



Bridging the gap between theory and practice: TVET lecturers' views on tourism education and labour market readiness in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) lecturers' perspectives on tourism education and labour market readiness within South African higher education with the aim of bridging the gap between theory and practice and preparing tourism students for the labour market, focusing on the issues they encounter and potential solutions. TVET colleges in South Africa offer a new approach to delivering services by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The qualitative study is informed by the Human Capital Theory (HCT), employs the interpretivist paradigm, collects data through interviews, and utilises thematic analysis to interpret the data. The study revealed that a lack of teaching resources, an obsolete curriculum, and a lack of continuous development programs are the challenges confronting TVET Colleges. In contrast, redesigning and implementing the curriculum, the availability of modern technology, and the provision of both human and non-human resources were identified as possible solutions to bridge the gap between theory and practice in TVET colleges. The study recommended that the government strengthen the relationship between lecturers and industry, provide tourism industry-focused seminars for TVET universities, examine tourism syllabi at predetermined intervals, and conduct educational visits to tourism attractions. Therefore, the study concludes with suggestions for the actions that should be taken to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Keywords: Technical and Vocational Education and Training; Curriculum; Tourism industry.

INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), which primarily focuses on equipping students with the knowledge and necessary skills for industry work, such as the tourism sector, was the first to initiate tourism education.¹ It expanded to secondary schools and universities.² In South Africa, the Department of Education (DoE) introduced Tourism as part of the school curriculum in 1996. In 2007, the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programs were launched, and Tourism formed one of the introduced programs. Many debates have been about how tourism as a subject should be taught

¹ Maria Theresa Verian, "Revolutionizing TVET Education: Tailored Methods for Tourism and Hospitality Skills," in *2024 International Conference on TVET Excellence & Development (ICTeD)* (IEEE, 2024), 146–50.

² A. Ana et al., "Entrepreneurial Intentions of Tourism Vocational High School Students in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Journal of Technical Education and Training* 8, no. 2 (2016).

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among TVET colleges.³ The expansion of curriculum and development of tourism as a subject is primarily influenced by the growth and needs of the tourism labour market, recognising that the travel and tourism industry contributes approximately 3.7% towards the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the South African economy.⁴ According to the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013), the primary objective of TVET colleges is to prepare young school leavers for the world of work by providing the required skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Because of the above underpinnings, the tourism curriculum is designed to suit the needs of students, companies, and government funding institutions, as no consensus exists on accomplishing this.⁵ However, tourism educators are often criticised for not preparing students for the tourism labour market.⁶ At the same time, it is asserted that what tourism educators teach in the classroom does not correspond with the current trends in the tourism industry.⁷ Hence, employment opportunities are limited for these graduates as it is difficult for them to compete with what the labour market offers.

Even though tourism education in South Africa is growing,⁸ the inability of tourism educators to prepare students for work in the specialisation they are pursuing is still a challenge.⁹ Tourism curricula in South Africa have not kept up with advancements in quality education, nor have they sufficiently fulfilled the needs of the tourism sector according to Pinto and Nakatani, and as a result, Rasethuntsa and Adukaite et al. argue that the industry continues to underestimate the worth of tourism graduates and tourism certification does not guarantee employment in the industry.¹⁰ With this challenge, the study aims to explore the gap between the preparation of tourism educators and learners in the labour market. The following questions guide the study:

- What challenges do tourism educators face in bridging the gap between theory and practice?
- What are possible solutions to the challenges faced by tourism educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice?
- The following objectives guide the study:
- To identify tourism educators' challenges in bridging the gap between theory and practice.
- To suggest possible solutions to the challenges faced by tourism educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

³ Mardine Engelbrecht, John Spencer, and Andre van der Bijl, "Relevance for Work in the Western Cape Tourism Industry of the National Certificate Vocational in Tourism Education at TVET Colleges," *Industry and Higher Education* 31, no. 5 (October 8, 2017): 328–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422217724050>.

⁴ Chien-Chiang Lee, Godwin O Olasehinde-Williams, and Ifedolapo Olabisi Olanipekun, "GDP Volatility Implication of Tourism Volatility in South Africa: A Time-Varying Approach," *Tourism Economics* 28, no. 2 (March 4, 2022): 435–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354816620970001>.

⁵ Rana Hammad Hassan et al., "ICT Enabled TVET Education: A Systematic Literature Review," *IEEE Access* 9 (2021): 81624–50, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2021.3085910>.

⁶ Margaret W Mungai, D M Kieti, and Isabella Cheloti-Mapelu, "The Tourism Education and the Tourism Industry Imbalances: A Review of Skills, Curriculum Proponents and the Way Forward," *European Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* 9, no. 3 (2021): 14–26.

⁷ Mustapha Touray et al., "Arthropod Vectors of Disease Agents: Their Role in Public and Veterinary Health in Turkiye and Their Control Measures," *Acta Tropica* 243 (July 2023): 106893, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actatropica.2023.106893>.

