essential and interconnected, collectively forming a holistic and responsive framework for a decolonised vocational education system.

Figure 24: Proposed framework for decolonising the NCV curriculum and the TVET sector



9.6.2 *Explanation*

9.6.2.1 Epistemic plurality and knowledge democracy

At the heart of a decolonised TVET curriculum is the recognition that knowledge is plural rather than monolithic. A decolonial model challenges the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies and advocates for diverse, contextually grounded ways of knowing. In this regard, Tabulawa's (2013) emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogy is instructive, as he argues that meaningful learning must be rooted in learners' socio-cultural contexts rather than imposed through abstract, decontextualised frameworks. Similarly, Táíwò (2010) cautions against uncritical nativism, advocating instead for a critical reconstruction of knowledge that draws selectively on both indigenous and global intellectual traditions.

This involves, first, the integration of African indigenous knowledge systems and vocational practices that are embedded in local histories and lived realities. Traditional agricultural and medicinal techniques, communal economic practices, and artisanal crafts, for instance, should be affirmed and taught alongside contemporary technical competencies. Secondly, the curriculum must be co-constructed with community knowledge holders, elders, and practitioners to ensure that it reflects lived experience and embodied knowledge, rather than being limited to formalised institutional content, an approach aligned with Tabulawa's call for participatory and context-sensitive education. Finally, the adoption of bilingual or multilingual pedagogies is critical, recognising that language serves not only as a medium of instruction but also as a vessel for cultural identity and epistemological framing. The elevation of African languages within technical education fosters deeper comprehension, enhances cultural relevance, and contributes to the broader project of reclaiming epistemic agency, while remaining open to the kind of critical, globally engaged knowledge production that Táíwò envisions.

9.6.2.2 Transformative pedagogy and lecturer reorientation

Decolonising the curriculum is not only about revising content but also about reimagining pedagogy, how knowledge is taught and who is deemed a legitimate transmitter of that knowledge. This shift calls for dialogical teaching approaches rooted in Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1970), where learning is a collaborative process between lecturers and students. In this model, the lecturer transitions from being the sole authority to becoming a facilitator of critical inquiry and mutual reflection. Furthermore, the adoption of critical vocationalism is essential. This approach goes beyond equipping students with technical skills by encouraging them to interrogate the broader socio-political and economic contexts of their work. For instance, plumbing instruction may be paired with critical discussions on access to water, infrastructure inequality and environmental justice. Crucially, this transformation requires a reorientation of TVET lecturers through structured training and ongoing professional development grounded in decolonial theory and praxis. Such initiatives should include workshop on unlearning colonial assumptions, examining one's positionality within the education system and implementing pedagogical strategies that are culturally and contextually responsive.

9.6.2.3 Curriculum relevance to local/national contexts

The findings of this study reveal that the current NCV curriculum frequently operates in dissonance with the socio-economic realities of South African youth. A decolonial model must therefore intentionally respond to the lived experiences of students and the needs of their communities. In line with Tabulawa's (2013) argument that meaningful education should be grounded in learners' socio-cultural contexts, this can be achieved by embedding community-based learning projects across programmes, allowing students to engage directly and practically with local challenges such as sustainable energy initiatives, infrastructure development and food security.

Moreover, the curriculum should prioritise content that aligns with South Africa's post-apartheid developmental goals and social justice imperatives, moving away from the wholesale adoption of Western industrial models that often fail to resonate with local contexts. At the same time, echoing Táíwò's (2010) caution against uncritical rejection or

adoption of knowledge systems, such a shift should involve a critical and selective engagement with global knowledge, ensuring relevance without epistemic isolation.

Finally, the design of flexible learning pathways that recognise and validate prior and informal learning is essential for enhancing inclusivity and accessibility, particularly for historically marginalised groups, thus expanding the transformative potential of vocational education in South Africa.

9.6.2.4 Institutional culture and structural change

For decolonisation in the TVET college sector to be meaningful and sustainable, curriculum and pedagogical reforms must be underpinned by deep-rooted institutional transformation, supported by coherent policy pathways and regulatory alignment. Without such systemic anchoring, efforts risk becoming tokenistic and episodic rather than enduring. This transformation should begin with the formal revision of institutional mission statements, core values and strategic plans to explicitly articulate decolonial commitments, aligned with national frameworks such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training and the Department of Higher Education and Training strategic priorities on equity, redress and responsiveness. Embedding decoloniality at this level ensures that it is not treated as an add-on, but as a guiding institutional mandate subject to monitoring and evaluation.

To operationalise this commitment, colleges should institutionalise decolonial review mechanisms such as standing committees or boards comprising students, lecturers and community stakeholders with clearly defined terms of reference, reporting lines and accountability measures. These structures can be integrated into existing quality assurance systems, including those overseen by South African Qualifications Authority and the Council on Higher Education, thereby linking decolonial practice to accreditation, programme review and institutional audits. In this way, decolonisation becomes part of formal compliance and quality processes rather than remaining informal or symbolic.

