

Exploring the dynamics and complexities of a misaligned TVET-Industry Partnership: A case of South Africa

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Abstract

TVET in South Africa faces many significant challenges in producing graduates who are well-equipped for the demands of the industry. The TVET curriculum is misaligned, which results in graduates lacking the practical skills and knowledge required by industry. This study is purposed to identify pertinent challenges in South Africa's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system which are not aligned to industry. A qualitative research design was employed, involving in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including three academic support officers, six engineering apprentices, and six National Certificate Vocational (NCV) interns. The results indicate that the curriculum is mismatched with industry needs, lacking alignment with modern technologies, and evolving workplace demands. There is a call for more flexible, industry-responsive curricula and for lecturers to be better qualified, both academically and professionally. Collaboration between TVET institutions and industries is crucial for bridging these gaps and preparing students for the future workforce.

Keywords: *TVET, curriculum relevance, curriculum alignment, curriculum revision, industrial experience*

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1. Introduction

Ngubane, Mncube, and Olaniran (2021) argue that the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in South Africa underwent sustained major governmental and curricular changes in the past two decades. These changes were necessitated by the skills mismatch and poor-quality graduates who went through Work-Based Experience (WBE). For Mothapo (2014), the first democratic government made a promise to deliver a post-school education system that was geared towards addressing the educational imbalances of the past to build a fair, equitable, and democratic South Africa. Thlamedi (2018) is of the view that TVET was earmarked to provide a solution to the country's socio-economic inequities through the acceleration of skills development. Thlamedi (2018) further maintains that policy frameworks have been established that advocate the need to effectively manage the development of skills. For this reason, the TVET sector is at the forefront of achieving this ambitious goal. Gamede and Uleanya (2019) state that TVET plays a key role in securing good employment for graduates.

Msibi (2021) argues that the current relationship between TVET and industry is primarily focused on student work placements rather than a comprehensive integration of industry needs into the curriculum itself. This narrow view fails to address the evolving demands of the labor market and does not ensure that the skills taught in the classroom align with those required by industry. Msibi (2021) further recommends that TVET college policies should be reviewed to include more direct industry involvement in curriculum development and implementation. By incorporating industry experts into the design and delivery of programs, TVET institutions can ensure that graduates are equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge that meet the current and future demands of the workforce. This collaborative approach would bridge the gap between the academic training and industry expectations, ultimately improving the employability and readiness of TVET graduates. Van der Bijl (2021) claims that although South Africa has a strong history of lecturer education, its strategy for vocational education is unclear. The main purpose of this

study was to identify the pertinent challenges, issues, and problems that make TVET and Industry partnership misaligned.

The objectives of this study are the following:

- To analyse the pertinent challenges that contribute to the misalignment between the curriculum and industry requirements.
- To explore the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders regarding the relevance and responsiveness of the current TVET curriculum to industry demands.

2. Revision of the specialty literature

2.1. Misaligned and ineffective TVET curriculum

Du Plooy and Du Preez (2022) are of the view that a significant discrepancy between the time allocated for theory and practical lessons in the NCV curriculum exists. This challenge is due to overcrowded classes, which result in an imbalanced student-to-staff ratio, particularly in practical sessions. In addition, another critical issue TVET faces is the tendency of students to prioritize practical lessons while often skipping theory classes, which further exacerbates the issue. This gap between TVET and industry is also noted by scholars such as Okon (2019). Moreover, research indicates that the NCV curriculum is outdated and no longer aligns with the latest technological advancements. Msibi (2021) stresses that the core focus of TVET should be on curriculum development, which directly influences the creation of a capable, skilled, and employable workforce. In concurring with Msibi, Brand (2021) acknowledges the challenges posed by the rollout of the NCV curriculum, including staffing requirements, administrative tasks, and the integration of theoretical and practical components. A more focused approach to refining the NCV curriculum is necessary to address these concerns.

Effective curriculum change requires committed efforts to develop relevant resources, knowledge, and skills (Mbarushimana and Allida, 2020). Ensuring that new lecturers are equipped not only with content knowledge but also with the pedagogical skills required to teach effectively is one of the strategies that could bring changes.

Omar et al. (2021) emphasize the need for a structured curriculum that keeps pace with rapidly changing technological trends. Denhere and Moloi (2021) argue that TVET curriculum fails to equip students with the necessary skills for employment, particularly concerning the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). This highlights the need for continuous support for lecturers, even those with theoretical training, to keep them updated with new developments. Madimabe and Omodan (2021) suggest that lecturers should create learning activities that encourage students to construct their knowledge, fostering deeper understanding and improved learning outcomes. In overemphasizing this point, Williams (2021) postulates that lecturers are central to curriculum implementation, as they possess the knowledge, experience, and competencies needed to create effective learning environments.

