



Re-imagining TVET:

The Implications of Covid-19

Proceedings of the Webinar Series

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- Nelson Mandela University
- Department of Higher Education and Training
- Eastern Cape TVET Research Round Table
- Institute for Post-School Studies at the University of the Western Cape
- Centre for Researching Education and Labour at the University of the Witwatersrand
- University of Nottingham
- Human Sciences Research Council

The TVET Webinar Working Group was chaired by Dr Francis Muronda and included representatives from most of the institutions listed above, many of whom are post-graduate students at the institutions of higher learning. Writing up of the conference proceedings was done by Ms Colette Tennison.

The HSRC provided the technical support for hosting the webinars and assisted with training the moderators for each webinar.

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Introduction

This TVET webinar series was conceptualised during the Covid-19 pandemic to open spaces for discussion and debate amongst those in the TVET sector in South Africa. During Covid-19, much was being said and written about the impact of the pandemic on universities and schools but there was relative silence on the implications for the TVET sector. The aim this webinar series was to break that silence and open conversations about the short, medium, and long-term impacts of Covid-19 on the TVET sector. Participants in the webinars included TVET policy makers, college management, lecturers, and students, as well scholars and researchers in the field of TVET.

A wide range of debates and discussions surfaced during the webinars. The need to capture these debates was identified so that the conversations could continue beyond the end of the webinar series. In recording these proceedings, the aim was to not just capture the formal presentations but also the voices of those who engaged in discussions on the presentations and some of the significant debates that occurred in the chat. The hope is that by including all of these in the proceedings, it will be an authentic reflection of what occurred and allow participants' voices to be heard.

The webinars ran in the second half of 2020, starting in October 2020 and running until early December 2020. Although the overall focus was *Re-Imagining TVET: The Implications of COVID-19*, each webinar drew from different ideas and perspectives on what this could entail.

The first webinar included a diverse range of presentations by those involved on the ground. Presentations were given by the Department of Higher Education and Training, the Eastern Cape TVET Research Round Table, a retired TVET college principal, a TVET college lecturer, and a TVET college student. They provided insights into what was happening in the colleges during the Covid-19 pandemic as well as some of the challenges facing the TVET sector more broadly.

The second webinar presented research from the Mpumalanga-North West TVET college region. It looked at what was happening during the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of how students were engaging with remote learning.

The third webinar was presented by Professor Joy Papier of the Institute for Post School Studies at the University of the Western Cape. Prof Papier presented insights into how teaching and learning occurred during Covid-19. She drew on her own research as well as international perspectives to discuss what is required for student success.

Webinar four was presented by Dr Lesley Powell of Nelson Mandela University. She presented a series of vignettes from the research currently being undertaken by the Research Chair: Youth Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment. Her aim was to present some of the theoretical work arising from the research and, thereby, stimulate the debates on what is happening in the TVET sector.

The fifth webinar was presented by Professors Stephanie Allais and Yael Shalem of the Centre for Researching Education and Labour at the University of the Witwatersrand. They argued for the use of occupation as a frame of analysis for VET and presented their thinking on why this should be the case.

Webinar six was presented by Dr Adam Cooper of the Human Sciences Research Council, with discussion by Professor Azim Badroodien. Dr Cooper's focus was on the informal sector and provided insights into what is happening in this regard, as well as possible resulting implications for TVET.

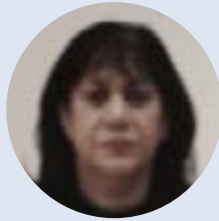
The final, seventh, webinar in the series was presented by Professors James Avis and Simon McGrath. Professor Avis drew on a recently published paper, suggesting ways in which VET can be reconceptualised post Covid- 19. Professor Simon McGrath closed the webinar series with reflections on some of the topics covered and debates raised.

Webinar 1: Positioning TVET Colleges During the Pandemic

Speakers



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Youth Unemployment,
Employability and
Empowerment,
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Mr Khaya Matiso,
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**Ms Nontutuzelo
Magingxa**, Lecturer at
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Ms Roné Horne,
Student at Eastcape
Midlands TVET
College

Moderators



Dr Francis Muronda,
Researcher to the
Research Chair: Youth
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Empowerment



**Mrs Tuletu
Nongauza-Njengele**, Deputy
Principal: Innovation &
Partnerships, Ikhala TVET
College; Eastern Cape TVET
Colleges Research Round
Table Coordinator



Ms Almaine Horne,
First Education
Specialist at Eastcape
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Date: 11 September, 2020

Introduction

Dr Lesley Powell

Dr Powell introduced the webinar series by referring to Christopher Winch who, in his book on education and work, noted that anyone interested in promoting and understanding vocational education is generally thought to be a philistine¹.

¹ Winch, C. (2000) *Education, Work and Social Capital: Towards a New Conception of Vocational Training*. London and New York: Routledge.

She pointed out that, if this were the case, there would be 250 philistines gathered for this webinar. However, she suggests that this is not the case as participants joined the webinar because they understand that vocational education matters as it is core to being human. It is about doing things that are meaningful, giving pride and dignity, and enabling people to earn a livelihood. The TVET college sector matters because it is where most post-school youth should be going, and it is in many ways the frontier that separates a young person from unemployment.

Further, Dr Powell encouraged participants to engage with the speakers in the webinar to 'open the conversation' and 'break the silence' surrounding the TVET sector. The aim of the webinars is to provide a space for discussion about the issues and challenges in the sector and, hopefully, begin to plot the way forward. Central to the webinars is considering the implications of Covid-19 for TVET in the short, medium, and long term.

In the short term, it is necessary to consider what remote learning looks like for students as well as teaching and lecturing staff. It is also important to consider the colleges' capability for remote learning. There are significant pedagogic implications and possibilities for participation rates and finishing the academic year, as well as the funding implications of losing a term. While it seems that there are more questions than answers, it is critical to, at the very least, ask the questions.

It is also vital to consider what it means for the TVET sector in the long term. Covid-19 has highlighted many challenges but also opened an opportunity to re-imagine TVET. Some of the questions that need to be asked include:

- What might be the purpose of TVET, particularly TVET in our context?
- What should TVET look like in our new post-Covid-19 landscape — further on in the series, Stephanie Allais and Yael Shalem will present the idea of 'building back better' and what this could look like.

These webinars were conceptualised as a series to develop a progressive dialogue through questions and debates that arise from the presentations.

Dr Powell concluded her introduction to the webinar series with a moment of silence to honour those who have lost their lives to Covid-19.

Presentation by DHET

Ms Aruna Singh

Ms Aruna Singh discussed the repositioning of TVET colleges during the Covid pandemic. From the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown, it has been a rollercoaster for the country, especially for the TVET sector. However, overall, the TVET colleges delivered despite the circumstances, against a revised academic calendar.

The impact of Covid-19 at the beginning of lockdown was not as severe as by July 2020. It is also important to consider the context of the lockdown levels. During lockdown levels 5 and 4, the TVET sector was required to immediately prepare to support students remotely and ensure that learning was beginning to happen despite the constraints of lockdown (movement restriction). There was no central point to coordinate learners from and staff had to work from home. Furthermore, the “tools of the trade” were not available for everyone to work from home. While it had all happened very suddenly, the responsibilities remained huge, and it was a given that the colleges should continue to be in contact with their students and support them through some amount of learning. This meant that from day 1, the colleges had to start planning towards reopening even though there was no indication of when that would happen. This required continual scenario planning and the imperative was “saving lives, saving the academic year”, which remains the focus in decision-making for the TVET sector.

Right from the beginning, it was about preparing the colleges to be safe environments for both staff and students. Protocols and minimum standards were put in place through workshopping in the first 6 weeks of the lockdown, in conjunction with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and Higher Health. Colleges were monitored at the operational level to see that the fundamentals were in place to ensure basic safety, including daily screening, sanitising, and referral systems.

Decisions on when students could return were different for the TVET colleges compared to universities as colleges have shorter periods of study, such as trimesters instead of 2 semesters. For the TVET sector, everything hinges on the national examinations and so the decision was made to run 2 trimesters and one semester for the NATED qualifications, and an amended assessment programme for the NC(V) students, which is a year-long programme, and completed their exams by mid-December 2020. It was a struggle to complete all the curriculum requirements, particularly in terms of practicals and assessment requirements. The focus for students was, “When do we write exams?”

Throughout the process, everyone needed to do things to protect both themselves and others. Preparations were carried out over 2 months with a focus towards reopening colleges at lockdown level 3 and students started returning in staggered cohorts from mid-June. By the end of July, all students were back at colleges. Colleges continued operating even during the August Covid-19 peak and this required daily strategizing to protect lives. The focus was on preparing colleges to be safe environments for both staff and students, which has been and the monitoring reports indicated that college campuses were comparatively safe as the infection rate of students remained low compared to the national norm.

On the topic of teaching and learning, Ms Singh emphasised that the TVET system has struggled with making the giant leap into a new era of pedagogy, even before Covid-19. Thus, plans for the sector were not premised on online learning as colleges did not have the wherewithal for that, both in terms of infrastructure and expertise within the teaching workforce. It would, therefore, have been an unrealistic expectation. Support to students at TVET colleges was never premised on online learning and the aim was to work with what was possible and what could be made available during the lockdown period.

Some colleges were able to get into television broadcasts from as early as May 2020 with key lessons broadcast and then put into podcasts on the DHET website for students to use if they had the data. Colleges also made use of local radio stations to broadcast lessons. Eventually, these were consolidated, and the zero-rated websites of colleges improved access. Use of social media, particularly WhatsApp, was key as lecturers used it to set up class groups to communicate with students and guide them through textbooks. The given was that students would at least have textbooks as these are provided for free to students when they register.

Ordinarily, the textbook would not be the only resource during face-to-face teaching but for this environment they were especially useful, serving as a common frame of reference and providing practical and assessment exercises which helped lecturers navigate through the syllabus. The TVET sector never spoke about “online learning” as they knew it was not possible. However, they did speak about “remote support” and all the above initiatives were aimed at the latter idea. Ms Singh indicated that, going forward, the focus will be on blended learning and how that can be grown in the TVET sector.

Ms Singh further pointed out that while the use of learner management systems (LMS) is a given for universities, it is not for TVET colleges. At the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown, under 10 colleges used a LMS and not always successfully, whereas now it is closer to 25 colleges (50% of colleges). Colleges have committed to

adjusting to the “new normal” and to doing things differently, not just in terms of Covid but also post-Covid in terms of the digital economy, delivering the expected digital and 4IR skills, and meeting National Development Plan (NDP) targets. NDP targets will not be met by full face-to-face learning as it is not possible to double the TVET infrastructure to accommodate students. Thus, it remains extremely important that all these initiatives to provide remote learning support, support e-learning, and to move into new modalities of delivery, are not lost.

When students returned, colleges had to split classes due to social distancing, leading to contact time alternating with remote support. Students attended in person on certain days and on other days were given work to do for self-study. It was noted that colleges settled in quite well and embedded this routine in their timetables. The colleges completed national exams in July, and, despite the difficulties and challenges, the overall evaluation is that the colleges coped well.

Ms Singh stated that the DHET remains committed to the “new normal” in this post-Covid period and it is hoped that the webinar series will provide the support, insights, and expertise for how the TVET sector can continue to be repositioned going forward. She pointed out that Covid forced the sector in the direction it should have gone into anyway. There is a push to support students by giving every student access to a device, along with a corresponding need to provide these to lecturers beforehand so they can master the technology to teach using devices.

Discussion points raised

Concerns were raised regarding the support of very remote and vulnerable students and how they would cope, as well as how those with disabilities will be supported. The question was also posed as to how lecturers and students would be supported in the draft open learning policy framework. Ms Singh responded to say that students with disabilities and comorbidities would continue to be supported remotely.

A further point raised was the DHET Minister's exclusivity in referring to universities in his presentations. The hope is that the stepchild status of TVET will be improved.

Eastern Cape TVET Colleges Research Round Table

Mrs Tuletu Nongauza-Njengele

Mrs Tuletu Nongauza-Njengele introduced the Eastern Cape TVET Colleges Research Round Table. She explained that the TVET colleges had identified the need for research in the sector and that colleges had institutionalised research to advise the college councils and develop lecturer competence. As a result, they are seeing an increase in master's and PhDs in the TVET sector. The Round Table is a coordination between 8 TVET colleges, a community college, and 4 universities. The focus is to improve the success of TVET students in the colleges as well as in industry, particularly in terms of work-integrated learning.

Ms Almaine Horne, in responding to the question on whether TVET colleges should be involved in research, pointed out that there is a need for TVET colleges to be included in the research about them. Dr Lesley Powell also pointed out that there is a close relationship between teaching and pedagogy, and research feeds into teaching and learning. It strengthens the core remit of colleges if they are empowered to research themselves and be involved in the research being conducted in colleges.