Structural transformation also requires the deliberate reform of governance frameworks. This includes revising institutional statutes and council procedures to enable more democratic, participatory decision-making processes, in line with principles of cooperative governance and social accountability. Mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, inclusive academic boards, and structured student and community representation in governance bodies can serve as concrete policy instruments to redistribute voice and authority within colleges.

Furthermore, institutional culture must be addressed through both symbolic and material interventions. Colleges should adopt formal policies for the transformation of physical and symbolic spaces such as language policies, naming practices, signage, and heritage representations to dismantle colonial artefacts and affirm indigenous identities. These interventions should be supported by dedicated transformation plans, resourced through institutional budgets and linked to performance management systems to ensure implementation.

In this way, institutional cultures can be reoriented toward justice, inclusion and epistemic plurality through clearly defined policy pathways, measurable targets and sustained accountability mechanisms, ensuring that decolonisation is embedded not only in discourse, but in the everyday functioning of TVET institutions.

9.6.2.5 Ethical and political foundations

A decolonised TVET model must be grounded in an explicit ethical and political commitment to social justice, equity and human dignity. This foundation ensures that vocational education does not merely serve economic ends but contributes to broader societal transformation. A key principle is the inseparability of access and success, meaning that entry into the system must be matched by robust support structures, including financial assistance (such as through NSFAS), psychosocial services, academic tutoring and career guidance. Furthermore, ethical citizenship must be embedded within vocational programmes, cultivating graduates who are not only

technically competent but also critically conscious agents of change within their communities. Finally, vocational education should be intentionally linked to emancipatory national development priorities such as land reform, gender equity and environmental sustainability so that it contributes to a more just and inclusive society.

9.7 Section Five: The TVET Sector at Crossroads: Will it dare to Decolonise?

The TVET sector in South Africa stands at a crossroad. Its institutional history deeply entangled with colonial and apartheid agendas of racialised labour control, still casts a long shadow over its present-day form and function. Today, as South Africa grapples with persistent inequalities, high unemployment and a crisis of relevance in education, the TVET sector is increasingly being called upon to transform, not incrementally, but fundamentally. The long-standing inequities in the sector linger behind low success rates, scarce institutional resources, and a recurring silence on decolonial transformation (Gamede & Uleanya, 2019; Powell, Muronda & Tini, 2024). This moment demands an urgent question: Will the TVET sector dare to decolonize and fulfil its societal role?

To illustrate these tensions, I return to the metaphor of the “a ship navigating a foggy, colonial sea”. This image captures both the sector’s transformative potential and its instability, while also evoking the paradox of ships as vehicles of movement and symbols of displacement under colonialism. The ship’s crew, who are management and lecturers, struggle to steer with colonial rudders and sails representing inherited governance traditions and curriculum frameworks coupled with technocratic controls that slow transformation. Students, as passengers, bear the weight of hidden burdens such as alienation, identity loss and language barriers, with some disengaging or dropping out not from individual failure but systemic constraints. The fog symbolises the hidden curriculum, Eurocentric dominance and persistent stigma surrounding vocational education while the maps and charts, stand for rigid curricula and Eurocentric knowledge systems that exclude indigenous epistemologies and often fail to reflect local contexts. Together, these elements highlight that the metaphor is not only descriptive but also diagnostic, pointing to the deeper changes needed if TVET is to truly transform.

The metaphor suggests that decolonising TVET involves more than curriculum adjustments or surface-level reforms. It requires a deep epistemic and structural shift: challenging the Eurocentric logic that underpins training models, foregrounding Africa and community-based knowledge, and redefining the very purpose of vocational education. It means interrogating who the TVET sector serves, how it defines knowledge and success, and whether it perpetuates or disrupts inequality.

South Africa's post-apartheid TVET policy landscape has laid some foundations for transformation. The underperformance of the TVET sector starkly contrasts with the goals of both the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013). The White Paper articulates a vision on an integrated, responsive and inclusive system. It acknowledges the need for TVET colleges to serve the broader goals of social justice, redress, and economic development. Similarly, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 positions TVET as a key driver in addressing skills shortages and promoting inclusive economic growth with an ambitious target of 80-90% throughput rates. Yet, while these frameworks offer important policy commitments, their implementation has largely focused on employability, skills pipelines and labour market responsiveness, often at the expense of deeper transformation.

The dominance of a neoliberal, industry-driven approach emphasising standardization, throughput rates, and market alignment risks narrowing the TVET mandate. This perpetuates a logic of education as a tool for economic utility, rather than as a site of critical consciousness and social justice. Consequently, the sector continues to reproduce colonial legacies: positioning students as passive recipients of externally defined skills rather than active participants in shaping their own futures. Clearly, the sector's prevailing neoliberal, efficiency-driven approach has failed to dismantle the colonial structures that define the TVET sector.