⁸ Mafor Penn and Umesh Ramnarain, "Current Status and Future Perspectives on the Integration of Virtual and Augmented Reality in STEM Education in African Schools and Universities," *Information and Communications Technology in STEM Education*, 2023, 198–214.

⁹ Johan Edelman, "How Should Tourism Education Values Be Transformed after 2020?," *Tourism Geographies* 22, no. 3 (May 26, 2020): 547–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1760927>.

¹⁰ Mateus José Alves Pinto and Marcia Shizue Massukado Nakatani, "Tourism and Hospitality Education in High School: A Lifelong Learning Approach," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Tourism* 7, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 71–83, <https://doi.org/10.31822/jomat.2022-7-2-71>; Boitumelo Caroline Rasethuntsa, "Tourism Skill Development Initiatives in Three Southern African Development Community Countries: A Policy Guide Analysis," *Turyzm* 32, no. 2 (2022): 51–68; Asta Adukaite et al., "Teacher Perceptions on the Use of Digital Gamified Learning in Tourism Education: The Case of South African Secondary Schools," *Computers & Education* 111 (August 2017): 172–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2017.04.008>.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training in South Africa

Hashim et al. describe TVET as the educational process involving general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, practical skills, and the acquisition of industrial knowledge.¹¹ The above definition implies that the TVET college is designed to prepare students for the labour market through hands-on training, which involves equipping students with the skills necessary for a particular area of study.¹² TVET colleges in South Africa need the attention of the Government so that lecturers are well-equipped to train students effectively. The Government of Malawi and the Human Resources Development Council of South Africa (HRDCSA) suggested that the Government initiate TVET college programs in response to industry criticism regarding the lack of fully capacitated individuals in specific sectors.¹³ Based on this premise, the study therefore explores the gap between the preparation of tourism educators and learners in the labour market.

Challenges faced by TVET colleges in South Africa

One of the challenges TVET colleges face, as claimed by Makgato, is the marginalisation of lecturers, resulting in many TVET college lecturers lacking the pedagogical training required for vocational fields.¹⁴ Sebola mentioned that the legacy of the past problems with understaffing and a lack of proper support continues to hinder constructive transformation and negatively impact the performance of TVET College's students.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Maluka and Mulaudzi found that TVET college council chairs, principals, and lecturers discovered that the complex governance reforms implemented in the TVET sector led to alienation and disempowerment among college workers.¹⁶

TVET colleges lack adequate financial resources

A detailed report published by the Human Resource Development Council in 2022 indicates that most South African TVET colleges are not financially buoyant and run functional, proactive educational institutions.¹⁷ This financial instability led to the findings by Makibinyane and Khumalo that TVET colleges lack suitable machinery and computers due to financial constraints, particularly for engineering students.¹⁸ The Green Paper and the White Paper both emphasise the non-convincing quality of education these institutions offer.¹⁹ The White Paper notes that most TVET colleges underperformed in terms of student and institutional outcomes. Overcoming this challenge calls for the quality of training in the country.

¹¹ Suhaizal Hashim, Nur Zulaikha Mohd Zain, and Nur Zahira Mohamed Zahir, "Cultivating Teachers' Creativity towards Education for Sustainable Development (Esd) in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)," *Journal of Nusantara Studies (JONUS)* 8, no. 2 (June 30, 2023): 157–81, <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol8iss2pp157-181>.

¹² Bakang Nthutang, "Causes of Low Enrolment in ICT-Related Courses: A Case of TVET Colleges in the North West Province of South Africa" (University of South Africa, 2021).

¹³ Government of Malawi, *National Education Sector Plan 2018–2022. Ministry of Education* (Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (HRDCSA), 2014).

¹⁴ Moses Makgato, "Challenges Experienced by TVET Colleges in Producing Skilled Workforces: Implications for Continuous Professional Development," in *Research Anthology on Vocational Education and Preparing Future Workers* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2022), 148–57.

¹⁵ Mokoko Piet Sebola, "The Role of Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) in Higher Education Teaching: A Higher Education Provided at Basic Education Standard," *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, no. 1 (January 28, 2022): 50–57, <https://doi.org/10.21303/2504-5571.2022.002257>.

¹⁶ Mojalefa Daniel Maluka and Maelekanyo Christopher Mulaudzi, "Emerging Perspectives Regarding the Implementation of Lecturer Professionalization at Selected TVET Colleges in Gauteng Province, South Africa.," *Journal of Research in Technical Careers* 9, no. 1 (2025): 60–74.

¹⁷ Richard A Swanson, *Foundations of Human Resource Development* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2022).

¹⁸ Julius Motala Makibinyane and Shutu Steph Khumalo, "Exploring Factors That Impede Student Support Services and Throughput Rate: The Case of TVET Colleges in South Africa," *International Journal of Education Economics and Development* 12, no. 4 (2021): 397–411.

¹⁹ Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET), *Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training* (Pretoria: DHET, 2012); South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2013).

