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Losing Practical Skills Through Academic Credentialization of Lecturers in Public TVET Colleges in South Africa

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Abstract

The global recognition of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) provision by the World Bank, the ILO, and UNESCO bears testament to its effectiveness and further highlights its potential to transition individuals into the labour market and support sustainable development and economic growth. Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the TVET sector has grown, helping young people and adults gain access to education and skills training needed to support their livelihoods. In 2013, the Department of Higher Education and Training enacted policy as part of its efforts to improve the quality of provision in TVET institutions. Consequently, 10 universities have contributed to the development and delivery of the Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching for initial teacher development. In this position paper, we demonstrate that TVET lecturer development in South Africa appears to contradict the technical, vocational, and occupational skills that public TVET colleges are meant to develop. The greatest shortfall of the Diploma programme, and the policy that informs it, is that it focuses more on academic credentialing, that is, awarding academic qualifications, than on practical learning in the workplace, from doing the work, and preparation for work in the relevant industry. Over the years, the South African public TVET college sector has lost skilled artisans (who serve as lecturers) in favour of academically qualified lecturers. In the wake of occupational qualifications and the loss of experienced artisans in public TVET colleges over the decades, we argue that academic credentialing is harming the sector and that entrusting universities with the training of TVET lecturers needs to be reviewed.

Keywords: Academisation; Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching; Work-Integrated Learning; Public TVET Colleges; TVET Lecturers; Faculties and Schools of Education; South Africa.

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Introduction

Education, in general, is considered essential to societal progress and development (Niazi, 2025). Economically developed countries usually have high levels of education and training. Studies consistently show that societies with higher literacy and education rates experience greater economic growth, improved public health, and lower crime rates (Niazi, 2025, p. 80). This understanding of human progress, economic development, and technological advancement is associated with economic theories (Becker, 1976) and human capital theories (Schultz, 1961). These economic and human capital theories can be traced back to Adam Smith's (2008) classic book on economics, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. We quote Niazi (2025, p. 80) at length to emphasise that,

> *Education stands as one of the most powerful tools for human and societal development. In an era marked by rapid technological advancements, globalisation, and complex socio-economic challenges, education serves as the foundation for equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to navigate and contribute to an ever-evolving world.*

One form of education and training associated with economic growth and industry needs is technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Internationally, TVET is recognised as a critical driver for employment, employability, skills, and economic development (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). In South Africa, public TVET colleges play a crucial role in addressing the triple challenges of inequality, poverty, and unemployment (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013b). Thus, TVET is a key policy priority in South Africa for social and economic development (Zascerinska, 2022). To address these triple challenges and other wicked problems, public TVET colleges are expected to produce graduates who are occupationally competent and ready for work (DHET, 2013b; National Planning Commission, 2012), although it is questionable whether these colleges are meeting this mandate satisfactorily.

Public TVET colleges are mandated to produce graduates who are occupationally competent and ready for work, yet evidence suggests they often fall short of this expectation. High unemployment rates among public TVET college graduates, compared with their university peers, highlight a gap between training and labour market demands (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023). Persistent perceptions of inferior-quality qualifications further undermine confidence in the public TVET college sector's ability to meet its mandate. Without stronger alignment between curricula, industry needs, and employability outcomes, public TVET colleges risk failing to address the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023).

Central to achieving this mandate is the development and preparation of quality TVET lecturers. In the public TVET colleges, lecturers are the primary mediators between curriculum and student learning (DHET, 2013a). Though it is often argued that lecturers are central to workplace practices, it is not clear how, in the South African public TVET college sector, lecturers are mediating between college learning and workplace-based experience. Additionally, the aggressive push towards occupational qualifications under the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) further calls into question the qualifications and expertise of public TVET college lecturers (Madambi, 2025). It is this lack of clarity that forms the key thesis of this paper.