Further, a recent DHET-supported national survey (2020-2022) (DHET, 2022; Powell et. al., 2024) revealed additional systemic constraints: chronic underfunding, uneven student

support and dysfunctional NSFAS mechanisms, all of which disproportionately disadvantage students from working-class, rural and marginalised communities. Barriers to digital learning, including infrastructure deficits and a persistent digital divide, exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for the sector's predominantly African and female student base (Mesuwini & Mokoena, 2024).

Despite policy-level declarations of intent such as the White Paper (2013) and the NDP, actual implementation remains stuck within an instrumentalist paradigm. Emphasis remains on throughput quotas, labour-market alignment, and employability metrics, neglecting essential epistemic and cultural transformation. The result: TVET continues to reproduce, rather than disrupt, the hierarchies that maintain inequality.

To truly realise the transformative intent of South Africa's policy frameworks, the TVET sector must engage in what decolonial scholars call an epistemic disobedience – a deliberate refusal to accept inherited norms and an embrace of alternative, locally grounded paradigms. This includes valuing community knowledge, indigenous innovation, multilingual pedagogies and relational approaches to teaching and learning.

TVET cannot claim transformation while remaining silent on the socio-historical injustices that shaped its formation. It cannot be decolonised without a willingness to criticise its own institutional cultures, address structural exclusions, and reimagine its social contract. The sector is not short of policies; what is lacking is the political and institutional courage to unsettle the foundations of which it rests.

This is the moment of reckoning. The tools for change exist, in policy, in scholarship and in lived experiences of students and educators. The question is no longer whether decolonisation is necessary. It is whether the TVET sector will choose the harder path: to disrupt, to reimagine, and to become a space of true educational freedom and justice.

I now turn to reflect on the envisaged challenges of adopting a decolonial approach in the NCV curriculum in TVET colleges.

9.8 Section Six: Challenges and Considerations

While the decolonial imperative is compelling, its implementation within the TVET sector is fraught with complex challenges that must be critically acknowledged and strategically addressed. One of the foremost barriers is the persistent gap between policy and practice. While national education policies often gesture toward inclusivity, transformation and redress, their realisation on the ground is frequently undermined by resource constraints, limited institutional capacity and entrenched bureaucratic procedures. Policies that promote curriculum transformation or lecturer professionalisation, for example may exist in name but falter in execution due to lack of funding, political will or coherent implementation strategies.

Secondly, resistance to change poses a substantial obstacle. This resistance can manifest both explicitly and implicitly among lecturers, administrators and even industry partners who may view decolonial approaches as disruptive or ideologically threatening to established practices. Some lecturers and even management, trained in Eurocentric paradigms, may feel unequipped or reluctant to adopt alternative epistemologies or pedagogies. In parallel, employers might prioritise immediate economic outputs and global competitiveness over curriculum relevance to local cultures, histories and identities.

Furthermore, the pressures of standardisation, driven by national qualifications frameworks and global benchmarking systems, often constrain curricular flexibility and innovation. While these frameworks aim to ensure quality and portability of qualifications, they can inadvertently reinforce Western models of vocationalism and limit the space for locally grounded content or context-specific pedagogies. As such, decolonial initiatives are frequently relegated to the margins, seen as incompatible with performance metrics that dominate the sector.

Nevertheless, decolonial scholarship remains a visionary and necessary framework through which the TVET college sector can reimagine its purpose, relevance and

orientation. It offers a powerful lens for critiquing inherited inequalities and imagining a system that is more just, inclusive and attuned to the lived realities of South African youth. The process of decolonising TVET is neither linear or immediate, but it is essential if the sector is to contribute meaningfully to postcolonial reconstruction and the creation of a more equitable society. It invites not only curricular transformation but also structural, pedagogical and philosophical shifts that reposition African knowledge systems and voices at the centre of vocational education.

In this light, the pursuit of decoloniality in TVET should not be viewed as a finite goal, but rather as an ongoing, contextually responsive process that challenges educators, policymakers and communities to continuously reflect, resist and reimagine.

9.9 Section Seven: Contributions to Decolonial Scholarship and the TVET Sector

This study's exploration of the NCV curriculum through a decolonial lens contributes to the growing body of research that seeks to deconstruct the colonial underpinnings of educational systems in South Africa. The findings of this study resonate with the existing decolonial scholarly work that critiques the epistemological, ontological and institutional frameworks that govern educational institutions in South Africa. Moreover, the application of a decolonial perspective to TVET colleges offers a unique advantage, which emphasises the role of coloniality in shaping the sector's challenges and instability. The decolonial lens further illuminates the ways in which the coloniality of knowledge, power, being and space permeates the TVET sector. This perspective posits that the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid continue to influence the structures, curricula and pedagogies within the TVET colleges. By examining the sector through this lens, this research underscores the need to consider coloniality as a significant factor contributing to the sector's instability and challenges.