The Labour Market

The labour market in the study is the tourism industry, known as the combination of all business operations that fulfil the needs and wants of tourists. According to Rasethuntsa and Maseru, the tourism industry is highly diverse, with numerous industry sectors and subsectors providing comparable goods and services.²⁰ These industries supply the infrastructure, goods, and services that facilitate travel for various purposes. The industry operates through an extensive network of linked and affiliated industries such as primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Tourism and hospitality courses are separate programmes in TVET colleges. Due to the close and overlapping relationship, several university curricula integrate the two into a single certification.

The significance of tourism to higher education

The positive impact of tourism on higher education cannot be overemphasised. Tourism serves as a source of income for governments, boosts the country's economy, and provides job opportunities, especially for TVET college students studying tourism.²¹ Adukaite et al. agreed that tourism has attracted a growing academic community, including specialised publications, textbooks, and national and international professional organisations.²² This achievement is supported by Anderson and Sanga, who argued that for any country's tourism industry to remain competitive and recognised, there is a need for high-quality managers and capable staff members.²³ Additionally, one significant aspect of the tourism industry is the decrease in the unemployment rate among young people who have graduated from TVET colleges.

Some of the issues surrounding tourism education for the labour market

Regarding the tourism sector, South Africa is a developing country compared to its African counterparts.²⁴ Nonetheless, they argue that the tourism educational system is struggling to equip the industry with qualified labour in terms of skill and education. Meanwhile, Hoogendoorn highlighted a lack of clarity and misconceptions regarding tourism as a subject of education and curriculum development.²⁵ The author believes the same problem has resulted in varying tourism education content across different sources, finding the lack of integrated frameworks within tourism education as another obstacle that causes fragmentation, which is a challenge for educators in building a holistic approach to delivering tourism curricular ideas.

Diversity

Government, industry, and academics have not agreed on what exactly constitutes the tourism industry; they only agree that tourism is incredibly diversified in terms of the range of sectors it encompasses. Additionally, the number of organisations it incorporates is hindered by the lack of an agreed-upon inventory of the activities and organisations that comprise the tourism industry, making it challenging to develop tailored education.²⁶ These authors have shown that tourism education has emerged in response to this backdrop of fragmentation. Additionally, Xu et al. stated that the partnership between education and industry exists within the context and should bring about positive change.²⁷ If these

²⁰ Boitumelo Caroline Rasethuntsa and Lesotho Maseru, "Government Collaborative Efforts Supporting Tourism Development in Lesotho," *International Tourism and Hospitality Journal* 4, no. 11 (2021): 1–14.

²¹ Gary Williams, Bob Mckercher, and William Chernish, *The Internet and Travel and Tourism Education* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003417866>.

²² Adukaite et al., "Teacher Perceptions on the Use of Digital Gamified Learning in Tourism Education: The Case of South African Secondary Schools."

²³ Wineaster Anderson and John J. Sanga, "Academia–Industry Partnerships for Hospitality and Tourism Education in Tanzania," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 34–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2018.1480959>.

²⁴ Christian M. Rogerson and Jayne M. Rogerson, "Niche Tourism Research and Policy: International and South African Debates," *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 10, no. 4 (2021): 1131–51.

²⁵ Gijsbert Hoogendoorn, "Last Chance Tourism in South Africa," *Tourism* 69, no. 1 (March 27, 2021): 73–82, <https://doi.org/10.37741/t.69.1.6>.

²⁶ Clara Martinez-Perez et al., "Current State and Future Trends: A Citation Network Analysis of the Academic Performance Field," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 15 (2020): 5352.

²⁷ Feifei Xu, Jessika Weber, and Dimitrios Buhalis, "Gamification in Tourism," in *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2014* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2013), 525–37, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-03973-2_38.

entities are not clearly defined in terms of their responsibilities, there will be a challenge because accountability will be lacking.

Academic materials and facilities

Other issues that surround tourism education and the labour market, according to Boluk and Panse, are the fact that the content of the reading materials and curricula is outdated; that is, the content has not been updated for years; hence, the information in the course materials is irrelevant to what is being taught.²⁸ According to Boluk and Panse, tourism education at TVET colleges often lacks academic facilities, including reading materials and curricula that contain relevant and valuable information.²⁹ In this regard, it suggests that educational systems, specifically curricula, should undergo constant review to meet current trends and address academic challenges. In this regard, it suggests that educational systems, specifically curricula, should undergo continuous review to meet current trends and address academic challenges.

Towards Building the TVET Tourism Education-Industry Relationship

Khuong explains industry-education collaborations as collaborative activities that bring together the institutions of higher education, corporations, and the community to address their shared interest in higher education.³⁰ Gamede and Uleanya believe that collaboration allows business professionals to participate in educational programs and decision-making.³¹ Similarly, Anderson and Sanga argue in favour of this collaboration, stating that academic institutions should collaborate proactively with industry to provide graduates with the relevant skills and capacities to meet societal and economic needs.³² Furthermore, the above scholars state that the core of this relationship should be identifying industry needs, creating a proactive work placement system, and dealing with curriculum planning issues.