Historically, towards the end of apartheid and during the early years of independence, South African public TVET colleges were largely staffed by lecturers who entered teaching from industry (van der Bijl & Taylor, 2018). These skilled artisans and technicians brought strong artisanal identities and practical occupational expertise to the college. These industry experts did not necessarily possess formal teaching qualifications (van der Bijl & Taylor, 2018). The pathway from industry to college ensured workplace relevance and brought alignment with the purpose of colleges. However, considering that public TVET colleges are educational institutions that mainly teach theory, the lack of teaching qualifications among lecturers raised some seemingly legitimate concerns about their pedagogical

competence. In response to these concerns, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2013a) promulgated the *Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training* (PPQLTVET).

The introduction of the PPQLTVET signalled a shift towards the professionalisation and credentialisation of TVET lecturers (DHET, 2013a). It is clear from this policy that the professional lecturer qualifications are to be offered by institutions of higher learning in accordance with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. This is not surprising given that the policy aligns with broader national and international trends that emphasise standardisation of formal qualifications in education systems (Field et al., 2014). Despite the seemingly legitimate reasons for the standardisation and credentialisation of TVET lecturer qualifications, emerging research points to the potential unintended consequences of this policy shift (Seitshiro, 2025). For the purposes of this paper, we refer to standardisation, professionalisation, and credentialisation as "academisation."

This academisation of TVET lecturer preparation and development has perpetuated a gradual loss of industry-skilled lecturers. Rather than strengthening public TVET college offerings, academisation has led to a gradual loss of lecturers with long and current practice-based occupational knowledge. There is a dominant narrative that TVET lecturers must possess both industry and pedagogical knowledge and skills, which Gamble and Hewlett (2022) describe as a dual narrative of professionalism. The implications of the shift towards academisation manifest not only in college classrooms and workshops but also in industry. Research studies across different industries highlight sustained dissatisfaction with the practical competence of TVET graduates (Akoobhai, 2024).

The seemingly poor performance of TVET graduates in industry is associated with the erosion of lecturers' industry expertise, competence, and knowledge (Akoobhai, 2024). Concerning TVET lecturers, van der Bijl and Oosthuizen (2019) argue that lecturers' qualifications often fail to develop work-related skills, thereby weakening the vocational orientation of TVET teaching. Wedekind et al. (2024) problematised the dominant and widely held understanding of "quality" of TVET lecturers. They argue that quality cannot be reduced to academic credentials but must encompass occupational credibility, workplace engagement, and the integration of theory and practice (Wedekind et al., 2024).

In this paper, we adopt the Quality Vocational Lecturer (QVL) framework (Wedekind et al., 2025) to analyse the academisation of TVET lecturer qualifications and subsequent abilities in their roles. The QVL framework conceptualises lecturer quality as multidimensional. It incorporates disciplinary knowledge, industry experience, vocational identity, pedagogical competence, and continuous engagement with industry (Wedekind et al., 2025). Drawing on the conceptual tools of the QVL framework, we argue that higher education-led TVET lecturer development has redefined quality in ways that marginalise skilled artisans and industry experts and are foreign to the TVET sector. Consequently, TVET lecturers are oriented towards academic identities, thus moving away from technical, vocational, and industry identities. This shift, we argue, undermines the national mandate of public TVET colleges. Regarding this shift, we argue that the capacity of public TVET colleges to effectively prepare students for the world of work is in constant decline.

Historical Overview of TVET Lecturer Preparation in South Africa

TVET in South Africa emerged during the colonial era, evolved through to the apartheid era, and reformed after independence, and continues to transform (McGrath et al., 2004). During the colonial and apartheid eras, it was referred to as "technical education, " offered in technical colleges. In line with apartheid policies, technical colleges supported the racially segmented labour market, and were designed to supply artisans, technicians, and clerical workers demanded by the White-led economy of that time (Badroodien, 2004; Behr, 1988; Malherbe, 1977).