As digital technology continues to evolve, particularly in education and training, Ehlers, Schuwer, and Janssen (2018) postulate that there is a demand for high-quality educational resources that prepare students for the digital workforce in the TVET sector. Open Educational Resources (OER) are proposed as a solution to provide access to these resources, which can be adapted and integrated into TVET teaching materials. However, Ehlers, Schuwer, and Janssen (2018) note that TVET has been largely excluded from the OER space and call for the sector to explore its potential in enhancing curriculum delivery. Siddiky and Uh (2020) echo this sentiment, arguing that TVET curricula should be developed in collaboration with industry to ensure alignment with labor market needs. For such collaborations to succeed, they recommend a partnership-based approach focused on shared vision, mutual understanding, and joint commitment. Additionally, the use of OER can help alleviate student concerns regarding the practicality of carrying textbooks and provide more convenient and accessible resources. By integrating these innovative approaches, TVET institutions can enhance curriculum relevance and better prepare students for the evolving demands of the workforce.

2.2. TVET-Industry collaboration and Work-Integrated Learning

The two entities, namely the TVET sector and industry, need to collaborate. This view is held by Okon (2019), who argues that this

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approach helps to overcome the challenges related to the skills gap, which South Africa desperately needs. Amongst other benefits, the collaboration between TVET and industry is the boosting of the curriculum development (Oviawe & Ehirheme, 2020). These scholars further believe that TVET should be acknowledged as a tool for cultivating a workforce that is both sustainable and technologically proficient. According to Soyemi and Soyemi (2019), a shallow curriculum that does not address what is in the employment sector defeats the objectives of the TVET sector. In supporting this view, Attah (2020) advocates for meaningful collaboration, which will benefit both entities. Taylor and Van der Bijl (2018) define WIL as a program centered on experiential pedagogy within authentic work settings. Work-Integrated Learning forms part of the backbone and the lifeblood of the TVET. TVET management should be very careful when planning WIL activities with industry. This should not be treated as an afterthought. The timing of it should be carefully considered, and this should be done in full collaboration with industry management. In planning WIL, both partners should take heed of the advice of Okoye, Anioke, Ugwuanyi, and Odokoro (2020), who maintain that TVET and industry must realign their aims for sustainability and work together towards a single agenda through WIL. Mesuwini, Nkadimene, and Kgomotlokoa (2021) posit that WIL can be intensified when instructors are equipped with real-world industrial knowledge.

2.3. Lecturer professional development

TVET, like any other organization, cannot perform optimally without a well-trained and professional staff. For the sector to be functional, lecturers, who are the backbone of TVET, should have diverse skill sets that include content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and counselling abilities. Zinn, Raisch, and Reimann (2019) are of the view that a significant number of TVET lecturers are academically qualified but lack the professional qualifications required for effective teaching. This gap in qualifications is exacerbated by the lack of adequate practical training and the reliance on outdated methods of instruction. To address this challenge,

universities and TVET institutions must collaborate to provide lecturers with the professional development necessary for them to meet industry standards. The advent and advancement of technology, together with Artificial Intelligence technologies, have heightened debate on the need for TVET lecturers to continuously update their skills, particularly in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Njenga (2018) notes that many current lecturers lack the practical expertise and technological proficiency needed for modern education, which further contributes to ineffective professional development in TVET. In the same vein, Motala and Pampallis (2020) argue that lack of professional development in TVET has resulted in poor student performance, low retention rates, and inadequate preparation for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). TVET management is faced with the daunting task of providing ongoing training and upskilling opportunities for lecturers to ensure effective contribution to the success of the educational system. Motala and Pampallis (2020) confirm that lecturers are ill-prepared to train South Africa's youth for the 4IR. Mbarushimana and Allida (2020) and Zinn, Raisch, and Reimann (2019) advocate for effective, continuous lecturer professional development. Omar, Ismail, Abdullah, Kadir, and Jusoh (2021) postulate that for the TVET to keep up with the rapidly evolving technological trends, a restructured curriculum is a necessity.