Positioning the TVET Sector: An Agenda for Action – 2020 and Beyond

Mr Khaya Matiso

Mr Matiso started by proposing that there is a need to acknowledge that the 50 TVET colleges in South Africa are at different levels in terms of basic systems and structures. This requires flexibility in planning the way forward as a system and as a nation. These webinars are putting TVET and the needs, aspirations, and expectations of students on the national agenda.

He began the presentation by reminding participants that Covid-19 is a dangerous pandemic that has devastated lives and that this is a difficult period in the history of our country. Businesses have collapsed and retrenchment notices have been issued.

The question he raised is whether institutions are ready to provide adult education and accommodate those who have been retrenched? Furthermore, at an international level, there are also red flags that make it difficult for developing countries to receive international support. International solidarity and support that should be available is being impacted by various international threats.

Mr Matiso then went on to make the point that it is important to bear in mind that various levels and components of the education system are interconnected. He gave the example of the Eastern Cape where there are struggles in the schooling system that impact on students coming into TVET. They are struggling to improve reading, writing, and numeracy skills and this will affect TVET, even without the challenges of Covid-19.

Moving on to the topic of TVET, Mr Matiso argued that there is a need for an agenda for action that understands the main pillars of the TVET sector. He then proposed a series of action points for the TVET sector:

1. There is a need for consolidation of the **College Governance System**. There are new councils that have been appointed who should focus on governance of the colleges only and not get involved in other matters at the college.
2. **Build management capacity** in all 50 colleges — it is critical to ensure that all the necessary managers are in place at all colleges and that they are qualified, trained, and do their job.
3. **Invest more resources and funding** — the DHET Funding Task Team found that TVET colleges were underfunded and under-resourced and the recommendations of this task team must still be addressed. Once the managers and governance are in place, it should create confidence for additional funding and resources.
4. **Consolidate and invest in the Financial Aid system** in colleges — the current system is uncertain and unstable. The strategy and policy for supporting students is good and we must not abandon it. However, operationally, we must make sure that we have the capacity to manage financial aid systems. This means providing financial resources in the right amount, to the right students, at the right time. Strong, viable, financial aid systems need to be in place in every college.
5. **Strengthen Student Support Services** in colleges — there is a need for:
 - Disability services
 - Counselling services
 - Student Housing projects
 - Academic Support services
 - Graduation recruitment services
 Support services are lacking in some colleges. Funding is given to students, but they are not

6. **Consolidation of current Lecture Development interventions** — interventions, including those around formal qualifications for lecturers need to be extended. There is a need for ongoing training and support but also in terms of universities introducing programmes for lecturers. The increase in research and master's degrees in the sector is going to lead to a more dynamic TVET sector.
7. **Consolidation and expansion of Student Entrepreneurship projects and worker co-op initiatives** — future jobs are going to be found in the small business sector and young people need to develop their own businesses and co-ops. The TVET sector is strategically located to develop skills for student entrepreneurship and co-ops.

In closing, Mr Matiso emphasised that there is a need to consolidate what has been done, and for further collaborative work between the different parts of the education sector.

Discussion points raised

Discussion on these presentations raised the need for work-integrated learning and collaborative involvement of industry in the process.

Experiences of a TVET College Lecturer

Ms Nontutuzelo Magingxa

Ms Magingxa, as a lecturer at a PE TVET college, reported that there were mixed feelings when they were told that they needed to return to the college after the lockdown, as they did not know whether they would be receiving students. Even before Covid-19, there were many challenges in the TVET sector and there were concerns around how they would return to the core business of teaching and learning. She made the point that the Covid-19 lockdown only highlighted the inequalities in the TVET sector.

Reporting on what happened, Ms Magingxa explained that lecturers developed WhatsApp groups to support teaching and learning even before the pandemic. However, many of the students at the college came from rural areas where there were issues with cell phone reception, and many did not even have a cell phone. This created challenges for effective teaching and learning. In general, the lack of resources created problems with making teaching and learning accessible to students. She also indicated that there was a further challenge in that, during the pandemic, the focus was on schools and universities while the TVET sector was not given any recognition or acknowledgement.

Ms Magingxa raised several challenges faced by the sector:

- Even before the pandemic, the TVET colleges experienced poor attendance which has increased after the pandemic.
- The lack of resources is an ongoing challenge in the sector. For example, assisting students and staff with disabilities is difficult due to the lack of resources.
- Career guidance is lacking in the TVET sector which results in students not registering for the correct courses.
- Work-integrated learning is also a significant challenge for the sector, even more so now that companies are retrenching. This must be evaluated as lockdowns ease to ensure that students get the necessary work experience.

She further argued that, going forward, the TVET sector needs rethinking and restructuring. There is a need for ongoing support for lecturers as well as psychosocial support for both lecturers and students. Online applications for students need to be introduced for all colleges to reduce paper usage and eliminate walk-ins. Furthermore, resources must be made available to better streamline teaching and learning.

Discussion points raised

The issue of internships and their provision was raised in the chat. Due to the lockdown, students were not able to complete their work-integrated learning. There is thus an urgent need for internships for these students.

Ms Almaine Horne also pointed to the challenge of completing the curriculum in the time available for the year. She referred to what Ms Singh had said regarding the fact that they will not be trimming the curriculum, but that the time frames are reduced. This is a challenge that needs further discussion.

Experiences of a TVET College Student

Ms Roné Horne

Ms Horne, as a student in the TVET sector, was invited to provide insights on her experiences in the TVET sector. She raised the point that work-integrated learning is a key challenge, particularly because there is more theory in the course than practical. There is a need to marry practical and theory as students are not prepared for certain practical tasks such as using a copy machine or taking basic minutes. She further stated that the current syllabus for her course is outdated and provided the example of computer subjects that do not teach the current computer programmes needed in the workplace.

Ms Horne also raised several other challenges faced by students, namely:

- The challenge of resources in terms of devices. There is a lack of access to internet devices to help with research and assignments. Internet access and access to computer labs on campus would assist students in gaining broader perspectives as textbooks are very one-dimensional.
- Workplace exposure related to the field of study — she gave the example of students studying to be legal secretaries who are working as cashiers rather than being placed at relevant companies for work-integrated learning.
- NSFAS is very delayed in paying out students, and support on campus in terms of communication with students has also been lacking.

Discussion points raised

Concerns were expressed about how rural students will use the online application system as they lack access to the internet. This was answered by Ms Nongauza-Njengele who indicated that TVET colleges are addressing this by making their resources available for students to come in to the TVET colleges campuses and use their resources to apply online.

Webinar 2: Remote Teaching and Learning at TVET Colleges: A Covid-19 Challenge

Speaker



Ms Vongani Sharon Mboweni,
Department of Higher
Education and Training
(DHET)

Moderator



Mr. Thivhudziwi Walter Vele,
Director: TVET Curriculum
Development and Support,
Department of Higher
Education and Training
(DHET)

Date: 02 October, 2020

Ms Mboweni's presentation focused on a short study conducted on the impact of remote learning on TVET students within the Mpumalanga-North West region. Data was collected from survey questionnaires that targeted Report 191 (NATED) Trimester 1 Engineering students across all 6 colleges in the region, namely: Enhanzeni TVET, Gert Sibande TVET, Nkangala TVET, Orbit TVET, Teletso TVET and Vuselela TVET Colleges, with 1 campus sampled at each college. The sampled college campuses were in different provinces and in different settings in terms of their rural, urban, or semi-urban location. In total, 220 students responded.

The TVET colleges issued surveys to students and then collected, scanned, and emailed the completed surveys to the office. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected with four main questions. The first category of data focused on lecturer support during Covid-19. Findings included that:

- Less than 6% of the students in the region indicated that they received support in their studies during the Covid-19 break.
- Over 5% of students in the region were unsure whether they were well supported or not by lecturers.
- Around 5% indicated that the support received had little or no impact at all.
- Only Ehlanzeni indicated more than 12% in agreement that there was support, while the other 5 colleges in the region were below this mark.

Students were also asked if they were assisted to prepare for examinations through remote learning. For this question, findings were that:

- 4% of the students in the region did not believe that they were sufficiently assisted to prepare for examinations.
- 8% of the students in the region indicated that they were satisfied with the assistance they received during remote learning to prepare for their examinations.
- 5% of the students were unsure if the assistance they received from lecturers is enough to sit for the coming examinations.
- 2% of the students in the region were not classified.
- Orbit and Ehlanzeni students indicated that they were assisted to prepare for examination and had the highest percentage of positive answers.

Ms Mboweni suggested that these results indicated that students were not supported as they had expected to be. They were between 80 and 90% through their course by the time the lockdown happened and assistance with examination preparation occurred using WhatsApp, Facebook, and television broadcasts.

Thirdly, students were asked if the programme made a positive impact on their studies, with findings indicating that:

- Almost 10% of the students in the region indicated that the programme had a positive impact.
- Almost 4% of the students in the region were not sure about the impact the programme had.
- 2% indicated that remote learning did not have an impact at all.
- Ehlanzeni and Orbit students had the highest percentages indicating that the programme had impact, while Vuselela and Nkangala had the lowest percentages.

Ms Mboweni also indicated that questions need to be raised about the low level of students who indicated that there was a positive impact. Furthermore, some students did not anticipate having to write exams which made it difficult for them to transition back to learning when they returned to write their exams.

Finally, students were asked if the programme added value to their studies and if they could cover much of the subject content. Findings from this question were that:

- By just looking at the graph presented, the 6 colleges did not show much confidence in the value added by remote learning.
- Almost 3% of the students indicated that they were unsure whether the programme added value to their studies.
- Only 9% of students believed that value was added by remote learning.
- Around 3% of the students gave a negative response towards the value, while around 4% decided not to respond at all.

It was noted that even though every college had programmes for their students, students decided to use groups and resources from other colleges, and even other provinces, rather than from their own college. Based on the findings, Ms Mboweni presented a series of recommendations for remote teaching and learning that should be considered. She indicated that it is critical to prioritise the capacitation of college lecturers in technologically based teaching and learning. Currently, lecturers are not well equipped for the methodologies of teaching and learning, particularly in terms of technologies. Further, the upgrading of TVET Colleges resources and aligning with the demands of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) must be prioritised as colleges are struggling to meet the needs of the 4IR.

The changes facing the educational sector require an urgent response in terms of offering lessons remotely more extensively, as very few colleges offer online or distance learning. She highlighted the fact that Covid-19 has raised awareness that TVET Colleges should always be ready for any eventuality and e-learning should from now on be incorporated into the daily routine. This has begun as colleges have started implementing online applications for the next year.

Ms Mboweni also presented a series of conclusions drawn from the study. These conclusions were that:

- Remote learning was new to the students, lecturers, and the region in general, hence its acceptance and coordination was challenging.
- A small number of students in the region showed interest in remote learning, and there are still some students who are unsure about its impact, which is a concern.
- A number of students indicated that they engaged with remote learning from other colleges outside the region, although the region catered for students in different platforms.
- As a result, most of the T1 Engineering students did not perform well during this period, with a 67% pass rate.
- Various factors attributed to the success and poor performance, including connectivity for students, the use of technology by lecturers, availability of resources for online learning, and preparedness.

- The use of college websites with portals for both students and lecturers were acknowledged as they were not a priority in some colleges. During this time, they were forced to go back to the college websites and use them to offer support for students. Some colleges did not have portals for students and lecturers and had to quickly set them up so that students could access materials.
- From now on, colleges should put e-learning in their strategic plans and allocate budget for it. E-learning must become part of the daily offering for teaching and learning.

Discussion points raised

The first question raised was regarding what conclusions were drawn about the number of students who did not respond to some questions. Ms Mboweni's feedback was that students chose not to comment but the reason for this was not explored.

A further point was made regarding the need for support for lecturers in using technology as they were unprepared and experienced challenges with using technology. There was a response stating that colleges were mandated to provide training to lecturers on using programmes for online learning e.g., Zoom and MS Teams. Colleges are now also launching e-learning units and student portals are being put in place to allow lecturers to upload classes for learners to access.

Further concerns were raised about students accessing online resources and infrastructure.

The challenge of students needing data to access the e-learning was emphasised. Many lecturers live in the same communities as their students and face the same challenges with data and connectivity as their students, which also needs to be addressed. Lecturers did not always have access to laptops and had to work off their smartphones. They could not afford the data and colleges had to provide lecturers with data. Mr Vele responded that enhancement of resources for teaching and learning is a priority of the department.