In summary, this section of the literature review concludes by highlighting the challenges facing TVET colleges in South African higher education, identifying some issues surrounding the tourism industry, and suggesting ways TVET colleges could be improved. The literature addressed and aligned with the research questions in the study, identifying the challenges faced by tourism educators in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Suggesting possible solutions to the challenges faced by tourism educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was grounded in the Human Capital Theory (HCT), as developed by Schultz and Mincer, and further expanded by Gary Becker.³³ HCT, being among the oldest theories utilised in TVET, was popularised by an argument that education and training are the most significant investments in human capital.³⁴ HCT offers the most effective approach to understanding the connection between the purpose of training and its relevance in the labour market. HCT believes that investing in people yields economic benefits for both individuals and society, advocating for an educated labour force and arguing that a highly educated workforce is more likely to enhance the production process than one that has not

²⁸ Karla A. Boluk and Gaurav Panse, "Recognising the Regenerative Impacts of Canadian Women Tourism Social Entrepreneurs through a Feminist Ethic of Care Lens," *Journal of Tourism Futures* 8, no. 3 (September 22, 2022): 352–66, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JTF-11-2021-0253>.

²⁹ Boluk and Panse, "Recognising the Regenerative Impacts of Canadian Women Tourism Social Entrepreneurs through a Feminist Ethic of Care Lens."

³⁰ Cam Thi Hong Khuong, "Work-Integrated Learning Process in Tourism Training Programs in Vietnam: Voices of Education and Industry.," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education* 17, no. 2 (2016): 149–61.

³¹ Bongani Thulani Gamede and Chinaza Uleanya, "Review of the Impact of Stakeholders' Participation in Rural School Education," *Multicultural Education* 7, no. 5 (2021): 18–25.

³² Anderson and Sanga, "Academia-Industry Partnerships for Hospitality and Tourism Education in Tanzania."

³³ Theodore W Schultz, "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review* 51, no. 1 (1961): 1–17; Jacob Mincer, "Investment in Human Capital and Personal Income Distribution," *Journal of Political Economy* 66, no. 4 (August 1958): 281–302, <https://doi.org/10.1086/258055>; Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964).

³⁴ Johannes Klassen, "International Organisations in Vocational Education and Training: A Literature Review," *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 77, no. 3 (May 27, 2025): 792–818, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2024.2320895>.

undergone educational institutions. The theory is relevant to the study because it demonstrates how education enhances the production process, including the tourism curriculum used in TVET colleges and the tourism industry, as well as related work. To align HCT to the findings, for example, in the area of technology, when lecturers teach innovatively, it opens students' eyes beyond classroom experience. It instils and builds students' human capital. Meanwhile, Mende states that HCT focuses on education to create human capital, thereby improving the quality of life and generating economic rewards.³⁵ The theory posits that education leads to increased productivity and should serve as the foundation for developing human capital.

METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm

The study adopted the Interpretivism paradigm because the researchers needed lecturers who teach tourism at TVET colleges to share their experiences.³⁶ The interpretivism paradigm in the study focuses on subjective issues surrounding the tourism education curriculum. Theoretically, the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to perceive the world via the participants' perspectives and experiences.³⁷ According to the interpretivism paradigm, nature is assumed to be socially constructed. The qualitative research approach acknowledges a relationship between the paradigm and a research approach influenced by the interpretivism paradigm. Mazaheri-Tehrani et al. explained that the qualitative research approach focuses on words rather than numerical data because it facilitates a deeper understanding of concepts, ideas, and thoughts.³⁸ Qualitative research was ideal for the study, as it allowed the researchers to collect data directly from the participants on how the gap between theory and practice at the TVET could be bridged.

Research Design

This study opted for the case study research design to allow the researchers to investigate a program, activity, process, or one or more people in depth.³⁹ A case study design suited this research to explore the tourism education curriculum in depth and an approach to investigate issues surrounding an educational-related phenomenon. The qualitative study opted for non-probability, purposive sampling, meaning the selection process was not random. Participants with at least three years of teaching tourism at TVET College and two years of working experience in the tourism industry were selected. Semi-structured interviews were suitable for gathering in-depth information from the participants, as four tourism lecturers were interviewed, recorded using a mobile device, and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

The study adopted thematic analysis to interpret the data generated following the six phases of data analysis.⁴⁰ For instance, this quotation from one of the participants supports the claim made through thematic analysis. *“As a college, we lack financial resources for our tourism students to undertake tourism industry visits. This challenge hampers them from at least seeing what happens in the industry instead of reading it in the textbook. Lack of functional simulation rooms to simulate a tourism office environment and improve students' soft skills.* The first phase of analysis involved the researchers familiarising themselves with the data by listening to the interview recordings and transcribing them simultaneously to ensure accuracy. The second step was to organise the data into categories to make it easy to read and interpret, and then assign the data to its appropriate formulated

³⁵ Christian Mende, Maria Esther Oswald-Egg, and Katherine Marie Caves, “VET System Governance: A Systematic Literature Review,” *CES Working Paper Series* 14 (2023).

³⁶ Husam Alharahsheh and Abraham Pius, “A Review of Key Paradigms: Positivism VS Interpretivism” 1 (December 31, 2019).