2.4. 4IR and AI generative technologies

Madu and Edokpolor (2021) assert that since the outbreak of COVID-19, TVET has experienced serious challenges concerning the provision of technological and digital resources. Subrahmanyam (2020) believes that digital technologies can enhance teaching and learning in TVET. Due to the lockdown that was imposed by COVID-19, the TVET sector was forced into the virtual space. Madu and Edokpolor (2021) note that most educational authorities were not ready for the transition. The TVET sector was forced into institutional closures. These practices resulted in some TVET colleges trimming the curriculum and proposing catch-up programs to cater for students who could not be accommodated in the normal, daily timetable. Madu and Edokpolor (2021) posit that students from rural areas could not cope due to the inadequate or lack of digital tools such as computers.

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Unreliable and unstable internet connectivity made matters worse. This led to most of these students dropping out of TVET. Okon (2019) maintains that TVET faces unparalleled challenges. This is made worse by the changing work dynamics and the kind of graduate required for employability. Okon (2019) further argues that those in leadership expect TVET to address multiple social and economic development issues, ranging from poverty to economic growth and competitiveness. For Chetty (2021), TVET colleges are not ready for the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). The sudden advent of AI technologies also added another challenge to the education sector globally, and TVET included. Chetty (2011) believes that none of the 50 public colleges in South Africa offer programs related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics. Makgato (2019) asserts that technological advancement is a major driver of economic growth, and the TVET sector is better placed to address this.

3. Research methodology

The present study examined pertinent challenges facing the TVET sector from the South African perspective. In exploring these challenges from the TVET perspective, this study deployed a qualitative research approach. The researchers drew from the views of Polit and Beck (2017) and Silverman (2021), who argue that qualitative studies offer participants opportunities to provide lived experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. This study was conducted from a constructivist-interpretive philosophical stance, where knowledge is shaped by the realities of participants' natural environments (Blandford et.al., 2016). This research followed a multiple case study design where several cases were explored (Lune & Berg, 2017) involving several TVET campuses. Research reliability is not only determined by the study's approach and design but also by the relevance and appropriateness of the chosen sampling strategy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). Purposive sampling was employed, enabling the researchers to select participants who possessed characteristics relevant to the research objectives. As Silverman (2005) notes, purposive sampling requires researchers to critically consider the parameters under investigation, ensuring the

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sample is carefully chosen. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from multiple units of analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participants' codes and rationale for inclusion

Participant & number	Codes & Age, experience in years & gender (M/F)	Rationale for inclusion
Academic Support Services: [n=3]	ASOA (48), [5 yrs], M ASOB, [47] [10 yrs], M ASOC (56) [11 yrs], F	They are critical in arranging placements for students with companies.
Business Studies Interns [n=6]	BSIa (48), [4 yrs], F; BSIb (51), [5yrs], F; BSIc (47), [7yrs], M; BSId (49), [11 yrs], M; BSIf (51), [5yrs], M; BSIf (53) [12 yrs], M.	They provide personal life experiences during placement
Engineering Studies Interns [n=5]	ESIa, (45), [7 yrs], M; ESIf, (41) [3 yrs], F; ESIf, (36) [6 yrs], M; ESId, (40) [4 yrs], M; ESIf, (56) [10 yrs], F.	They provide personal life experiences during placement.

The table indicates that 14 participants were selected for the semi-structured interviews. These participants constitute different categories, including Academic support services staff (n=3), business studies interns (n=6), engineering studies interns (n=5). The reasons for the selection of these participants are provided in the table. The table further indicates demographic profiles of the participants in terms of age and experience, and gender mix.

4. Presentation of the main themes and analysis of data

This section presents the study's key findings and provides an in-depth analysis of the data collected. The main purpose of this paper was to examine the pertinent drawbacks that TVET colleges experience. The thematic method was used to analyse data from the 14 different categories of the participants. The interview process was characterized by prompting and probing for more clarification. To capture the interview sessions, we used a tape recorder with the permission of the participants, and the data were transcribed verbatim. We coded all the participants to comply with the ethical protocol. The process of analysis was characterized by reading and re-reading of transcribed data. Patterns were observed, and this process resulted in the formation of themes. These findings offer valuable insights related to the epistemology of TVET and industry partnership.

4.1. Curriculum relevance and alignment

The study's findings revealed that TVET's curricula are irrelevant and do not meet industry needs. The ASOs highlighted the significant gap between the TVET curriculum and the industry's evolving needs. ASOA criticized the curriculum's rigidity and lack of responsiveness to community needs as follows:

ASOA: “The curriculum is not flexible to accommodate new things. It will wait for a review before it is changed. By the time you review it, there are a lot of changes in terms of new technology that has taken place. Take for instance a minimum qualification of three years, by the time you finish your three-year qualification it has become redundant because it's no longer addressing the need of the current situation”.