In addition, a decolonial lens is an invitation to question the inherited Eurocentric models of vocational education that often marginalise indigenous knowledge systems and fail to align with socio-economic realities of post-apartheid South Africa (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024;

Norodien-Fataar, 2024; Mafika & Khasane, 2024). The notion of coloniality as conceptualised by scholars such as Maldonado-Torres (2007), points to the persistence of colonial power dynamics in contemporary institutions, long after the formal end of colonialism. In the context of the TVET sector, this translates into curricula, pedagogical practices and institutional cultures that are disconnected from the lived experiences and aspirations of most students, many of whom come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

9.10 Towards Praxis

The proposed conceptual model presented in this study does not purport to be exhaustive, definitive or universally applicable across all TVET institutions in South Africa. Rather, it should be understood as a conceptual framework a provocation toward action that must be continually interpreted, adapted and reworked in relation to the unique historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts in which TVET colleges are situated. Importantly, this model must also be read alongside, and in dialogue with, existing policy frameworks such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, the National Development Plan 2030 and the Continuing Education and Training Act, which collectively shape the mandates, constraints and possibilities of the sector. It recognises that decolonisation is not a technical, universal or linear task; it is a dynamic, contested and evolving project that must be approached with humility, reflexivity and critical commitment, even as it navigates the regulatory and institutional architectures of the state.

Decolonisation, in this context, is not merely about replacing one curriculum with another or introducing African content into an otherwise unchanged structure. It is an invitation to reimagine the very purpose, design and ethics of vocational education that is, what we teach, how we teach, and why we teach while remaining attentive to policy imperatives around employability, skills development and economic participation. It is about challenging the deeply embedded legacies of colonial modernity that continue to shape institutional cultures, pedagogical practices and epistemological boundaries, even within

progressive policy frameworks. This includes interrogating whose knowledge is privileged, whose voices are marginalised, and whose interests are being served or not served within both curriculum and policy enactment.

The framework developed in this thesis is therefore not a static blueprint, but rather a call to praxis to thoughtful, engaged action that is both pedagogical and policy-oriented. It is a living model that invites ongoing dialogue, experimentation, critique and collective meaning-making. At the same time, its realisation depends on policy translation and institutional uptake: alignment with quality assurance regimes such as those overseen by South African Qualifications Authority and programme accreditation processes, as well as responsiveness to funding, planning and reporting requirements embedded in the public sector. It assumes that transformation must be co-owned and co-created by lecturers, students, policymakers, industry partners and communities, recognising that policy actors are not external to decolonisation but central to its enactment. In this way, decolonial work becomes a shared responsibility, grounded in relationships of trust, solidarity and mutual accountability, and mediated through both formal policy instruments and everyday institutional practices.

This means embracing discomfort, uncertainty and contradiction as part of the process. It requires that institutions open themselves up to radical self-reflection within the constraints and opportunities of existing governance and policy systems; that lecturers engage in pedagogical risk-taking despite standardisation pressures; and that students be treated not just as recipients of knowledge but as co-constructors of educational futures. At its heart, this vision repositions TVET colleges not as passive extensions of colonial or neoliberal legacies or merely instruments of policy compliance but as active agents capable of reshaping policy meanings and practices from below.

Ultimately, the value of this model lies in its capacity to provoke new questions, inspire context-specific practices and embolden those within the sector to pursue justice-oriented education, even within complex policy environments. In a society still grappling with the enduring effects of colonialism and apartheid, a decolonised TVET college sector offers

not only the promise of skills development aligned to national priorities, but also the potential for social healing, cultural affirmation and democratic transformation.

9.11 Conclusion

Decolonising the NCV and the broader TVET sector is a historical, political and ethical imperative. It requires us to interrogate not just what is taught, but how, by who, and for what purpose. It demands the courage to disrupt entrenched systems and creativity to imagine alternatives. Most of all, it requires faith in the potential of students, not just as passive recipients of instruction, but as co-creators of knowledge and agents of transformation.

Decolonial scholarship provides a necessary lens to critique and reimagine South Africa's TVET sector in the wake of its colonial and apartheid past. It urges us to question dominant paradigms of knowledge, training and economic development and to build a system that is rooted in the lived realities, aspirations and epistemologies of the South African people. If taken seriously, decoloniality can transform TVET colleges from a marginalised sector into a site of innovation, empowerment and social justice.

This thesis, then, is not just an academic exercising critiquing of what is. It is a call to educators, policymakers, communities and students to reimagine TVET colleges as sites of liberation. If done with integrity and commitment, decolonising the NCV curriculum and TVET colleges, can turn what is currently a space of marginalisation into a crucible for possibility, dignity and justice. For, to decolonise the NCV is to uproot centuries of exclusion, dehumanisation and injustice.