A debate was facilitated in the webinar chat regarding access to colleges. Since 2015, access to colleges has been capped mainly due to budget constraints. There are, therefore, possibilities that blended learning and e-learning could enable the colleges to cater for more students. Dr Lesley Lowell suggested that this may be a moment to reopen the debate, as it was previously closed due to concerns about barriers for previously disadvantaged learners. Mr Vele responded by indicating that funding norms at DHET are currently being adjusted to accommodate more students through other modes of learning.

Another question raised was regarding what will happen with the data from that study, as lecturers do not see the results of the studies. One lecturer commented that students are ill-prepared for their exams because they are not equipped for remote or blended learning. Ms Mboweni replied that the study gave the regional office information to use for comparing results, and to provide insights for intervention. It provided insights on what students thought during the process thus far — for example, the data on students who did not think that they would be writing their exams.

Webinar 3: Teaching and Learning in a Time of Social Distancing – What Do TVET Colleges Need to Ensure Learner Success?

Speaker



Prof Joy Papier, Director,
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Studies (IPSS) at University of
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Moderator



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Date: 23 October, 2020

Prof Papier started by making the point that TVET colleges have been resilient despite 25 years of change at every level — systems, structures, and curricula amongst others. Now, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic presents new difficulties. While the worst seems to have passed, the effects will still be felt for a long time. Educational institutions have been exhorted to 'leave no student behind', and to 'save the academic year'. However, the question is, "At what cost?" Her presentation focused on the following questions:

- How should TVET college lecturers teach and how will students learn?
- What pedagogies and practices can be sustained to ensure learner success?
- What are the implications of switching from full contact face-to-face to remote learning overnight?
- What do TVET learners need to learn, and what has Covid taught?

She emphasised that there are no magic formulas or spectacular insights and set the scene by pointing out that, with extremely short notice, students had to leave residences, classes were suspended, and campuses became no-go zones. TVET colleges moved from full contact face-to-face classes to remote learning in the space of a few weeks.

Professor Papier started by drawing on the TVET literature to answer the question of what teaching and learning looked like pre-Covid-19. The literature points to competencies needed for a changing world, for example Schwab², who stated that “we are at the beginning of the new technology revolution that is fundamentally changing our lives”. Papier also further suggested that the future in the aftermath of Covid-19 is even more uncertain and complex than initially envisaged³, and education and training institutions are being called on to explicitly address the competencies — or what is termed in education literature as “21st century skills” — that young people need to survive and succeed in a 21st century context. These skills are generally seen as relevant across many fields and include subject knowledge as well as more specific skills, such as the ability to cope with complex problems and unpredictable situations. She further observed that this is even more relevant with facing such complex problems and unpredictable situations as in 2020.

The Covid-19 crisis has foregrounded knowledge and skills that have not been prominent before. Papier further highlighted the need for citizens who live in a rapidly changing world to be not only literate but also digitally literate, self-directed problem solvers who possess social skills, the ability to work collaboratively, and be ethical, responsible, and accountable. These ideas are referred to in some literature as the “4Cs”:

- critical thinking
- creativity
- collaboration
- communication

It was also noted that some literature adds another two Cs — character education and citizenship — which brings it to six Cs.

Learners need to develop digital information and literacy skills due to digitalisation in all areas of life. They access multiple forms of information and need to understand the difference between valid information and fake news, which is what a critical citizenry is all about. Digital literacy means not only the ability to find and use digital content but, particularly for educators, also knowing how to create and share digital content.

Papier pointed to two examples of proposals for how these ideals are not merely add-ons but can be integrated into the curriculum through pedagogies that support deep(er) learning, also referred to as meaningful learning. The OECD’s ‘Future of education and skills, 2030’ provides a vision of the competencies that students will need to thrive in 2030 and beyond — an evolving learning framework that sets out an aspirational vision for the future of education⁴. The Four-Dimensional Education Framework from the Center for Curriculum Redesign at Harvard University serves as another organising and guiding framework that can help to re-examine school curricula for 21st century education⁵. The framework’s four dimensions are:

- Knowledge — what we know and understand
- Skills — how we use the knowledge or what we do with what we know
- Character — how we behave and engage in the world
- Better learning — how we reflect and adapt

2 Schwab, K. (2016) The Fourth Industrial Revolution. World Economic Forum. pp1.

3 OECD (2018) The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030, OECD Education Working Papers. Available at: [http://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030 Position Paper \(05.04.2018\).pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf).

4 OECD (2019) ‘OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030: OECD Learning Compass’, pp. 1–149. Available at: http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/OECD_Learning_Compact_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf.

5 Fadel, C., Bialik, M. and Trilling, B. (2015) Four-Dimensional Education. Harvard: Center for Curriculum Redesign.

She pointed out that the notion of deliberately infusing competencies into the curriculum is strongly supported in the literature. This kind of learning does not neglect disciplinary content but enables deep learning through whatever content is being learned.

Professor Papier raised the issue that, even before Covid-19, the pass rates over the last few years indicate that TVET college learners have struggled in class, even with a teacher present. Online learning does not equate to independent learning nor mean that the lecturer is redundant. Most literature emphasises that online learning cannot be a permanent solution for TVET, and face-to-face learning cannot be fully replaced by online or remote learning. Lecturers are still needed to mediate content, especially unfamiliar or new concepts. It is critical for lecturers to see understanding dawn on the faces of learners — the “aha” moment — and to read body language on how learning is being received.

Moving on from there, her argument was that the dilemma faced in trying to continue teaching and learning in lockdown or semi-lockdown is a case of “Maslow before Bloom”. Maslow’s theory addresses the idea that basic human needs – food, shelter, safety — must be met before people move to emotional needs and self-actualisation. Bloom’s taxonomy is a hierarchy of six cognitive levels from lowest to highest. She argued that human beings need to have their basic physical needs meet before they can progress at cognitive levels. Many learners struggled to continue learning at home because they could not cope at a basic level due to loss of family incomes, deaths, homes not being conducive to studying and distancing, connectivity issues, and the lack of easy access to appliances and other affordances needed for study.

However, as well as acknowledging the learners’ struggles, Papier emphasised that it is also necessary to consider the lecturers. The Covid pandemic thrust a mostly unprepared college sector into hastily conceived contingency plans to support learners and keep learning going under exceedingly difficult conditions. Early in the lockdown, in May 2020, she conducted a small, targeted study of college lecturers in 4 provinces: Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KZN, and Gauteng. Respondents consisted largely of postgraduate students who are also full-time college lecturers. The study was dipstick research, testing the waters at a particular point in time. The aim was to examine what the lecturers were experiencing regarding the sudden move to online learning.

The first question posed was, “Would your students be able to study independently, using online content?” Answers to this question included that:

- Students battle to deal with new content via an online platform.
- Some students are too immature to take responsibility for their own learning, and they rely on being guided by the lecturer.
- WhatsApp was a major means of keeping contact with their students. As a result, everything had to be quite short and concise. Also, students also did not always respond to the WhatsApp messages.
- Students rely on their cell phones to download content and these are regularly stolen.
- Home conditions are too crowded to study.

Lecturers also experienced similar conditions to learners in that some had small children, or many members in their households, that made finding a quiet space to engage with learners difficult. Colleges had varying levels of access to affordances like data and devices for their lecturers, and some also could not afford the resources needed to work from home.

A further question was, “What were the main anxieties lecturers had?” Safety of self and immediate family (Maslow) was the overriding answer, as well as fear of infection, fear for students’ health and safety, anxiety about the accessibility of content for students, and readiness for the exams. Lecturers were nervous about using technology and felt inadequately prepared for what the college was expecting from them. When asked to “Describe your ‘mood’ and that of your colleagues?” adjectives used most frequently in replies were “anxious, lost, confused, scared, frustrated, unrealistic expectations of the college management, unprepared, pressured, rushed, daunted by technology...” Papier suggests that these responses seem to reinforce the Maslow before Bloom argument, and this was just in the South African context. She referred to a blog from the World Bank⁶ that echoed the findings of the study in a broader context and observed that the skills that have emerged as important for life, for example socio-emotional skills such as empathy and resilience, will likely have a lifelong learning impact for TVET students and probably build the kind of 21st century skills that are needed as well.

Papier further emphasised that there are similarities between the local and international contexts. She referred to the ILO Policy Brief⁷ on ‘Distance and Online Learning during the time of COVID-19’, and suggested that it provides important lessons such as:

the shift to online or distance learning during the pandemic should be seen first and foremost as an emergency response. However, the crisis also provides an opportunity for the development of more flexible learning solutions that make better use of distance learning and digital solutions.

THE ILO Policy Brief also suggests three policy initiatives for greater resilience:

- **Human and financial resources must be mobilised to ensure universal access to digital infrastructure, tools, and technology.**
- **College managers, teachers, trainers, and learners need training and support to engage in distance and online learning.**
- **Providers must revise teaching and learning models to make the best use of digital resources and tools.**

⁶ TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) in the times of COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities (2020). Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/tvet-technical-and-vocational-education-and-training-times-covid-19-challenges-and>

⁷ ILO (2020) Policy Brief: Distance and Online Learning during the time of COVID-19.

Further, Papier made the point that across the world, emergency measures have had to be taken in the TVET sector and there are a variety of examples from Europe, South America, and Russia. They are mostly for theoretical learning but there were also some videos that provided practical demonstrations and occupation-linked skills. However, her opinion is that that is where much more work is needed, especially in the TVET environment. Based on what is being done in various countries, she suggested that there are certain distance coping strategies that could be implemented, such as group challenges that allow learners to practice their skills in a collaborative way. TVET institutions can make use of commercial online teaching companies to teach the soft skills that learners would have learned in the classroom, and co-operation between stakeholders to utilise digital platforms can help with the development of more innovative solutions.

Papier acknowledged that there are huge regional inequities in digital infrastructure and capacity, particularly in the TVET and skills sector where underinvestment has limited the quality of both face-to-face and online delivery over the long term in many countries. She referred to a recent survey by the World Bank in Central Asia that found that 70% of the countries had minimal distance learning capabilities, with no universal online curriculum-linked resources for teaching and learning. A further observation was that even European systems are underprepared for digitalisation as 40% of EU citizens lack basic digital skills and less than 40% of teachers and trainers receive training on educational technologies during their Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

Following on from this, Papier made the argument that, together with digital skills, attitudes and behaviours regarding digital learning are also of major importance. Learners struggle with maintaining engagement in digital courses due to lack of a supportive context, previous experience, and/or adequate instructional methods. The transition from face-to-face to distance and blended learning has been difficult for students and teachers.

Papier once again referred to the ILO Policy Brief, which presented key measures that need to be taken. She highlighted that, to build a sustainable environment into the future, decision makers need to:

- improve internet infrastructure and access to the internet for all;
- expand access for learners to online digital application and platforms;
- utilise inclusive digital and analogue technologies for distance learning and support to learners;
- support teachers and trainers to operate in the new environment — there is also a new cadre of lecturers and teachers and we can't be blind to what they face in this new environment;
- provide support, career guidance and digital skills development for learners who have poor or insufficient backgrounds in that learning modality;
- strengthen systems for the recognition and validation of digital learning;
- increase investment in digital solutions for practical skills development; and
- improve social dialogue and coordination amongst education and training institutions, employment services and local authorities⁸.

⁸ ILO (2020) Policy Brief: Distance and Online Learning during the time of COVID-19.

She emphasised that this kind of interaction will move the sector forward. There is a general acknowledgement that despite advances in technology, distance learning (online or offline) is not a long-term substitute for face-to-face teaching and practical skills training. To address these challenges, it is critical that social partners work together to develop human-centred solutions that consider the needs of the most vulnerable.

In closing, Papier observed that, like any other situation in life, there will be gains and losses that result from this crisis. Once the dust settles, there will need to be a serious appraisal of how learning has taken place, how successful or not it has been, what the reasons were for the success or non-success, and, interestingly, what kind of unintentional learning occurred. An appraisal of the flexibility of the learning systems will be necessary to know what is possible and what is simply not possible, even with the best intentions in the world. So much has already been learned in such a short time about adaptation and innovation, and she expressed the hope that these lessons will be sustained in policies and practices once the immediate crisis has passed.

Discussion points raised

Questions were raised on distinctions between online learning and blended learning, as well as how suited colleges are to online learning and whether practical components can be taught in an online environment. Professor Papier responded to say that the jury is very much out on what works best in TVET situations because the practical component, even if it's not currently large enough in TVET colleges, is crucial for the preparation of students. She also indicated that she had not referred to blended learning as, in the crisis, everything was moved over to the online environment. However, she did comment that blended learning is possibly a way of providing the best of both worlds because students have access to a teacher, whether in person or through synchronous remote interaction, as well as online content. She raised the question of whether the college curriculum enables this and the need to review the programme content to ensure that it is more flexible for such application.