ASOA stated:

“In terms of the programmes that we're offering, they are not responsive to the needs of the community. Our curriculum is not flexible but very rigid and does not speak to the needs of the community”.

In agreeing with ESIf, ESIf commented:

“The Engineering curriculum is 100% theoretical. Maybe for the NATED students, they should make the workshop training part of the curriculum”.

Reiterating the same sentiments of ASOA, ASOC noted that the TVET curriculum is not aligned with the mission of industry. He recommends that TVET develop and teach programs that are aligned with new technologies. The participant observed:

“We must also create programmes that align and cater for the future direction of industries because of new technologies”

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The views above on misalignment were strengthened and overemphasized when BSib and ESia respectively expressed their views as follows:

“I think that TVET needs to align their modules to what is happening in companies”. BSib

“TVET should improve their curriculum because when we arrive at industries, we are not able to work, what we do at the college is not what is done at companies”. ESia

ESia further lamented and recommended:

“The college must give us the correct skills so that when we arrive at companies, we are not shocked”.

4.2. Curriculum revision

As argued emphatically by scholars, the South African TVET sector faces the critical challenge of ensuring that its curriculum remains aligned with the dynamic demands of the modern workplace. A curriculum that fails to keep pace with industry trends results in the production of irrelevant and unemployable graduates. ASOA and ASOB concur that there is a serious need for a total overhaul of the TVET curriculum to be aligned with the needs of the industry. ASOA suggested that the qualifications offered by TVET be revised. This is what the participant suggested:

“I don't believe that it is now really addressing the needs of the community or the needs of the industry. If one can say that when our Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) is reviewed, our curriculum must also be reviewed, not once in 10 years or once in five years. It has to be reviewed at least if you are late, it has to be two years. Because within that space of time a lot of changes in terms of new technology will have taken place the curriculum has to be flexible to accommodate new things”.

4.3. TVET lecturer's academic and professional qualifications

The academic and professional qualifications of staff members are critical in determining the quality of instruction offered to students in the TVET sector. Without properly trained staff members or lecturers, the TVET sector will not help address the challenges facing the unemployment challenges South Africa faces. An academic qualification is when a lecturer possesses not only the qualifications but also qualifications relevant to the subject they are teaching. Professional qualification is when lecturers possess the methodology of teaching the subject that they are academically qualified to teach.

ASOB laments that

“the staff that is not adequately trained produces the youth that is not capable and that affects their employability chances negatively”.

4.4. Computer literacy and digital teaching methods

It emerged from the findings of the study that some lecturers are not computer literate, hence they struggle with the digital methods of teaching. Some lecturers also find it difficult to operate certain equipment because they are not computer literate. ESIC, one of the participants, noted that their curriculum is theoretically inclined and does not have computers as one of the modules. She recommended that computer literacy be added as one of the subjects taught as part of the curriculum. This is what she said:

“The first point that the engineering studies must have computer literacy as one of the subjects and TVET institutions ensure that their curricula or syllabus and training programmes meet the needs of industry”.

All the ASOs agree that the lecturers need to be capacitated continuously to keep up with the technological changes. It was also revealed that the industry is always ahead of TVET with regard to technological advancements. ASOC postulated that TVET should

appoint lecturers who can deliver using alternative technology-driven methodologies.

ASOC: *“We must have lecturers that will be able to deliver, you know, alternative delivery methodologies and who can blend in remote and digital based teaching and learning so that they evolve with the times and the technologies that we have”.*

ASOA supported that:

“Even the lecturers are still behind. When you look at what is happening, the industry will always be 5 steps ahead of us in terms of technology. That is the reason I'm saying that it's important that, now and again, they should be going to industry and be exposed to new technology all the time, so that when they come back to class, they are able to apply the knowledge that they have acquired. That is why I say constant lecturer capacitation is required”.

4.5. Enhancing practical training through Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

WIL offers numerous advantages for TVET lecturers, including enhanced curriculum relevance, improved student learning outcomes, strengthened industry partnerships, professional development, and improved employability for graduates. By embracing WIL, TVET lecturers can contribute to the success of their students and the overall competitiveness of their institutions. WIL also helps lecturers develop new skills and competencies, such as project management, mentoring, and understanding how industry functions. Based on the findings of the study, it can be argued that there are engineering lecturers who cannot operate certain machines in the workshops. BSIa argued that students cannot operate some machines in the industry workshops.