As Ndlovu-Gatsheni reminds us, decoloniality is not merely a political and epistemological movement aimed at liberating (ex-)colonised people from global coloniality; it is also a transformative way of thinking, knowing and acting. In this light, when unresolved histories continue to shape present realities and obstruct the future, it is unsurprising that sentiments like *"they are sick and tired of the past"* as Avame, a lecturer from TVET

college A, referring to students, emerge. Such expressions highlight the urgent need to meaningfully engage with the past in ways that empower rather than burden the present.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – 1st EC Clearance



19 March 2020

Mrs Josephine Yandwa Towani (206524914)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Towani,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/0000939/2020

Project title: A DECOLONIAL EXPLORATION OF THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL (NCV)
CURRICULUM: A CASE OF TWO TVET COLLEGES IN KZN

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 13 January 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 19 March 2021.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Urmilla Bob
University Dean of Research

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix B – 2nd EC Clearance



11 May 2021

Mrs Josephine Yandwa Towani (206524914)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Towani,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000939/2020

Project title: A DECOLONIAL EXPLORATION OF THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL (NCV)
CURRICULUM: A CASE OF TWO TVET COLLEGES IN KZN

Approval Notification – Recertification Application

Your request for Recertification dated 29 April 2021 was received.

This letter confirms that you have been granted Recertification Approval for a period of one year from the date of this letter. This approval is based strictly on the research protocol submitted and approved in 2020.

Any alteration s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. Please quote the above reference number for all queries relating to this study.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix C – Letter to TVET Supervisor



19 January 2021

To whom it concerns

Re: Ms Josephine Towani (Student Number: 206524914)

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter serves to confirm that Ms Josephine Towani (Student Number: 206524914) is registered for the PhD degree with the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Ms. Towani is presently enrolled to study for a PhD focusing on the TVET College curricula in the context of decolonisation. I am supervising her PhD study on *"An exploration of TVET College sector curriculum within the context of decolonisation: the case of the National Curriculum Vocational (NCV)"*. It is my firm belief that Ms Towani's her study would contribute positively to the body of knowledge being developed on indigenisation of curriculum, especially in the neglected Technical, Vocational, Education and Training sector.

Ms Towani is presently preparing to engage in data collection for the above study. It would be appreciated if she could be supported with provision of leave to allow her to undertake the necessary data collection.

Yours sincerely



Prof. Vaughn M. John
Supervisor and Deputy Cluster Leader
School of Education, College of Humanities

Address: Private Bag X01, Scottsville, 3209

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Appendix D – Lecturer Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR LECTURERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

PROJECT TITLE: A decolonial exploration of the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) curriculum: A case of two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal

To the Lecturer

My name is Josephine Yandwa Towani, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus. As part of the requirements for my qualification, I am conducting research on the topic indicated above.

You are invited to participate in this study, which explores the NCV curriculum through a decolonial lens. The purpose of the research is to examine the educational foundations of the NCV curriculum and how these reflect its underlying purpose.

The study will involve 20 participants from two TVET colleges. Of these, 7 will be lecturers and 13 will be students. This study is not funded by any organisation.

Your participation will involve taking part in an in-depth interview and a collage activity, each lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Both the interview and collage session will be audio recorded (not video recorded). At the end of the study, you will be invited to attend a participant feedback session, where I will share and discuss the findings with you. This aims to promote engagement and a deeper understanding of the study outcomes.

Please note that all data will be treated confidentially and used only for research purposes. Your name and the name of your college will not appear in any part of the report; instead, pseudonyms will be used. The audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty or disadvantage. Should you wish to withdraw, please inform me via telephone, SMS, or WhatsApp, so that your participation can be officially withdrawn. If you do not attend a scheduled data collection session without communication, I reserve the right to terminate your participation in the study.

There will be no cost to you for participating. If the session occurs during lunch hours, light refreshments will be provided. Should any unforeseen costs arise from your participation, these will be covered by the researcher.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC).

Approval Number: *HSSREC/00000939/2020*

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Researcher:

Ms. Josephine Yandwa Towani
Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor:

Prof. Vaughn John
Email: JohnV@ukzn.ac.za
UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee:
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration
Research Office, Westville Campus
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Durban, 4000, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
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Fax: +27 (0)31 260 4609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT FORM FOR LECTURERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Instructions: Please complete below. Keep a copy for yourself and submit a copy to the researcher)

Project Title: A decolonial exploration of the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) curriculum: A case of two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal

Researcher: Ms. Josephine Yandwa Towani
Institution: University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus

Supervisor: Prof. Vaughn John
Ethical Approval Number: HSSREC/00000939/2020

Statement of Agreement to Participate

I, _____ (Full Name), have read and understood the information provided in the Information Sheet regarding this study. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.
I understand that:

- My participation in this research is voluntary.
- I may withdraw at any stage of the study without any penalty or loss.
- My responses will be kept confidential, and pseudonyms will be used in all written and oral reports.
- The interview and collage session will be audio recorded for accuracy, and these recordings will be securely stored and deleted after the completion of the study.
- I will not incur any costs for participation, and refreshments will be provided if the session occurs during lunch hours.