³⁷ Ayşegül Karaca-Atik et al., “Uncovering Important 21st-Century Skills for Sustainable Career Development of Social Sciences Graduates: A Systematic Review,” *Educational Research Review* 39 (May 2023): 100528, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2023.100528>.

³⁸ Sadegh Mazaheri-Tehrani et al., “Sedentary Behavior and Neck Pain in Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Preventive Medicine* 175 (October 2023): 107711, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2023.107711>.

³⁹ Zulaikha Mohd Basar et al., “The Effectiveness and Challenges of Online Learning for Secondary School Students – A Case Study,” *Asian Journal of University Education* 17, no. 3 (August 1, 2021): 119, <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i3.14514>.

⁴⁰ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(Com)ing a Knowing Researcher,” *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (January 25, 2023): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>.

codes. The previously formulated codes were examined and collated into different fitting groups in the third phase. At this phase, the codes were organised into more significant themes that addressed the research questions. The fourth phase focuses on the themes discovered in the third phase to review, modify, and develop them further. In the fifth phase, the themes are refined one final time by examining the following: the message conveyed by each theme and whether there are sub-themes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are rules and guidelines that guide the researcher in conducting this study and aid in ensuring research is conducted with integrity.⁴¹ The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of the Free State's ethics committee, UFS HSD2021/0301/21/22. An informed consent form was provided to each participant for review and signature. They were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable participating in the interview. Pseudonyms were used to replace the participant's name. The researcher also received permission from the TVET college's principal to conduct the study with their personnel (lecturers) as participants.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the interpretation and analysis of the data in relation to the study's objectives, explores the challenges faced by tourism educators in bridging the gap between theory and practice, and suggests solutions to address these challenges. For the sake of anonymity, letters L1-L4 were used to identify the participants in the study. Below are the emerging themes and conversations from the participants.

Objective 1: What challenges do tourism educators face in bridging the gap between theory and practice?

a. Lack of teaching resources is a challenge

The lack of teaching resources and facilities was identified as one of the challenging factors for TVET college students in bridging the gap between theory and practice. This challenge means that TVET college institutions lack teaching resources that could have helped students learn better. The colleges are established to teach students practical vocations. The absence of resources implies the failure of students in some aspects. Below are the conversations from participants.

L03: *“As a college, we lack financial resources for our tourism students to undertake tourism industry visits. This challenge hampers them from at least seeing what happens in the industry instead of reading it in the textbook. Lack of functional simulation rooms to simulate a tourism office environment and improve students' soft skills.”*

L1: *“Here we don't have library and media centre access; students can only access these resources during college time and not after hours; even access to Internet hot spots is very limited, not free of charge, for research purposes.” People cannot function properly without internet access these days.”*

L2: *“When teaching these students certain topics such as airport procedure, for example, after teaching them through that in class, they supposed to go computer labs if we had one to go and watch the latest updates on YouTube, this would aid in ensuring that should they be required to go to work in the airport tomorrow at least they know what to expect.”*

L4: *“Tourism lecturers face challenges of insufficient school partnerships.”*

⁴¹ Nazmul Hasan et al., “Ethical Considerations In Research,” *Journal of Nursing Research, Patient Safety and Practise*, no. 11 (August 28, 2021): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.55529/jnrpsp11.1.4>.

The above participants said that TVET colleges lack teaching resources like libraries, simulation centres, and internet access, and students cannot visit the industry to acquire experience due to financial constraints. If all participants could mention the lack of teaching resources as a factor that prevents their students from being taught as they ought to, then this challenge should be addressed by the relevant authority.

Without resources, the college would be unable to conduct its primary operations. The factors above imply that the TVET college students who learn practically are deprived of the opportunity to learn by doing; instead, they view pictures in books and lack simulation rooms, which are highly significant for efficiently teaching these tourism-related disciplines. According to Erdin, the absence of resources in these colleges disadvantages the students; participants in this study have highlighted the following: TVET colleges lack sufficient recreational facilities and media centres for students to access the Internet.⁴² Simulation rooms for practical activities are vital; however, due to rising enrolment, most such rooms are now used as classroom space. One of the participants indicated that, when it comes to the simulation machines, they are not relevant since they are not working well. He says they are not performing as expected, so they are irrelevant.

Obsolete instructional material

The data revealed that outdated instructional materials are a challenge faced by the TVET college. Outdated instructional materials in this context refer to the curriculum and books used to teach at TVET colleges, which are obsolete and irrelevant to addressing the needs of college students and the industry. Below are the conversations from participants:

L2: *“Students will be declared competent based on their ability to answer examination questions that are based on the outdated syllabus and not on what the current trends are in the tourism industry, and at times, as lecturers, we don’t want to dwell more on what the industry is doing because we may end up confusing these learners. Assessments are based on the syllabus and the textbook, not the industry’s offerings. As lecturers, our hands are tied, and the syllabus limits us.”*

L01: *“Instructional materials, like design and technology, are irrelevant as their needs are prescribed in the syllabus. The present workshops and machinery were designed for woodwork and metalwork. Also, the curriculum is far behind and does not address what the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2005 – 2015 wanted to address. This means that machinery and tools are outdated and need to be replaced.”*