ESId commented:

“There are also machines but some of the lectures when they present the lecture, they don't show us how to operate these machines. It haunts us as students because we are the ones who are preparing for

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workplaces. We are the ones who going outside the world, we are the ones who will be employed. The management should do WIL for lecturers so as to add to what we do at the college. If lecturers are not capacitated, they will continue doing what they are doing to students. Lecturers should consider what is in the curriculum serious. Managers should send lecturers for WIL to supplement what they know”.

ASOC had this to say:

“I think the WIL is not properly structured because they say a lecturer must go to industry for a minimum of five days. Five days is too short. Lecturer might not grasp all the concepts in five days, at least, a longer period for me. What I suggest is that the college could get some lecturers who can come in to stand in for these lecturers and they give them an opportunity to the industry for a longer period like 6 months or one year while we are having these lecturers that stand in for them. Then it may close this gap”.

When lecturers also spend considerable time in WIL with students, they will be able to easily incorporate some good practices in their teaching.

ASOA: *“Let us be honest, the quality of lecturers that TVET requires does not match the quality of lecturers that are appointed. Sometimes we have to bring in a person simply because we need to close gaps. After all, there are already students in class waiting. Therefore, we struggle to get the correct people. That they have to look at because we need people with industrial exposure, maybe to steal those people from industry to come and give us those skills”.*

ASOC corroborated the claims made by ASOA and ASOB:

ASOC: *“We must have lecturers that will be able to deliver, you know, alternative delivery methodologies and who can blend in remote and digital-based teaching and learning so that they evolve with the times and the technologies that we have”.*

5. Discussion of the results

The participants highlighted a significant gap between the curriculum content and the rapidly evolving practices in the industry. The participant further argued that the equipment and techniques taught in the TVET curriculum are outdated compared to the advanced technologies used in modern industries. This discrepancy has the potential to hinder students' ability to effectively apply their knowledge in real-world settings. Furthermore, there is a need for the curriculum to be revised to meet the demand of the industry. ESIB emphasized the theoretical nature of the Engineering curriculum and suggested incorporating practical workshop training for NATED students. As argued, the inflexibility of the TVET curriculum, which often takes too long to review and update, leads to outdated content by the time changes are implemented. ASOA agreed that the curriculum needs to be aligned with the current and future direction of industry, emphasizing the importance of incorporating new technologies into TVET programs.

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that the TVET curriculum is not adequately aligned with the evolving needs of the industry. The participants above corroborated their claims when, in the main, agreed that there is a significant misalignment between the TVET curricula content and the practical demands of modern workplaces. TVET must implement a more flexible and responsive curriculum to address these shortcomings. This would involve frequent reviews and updates to ensure that the content remains relevant to industry trends. Incorporating practical training components, such as workshops and internships, would provide students with valuable hands-on experience.

Through collaborative partnerships, industries can offer valuable insights into contemporary job market demands, thereby guiding the development of industry-relevant TVET curricula and training programs. To overcome the reported skills gap, Okon (2019) argues that TVET must form collaborations with the industry. According to Oviawe and Ehirheme (2020), TVET should be acknowledged as a tool for cultivating a workforce that is both sustainable and technologically proficient. In the view of Soyemi and

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Soyemi (2019), the implementation of a void curriculum could be the reason why TVET education fails. Hence, it is crucial to redesign the curriculum at every level. In addition, industrial content needs to be included in the curriculum, otherwise, the country might not meet its educational objectives for the twenty-first century. Engineering students pursuing the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) revealed that their college solely offers theory courses; there is no provision for the practical component. To this end, Attah (2020) maintains that it is necessary to match the outcomes of TVET curricula to the industry's requirements for higher skill levels. In supporting the assertions, Okon (2019) acknowledges that to close the skills gap, TVET must collaborate with industry. ASOA stressed that it cannot be fair that a lecturer teaches a level that is equal to or above his/ her qualification, for example, a lecturer with N6 teaching N6 or Diploma students. Qualifications often include training in teaching methodologies, classroom management, and assessment techniques. These skills equip lecturers with the tools to create engaging and effective learning environments. Lecturers with relevant qualifications demonstrate a deep understanding of their subject matter. This expertise enables them to effectively convey complex concepts, answer students' questions, and provide valuable insights.