I freely consent to participate in this research study under the conditions described above.

Please indicate your agreement by ticking the boxes below:

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about the study.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.
- ☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- ☐ I consent to the audio recording of the interview and collage session.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E – Student Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Project Title: *A decolonial exploration of the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) curriculum: A case of two TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal*

To the Student

My name is **Josephine Yandwa Towani**. I am a PhD student at the **University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)** in the **School of Education, Pietermaritzburg Campus**. I am doing research as part of my studies. My research looks at the **NCV curriculum**: what it teaches, how it is taught, and how it can better include students' knowledge, culture, and experiences.

You are invited to take part in this study. I will be working with students and lecturers from two TVET colleges (a total of 22 people). This study is not funded by any organisation.

1. If you agree to take part, you will:
 - Join a **metaphor drawing and focus group session** (about 45 minutes to 1 hour).
 - Take part in a short discussion about your drawings and your experiences as an NCV student.
 - Allow the session to be **audio recorded** (voice only, no video).
2. Everything you share will be kept private and confidential.
 - Your name and your college's name will not appear anywhere in the report.
 - I will use fake names (pseudonyms) in the research report.
 - All audio recordings will be deleted after the study is finished.
3. Your participation is **voluntary**, which means:
 - You do not have to take part if you don't want to.
 - You can stop participating at any time without any problem or penalty.
 - If you want to withdraw, please contact me by SMS, WhatsApp, or phone so I can officially withdraw you.

You will **not pay anything** to take part. If the session happens during lunchtime, **light refreshments will be provided**. If there are any unexpected costs, I will cover them.

This study has been checked and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: HSSREC/00000939/2020).

If you have any questions, please contact:

Researcher:

Ms. Josephine Yandwa Towani

Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor:

Prof. Vaughn John

Email: JohnV@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee:

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)31 260 4557

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

Please read and tick each box if you agree:

- ☐ I have read (or had explained to me) the information about the study.
- ☐ I understand what the study is about and what I will do.
- ☐ I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop at any time.
- ☐ I understand that my name and the name of my college will not be used.
- ☐ I agree to take part in the study.
- ☐ I agree that the session may be **audio recorded**.

Student's Full Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix F – Document Review Guide

A DECOLONIAL EXPLORATION OF THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY OF TWO TVET COLLEGES ON KZN

DOCUMENTARY REVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

The purpose of this documentary review is to analyse key institutional and policy documents related to the National Certificate (Vocational) [NCV] curriculum and the transformation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in South Africa. The review seeks to uncover how the philosophical, epistemological, and ideological orientations embedded within these documents shape the purposes and practices of the NCV curriculum. Guided by a decolonial lens, the analysis focuses on identifying the dominant knowledge systems represented, the agendas informing transformation, and the extent to which the curriculum is positioned as responsive to the social, cultural, and economic needs of South African society.

Research questions:

1. Transformation Agendas

- How are the various agendas and policies driving the transformation of TVET colleges articulated and enacted within institutional and national documents?
(Focus: transformation frameworks, policy intent, and implementation practices.)

2. Philosophical and Epistemological Foundations

- What philosophical assumptions and epistemological orientations underpin the design and development of the NCV curriculum as reflected in curriculum and policy documents?
(Focus: Western, indigenous, or hybrid knowledge systems; values embedded in curriculum purpose.)

3. Curriculum Relevance and Societal Responsiveness

- To what extent does the documentation suggest that knowledge and skills offered through the NCV curriculum are responsive and relevant to societal and community needs?
(Focus: alignment with local contexts, labour market needs, and social transformation goals.)

DOCUMENTARY REVIEW DATA EXTRACTION AND ANALYSIS MATRIX

1. Document Title / Source: (Record of full name, author, and date of the document)
2. Type of Document: (national policy, curriculum guide, institutional strategic plan, college mission statement, etc)
3. Main Purpose or Focus:
4. Evidence of Transformation Agenda:
5. Philosophical / Epistemological Orientation (underlying worldviews (e.g., positivist, human capital, humanist, indigenous, Afrocentric).
6. Evidence of Colonial or Decolonial Discourses (assumptions, or representations that reflect either colonial legacies or decolonial resistance).
7. Curriculum Relevance to Societal Needs: (document positions knowledge and skills in relation to community, local economies, or broader social purposes).
8. Key Quotes / Extracts
9. Preliminary Interpretation

Appendix G – Interview Schedule

A DECOLONIAL EXPLORATION OF THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY OF TWO TVET COLLEGES ON KZN

COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TIME ALLOCATION: 1hour 30mins

Introduction to the study

The period 2014 - 2019 has seen significant shifts in student governing structures and how they engage with institutions. Of interest is the student protests of #FeesMustFall across university campuses which have been classified as calls for decolonisation and free education.