A comment was made by Karen Hendricks of False Bay that it is incorrect to say that colleges are not suited to blended and online learning — False Bay took the initiative and invested heavily in blended learning which stood them in good stead during the lockdown. However, when students left the campuses, they no longer had Wi-Fi access — an issue that still needs to be addressed on a national level. The question was, "How do we capacitate communities to access free Wi-Fi?" She also pointed out that distance learning has been offered by some colleges since 2012.

Prof Papier responded and acknowledged that in any crisis, there are those that are better prepared and those that are not prepared but emphasised that it is important to bring everyone along. There are many aspects beyond the college's control, for example where the student is learning, where they are situated and located, and that is where more solutions are essential. There needs to be a focus on the kind of innovations that can enable people to access learning programmes (whether blended or online) in their own context.

A further comment from one of the participants was on the theme of human-centred analysis emerging strongly in the presentation, which emphasises that it is about people's lives and the realities of a Covid-situation which goes way beyond just formal learning and teaching.

Professor Lesley Powell commented that she did not think this webinar provides sufficient space to engage with the issue, but that there needs to be a discussion on blended learning and what that means in the TVET space. She had hitherto been completely opposed to this approach as she believed that it leads to inequalities and that the mediation of an educator is needed. However, she referred to her own research with youth that had indicated that it can allow students to participate without paying travelling fees, it allows them to engage in certain aspects of the curriculum without the financial cost and time, and students could continue working in various ways in their communities or in whatever jobs they might have. She suggested that this is a topic for deeper debate as it needs to be considered from both a knowledge and a pedagogical perspective.

Helen Brown commented on how the move into virtual communication and liaison has opened everybody's eyes to the risks and the challenges involved. She raised the concern that there is insufficient teaching and training of lecturers on educational technology.

Judy Favish referred to the comment in the presentation regarding a teacher in a classroom needing to read the expressions on students faces to see and adapt to their responses to the teaching. She made the point that to expect technology to mediate learning in the same way is challenging. This presentation highlighted the different ways in which people have tried to modify or improve on the basics of simply putting learning materials online by doing whatever is possible to ensure better learning. However, these efforts are also expensive and, to deal with the effects of the structural inequalities requires investment and money. The challenge is how to collaborate to ensure that resources are mobilised in the society and distributed in helpful ways.

Elsie Potgieter pointed out there is currently a debate in the college regarding how to proceed with limited resources. She indicated that it is important to have a coordinated effort and process between the Department of Higher Education and Training, the universities, and the colleges, and not develop solutions in silos. There is a successful model in use where specific students study online but also come into the college for some of the practical work and contact sessions. Her comment was that the students and staff come for the contact sessions because of the experience of being in the college and, for other programmes, by replicating this for the online environment, it might remove some of the anxiety of online studies.

Professor Papier responded to the comments and questions by making the point that blended learning means different things to different people and that there may be a lack of a common understanding of what it is. The necessary starting point may be to consider what constitutes blended learning and what

it is a blend of. The models of blended learning that are currently being used should also be investigated to consider how it is being done. She also concurred with the point regarding the lack of lecturer education in educational technology and suggested that qualifications should include this going forward.

Comments were also made in the chat regarding the fact that occupational qualifications are often not included in the discussion around TVET. Theory could be taught through online means, but practical components are a challenge and need solutions which might not currently exist.

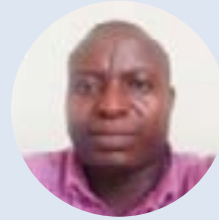
Webinar 4: The Future of Work and the Implications for South African TVET Colleges

Speaker



Dr Lesley Powell, Research Chair:
Youth Unemployment,
Employability and Empowerment,
Nelson Mandela University

Moderators



Dr Francis Muronda,
Researcher to the
Research Chair: Youth
Unemployment,
Employability and Em-
powerment



Ms Shawn Tini,
Junior Researcher to the
Research Chair: Youth
Unemployment,
Employability and Em-
powerment

Date: 03 November, 2020

Dr Lesley Powell started with a quote by Sonya Renee Taylor:

We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.

She posited that the challenge posed starting out was for individuals to set their positions aside and engage with the new world to think about how to move forward into an unknown future, and to consider what that could look like for the TVET sector.

Dr Powell presented a series of vignettes from the various projects that the Research Chair is involved in. The aim was to provide insights to some of the theoretical work that is emerging from the projects rather than empirical findings, as the projects are still being written up. The first project forms part of one of the themes in the DHET TVET Colleges Research Programme and is focused on student demand in terms of what programmes students are applying for. The project started by looking at enrolment rates for NATED and NC(V) programmes in two colleges. Overall, across both colleges and programme types, the approximate enrolment rate at its most generous is 1 in 5 applicants, with 4 in 5 applicants being turned away. When these

figures are applied to the national figures, at its most generous, they are turning away between 2.4 and 2.6 million of whom 84% have a matriculation certificate. This data suggests an enormous crisis in the sector and a social justice travesty.

The second vignette was a quantitative study of student voices on micro-credentials. The results showed a weighted mean of 7.8 out of a possible 9 in support of micro-credentials. Dr Powell presented quotes from some of the young people in the study which explained why they opt for short courses and micro-credentials. These included points about affordability and time frames for completing courses that allow them to work and earn an income in between courses.

The third vignette reported on a study that was conducted on TVET and the informal sector, and which gave the perspectives of unemployed youth. Dr Powell presented a quote from a young baker that made several points regarding how the TVET training differs from what she does on a day-to-day basis in terms of:

- the tools she uses and the way she uses them compared to what she would be taught at the college, for example operating a large mixer at college.
- how she engages with customers, and who her customer base is.
- her home-based work environment versus training to work in a large bakery.

Similarly, the MerSETA research that the Chair is engaged in, which focuses on the engineering-related informal sector, demonstrates the need for certain skills related to interacting in the community. There are certain common skills and cultural norms that everyone must engage in, but everyone has a different piece of the puzzle. They communicate, liaise, and negotiate with each other regarding skill and tool sharing. Dr Powell emphasised that there are very different ways of working in the informal sector or micro sector compared to the formal sector, and that these are not currently sufficiently understood. The assumption of transferability of skills from TVET into these sectors is not necessarily true.

The next vignette formed part of a presentation for the 2018 DHET Colloquium and centred on studies done with the University of Nottingham on student and institutional endowments. The study tried to identify where students “glitch” and where the system “glitches” them. As part of this, they identified points at which the system “glitches” the students, called “zones of vulnerability”. These zones relate to the way in which NSFAS funding is implemented and how the zones are built into the system. The zones of vulnerability are part of what makes it so hard for learners to make it into, and through, their programme.

Dr Powell moved on to present data from the MerSETA Lived Livelihoods study which traced 40 young people who work in the informal sector in engineering-related areas, over a 2-year period. One of the findings of the study was the complex differentiation in the education and training needs of Survivalist Entrepreneurs. She explained that this is not a homogenous group to which a “one-size fits all” approach to education and training can be applied as they have quite different aspirations, relationships to their craft, and understandings

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She also presented briefly on some of the findings from a further DHET research project section being undertaken, that focuses on student performance and what contributes to student performance. The colleges reported on institutional challenges that they think impact on student performance. These included challenges such as:

- The decrease in TVET budgets
- Growing student debt
- Crumbling infrastructure
- Workshops needing desperate upgrading and maintenance
- Lecturer development
- A desperate need for safe and clean student accommodation
- The need for management ICT systems
- Outdated programmes
- Limited to no access to Wi-Fi
- Late NSFAS payments (part of culture of late applications to TVET)

- Continued problems with certification backlogs
- Low success and throughput rates

The above challenges were highlighted as they were reported in the 6 months prior to this presentation and reflected the reality of what institutions considered to have an impact on student success in their colleges.

A further vignette on blended learning drew on the Covid-19 Youth Voices project and demonstrated that students were engaged in online learning during lockdown levels 4 and 5. It was also found that students who had a PSET qualification, or even part of a PSET qualification, were significantly more positive towards blended learning. For the quantitative part of the study, the results showed a weighted mean of 6.2 out of a possible 9, while the qualitative part of the study gave explanations of how the blended learning is viewed as important.

Dr Powell observed that, across all the work being done, everyone says that they want to contribute to development in their community. She flagged the importance of this, as well the importance of providing skills and making use of the skills of community members for community development. In terms of re-imagining TVET, Dr Powell also pointed out that it is critical to ask questions about capped enrolment, declining budgets, student debt, the risk that TVET and community colleges will be the hardest hit, the impact of the decolonising agenda on TVET, a Human Development (Capability) approach, and the possibility of a Pan African TVET agenda. She referred to the UNESCO call for a radically transformed TVET that is also transformative, and that does not just adapt to current work and societal change but aims to challenge and transform. In terms of this, there are questions that need to be asked about responsiveness in terms of who and what is being responded to.

On a systemic level, there is more and more talk about a differentiated sector, but it is not yet clear what that means. There are additional questions regarding projects such as the ETDP SETA “colleges of excellence” in terms of what that means for the college sector and what it means for the rest of the colleges that are not “colleges of excellence”. The topic of vocational schools has become a major part of the dialogue in terms of the Department of Education’s idea that vocational education should be offered at schools. If so, there are questions about which programmes and what that means for TVET colleges. Dr Powell suggested that there is much that is not being spoken about and there are certain “holy grails” underneath TVET which need to be re-examined.

In presenting these vignettes, Dr Powell explained that she hoped to “throw the garment out there but not stitch it together” — i.e., to provide the insights but create space for everyone to share their perspectives and collaborate. She continued by putting out a call for public deliberation, and for space to be opened for these deliberations to take place. This included a proposal that a commission on the TVET sector is necessary. Dr Powell, referring to her original quote at the beginning of the presentation, posited that normal never was for the TVET sector, and that it never should be. She emphasised that it is imperative to re-imagine, rethink,

and dream about the new system.

Discussion points raised

A question was raised in the comments regarding the enrolment rate reported in the first study, and what it was based on. Discussion in the comments indicated that the enrolment rate is due to capping of the numbers.

There was also a discussion in the chat on the need to talk about the pockets of excellence in the TVET sector. It was suggested that there is a need to conduct an “audit of excellence” across the sector.

A further discussion arose around how the labour market has changed to incorporate more SMMEs and the informal sector, but that TVET is still focused on the formal sector, as is skills development, and this should be reviewed. This is particularly important as the formal labour market is becoming increasingly precarious. The point was also raised that the focus should not just be on jobs but on meaningful jobs.

Simon McGrath commented that there is a fine line between acknowledging the challenges faced and criticising the colleges. He suggested that colleges were set up to deliver a set of skills that are increasingly outdated; therefore, it is important to think carefully about what colleges can do to avoid setting them up for failure. Consideration should be given to what colleges are for and how to support them to be the best they can be.

Guy Harris pointed out the need to look at the expanded unemployment rate for South Africa as the narrow unemployment rate for youth is 60%, but the expanded one would be higher. He further proposed that the skills that youth need for employment are the hard skills offered by TVETs, and not the soft skills offered by universities. He also emphasised the need to promote TVET entrepreneurship and suggested that work-integrated learning should include not just work in large companies but self-employment as well.

Yael Shalem questioned whether the role of the college is to emulate the workplace or whether it should be about preparing students for a broader work environment and life in general. Dr Powell’s response was that everyone has their own perspective on what the job of TVET, and education in general, is. According to her, the job of TVET is to expand capabilities or meaningful opportunities for young people. In her previous work, she found that young people reported that their “takeout” from TVET was the way in which TVET had shaped their lives. Dr Powell questioned whether micro-credentials and blended learning create meaningful opportunities and open an array of choices but the young people, who have nothing, are saying that it is at least better than nothing. She also suggested that what various people understood TVET to be is not the same thing.

DN commented that, as TVET, the sector is supposed to lead the charge for the 4th IR. He proposed that students should be advised regarding relevant courses to help them get a job in their area, for example someone from a mining town could be encouraged to study engineering.

Khaya Matiso proposed three big agenda items for the next five to ten years in the TVET sector, namely:

- mobilisation of additional resources to support innovative thinking,
- support of new programmes that in turn support empowering projects,
- improvement of infrastructure, and
- improved student support services.

Webinar 5: Building Back a Responsive, Flexible, and Agile TVET Sector — Why Occupation as a Frame of Analysis for VET?