Subrahmanyam (2020) maintains that the deployment of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enhances performance in TVET. The author is of the view that digital technologies assist in developing teaching and learning platforms. Njenga (2018) suggests that lecturers should be knowledgeable with regard to ICT, given technological agility. This may not be the case with the current TVET lecturers because of their inadequate professional development. Motala and Pampallis (2020) confirm that lecturers are ill-prepared to train South Africa's youth for the 4IR. Poor student performance on NCV programs, low attendance, low retention rates, low throughput, and low certification rates could all be explained by this. Mbarushimana and Allida (2020) believe that for reforms to be effective, there needs to be a commitment to producing the necessary tools, information, abilities, and training. Beyond that, to effectively teach, new lecturers should have both pedagogical and content understanding. Omar, Ismail, Abdullah, Kadir, and Jusoh

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(2021) argue that for TVET to keep up with the rapidly evolving technology trends, a restructured curriculum is required. In addition, to guarantee the greatest outcomes, lecturers with relevant experience are essential. TVET lecturers lack practical component expertise, which is why Njenga (2018) is of the view that their training is insufficient. Further, Njenga (2018) argues that a significant portion of the current TVET lecturer workforce comprises individuals who transitioned from the former technical college system without receiving substantial professional development. This may result in a reliance on traditional teaching methods, such as rote learning and lecture-based instruction. As reported by Motala and Pampallis (2020), the management of lecturer professional development in TVET is critically deficient and demands immediate and substantial reforms. The goal of higher education may be accomplished if the colleges are run professionally, utilizing educational system patterns that can create talented, adaptable, and flexible human resources. According to Zinn, Raisch, and Reimann (2019), TVET teachers must possess competencies pertinent to their field of expertise. The four categories of professional knowledge that Zinn, Raisch, and Reimann (2019) believe are most important are content knowledge, pedagogical content, pedagogical-psychological knowledge, and counselling knowledge.

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is defined by Taylor and Van der Bijl (2018) as a program centered on experiential pedagogy within authentic work settings. TVET lecturers must complete WIL in a suitable industry setting. This might guarantee that they acquire the required knowledge in the fields in which they teach and that their learners are suitably prepared for the industry. According to Gamede and Uleanya (2019), TVET plays a key role in securing profitable jobs for qualified graduates who are ready to enter the workforce. Mesuwini, Nkadimene and Kgomotlokoa (2021) state that for TVET to fulfil its goal, instructors must be equipped with real-world industrial knowledge. Van der Bijl (2021) claims that although South Africa has a strong history of lecturer education, its strategy for vocational education is unclear. According to Okoye, Anioke, Ugwuanyi, and Odokoro (2020), TVET and industry must realign their aims for sustainability and work together toward a single agenda through WIL. Working in a real workplace, whether for pay or not,

and doing real work are essential components of WIL. Under these circumstances, lecturers will be in a better position to assist students in gaining a more comprehensive grasp and awareness of sectors and the employment prospects that are open to them. According to Okoye et al. (2020), the WIL theory and models could significantly alter the way that TVET, businesses, and society are positioned. Furthermore, a wide range of informal and formal arrangements, such as apprenticeships and on-the-job informal learning, are recommended.

6. Conclusion

This research paper focused on identifying serious weaknesses in the TVET industry partnership. The findings of this study highlight the critical impediments the TVET sector experiences. The central theme that appears to be problematic is the misalignment between the curriculum and the rapidly evolving demands of industry. Amongst other major issues raised was a significant gap between the theoretical content taught at TVET institutions and the practical skills required in modern workplaces. Further, a flexible and responsive curriculum that integrates industry-specific technological advancements, which provides students with hands-on experiences, is critical for ensuring that TVET graduates are adequately prepared for the workforce. Professional lecture development has been highlighted as key for TVET lecturers. Work-integrated learning (WIL) programs also emerge as a key strategy for bridging the gap between classroom instruction and industry practices, benefiting both lecturers and students alike. For TVET to meet the demands of the 21st-century workforce, curricula must be regularly updated, and lecturers must be well-equipped with both academic and industry-specific skills. A robust collaboration between TVET institutions and industries should be top on the agenda of TVET management planning. For converting the TVET sector into a viable platform for producing employment-ready graduates, the management must consider doing things differently. This will enhance the economic development of the country and address the major unemployment challenges that South Africa is facing.

Ethics statement

As researchers, we applied for ethical clearance from the University of South Africa, and after that, we were able to approach the Department of Higher Education and the participating colleges to interview the participants. The participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, and their rights were clearly explained. All ethical protocols, such as anonymity, volunteer participation, the right to withdraw, and the benefits of the study, were explained.

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