L3: *“The instructional materials are too old.” The machines and tools are relevant, except that most of them are outdated, so it isn’t easy to upgrade them, as it is challenging to find replacement parts and funds; if upgrading is required, the Government must intervene by providing funds.*

L4: *“Lecturers are faced with outdated pedagogical knowledge and find their teaching influenced by traditional methods, which do not align with the realities that differ from their training. Novice educators often lack practical skills and adequate support, and struggle to apply theoretical knowledge.”*

Participant L03 said there is an imbalance between theory and practice, even though both are equally significant and highlighted that there are occasions when the lecturer feels terrible while teaching and emphasising essential points, but knowing fully well that the points are irrelevant due to outdated sources of information.⁴³ The curriculum was developed and implemented shortly after South

⁴² Yaşar Erdin, “A Review on Technology Competencies of Language Teacher Educators via Web of Science Database,” *Language Education and Technology Journal* 1, no. 2 (2021): 79–89.

⁴³ Mutembei Ndumba Lucy, Kibaara Tarsilla, and Gichohi Maku Paul, “Teaching-Learning Resources and Employability Skills Development of TVET Graduates in Meru County,” 2024.

Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994; hence, the curriculum was pertinent at the time since tourism in South Africa was only beginning to grow. The trends have radically altered; thus, the curriculum must also evolve. Lecturers should be influenced by the requirement for students to acquire fundamental skills. Instructional materials are the content conveyed within a course. These include the lectures, readings, textbooks, multimedia components, and other resources in a course.⁴⁴ It was also argued that TVET colleges don't have sufficient instructional materials; contrary to that, the participants stated that the prescribed materials for teaching tourism are available but outdated and don't speak to the current trends of the tourism industry.

However, the above participants believed that the curriculum for TVET College addresses the current needs of students, that the syllabus is outdated and does not benefit anyone, and that the instructional materials, such as the prescribed textbooks, are irrelevant.⁴⁵ In other words, even though the world is in the 21st century, where education should be innovative, informative, and meaningful, it is unfortunate that TVET College students are living in the past. Another danger of this challenge is that these students would find it difficult to be employed after their education; this puts the nation in a dilemma in many aspects.

Lack of continuous development opportunities for educators

The lack of continuous development opportunities in the TVET Colleges presents a significant challenge in modern workplaces, often leading to disengagement. TVET College students are expected to demonstrate skill development as part of training, especially as the workforce becomes dominated by millennials and Gen Z, who prioritise career advancement. Unfortunately, tertiary institutions like TVET College fail to provide clear opportunities due to a lack of continuous development opportunities, causing them to be looked down upon and undervalued.

Participant 1: *“Surprisingly, from Level 2 to Level 4, our students do not have any training in tourism systems that require a computer. Since we are heading towards the Fourth Industrial Revolution, computer knowledge must be an essential component of any training program.”*

Participant 3: *“Honestly, it is disturbing when the Department of Higher Education expects graduates to have a computer certificate as a prerequisite to graduate with a diploma in tourism. Where will they get that certificate if the curriculum does not provide a computer course”?*

According to both participants' replies about professional development and possibilities for students, TVET College students must engage in continuous professional development, such as computer training in tourism. Professional development is how teachers and other members of the teaching profession extend and enhance their knowledge and abilities to build the personal traits essential for their professional lives. Unfortunately, Harun et al. said that the lack of continuous development opportunities for TVET college students poses a danger to students, the community, and the country.⁴⁶ These opportunities and privileges are supposed to prepare students with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values necessary for implementation.

The lack of continuous development opportunities among TVET colleges presents significant challenges, particularly affecting instructor quality and student outcomes. Without consistent training and professional development, many TVET instructors struggle to stay updated with industry advancements and evolving skill requirements. This gap between instruction and industry needs means that students may receive training on outdated tools or techniques, leaving them less prepared and unfit for the workforce. For instance, a recent World Bank study highlights that many TVET systems

⁴⁴ Kurt Swart, Taryn Bond-Barnard, and Ritesh Chugh, “Challenges and Critical Success Factors of Digital Communication, Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing in Project Management Virtual Teams: A Review,” *International Journal of Information Systems and Project Management* 10, no. 4 (November 30, 2022): 59–75, <https://doi.org/10.12821/ijispm100404>.

⁴⁵ Skeikh Shahana Shimu and Faruque A Haolader, “TVET Is Under-Resourced and Held in Low Regard? Teachers' Perceptions of TVET in Bangladesh,” *Education+ Training* 67, no. 3 (2025): 419–35.

⁴⁶ Anaa Harun, Ruzit M. D. Yusoff, and Ahmad Munzir Zakaria, “Tvet in Malaysia: Capabilities and Challenges as Viable Pathway and Educational Attainment,” *Journal on Technical and Vocational Education* 5, no. 1 (2020): 52–58.

globally struggle to align training with market demands, especially in emerging economies, contributing to skill mismatches in the job market. Consequently, students may graduate without the competencies required in high-demand industries, which impacts their employability and perpetuates skills shortages within local economies.⁴⁷

Furthermore, limited development opportunities hinder the career growth and satisfaction of TVET instructors, affecting retention and teaching quality. Studies in several countries suggest that instructors lacking industry exposure and ongoing professional development may struggle to implement effective instructional techniques that foster critical thinking and creativity.