Speakers



Prof Yael Shalem,
Honorary Associate
Professor of Education
at the University of
Witwatersrand, based
at REAL



Prof Stephanie Allais,
REAL, SARCHi
Research Chair: Skills
Development



Dr Presha Ramsarup,
Director for the Centre
for Researching
Education and Labour
at the University of
Witwatersrand

Moderator

Date: 27 November, 2020

This presentation draws on 3 source papers⁹. The focus of the presentation is on theories about knowledge and skills, particularly in terms of tools of analysis. Their argument is that we need better tools of analysis to “build back better” — a phrase coined to refer to post-pandemic recovery and systemic transformation in TVET education.

Professor Stephanie Allais referred to students’ and employers’ view that there is insufficient workplace or practical experience in TVET and that the main need is for what is termed agility or responsiveness. They aim to problematise this and take a slightly different position, namely that work cannot be emulated in the context of formal learning. However, there are many kinds of learning that take place in workplaces — learning that cannot happen in formal educational institutions — and our policy does not consider or sufficiently support this.

Further, Professor Allais makes the point that the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly negative for skill formation in South Africa and that it has hit hard in a sector that was weak to begin with. Furthermore, TVET serves many of the poorest students in the post-school system who are least able to engage in remote learning. The restrictions on access to workplaces, together with the challenge of funding workplace learning because of the holiday on the skills levy and general financial crisis, dealt a heavy blow to workplace experience. Despite this, there are high expectations that TVET will support economic recovery and individual livelihoods.

⁹ Allais, S. and Marock, C. (2020) ‘Educating for work in the time of Covid-19: Moving beyond simplistic ideas of supply and demand’, *South African Review of Education*, 26(1), pp. 62–79.
Buchanan, J. et al. (2020) ‘The futures of work: what education can and can’t do’, Paper commissioned for the UNESCO Futures of Education report, pp. 1–24.
Shalem, Y. and Allais, S. (2018) *Linking Knowledge, Education and Work: Exploring occupations*.

The paper that Allais co-authored with Carmel Marock (2020) problematises the notion of “supply and demand” in education, where the economy demands skills and the education system supplies skills, arguing instead that skill formation is embedded in a range of different economic, social, and political arrangements and systems. The policy notions of supply and demand are an underestimation of how the ability of education to prepare for work is shaped by the ways in which work is organised. Thus, TVET must be considered in the context of the full picture of vocational skills development. This is important because of problems in the vocational and occupational qualification system in South Africa related to the balance between short-term training programmes and a long-term vision of formal qualifications, as well as the balance between what should be formally recognised and what should not, and how they relate to each other.

The paper further argues that the problem of supply and demand further necessitates thinking about formal TVET and a range of different types of initiatives — such as of non-formal, informal, formal, company-based but non-credentialed, etc. — within specific economic recovery models as well as sectoral and community development programmes. This is as opposed to the thinking that the economic recovery model is designed first and then a list of necessary skills is sent to the education system. Drawing on Simon McGrath’s work it also follows that, for this to happen, colleges should shift from regulatory models of governance that have their models in marketisation and competition towards a focus on building institutional capacity.

Professor Yael Shalem then presented some ways of thinking about knowledge and skills in the kinds of programmes offered by the formal vocational skills development sector and, specifically, the TVET colleges. She started by making the point that there are some rules that constrain the ideas that are currently being posited, particularly in terms of knowledge-related issues.

The first issue she raised was the predicament that the spheres of education and work are organised differently. While knowledge is produced in both the workplace and in institutions of knowledge, it is produced, evaluated, and used very differently. Yet, despite this, there is a push for the two spheres to mirror each other. There is a clear distinction between education and work in terms of knowledge production, with while knowledge in education produced by distanciation. This involves using bodies of specialised knowledge to systematise observations of the natural and social world. However, while bodies of knowledge help to generate more certainty, they do not necessarily speak to the experiences of day-to-day work. This contrasts with the sphere of work which has systems and procedures, and where many solutions to problems are standardised. However, there are also many that are not, resulting in uncertainty.

In both spheres, there is a relationship between certainty and uncertainty, although the aim is always to create more certainty. The question is how to do this. One of the ways that this is expressed is in a request for people with more skills and who are able to create standardised ways of solving problems, thereby dealing with uncertainty. Shalem posits that the challenge of dealing with the problem of uncertainty, brought about by elements such as fast technological change, rests with education and, in particular, with curriculum.

She presents two main arguments regarding how the relationship between the spheres of work and education can be developed in terms of curriculum:

- The creation of specialisation — this view emphasises the inferential processes which people will learn through, and in, specialised bodies of knowledge, as well as how people are socialised into the bodies of knowledge that support the specialisation.
- Practical knowledge — this view is critical of the ideas of specialisation and occupation. It works on the understanding that occupations will disappear and that students need much more generic skills like flexible skills, problem-solving skills, and practical knowledge.

The notion of work evokes a variety of associations. From an ideal perspective, work is firstly associated with knowledge and different kinds of knowledge. There are also issues related to occupational pride, specialisation, autonomy, uncertainty, meaningful tasks and variation, social interaction and a sense of belonging, a stable income, progression, the benefit to oneself and others, and satisfaction. Shalem and Allais use a notion of occupation that is not empirical but could also be referred to as an “occupational pathway” or “ecosystem” and suggest that thinking about VET through this lens provides a useful frame of analysis. This framework includes, but cannot rely on, education. They propose 5 main features of occupation:

- Normative dimension
- Formal knowledge
- Division of labour (power relations and control)
- Qualifications
- Socio-economic conditions

Thus, changing VET encompasses all of these and not just the question of curriculum. Using occupation as a frame for analysis allows for thinking about work beyond just the concept of a job or labour. According to Shalem and Allais, an understanding of occupation can help with understanding:

- What is at stake about work,
- Why and how occupations struggle to maintain their power in the labour market,
- What needs to be changed in the labour market,
- What needs to be emphasised about knowledge, and
- What qualifications are intended to signal for employers.

There is a common claim that students need to learn problem-solving rather than knowledge as they can research everything on the internet. Put to the floor in the webinar, this statement evoked many responses that both agreed and disagreed with this statement. Prof Yael Shalem summed up many of the responses as “yes, but...” and drew on a quote from Christopher Winch’s work *Dimensions of Expertise* to suggest an explanation for this. She suggests that it is not possible to be naïve and talk about bodies of knowledge in relation to all occupations but that there is always some relationship between subject and expertise, and that expertise cannot be created in a disorganised way. The biggest challenge is to give students both subject knowledge that is systematic and produced over a long period of time, as well as to give them the opportunity to experience parts of it.

Shalem goes on to point out that there are many ways to typologise knowledge, for example Winch, Freidson, Bernstein, Abbott, and Becher all have different ways of presenting various knowledge types. Bernstein’s distinctions between types of knowledge are of particular interest currently as, in his time, he found certainty in the hierarchical bodies of knowledge of the physical sciences as they produce certainty. By contrast, the social sciences and humanities do not as they are horizontal. Currently during Covid-19, however, science is not producing certainty, but it does provide some surety that some form of methodology was followed and possible certainty regarding which arguments may hold value. When working with knowledge, there is a need to look for certainty. As a result, referring again to the previous statement about finding knowledge online, Shalem points out that the internet is both attractive and dangerous.

At every level of occupation, there is a need for procedures that people will develop out of bodies of knowledge to help them diagnose a problem and apply the best procedure. There is a need for practical applications; however, knowledge that is learned and produced in systematic way cannot be translated into practical knowledge in a direct and uncomplicated way.

Returning to the issue of people who say that skills are needed, Shalem argued that it is necessary to consider what constitutes skill and differentiated between two different ideas of skill. The first is skill that is specialised to a task but also transferable to similar tasks, and non-specialised skills that are transferable to other work domains. People tend to consider skills as those that are specialised to a task. Thus, frames such as the qualification framework and Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO) define occupations through task, with the idea that it is possible to build up from tasks what needs to be taught and tasks dictate skills. However, each task actually gives rise to a bundle of skills, rather than just one, and there is no single correspondence between task and skill. This then reverts to the problem of sequencing, order, and selection of what will provide better, or more, certainty. In contrast to this is the view that specialisation should be left behind and that focus should be on non-specialised skills such as creativity, problem solving, critical skills, and communication, because the world is changing so fast, and the current generation is likely to change careers multiple times.

The argument is that they will need broad skills, but the challenge is how to teach these. Shalem raises the argument that it is not possible to teach these skills outside of a particular specialisation as a body of

knowledge is needed to base the teaching of these skills on. Either these terms are continually broken down into more specific skills needed by the particular task, or else there is the risk that it will lead to “conceptual inflation” that renders the terms meaningless. There is also the element of whether skill is used purely as an adjective that describes what they do, or whether skill is used as an aspect of a task related to other skills. The latter then relates to some form of classification of skills which relies on a specific procedure or specific bodies of knowledge, where the skill is incorporated into a far more complex system.

The second idea is that of inferential comprehension within a specialisation, or “knowing how”. This does not deny the notion of skill but attempts to inculcate in students the ability to reason, apply, and evaluate, which Christopher Winch refers to as “applied theoretical knowledge”. This concept is the idea that in the field of professions and occupations, a different kind of knowledge is developed compared to the pure sciences. This knowledge should not need to be translated or mirrored in the workplace but should have the power to be applied to more than one context to develop a discretionary specialisation rather than a mechanical specialisation. This leads to the development of professional judgement where thoughts are related to each other and create a web that strengthens ideas. Thus, inferential comprehension encourages apprenticeships and practical experience, and is aimed at producing a form of deductive practical experience.

Processes within the practical learning time are deductive and encourage the application of knowledge, which requires a very well-thought-out way of organising practical experience. Shalem then referred to her original statement about the complaint that there is insufficient practical experience and suggested that, instead, the issue is that the practical experience is not organised correctly to allow for a deductive learning experience. She then went on to make the argument that knowledge and skill are inter-related but at a different level of specification. Knowledge is more systematised and organised and, therefore, more transparent, while skill tends to be more hidden. Insight is within knowledge but comes as result of the connections between knowledge, while wisdom grows over several years.

The notion of occupation in the broad analytical sense was presented by Shalem as a helpful way to think about vocational education and training in a way that focuses on knowledge beyond just the colleges. However, there are certain kinds of knowledge that are more exclusive and provide more certainty. She went on to present examples of topics contained in two curricula where information was presented purely as information without any sort of relational web and suggested that this is therefore about information only, rather than education about the topics. Her argument then is that knowledge and skill do not exist as an end, but rather in relationship to one another. The role of an educator is to provide a broad and complex lens for students and, by organising the practical experience in a deductive way, inferential comprehension will develop over time. This will enable students to connect ideas and thereby develop the necessary problem-solving skills.

Professor Stephanie Allais then went on to discuss how the tools of analysis for thinking about knowledge and skill have implications for policy. She referred to work being done in the field of job clusters or vocational streams and that, when thinking about vocational curricula, it is necessary to think about how experience in one type of job or occupation can prepare people for movement into multiple other types of work since

jobs and occupations share many common or adjacent skills. This implies that, in terms of qualifications and curricula, it is better to think about them as broader streams in which people might work, as opposed to thinking of them as a one-on-one correspondence between a vocational programme and particular jobs in the labour market or in the world of work.

This section of the presentation drew on the Buchanan et al. (2020) paper that was focused on the future of education and work. The paper makes the argument that Covid-19 has unsettled even the most settled orthodoxies about policy choices that are open to many countries. Allais connected the paper to what was presented previously, by making the point that it has become increasingly clear that labour demand and education provision are two separate demands, and that education cannot solve the lack of demand for labour. She goes on to suggest that what education can do is:

- help people master bodies of conceptual knowledge,
- help people master relationships between bodies of knowledge,
- help people master relationships between skills and capacities and bodies of knowledge that support the common good,
- develop learning dispositions, and
- support new configurations of expertise made possible by new technologies.

She once again reiterated that education cannot create labour demand and, therefore, what is needed from policy is more ambition about directly addressing economic and labour market problems instead of trying to address them through education. The placement of education in the broader policy mix requires more care and should move away from the idea that education will solve the economic problems.

Allais suggests that, if the ideas presented in this presentation are taken seriously, it is necessary to think about strengthening institutional capacity, which again emphasises the need for an agile and responsive TVET sector. She referred to the work presented in the Buchanan et al. (2020) paper that drew on the literature on innovation in industrial production and technology, to emphasise an institutional pre-condition for flexibility and responsiveness. It requires strong institutions, often working in clusters, and patient funding rather than short-term funding.

While labour market demand is likely to remain uncertain, the role of education is to maintain its institutional and conceptual coherence as a set of societal structures created for the development, acquisition, and application of knowledge, skill, and learning dispositions. This requires time, resources, support structures, and employment conditions that enable educators to develop and perform as inspiring teachers, but also to engage with the world of work to be responsive. Allais refers to the term “surge capacity”, which is the

additional capacity institutions need to offer and develop a range of different, often unplanned for, short-term educational offerings on top of a set of ongoing core offerings.