The Manpower Training Act (Republic of South Africa, 1981) shaped technical education by regulating apprenticeships, artisan training, and occupational certification. In accordance with narrow apartheid labour and economic needs, technical colleges strongly focused on occupational and skills-based

programmes. Unlike the current public TVET colleges, technical colleges did not focus on broader educational development (McGrath et al., 2004). During the era of technical colleges, lecturers were referred to as instructors or technicians. These instructors or technicians were chiefly recruited from industry, and the main requirement was occupational expertise (Gamble & Hewlett, 2022).

Many of these lecturers were qualified artisans and technicians who held Trade Test Certificates and National Technical Certificates obtained through Trade Test Centres, technical colleges, and technikons (Akoojee et al., 2005). Given that the focus was more on occupational and skills-based competences, formal teacher qualifications were not consistently required. Many lecturers were skilled in occupational practice, and that aspect was generally evident in technical college performance (Akoojee et al., 2005). This is different from lecturers produced through university academic programmes, who are theoretically prepared but lack adequate practical skills training in industry.

After the dawn of democracy, the TVET sector in South Africa underwent several policy reforms (DHET, 2013a), despite which (i.e. institutional restructuring and curriculum introduction) lecturer development lagged. Until 2013, there was no coherent policy for the professionalisation of TVET lecturers (DHET, 2013a); this period was characterised by under-professionalisation of these lecturers. TVET colleges operated with industry experts without professional teaching qualifications, sometimes with lecturers who were academically qualified but lacked industry experience, and at times with lecturers who held school teaching qualifications (van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019).

Recruits to public TVET colleges relied on their prior occupational qualifications rather than formal pedagogical training, as entry requirements remained variable (van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). While industry experience took priority in the hiring of lecturers, lecturers' competence was mostly assumed rather than systematically assessed. Furthermore, structured workplace-based learning for lecturers was uncommon (van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). The absence of a career pathway for lecturer professionalisation led to uneven lecturer quality and blurred professional identities, sometimes referred to as artisans, at times as teachers, trainers, instructors, technicians, or demonstrators (Gamble & Hewlett, 2022).

In the late 2000s in South Africa, national and international reviews increasingly emphasised the central role of lecturers in improving TVET. For example, *A Skills Beyond School Review of South Africa* (Field et al., 2014) emphasised the key role of quality educators in the education system. This review reiterated the mantra that an education system cannot perform better than the teachers who work within it. Similarly, South Africa's *National Development Plan 2030* (National Planning Commission, 2012) identified lecturer development as important for the performance of TVET colleges in producing competent graduates. These national and international pressures resulted in the PPQLTVET (DHET, 2013a), after which universities began to develop professional qualifications for TVET lecturers, with the first qualification offered in 2019. This period, which saw the first cohort graduate in 2020, represents a shift from the past ad hoc arrangements to more formalised professionalisation of lecturers in TVET.

The PPQLTVET

The promulgation of the PPQLTVET (DHET, 2013a) was a significant historical moment in the professionalisation of TVET lecturers. It brought new regulations governing the development and delivery of initial and continuing professional qualifications for these lecturers. This policy enabled a shift from fragmented, inconsistent, and poorly regulated entry into the teaching profession in public TVET colleges (van der Bijl & Taylor, 2018). The PPQLTVET is notable because it aligns with the broader vision of the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2013b) for a single, integrated, and coordinated post-school education and training system, with lecturers at the centre of quality and credibility of the TVET sector.

The most important change was the introduction of formal qualifications for employment in the TVET sector. The policy includes a range of qualifications, from undergraduate to post-graduate (DHET, 2013a). These qualifications, which we have already alluded to, are located within higher education—a concern that centres our argument in this paper. We raise this as a grave concern because this shift has potentially shifted the locus of authority over technical and vocational pedagogy from colleges and industry to universities and higher education, more broadly. Placing technical and vocational pedagogy in the hands of universities is not a neutral manoeuvre but a redefinition of knowledge domains. For example, the PPQLTVET clearly draws on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), which regulates qualifications for schoolteachers.