This can lead to an instructional approach that is overly theoretical rather than practical, reducing the hands-on experience students need. Calls for reform have emphasised the need for better support structures, including mentorship, job rotation, and data-driven tracking of instructor competencies to ensure skills remain current and relevant.⁴⁸

Objective 2: Solutions to the challenges faced by tourism educators to bridge the gap between theory and practice

Objective two sought to determine what can be done to ensure that tourism educators bridge the gap between theories. Below are the responses from participants:

The need for modern technology

Technology integration in education and every sphere of life is not strange to anyone, regardless of where you live. There is a need for modern technology in TVET colleges across the country to enhance teaching and learning. This possible solution was revealed as one of the themes that emerged from the data; below are the conversations from the participants.

L1: *“TVET curriculum needs modern technology to be up to standards, computers and computer-aided machines used in other countries.”*

L3: *“Suppose the Government wants to reduce poverty and unemployment among the youth. In that case, it is time for the current school curriculum to be adjusted to accommodate innovation so that students can create jobs for themselves or get employed.”*

L4: *“There is a need to ensure that teacher educators remain informed about current classroom dynamics.”*

The respondents indicated that the TVET curriculum fails to address the employment needs of students. They both stated that it is time for this curriculum to be re-adjusted so that it is relevant and responsive to the economic needs of society. Also, the curriculum should prepare students for further training, job creation, and employment. The above statements confirm Dwiyanti et al.’s views that globalisation has become a priority topic of discussion and concern since it significantly impacts people’s lives.⁴⁹ As such, for TVET students to compete on the global stage and meet the globalisation challenges successfully, there is a need for the Government to invest in modern technology that promotes and enhances the teaching of tourism at TVET Colleges with specific curricula designed.

From the researcher’s point of view, learning and teaching at any higher institution should be priorities, especially for TVET students whose learning model is hands-on activities; they need modern facilities to know and practice better.⁵⁰ Invariably, lecturers at TVET colleges should be empowered with the required modern classroom facilities that support innovative teaching and aid learning; with

⁴⁷ Salem Badawi and Monica Drăgoicea, “Towards a Value Co-Creation Process in Collaborative Environments for TVET Education,” *Sustainability* 15, no. 3 (January 17, 2023): 1792, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15031792>.

⁴⁸ Joseph Mesuwini and Sello P Mokoena, “TVET Lecturer Work-Integrated Learning: Opportunities and Challenges,” *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 22, no. 8 (2023): 415–40.

⁴⁹ Vina Dwiyanti, Dwi Novi Wulansari, and Hanissa Okitasari, “Competencies Needed for Vocational Education Graduates in Logistic Industry: A Systematic Review,” *Online Journal for Tvet Practitioners* 6, no. 2 (2021): 11–20.

⁵⁰ Leif Christian Lahn and Svanhild Kristine Berntsen, “Frameworking Vocational Teachers’ Digital Competences,” *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE)* 7, no. 2 (August 31, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.5322>.

this training, TVET students could be self-reliant and self-employed based on the skills and knowledge acquired. Indirectly, this would decrease the high number of youth unemployment in the country and reduce poverty in society.

Redesigning and implementing the TVET curriculum

The redesign and implementation of the TVET curriculum was another theme that emerged from the data as one of the possible solutions to the challenges facing South African higher education institutions. Below are the conversations from participants:

L3: *“Curriculum designers and implementers should design the curriculum to align with the demands of industry and society. The subjects taught should be those courses that industries need, and the course content should be aligned with the requirements of the local and international markets and economy.”*

L1: *“The curriculum should be left as it is. Instead, students should be trained to generate income and market themselves with what they have. This is because they still do not get jobs or generate income if they do not know how to market what they have and make a living.”*

L2: *“There should be a collaboration between the TVET and the tourism industry to provide students with an industrial attachment as part of their training. This will help them to link what they have been taught with the practices of the industries, and they will know better what is expected of them when they leave the institutions.”*

L4: *“One of the ways to overcome this challenge is to foster integrated learning experiences.”*

From the perspective of Participant 3, education stakeholders must ensure that what is taught in the classroom aligns with the South African curriculum design. This way, TVET students will be relevant and employable in the tourism industry and have the necessary skills and knowledge because they play a crucial role in addressing the disparity between theoretical learning and practical application.⁵¹ TVET students should be trained to market themselves in searching for jobs based on their acquired skills. In other words, the participant believes that students should be able to secure employment based on their abilities and skills. Unfortunately, the researchers disagree with these claims and believe that curriculum in learning and teaching is not something that any organisation, especially higher education, can do without, as it provides the guidelines and the contents that should be taught per government regulations.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 believes that the need for TVET students to be exposed to industrial attachment, in collaboration with tourism industries, is to gain practical experience. The researchers buy into this idea in the sense that, by the nature of TVET colleges, students are taught to gain practical experience and acquire knowledge through training to test and implement these skills; there is a need for them to work in related industries for perfection and for work purposes. This claim is affirmed by Hlatjwako et al. that exchange programs between TVET institutions and industries for adequate technical and vocational education and training that meet the needs of the industry and the needs of the individuals for self-employment and improved productivity should be enhanced.⁵²

The Availability of Human and Non-human Resources

The availability of human and non-human resources has been revealed as one of the factors that could bridge the gap between theory and practice within South African higher education systems. The factors emerge from the data generated in the study, and below are the conversations from participants.