This study therefore seeks to explore the NCV curriculum in the context of decolonisation and to know if TVET college students and lecturers engage in talks on decolonisation and if so, what form do such discussions take.

SECTION A: PERSONAL INFORMATION

(Purpose: situate responses within lived realities)

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of gender (if comfortable sharing)?
2. How long have you been teaching in a TVET college?
3. How long have you taught on the NCV programme?
4. Which NCV subjects and levels do you currently teach?
5. What community or region do most of your students come from, and how does this shape your teaching?

SECTION B: WHAT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IS FOR

(Purpose: reveal underlying values, beliefs, and ideologies)

1. In your own words, what is vocational education?
2. What do you believe is the purpose of vocational education in South Africa today?
3. What beliefs, values, or worldviews do you think underpin vocational education in your college?
4. How do these beliefs align or conflict with community values and students' lived realities?
5. How do you view your role as an educator in shaping socially just and relevant vocational learning?

SECTION C: THE NCV CURRICULUM

(Purpose: expose hidden assumptions and possibilities for transformation)

1. What do you understand the NCV curriculum to be about?

2. What makes the NCV curriculum different or similar to other curricula you have encountered?
3. What values or assumptions do you think underpin the NCV curriculum?
4. In what ways does the NCV curriculum respond to—or fail to respond to—the needs, histories, and knowledge systems of your community and industry?
5. Whose knowledge do you think is most visible or most invisible in the NCV curriculum?

SECTION D: ENACTING THE NCV CURRICULUM IN THE CLASSROOM

(Purpose: explore curriculum delivery as a site of epistemic inclusion/exclusion)

1. How is the NCV curriculum communicated to you as a lecturer (e.g., through policy, management, peers)?
2. What informs your choice of content and knowledge when planning your lessons?
3. How do you link the knowledge you teach to the backgrounds, languages, and lived experiences of your students?
4. Can you give an example of how a topic in your subject can be connected to local community knowledge or Indigenous practices?
5. How do institutional expectations or policies influence your freedom to teach in culturally relevant ways?

SECTION E: PURPOSE AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

(Purpose: understand pedagogical positioning through a decolonial lens)

1. How do your NCV students learn best, in your observation?
2. What teaching methods or cultural practices do you use to make learning meaningful to them?
3. What languages do you use in class, and how do these affect inclusion, participation, and understanding?
4. What tools or strategies do you use to promote epistemological access for students from diverse backgrounds?
5. How do you reflect on your own teaching in relation to equity, social justice, and transformation?
6. How do your students connect what they learn to their own histories, families, and communities?
7. Have you examined your curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment for hidden colonial or exclusionary practices?

SECTION F: EXPERIENCES OF LECTURERS AND STUDENTS WITH THE NCV CURRICULUM

(Purpose: capture lived experience and emotional geographies)

1. How would you describe your overall experience of teaching the NCV curriculum?
2. How do your students seem to experience it?
3. What moments have made you feel included, excluded, empowered, or silenced in this curriculum?

4. In what ways do you think the NCV curriculum can be transformed to better reflect your reality and that of your students?

SECTION G: DISCUSSION OF PHOTOS (PHOTO COLLAGE METHOD)

(Purpose: deepen interpretation through image-based reflection and storytelling)

1. Historical Power & Memory:
 - How does this photo reflect the histories, power relations, or colonial legacies that still shape your college today?
2. Local Knowledge & Belonging:
 - What local or Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, or being do you see—or wish to see—represented in this space?
3. Re-imagining the Space:
 - If this space, object, or symbol could be transformed to reflect your identity, values, and hopes as an NCV lecturer, what would it look or feel like?

NB: Ethical Reminder (for facilitator and participants)

This conversation recognises that you are a knower and co-creator of knowledge, not just a participant. Your words and photos will be used with your consent, and you will be part of meaning-making and validation of findings.

THANK YOU!

Appendix H – Metaphor and Focus Group Schedule

METAPHOR DRAWING AND FOCUS GROUP WITH STUDENTS

VENUE: TVET COLLEGES A & B

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 13

AGE RANGE: 19 – 25 YEARS

LEVEL OF STUDY: NCV LEVEL 4

Section A: Metaphor drawings

Time allocation: 15 minutes

Number of drawings per student: 3

Instructions and protocol:

Students were requested to draw 3 drawings showing a phenomenon under discussion. The drawings were collected from students and posted on a whiteboard. Each student was asked to briefly say what their picture was about and why they drew that picture to represent the phenomenon under discussion.