Covid-19 has reinforced the need for agility in institutions; however, this only comes through institutional stability, something that has not been fostered by the funding model for TVET institutions. She argues that, while the expectation has been that market demands will achieve short-term responsiveness, the reverse is actually true. While there is a need for short courses on top of the broader, longer-term courses that build the webs of knowledge and skills, the educational institutions do not have the capacity to meet it in an agile manner to supply short-term labour market demands. This capacity cannot be built when a crisis arises.

The final point that Allais made is that industrial transformation and skills are inter-related. Vocational skills development cannot be viewed as outside of economic development and the policies for industrial, sectoral, and community development. The provision of vocational skills development, in all its various forms, must be conceptualised as part of a wider industrial and social development trajectory that considers the overall direction of specific sectors of the economy as well as specific dynamics of workplaces.

She argues that there is a need for the notion of occupational or vocational streams to ensure breadth of provisioning, along with strong institutions able to offer focused short-term programmes. Her argument is that this may result in a smaller, formal TVET provision if there is limited real demand for technically trained workers in the economy as mass TVET should not be seen as a solution to unemployment. Instead, central to quality vocational skills development are communities of trust in which all relevant stakeholders for a vocational stream can formulate broader vocational offerings together with the supporting workplaces.

Discussion points raised

A point raised in the chat was that soft skills are often overlooked, and these are critical for entrepreneurship. Yael Shalem responded by suggesting that by immersing students in knowledge, they will begin to develop those skills, while Stephanie Allais raised the point that not everything can be taught in education institutions and some things should be taught in workplaces. Yael Shalem then reiterated the role of deductive learning in helping to develop soft skills.

It was suggested that surge capacity may require more autonomy for colleges. Stephanie Allais responded by saying that there are elements where colleges need some autonomy while other areas require more national guidance.

Simon McGrath raised a question about those who will not gain access to either a high-quality vocational system or high-quality workplaces. Stephanie Allais responded that it may be necessary to find other ways of meeting people's needs, for example community colleges or other ways of providing livelihoods. She also reiterated that it is important to acknowledge what education can and cannot do.

Powell made the point that Winch's and Friedson's work are useful, but the base from which their work has grown does not reflect the reality of how the vast majority of South Africans and Africans work. There is a safety and comfort in the disciplinary frameworks within the occupational knowledges that underpin them, but knowledge is not static. Covid-19 has opened a big moment of epistemic disruption, set on the back of other movements such as Black Lives Matter, and there is a call from the poor in the world to say that the way in which we understand work and occupations is not their reality. She suggested that the benefit of surge capacity at the colleges is that it creates space for innovation and epistemic rupture — we need to explore those epistemic spaces, engage with, and examine them to better understand what it means in our country, on the continent, and in the developing context. Yael Shalem responded that knowledge always needs to be recontextualised, but sometimes seeing all knowledge as contaminated can lead to paralysis.

Webinar 6: "Markets on the Margins": TVET, Covid, and the Informal Economy in South Africa

Speakers



Dr Adam Cooper, Senior Research Specialist, Inclusive Economic Development research programme at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Discussant

Prof Azeem Badroodien, Deputy Director (soon to be Director), School of Education at the University of Cape Town

Moderator



Dr Lesley Powell, Research Chair: Youth Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment, Nelson Mandela University

Date: 04 December, 2020

A Portal to a Post-Employment Planet: TVET and "Distributed Livelihoods" After Covid

Dr Adam Cooper

Dr Adam Cooper started his presentation by stating that he is approaching this issue from a background of sociology of education and sociology of youth and is trying to apply some of these ideas to the TVET space in terms of both the current global pandemic context and the prior set of conditions around work. His aim, through the presentation, was to question some of the notions of work and probe what that might mean, going forward, in contexts such as South Africa. Cooper began with a quotation from Arundhati Roy:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

He proposed that this quote speaks not only to the pandemic, but also to ideas around work, as well the notion of a job and what that means. He further suggested that these ideas do not describe the context,

particularly the context of the Global South, and places that were colonised, such as places on the African continent, Latin America, and Asia. Cooper then drew on a quote by Ferguson and Li¹⁰ that posits that salaried labour is losing its plausibility as the universal solution and suggested that these notions are part of the “old ways” from Roy’s quote that need to be left behind.

This presentation draws on a range of pieces of work that Dr Cooper has been involved in over the years but, particularly, two that are due to be published in 2021. These two are *The Oxford Handbook of Global Youth Studies* that contains 40 chapters on Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and a special issue of the *Journal of Social Dynamics* that contains 6 in-depth ethnographic studies of young people’s searches for employment, and their innovations around creating livelihoods for themselves. In the presentation, he sought to answer questions related to improvisation in adversity, and how young South Africans make a living.

The first question related to the usefulness of concepts such as work, employment, income generation, and livelihood for young people in places like South Africa. Cooper referred again to Ferguson and Li’s (2018) paper that points out the failure of transition narratives, and the belief that there will be a universal trajectory from farm-based and traditional livelihoods into the proper jobs of a modern industrial society. Furthermore, although economic progress stories promised this universalisation of wage to salaried employment, the situation on the ground is vastly different.

Dr Cooper then suggested that, if the concept of the proper job is not universal, it may be useful to consider this issue in terms of formality and informality. He drew on several definitions to provide a broad understanding that defines informal employment as “all employment not characterised by formalised employment contracts, conditions and benefits. Enterprises that are paid and unpaid in all economic sectors, with employees not necessarily or not paying taxes”.

Graphs from ILO data show that, on the African continent, only between zero and ten percent of youth between 15 to 24 years have formal employment, expressed as an amount in relation to total employment. Five percent have formal employment, while 95 percent have informal employment. Although this rises slightly with age, it does not rise significantly. This is quite similar for places such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia. By comparison, for the Global North, more than 70 to 80 percent of people, including young people, are getting formal positions. Using this data, Cooper makes the point that labour markets are different in different parts of the world. He also highlighted that South Africa is slightly different as the informal sector is smaller and a few conglomerates dominate each sector, making it difficult for SMMEs. However, the human economy, in terms of the way money changes hands and how social grants compensate for the market, is strong.

Dr Cooper also raised his concerns with the concept of the labour market, pointing out that the social analysis of supply and demand in labour markets does not give a full picture of what is going on with young people and work in South Africa. He presented graphs that demonstrated that the social factors that shape employment are important mediators of the labour market and have vast repercussions for which kinds of young people can access livelihoods.

¹⁰ Ferguson, J. and Li, T. M. (2018) Beyond the ‘Proper Job:’ Political-economic Analysis after the Century of Labouring Man. Available at: www.plaas.org.za.

Although he raised the notion of informality as a way of making sense of livelihood generation in this context, Dr Cooper also posited that the formal and informal binary is problematic and suggested several reasons for this. He referred to studies on informality that propose that informality is actually a continuum, as well as making the point that the relationship between the formal and informal sectors is not clear. Further, informality is defined by what it is not, for example the ILO defines it as “non-standard work”, and this does not indicate what the activities are. Thus, the formal-informal division does not assist with understanding how young people are generating livelihoods.

The second question Dr Cooper addressed was regarding what young people’s practices on the ground tell us about the concepts of work, employment, income generation, and livelihood. He referred to work done by various people that suggests that the notions of mixed livelihoods, diverse income streams, or hustling may be better than formal and informal, and that many or most young people, particularly in urban areas and in Africa, are making a living through mixtures of activities. He further points out that, in part of the Global South, the social institutions and social protections that might encourage people to go into the labour markets — in exchange for certain benefits from the state — do not necessarily exist, and that the support that comes from such places in the Northern Hemisphere are often absent in contexts such as South Africa and places like it.

Dr Cooper spoke of “busting the myth” of the proper job as, looking at various places across the Global South, there are a range of concepts and ideas that speak to the notion of differentiated livelihoods. He indicated that the special issue of the *Journal of Social Dynamics* contains a range of papers that explore the notion of distributed livelihoods. Some of the papers raise the debate regarding the types of jobs that young people can access and what kinds of jobs young people want, making the point that young people are interested in jobs if there is the potential for better jobs in the future and, if there is none, their experiences in these jobs often result in them leaving the labour market and becoming what survey research calls “discouraged job seekers”. The appeal of leaving low wage work relates to people being able to have control over income generation in relation to time and that they do not have to remain subject to the abuse and exploitation that occurs in those jobs. The ethnographic studies provide interesting insights on how young people make create their livelihoods through other ways.

Dr Cooper also reported on his own study of young Black tourism entrepreneurs in the Johannesburg tourism industry, explaining how they draw on stories and practices, like historical artifacts, and buildings in marginalised spaces that they know well. This gives them a form of competitive advantage because they grew up in these spaces, but they also have resources from formal education, schooling, English language, and relationships with privileged others. He indicates that their strategies for making these businesses work involve what he refers to as subfields, with different rules of the game — using the logics and rules from formal economic and educational spaces and applying them to the informal economy. The young people can use the language of tourism and their knowledge of what a business should be doing in the informal spaces, and Dr Cooper argues that the policy ideas to formalise informal spaces would take away their business because tourists want the so-called “raw” experience that formalising it would remove.

For his last section, Dr Cooper considered what the previous answers mean for TVET, starting with examples of ideas from various parts of the world, including South Africa. Referring to a book edited by Kraemer-Mbula & Wunsch-Vincent¹¹, he drew on the chapter by Kraemer-Mbula that examines the sources of knowledge used by people who are manufacturing home and personal care products and selling them informally. The chapter shows that the knowledge comes from a wide range of sources and that people mix and match knowledge from various places.

A further example is from the work of Pilz¹², who looked at skills development in the informal sector in India and the support given to informal sector traders. It suggests a kind of tailored solution that links both formal and informal opportunities, and that support might be tailored for street vendors, most importantly in their places of work. Dr Cooper proposed that, for the kinds of mixed livelihoods and range of places where people are working, a form of centralised, state planned, industrial development approach with TVET courses accompanying it cannot be the only way to help generate livelihoods for people on the ground. He argues that this is because, in a democratic, developmental state, there is a lack of centralised authority to do so at the pace at which things are moving. People are generating livelihoods in ways that are in flux, making it difficult for state organisations to be responsive to what is happening on the ground. However, he suggested that it can be used for certain elements along with locally responsive support mechanisms for livelihood generation.

In closing, Dr Cooper made the point that, in the TVET sector, there are a lot of binaries — “either or” scenarios — and suggested that it does not have to be that way. It does not have to be either powerful knowledge or experiential knowledge, either formal or informal, and either employment or unemployment, as that is not the way it is on the ground. The question is how to encompass both. Dr Cooper also cautioned against glorifying the informal economy as a wonderful space where young people hustle and are creative, highlighting that it is also a hard space with its own hierarchies and ways of meting out justice. He further emphasised that work is being remade in front of our eyes, and that it is about both creating structures of governance that are going to enable a kind of centralised planning mechanism and supporting people where they are at.

11 Kraemer-Mbula, E., & Wunsch-Vincent, S. (Eds.). (2016). *The Informal Economy in Developing Nations: Hidden Engine of Innovation?* (Intellectual Property, Innovation and Economic Development). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781316662076

12 Pilz, M., Uma, G. & Venkatram, R. Skills development in the informal sector in India: The case of street food vendors. *Int Rev Educ* 61, 191–209 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-015-9485-x>

Discussion

Prof Azeem Badroodien

In responding to Dr Cooper's presentation, Professor Badroodien started out by commenting that when he began working with colleges, they did not seem to offer a solution to the problems in South Africa regarding people getting access to knowledge and ways of knowing that allow them to find sustainable work and employment in viable ways. He further pointed out that the challenge has always been there, but that it is also racialised as, if the majority of the African population is going to colleges and entering at the bottom, they will never rise to the top and thus it is essentially supporting a system that will always be racialised. Therefore, there is always the fight to invert it and the challenge is that, if it is not changed, people will not get out of poverty. There is a close relationship between formal and informal education, poverty, and the livelihoods of our larger communities.

Prof Badroodien raised the question regarding at what point we give up on the ideal of equalisation and simply focus on getting them into jobs and a form of sustainable living that lifts them out of their daily challenges. He suggested that this is the dilemma that the TVET sector faces all the time and questioned how it would be possible to change the scenario that Dr Cooper referred to, where only five percent of the marginalised communities in Africa are formally employed while ninety-five percent are not. Prof Badroodien further reflected on the question that, if informal employment is the way to go, how it is possible to give people access to knowledge forms that allow them to work in those sectors and manage those sectors in ways that grow without collapsing overnight.