⁵¹ Md Shamimul Islam, “Role of TVET in Human Resource Development and Sustainable National Development of Bangladesh: A Review of Literature,” *Int. Multidiscip. Res. J.* 1 (2021): 263–69.

⁵² Sihle W Hlatjwako, Bhasela Yalezo, and Emmanuel Mutambara, “Coaching Behaviour Competencies for Managers within Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges in South Africa,” *Gender and Behaviour* 20, no. 3 (2022): 20008–21.

L1: “Access to people working in the tourism industry as guest lecturers, off-site education to tourism-related facilities, sites, and offices. If partnered with individuals in the active tourism industry, simulation rooms would be a great idea.”

L3: “Working on the latest travel software (hence the need for computers and software purchases and subscriptions. Working with current data and trends in the tourism industry. This is primarily done through research and analysis of company promotions, international trends, and analysis of statistics, etc. For this reason, adequate Internet resources should be available to students and lecturers.”

L4: “Establishing strong school collaborations with other institutions.”

From the above statements, the availability of both human and non-human resources – is crucial for bridging the gap between theory and practice in TVET. For instance, Participant 1 highlighted that access to professionals in the tourism industry is one of the things that could help motivate TVET students. The participant further mentioned that inviting such experts to give lectures would keep them abreast of what happens in the tourism market labour, even though the institutions do not provide any means of accessing, collaborating, and contacting sections. The study also agrees that professionals with hands-on experience and up-to-date knowledge of industry standards can effectively incorporate practical elements into their teaching, making learning more relevant and applicable.⁵³ Regarding non-human resources, facilities like computers, internet access, training, and current data and trends in tourism could also help bridge the gap between theory and practice and provide a conducive learning platform and training for TVET. Facilities that simulate real-world working environments allow students to practice and refine their skills, providing a seamless transition from classroom to job site.⁵⁴ Colleges must have the required facilities and equipment to offer the industry’s anticipated level of curriculum instruction. Their curriculum requires well-equipped workshops to provide the practical training required.⁵⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Strengthen the relationship between lecturers and industry

The primary objective of technical and vocational education is to provide graduates with the appropriate skills and abilities required by industry and the economy. Partnerships with the industry provide curriculum relevance and currency.

• Tourism industry-focused seminars for TVET universities

Regular workshops might serve as a forum for dialogue as part of efforts to develop ties between TVET institutions and the business sector. The workshops might be utilised for information sharing and exchange.

• Examining tourism syllabi at predetermined periods

Revising the curriculum at least once every five years might be beneficial. The procedure should involve discussing how the topics may be taught and evaluated most effectively, and could address the problem of time allocation for the many courses provided in the program. The review process should include all stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the DHET, TVET management, lecturers, former students working in the industry, curriculum designers, examiners, representatives from the various tourism industry sectors, book publishers, SETAs, and the various tourism industry professional bodies.

⁵³ Gita Subrahmanyam, “UNESCO-UNEVOC Study on the Trends Shaping the Future of TVET Teaching,” *UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, 2020.

⁵⁴ Yogesh K. Dwivedi et al., “Opinion Paper: ‘So What If ChatGPT Wrote It?’ Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Opportunities, Challenges and Implications of Generative Conversational AI for Research, Practice and Policy,” *International Journal of Information Management* 71 (August 2023): 102642, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.102642>.

⁵⁵ Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET), *White Paper on Post-School Education and Training* (Pretoria: DHET, 2013).

• Educational visits to tourist attractions

Students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the tourist business through educational field trips to diverse sectors. When tourism students on an educational trip observe industry professionals fulfilling their responsibilities, they are likely motivated to develop specific skills.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the views of TVET lecturers on tourism education and labour market readiness, aiming to bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, based on the research questions, the findings revealed challenges that hinder tourism lecturers from bridging the gap between practice and theory. The study also suggested solutions for mitigating the challenges, such as the need for Government interventions to strengthen TVET colleges across the country and the need to review the curriculum to address the needs of students constantly, the tourism industry, and the country as a whole. TVET colleges are designed to provide students with skills development, reduce the unemployment rate, and gain experience in industries; unfortunately, these benefits are hampered due to a lack of funds. Indirectly, this affects both the country's economy and the personal lives of TVET college students, as they are unable to secure jobs that enable them to contribute to economic growth. Instead, they become a nuisance, drug addicts, and problems to the community, even after obtaining their certificates.

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