The drawings were then grouped with similar drawings for discussion in the Focus group discussion session.

Question 1

Students were requested to draw a picture representing their sense of identity and belonging as an NCV student.

Question 2

Students were requested to draw a picture representing symbols of power in the college.

Question 3

Students were requested to draw a picture representing either negative or positive NCV experiences with the curriculum.

Section B: Focus Group Discussion Based on Metaphor Drawings (Decolonial Framing)

Purpose:

To explore how students' drawings express their lived experiences, identity, and perceptions of power in the NCV programme, and to understand how these may reflect or resist colonial ways of knowing and being within TVET spaces.

Question 1: Identity and Belonging

Looking at your drawings about identity and belonging, what do they say about who you are and how you see yourselves as NCV students in this college?

(Follow-up: In what ways do you feel your identity and background are valued, ignored, or reshaped in this space?)

Decolonial aim: Surfaces how institutional cultures recognise or silence students' identities and local knowledges.

Question 2: Symbols and Power

When you look at the drawings about symbols of power, what do they reveal about who has power and whose voices matter in the college?

(Follow-up: How does that power shape what and how you learn?)

Decolonial aim: Exposes hierarchies of power and epistemic dominance that shape the learning environment.

Question 3: Curriculum Experiences

In your drawings about your experiences with the NCV curriculum, what do they tell us about the kinds of knowledge and ways of thinking that are promoted here?

(Follow-up: Do you feel your own community's knowledge, culture, or ways of doing things are included in what you learn?)

Decolonial aim: Challenges the privileging of Western knowledge and examines inclusion of indigenous or local perspectives.

Question 4: Interconnections Between Identity, Power, and Knowledge

If you think about all three drawings together: identity, power, and curriculum, how do they connect?

(Follow-up: How do these connections shape your sense of belonging, empowerment, or exclusion as NCV students?)

Decolonial aim: Encourages relational thinking about how colonial legacies continue to operate through curriculum and institutional culture.

Question 5: Imagining Decolonial Futures

If you could redraw one of your pictures to show your hopes for a more inclusive or empowering NCV experience, what would you change or add?

(Follow-up: What would need to change in the college or curriculum for that picture to become a reality?)

Decolonial aim: Promotes agency and envisioning of transformation beyond critique — toward epistemic and institutional healing.

THE END

Appendix I – Photo Collage Data Collection Instrument

A DECOLONIAL EXPLORATION OF THE NATIONAL CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY OF TWO TVET COLLEGES ON KZN

PHOTO COLLAGE DATA GENERATION INSTRUMENT (2nd Phase)

For NCV Lecturers

Time: 25 minutes

Purpose

This activity invites you to take photographs that show your lived experiences as an NCV lecturer. Your photos will help surface local meanings, histories, and ways of knowing that shape life in your TVET college. There are no right or wrong photos, only what matters to you.

Instructions

1. **Time:** Use about **15 minutes** to take photos and **10 minutes** to label or describe them.
2. **What to photograph:** Take 6–12 photos that respond to the prompts below.
3. **Prompts:**
 - Something that represents a **positive or negative experience** as an NCV lecturer.
 - A place, object or person that shows **belonging or not belonging**.
 - A symbol of **achievement/success** or **failure/difficulty**.
 - A **symbol of NCV lecturer identity** (e.g. classroom, tools, name tags).
 - A **symbol of historical power** in your college (architecture, plaques, old buildings).
 - A **symbol of access** (entrances, noticeboards, student services).
4. **Captions:** For each photo, write 1–3 sentences explaining:
 - What is in the photo?
 - Why did you choose it?
 - What does it mean to you?

5. **Send via WhatsApp:** Send your photos and captions to Josephine Towani on [REDACTED]. I will save the photos using a pseudonym that you choose.

After the Photos

We will meet for a **collaborative story-telling session** where you will explain your photos in your own words and link them to your experiences. You will help identify themes and meanings that reflect your realities.

Ethics and Respect

- Participation is voluntary; you may withdraw at any time.
- If you photograph people, please ask their permission first.
- You can caption in **any language** you prefer.
- You may choose whether your photos can be shared publicly or kept confidential.

Consent Message (WhatsApp Template)

I, _____, agree to send photos for the NCV curriculum study. I understand I can withdraw any photo at any time. I give permission for my photos to be used in full / anonymised / not at all. Date: _____

Research Approach (Decolonising Principles)

This project values your **voice, local knowledge, and lived experience**. You co-create meaning; the researcher listens and learns. The photos belong to you, and findings will be shared back with you and your college community.

Appendix J – Turn It-In-Report and Receipt

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