Professor Badroodien referenced the work of Dr Powell and others that show that, ironically, in South Africa, it is easier to enter the informal labour market in the rural and more poverty-stricken areas than in the more formal areas like Cape Town, Johannesburg, and other cities where the conglomerates or the formal industries squeeze the possibilities of earning wages for what could be called meaningful work that is also legal work. It is possible to earn money in the cities in the informal sector, but it is inevitably criminalised.

Prof Badroodien posited that the challenge that came out of Dr Cooper's presentation was related to how to access and develop infrastructure to deal with these kinds of scenarios. Referring to the quote from Arundhati Roy that Dr Cooper began his presentation with, he also raised questions regarding what the institutional and policy portal is that we need to enter and pass through, and what the "little luggage" is that people need to take through. Key challenges related to the ideas of work, employment, income generation, and livelihoods are whether the "little luggage" for learners, in terms of the little knowledge that is given to them, is sufficient for them to be able to find spaces to work and make their lives viable in terms of employment, and how much baggage they need to let go of to get there.

In closing, Prof Badroodien suggested that the problem with imagination is that, to imagine, it is necessary to foresee and identify a possible future to be able to plan towards it. However, in an environment where this is not possible, it is extremely hard to imagine and whatever is spoken about in relation to imagining is almost rhetorical and flimsy, whereas the idea of the imagined community was always meant to be far more

structured and far more viable. His final point was that the human economy is strong, and that people have the ability to find work, but how they find work and how we empower them with forms of knowledge that make that work sustainable over time is where the big challenges lie. The discussions regarding these ideas have been spoken about for 20 years without any substantial results. He closed by commenting that holding on to this notion of informal education can change people's daily lives, but it is debatable whether it is a way forward in terms of what the system allows.

Discussion points raised

Dr Lesley Powell continued on from Prof Badroodien's commentary on Dr Cooper's presentation, commenting that the presentation focused on the tension between, on the one side, the cognitive and developmental purposes of education and, on the other side, the social justice and ethical purpose. She suggested that, in South Africa, these two ideas were viewed as distinctive and opposing contestations, and it would be better to consider a more complex continuum of ideas that could be implemented in one context in one way and differently in another context. The debate regarding "powerful and experiential" or "sacred and profane" has been embedded in the discussions of the previous webinars and deserves further consideration. She further suggested that perhaps one of the most powerful ideas to bring into that debate is the challenge of seemingly conflicting ideas existing on a continuum without the tension between cognitive and social justice purposes.

Professor Stephanie Allais commented that there is a need to introduce concrete examples into the discussion to look empirically and not just theoretically at what is happening in practice.

A comment was made in the chat that there is a challenge related to how young people seeking work in the formal economy can be supported to achieve their aspirations and enjoy sustainable livelihoods. A further comment in the chat drew on the idea of things not being an "either or" scenario and suggested that this could be applied to language access, in terms of it not being English or indigenous languages but, rather utilising both while discarding notions of standard languages in which students are taught and being assessed.

Mr Khaya Matiso raised the idea that it is necessary to talk about education as an ecosystem with TVET colleges, community, education centres, schools, and universities all addressing identified needs as an integrated education sector. He also raised the importance of working with, rather than on young people — meeting them where they are through quality engagement, consultations, and finding solutions together with them.

Dr Cooper responded to the comment about concrete examples by suggesting that is necessary to review organised space in urban contexts, particularly at how space is used and who has the right to use it in what ways. He further addressed a question regarding young people's aspirations by commenting

that it is about creating places where people feel that they can aspire to and reach certain opportunities. From working with young people, he has learned that people have a deeply damaging sense of society and how it operates. Aspirations are about trying to change that in whatever role educational spaces might have. He also linked back to the comment about language by pointing out that language is a major area where people are made to feel excluded and even inferior in certain spaces, which is why bilingual approaches are a positive idea.

Professor Enver Motala made the connection between the TVET webinars and other related discussions, and their conclusions regarding human capital theory, formal labour markets, and the policies and strategies that government have implemented over the last twenty years. He suggested that the policies and strategies have been unproductive, resulting in an even greater crisis in relation to what is possible for young people. In terms of the concepts of socially useful work or socially useful labour, it is critical to consider the learning processes taking place in communities and their social movements organised around various issues.

It is important to understand the learning processes taking place between academic institutions and communities, what key pedagogical principles are emerging in the engagements between, particularly, universities and locally organised communities, and how that might begin to constitute the foundations of a curriculum which could be taken forward in an organised and systematic way. These learning processes are deeply embedded in socially useful work, for example producing food, and through practice develop sets of principles for cooperation, sharing, and working collectively.

He also pointed to the problematic development of social and political consciousness — a consequence of practical and demonstrable activities on the ground through which learning is taking place. Reliance on the state is no longer taken for granted and it is clear that there is a strengthening of organisational and community leverage on the ground taking place globally.

Mr Gareth Williams commented from his experience as a university lecturer and dealing with young people that universities do not understand the aspirations and livelihoods of students that come into their spaces.

Mr Guy Harris raised concerns around the implementation of entrepreneurship in the TVET sector and suggested that industries that use hard skills, such as hairdressing and the motor industry, are the ones that are likely to create jobs which, even if they are not entrepreneurs, will work toward poverty alleviation.

Dr Randa Hilal discussed the issue of the marginalised and TVET, and in particular gender and TVET in her work in Palestine. She explained that gender is an issue in TVET as women have shown a high interest in education in Palestine but entrance into the labour market has been low. In Palestine, TVET

has played a role in gender equality, through entry into employment if they want, but also as a route towards achieving their personal aspirations.

Ms Annette Loubser referred to the communities of trust concept from the previous webinar and suggested that, based on her own experience, those looking at becoming entrepreneurs had many ideas, but they needed to feel safe and to belong. She suggested that facilitating the idea of communities of trust is important because people are looking for authenticity, which is often linked to their history.

Mr Khaya Matiso reiterated the need to engage with the marginalised youth directly to understand their needs, as well as where they come from, and what they are doing to survive. He suggested that there could be opportunities for young people in housing trends and food security, and there is a role for TVET colleges and community learning centres in addressing this.

Dr Cooper closed the discussions by commenting on the importance of socially engaged scholarship. He also responded to Professor Motala's comments by highlighting the importance of co-operatives, as well as the need to support what is already happening on the ground, as opposed to promoting ideas that might resonate with those who are not situated in the context that they are writing about. In closing, Dr Cooper also referred to Dr Hilal's comments on gender and emphasised that looking at what he presented through a gendered lens has significantly different repercussions in terms of how livelihoods work and operate through gender.

Webinar 7: TVET and COVID-19: International Perspectives

Speakers



Prof James Avis,
Professor of
Post-Compulsory
Education, Emeritus
Professor University
of Huddersfield



Prof Simon McGrath,
UNESCO Chair in
International Education and
Development at University of
Nottingham, and Extraordinary
Professor at University of the
Western Cape

Moderator



Prof Volker Wedekind,
Deputy Head of School,
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Convener of UNEVOC
Centre

Date: 10 December, 2020

Post-Covid Futures: Vocational Education and Training, the Labour Market, and Social Justice

Prof James Avis

This presentation was based on an article by James Avis, Liz Atkins, Bill Esmond, and Simon McGrath entitled *Re-conceptualising VET: responses to Covid-19*,¹³ which draws on the notions of interregnum and neo-liberalism. The paper makes the argument that Covid-19 has profoundly disrupted VET but that it has also given glimpses of different ways of organising VET.

Professor Avis introduced the presentation by painting a picture of where countries are as a result of the crisis, suggesting that the Global South and North have both moved towards an interventionist state. This is akin to the concept of the “development state” for the former, and for the United Kingdom government, it tends toward a “war mentality” in terms of rhetoric. He referred to the work of Acemoglu¹⁴, who suggests that this is a critical juncture in history with several possible futures, one of which is the idea of a renewed social democratic welfare state, or Welfare State 3.0, that focuses on concepts such as the green economy and a flatter distribution of income and wealth.

He then elaborated on the current context in which the deepening health crisis has progressively increased the visibility of neo-liberalism’s failings. Avis suggested that there is increasing disillusionment with the

¹³ James Avis, Liz Atkins, Bill Esmond & Simon McGrath (2021) *Reconceptualising VET: responses to covid-19*, *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 73:1, 1-23, DOI: 10.1080/13636820.2020.1861068

¹⁴ Acemoglu, D. 2020 “The post-covid state.” Project Syndicate, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/four-possible-trajectories-after-covid19-daron-acemoglu-2020-06>

rhetoric that underpins neo-liberalism, and draws from Mason¹⁵, who states that “the free market system has imploded” to make the case that there is increasing scepticism regarding its doctrines. However, he does also point out that its popularity was based on a lack of a realistic alternative.

In considering the alternatives developing currently in the move towards post neo-liberalism, and as a result of Covid-29, Avis posited that it is characterised by cynicism. He drew on Gramsci’s¹⁶ notion of the interregnum, suggesting that “the old is dying and the new cannot be born”, and that neo-liberalism has been shown up as fraudulent. The current interregnum is a consequence of this, combined with the crisis of Covid-19, and it is suggested that this may give rise to “a new way of relating economy to polity, production to reproduction, human society to nonhuman nature”, as per Fraser¹⁷.

Avis went on to suggest that the crisis of healthcare deepens the interregnum and, possibly, allows for a sustainable re-evaluation of “key workers” and what constitutes “really useful labour”. There is a further possibility for rethinking the notion of skill as what was previously regarded as low skill, such as care work, becomes viewed as critical in scenarios such as caring for a dying patient. However, as well as the opportunity for acts of solidarity, such as those in support of previously undervalued labour, he refers to examples such as Butler¹⁸, to demonstrate that there is also the opportunity for the acquisition of profits. There is also the unequal impact of Covid-19 on ethnic minorities in countries such as the UK and US, as well as how social and economic conditions render people more or less vulnerable to infection.

Furthermore, there is also the “crisis of care” which Avis, drawing on Fraser¹⁹, says refers to issues such as time poverty, family-work balance, and social depletion, as well as the need to engage in waged labour that results in the need for childcare. Those who have been previously involved in childcare for professional middleclass families have seen this interrupted by Covid-19 and, as result, face deepening poverty. The pandemic, Avis argues, raises the importance of care and the possibilities for reconsidering social obligations and the way in which the society is ordered, even if it remains contested. There are also the experiences of the lockdowns that suggest possibilities for a more sustainable world which addresses both environmental issues and inequality. He referred to SDG 8, which addresses sustainability, drawing on McGrath²⁰ to highlight that it is, at heart, unsustainable and impossible under capitalism.

Avis highlighted an expansive view of VET, together with a focus on “really useful labour”. Against the backdrop of an epidemic and educational crisis, there have been renewed debates around the future of VET. There have also been calls for VET to adapt to the pandemic, as well as to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable, and he suggested that VET could stand as a public pedagogy to address the needs of the unpaid and those who are excluded from waged employment but still engaged in really useful labour.

In concluding, Avis emphasised that this is a moment of profound social change that provides opportunities for alternative conceptualisations of VET. He observed that there is a struggle in the alternative conceptualisation of VET and proposed an agenda based on entitlement to VET, rather than a VET that serves capital. Thus, a broader conceptualisation of VET could rethink its relationship to waged labour and employment, instead

15 Mason, P. (2019) *Clear Bright Future*. London: Allen Lane. pp. xii.

16 Gramsci, A. (1971) *Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. pp. 271.

17 Fraser, N. 2019. *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*. London: Verso. pp. 38.

18 Butler, J. 2020. *Capitalism Has its Limits*. https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4603-capitalismhas-its-limits?utm_source=Master+List&utm_campaign=53bb38c6d5-UK+Direct%3A+Verso+blog+response&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1f96ba5fab-53bb38c6d5-410277665&mc_cid=53bb38c6d5&mc_eid=c622b1ec82

19 Fraser, N. 2016. “Contradictions of Capital and Care.” *New Left Review* 100: 99–117.

20 McGrath, S., 2020. “Skills for Sustainable Futures.” Background paper, *Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures*, <https://www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4022328>

emphasising the importance of really useful knowledge/labour and providing skills that impact on life in general. His final argument was that a progressive VET must move beyond capitalist relations to address questions of social justice.

Discussion points raised

Several speakers raised questions on the notion of entrepreneurship and its role in the new conceptualisations of VET. Avis responded by suggesting that entrepreneurship is problematic, referring to the example of social entrepreneurs and tensions regarding the sourcing of PPE in the UK during the pandemic. He answered further questions on survivalist and micro entrepreneurship by raising the point that surplus labour is not solvable through this model, and that there is an ongoing churning of labour.

Professor Avis also addressed the question of what a mass VET system might look like. He proposed that there is a pedagogic problem in providing what people want while also providing spaces for full educative engagement. There is also the danger of imposition in the provision.

What TVET do We Want Post-Covid?²¹

Prof Simon McGrath

Covid has been devastating for the lives and livelihoods of many. Its effects have been distributed unequally, often reflecting existing patterns of multidimensional poverty and intersectional disadvantage. Our first task, therefore, is to arrest the negative impact of Covid. However, beyond that, the slogan of “build back better” should be seen not as empty rhetoric but as a genuine commitment to meeting the needs of the current and future generations, of nature and of the planet. For, the threat of Covid is nothing to the challenges posed by the climate crisis. Moreover, all of this is taking place in the presence of a third crisis, that of democracy and dialogue.

And, to add to the challenge, we cannot think of this in the TVET setting without thinking about the interlocking (but also distinct) challenges of uncertainty and contestation about the jobs, work, and livelihoods of the future.

This seminar series has highlighted various TVET challenges that make it clear that we cannot return to “business as usual”. At the heart of the problem is that our current TVET systems emerged from and are hard-wired into carbon capitalism and are therefore complicit in the problem of unsustainability.

What then might TVET look like if it is to be part of the solution? Let me offer a four-part provocation.

1. A revised notion of TVET responsiveness

Public TVET, especially in the South, is criticised for being unresponsive to labour market realities. For the largely neoliberal proponents of this view, this means an unresponsiveness to formal employment opportunities, despite the very limited nature of such opportunities in cases where the age cohort of school leavers is as big as the formal economy and many times the size of the demand for new workers.

Noting that massified TVET systems face a major problem of numbers is not to argue that there is no place for high quality public TVET that does respond to formal labour market opportunities. However, a better notion of responsiveness can be found by drawing on the evolutionary economics tradition. Evolutionary economics, and, specifically, the national innovation systems approach strongly associated with it, offers distinct benefits in conceptualising TVET’s developmental role due to its stress on the importance of education, skills, work, innovation, and production for economic development. Crucially, its focus on organisations and networks offers a new scalar level and methodological purchase on the TVET-economic development relationship. Together, these theoretical and methodological lenses offer very different policy implications and possibilities when compared to more conventional neoclassical approaches.

A focus on competences and capabilities (in the innovation literature sense) enriches an analysis of how responsive provider institutions are by giving a set of new analytical categories. Moreover, the attention of the innovation account on organisational learning helps move from the deficit-laden snapshot of a

²¹ Special thanks to Simon McGrath for writing this section.

responsiveness survey towards a richer sense of institutions that are dynamic, even if that dynamism is fallible.

Furthermore, the insight of the innovation systems approach that organisations should be understood in a dynamic and relational manner crucially moves our thinking away from the atomised understanding of the responsiveness orthodoxy. It draws our attention to how TVET institutions interact with other actors and reminds us that they exist within wider networks of policies and structures, firms, universities, private training providers, and sectoral intermediary organisations. It directs us to an analysis of how these constellations have evolved over time; what place they give to public TVET provision; and what potential there is for strengthening that place. A focus on intermediary organisations reinforces the importance of looking at ways of building capacity and communication at institutional, place-based, and sectoral levels.

This all has practical implications for thinking about how to improve responsiveness at institutional and system levels. It offers important new insights into how responsiveness might be more about capacity development, learning and interaction within wider sectoral networks. This has potentially critical implications for how colleges are funded, staffed, and organised, and about their degrees of autonomy. It also highlights the need to consider sectoral intermediary organisations as crucial to college capacity development rather than remaining largely marginal, if not invisible, in the calculations of TVET policymakers. This in turn emphasises the dual logics of sector and region in thinking about skills and innovation, with implications for policy processes that seem to only be conceived in terms of the centralisation-decentralisation axis.

2. Majority labour markets

The majority of young people are likely to find work in the informal or subsistence economies in many countries. However, there has been almost no attention to either rural subsistence or urban informal sectors and TVET in the last quarter-century.

Nonetheless, interest in these issues is rekindling. This encourages the location of TVET debates in rural settings in the wider contexts of capitalist development, and its effects on rural underdevelopment, and experiences of educational exclusion as a result of the failings of the 'education for all' movement. By focusing on how young people experience both labour markets and education systems, it becomes possible to think about how alternative systems can be developed that build from existing knowledges and create viable opportunities for craftsmanship and entrepreneurship.

Some very recent work is beginning to revisit skills in informal economies, as this series has shown. Importantly, this places greater emphasis than the earlier tradition on structural dynamics, such as gender and poverty, and the persistent effects of colonialism. This helps us to move beyond naïve accounts of skills for entrepreneurship. Rather, it alerts us to different types of entrepreneurship.

Much of what is provided in the South as skills for entrepreneurship is copied from Northern programmes targeting "opportunity entrepreneurship" where educated, middle class youth are empowered by the state and other structures to follow their entrepreneurial dreams. Such entrepreneurs do exist in Africa but far, far

more of those entering such programmes are “necessity entrepreneurs”. Whilst they may aspire to much of the entrepreneurial dream, they also face poverty, marginalisation, and a disabling state, and are unlikely to be able to move beyond subsistence. For many, more important than a notion of becoming a successful individual businessperson is gaining the skills and income to be recognised in their communities as adults. What is required, therefore, is an approach to skills for entrepreneurship that is grounded both in structural constraints and broader agentic aspirations towards human flourishing.

3. Human development

This concern with aspirations towards human flourishing takes us to a growing theoretical approach to TVET and development that draws on the human development and capabilities approach. It addresses both inequality in skills development and how we move away from a narrow focus on immediate employability and production towards a wider view of TVET as supporting human flourishing.

The approach insists on foregrounding poverty to better understand many young people’s challenging lived experiences. It sees poverty as multidimensional. Given that most who enter TVET are from poor backgrounds, this insistence on a careful analysis of how they experience poverty seems essential. Furthermore, the approach draws on feminist literatures to stress how women experience intersectional disadvantages that shape their decisions about education and work throughout their lives and the outcomes they achieve.

Whilst it is important to understand structural obstacles to human flourishing, this approach emphasises the centrality of human agency. This leads to a strong focus on what individuals aspire to, why they attend TVET, and what they value in their TVET experience. Unlike the orthodoxy, this literature finds that many, both youth and adult returners, actively choose TVET, and that they find value in it that includes but also transcends its immediate labour market value.

Related to this, the approach insists on a broad conception of work. It argues that work is not only about income/production but also about self-identity and self-worth. This leads to a stress on how work’s potential to fulfil wider human needs can be maximised. Thus, the notion of ‘decent work’ needs to be protected and expanded.

All of this implies the need for a reassessment of what counts as success for vocational providers. Rather than emphasise pass, throughput, or employment rates — important though these are — it calls for evaluation to focus primarily on the extent and ways in which institutions and the system support the flourishing of learners.

4. Just transitions

Historically, mainstream TVET has been disconnected from a concern with the environment.

Colonial land expropriation underpinned a bifurcation of skills formation systems between an industrial-

Historically, mainstream TVET has been disconnected from a concern with the environment.

Colonial land expropriation underpinned a bifurcation of skills formation systems between an industrial-focused TVET mainstream and a separate agricultural and natural resource management-focused skills system. Whilst there were some post-independence efforts to adopt a more participatory and sustainable approach to rural skills, this had relatively little impact on the industrial TVET model.

Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, a discourse of green skills has emerged at the international policy level. However, this is doubly flawed. First, there is a fundamental tension between a drive from environmental ministries towards green skills and a TVET policy reform approach characterised by new public management and employability. Second, the drive towards environmental skills has tended to neglect the technical level, ignoring the types of skills most usually found in TVET.

Some of us involved in this seminar series have begun to bring just transitions thinking into the TVET mainstream. This provides a way to move beyond the jobs versus environment argument. It intersects with the environmental justice and climate justice movements to provide a broad framing that supports an expanded scale of considerations across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

A system that is more proactively constituted for addressing complex and as yet unknown consequences of climate change and water scarcity is needed. Research is emerging to better assess skills demand that probes the unlocking of green skills that are latent and hidden, yet possible within current systems of operation, e.g., via adopting circular economy principles in local industrial or agricultural contexts and within the wider frame of just transitions.

Overall, this approach highlights the ways in which colonial and post-colonial political economies have resulted in TVET systems that largely ignore the needs of most people and of the environment. It argues that TVET needs urgent transformation if it is to be fit to support pressing processes of just transitions. It also points to a need to theorise TVET in more complex ways that consider history, ecology, and context as well as national policy imperatives, political economy, inclusivity, transformative curriculum and pedagogy, and capabilities. This approach suggests that just transition principles, processes, and practices are needed to support a fundamental rethinking of the systemic organisation of TVET systems, the world of work, and the ways in which they have excluded the majority.

Conclusion

“Modern” TVET has been inextricably linked to faith in the inevitability of industry-led development, despite the waning of such faith elsewhere in development thinking. To better support sustainable development, TVET needs to be far better aligned to both existing labour markets and to the possibilities of transforming these towards the challenge and opportunity of just transitions. In so doing, it is important also that TVET’s close relationship to thinking about work does not ignore the longstanding counter-tradition in TVET that stresses its role in building people and communities, and not just workers.

The Way Forward

Various themes became evident as the webinars proceeded and participants engaged in robust debates on the points raised in the presentations. Although Covid-19 was the starting point for the webinar series, discussions encompassed a much broader range of topics and issues in the TVET sector.

Extensive discussion was centred on the institutional challenges faced by TVET colleges. These challenges relate not only to the current Covid-19 crisis but were already in existence prior to the pandemic. Access to resources for teaching and learning was raised repeatedly as one of the critical weaknesses of the system. The need to build both institutional capacity and stability for the TVET colleges was identified as essential to the future of the TVET sector. While the challenges in the sector are significant, the need to conduct an “audit of excellence” that identifies and acknowledges the positive was also deemed necessary.

Throughout the webinar series, in the presentations and in the discussions thereafter, the role of technology in the TVET sector was raised. The role of the Covid-19 pandemic in exacerbating the urgency with which the TVET sector had to engage with technology was evident in presentations, particularly in terms of remote learning. However, how the TVET sector engages with the technological advances of the changing world remains to be seen. The use of blended learning and digital learning technologies in the TVET environment need to be further explored, both in terms of how best to use them and how lecturers and students can be capacitated for their use.

It is also clear that it is not possible to ignore issues such as micro-credentialing and online learning as the young people whom the sector is supposed to serve, argue for their use. Debates around the role of TVET in preparing students for the world of work are juxtaposed with a broader social justice role that moves beyond human capital. These debates raise significant questions from a pedagogical and knowledge perspective, and present challenges for the future of the TVET sector. However, there is also an opportunity to reconceptualise VET in light of the changes happening in the world and, possibly, envision its purpose and role in new ways.

The need to reconsider how TVET can support young people going forward was highlighted in discussions that centred around changes in the labour markets and the increasing emphasis on the informal sector, as well as entrepreneurship. Varying views on how TVET could do this were raised in these webinars, with the need to further unpack concepts such as meaningful work and really useful labour. The question was also raised regarding what is already happening in the informal sector and how best to support it. Entrepreneurship was raised extensively in the discussions among participants, although what this looks like in the TVET space remains up for debate.

The debates and comments included in the discussion points raised for each webinar reflect the diverse perspectives and ideas of participants. All participants, however, share a passion for the TVET sector and long to see it transformed into a sector that meets the needs of young people and contributes to a better post-Covid world. Numerous participants called for the opening up of further platforms for these discussions and debates to continue beyond the confines of the webinar series.

Suggestions such as the need to set up a Commission on TVET, that examines these issues in greater depth, were made, along with repeated pleas for student and lecturer voices to be heard. In the closing session, it was emphasised that it is vital to involve practitioners on the ground in the discussions, as well as to consider what these debates mean for the person sitting in a college. Furthermore, these debates cannot remain in the realm of merely talking about the issues. Action must be taken based on the outcome of the discussions, and colleges must be empowered to move forward.

What these webinars clearly show is that there is a range of people who are passionate about the TVET sector in their own ways, and it is critical to come together to not just debate and discuss but to devise practical, concrete, implementable solutions for the sector without expecting TVET to do the impossible. Re-thinking, re-imagining, and dreaming a new TVET sector starts with creating space for dialogue and for all voices to be heard but ends with taking action to move TVET forward into a better, reconceptualised future for all.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LMS	Learner Management System
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NC(V)	National Certificate (Vocational)
NDP	National Development Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SMMEs	Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training