The PPQLTVET is based on the MRTEQ logic for disciplinary, foundational, pedagogical, and practical learning, with a primary focus on theoretical learning and teaching practice. While the promulgation and implementation of the PPQLTVET represent an advancement over earlier arrangements and practices, the challenge is that universities, particularly faculties of education, lack the requisite capacity and expertise to support the professionalisation of lecturers who are expected to be both industry and pedagogical experts. While work-integrated learning (WIL) is included in the PPQLTVET, university faculties and schools of education (whose primary focus is schooling) lack partnerships with, and linkages, to industry (Oosthuizen et al., 2022; van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). Consequently, faculties and schools of education treat TVET lecturer education as they do schoolteachers' education. This has led to the academisation of TVET lecturers, thereby academising TVET offerings, especially in public TVET colleges that rely on universities to produce qualified lecturers. This is because, at least so far, and as far as teacher education in South Africa is concerned, academic credentials triumph over industry expertise and occupational competence (Gamble & Hewlett, 2022).

Public TVET colleges are required to employ lecturers with at least initial teacher qualifications or who are registered for one. The qualification that is predominantly offered is the Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching (AdvDip TVT) at Level 7 of the South African National Qualifications Framework. The minimum entry requirements for this qualification are a 360-credit qualification, such as the National N Diploma achieved through TVET colleges, a university diploma, or a university bachelor's degree. By default, anyone without a diploma or a bachelor's degree is excluded. It is important to note that PPQLTVET does not make provisions for a higher certificate that could serve as a bridging course. So, the industry experts and artisans are, by definition, marginalised in favour of academically credentialised individuals, to the detriment of the TVET sector.

The 2013 policy shift has, to some extent, led to stagnation and the departure of skilled occupational lecturers from public TVET colleges (Wedekind et al., 2024). Without clear articulation pathways from N3 and Trade Test qualifications to diploma and advanced diploma levels, the industry-oriented lecturers (instructors, artisans, and technicians) are either pushed out or made redundant. Due to age and limited academic orientation, some individuals may be unwilling or unable to meet the new policy requirements for an academic path (Wedekind et al., 2024). At face value, the PPQLTVET is to be commended for its apparent attempt to improve the quality of teaching and learning in TVET. However, a critical examination of the consequences of this policy and its implementation reveals that it is not just about how TVET lecturers must be trained, but mostly about who must be trained and who must remain within the system.

Some scholars argue that teacher qualifications are best located in higher education, with Sebola (2022) suggesting that the transfer of teacher education from colleges to universities provides a model for TVET through technical universities. In this paper, we contend that universities are not the most appropriate institutions for developing TVET lecturers. While TVET policy positions lecturer quality as integral to developing skills for the economy, it also recognises that the quality of TVET lecturers is closely linked to the economy rather than to higher education alone (Wedekind et al., 2024). In practice, however, public TVET college lecturers have limited opportunities to engage directly with industry despite their expected role in connecting the curriculum to the world of work. Instead, industry partnerships and workplace linkages are typically managed by non-teaching staff through

partnerships and linkages offices, creating a disconnect between lecturers and the industry experience that is essential for effective vocational teaching (Sebola, 2022; Wedekind et al., 2024).

Ideally, when students leave TVET colleges, they should have not only a theoretical understanding but also some practical knowledge. This, of course, would depend on the programme and its requirements, as well as available resources. If this is the expectation and it is considered a practical reality in public TVET colleges, then let us consider Wedekind et al. (2024, p. 133) in greater depth.

> *Mastering knowledge in the field of the economy might be achieved if TVET lecturers are experienced in their chosen occupation or have developed expertise through forms of simulation of work activity such as in training facilities. However, because activities in the economic field are constantly changing, it is not sufficient simply to build up knowledge of the economic field and then move back to the education field. From a field perspective, the notion of having a "connection" to industry or bridging the gap between the college and local industry is not the same as actually being in the field. To be a player in a field, one has to maintain the habitus and cultural and social capital of the field and not simply be connected to it. This points to our key argument regarding the notion of quality: the quality lecturer must necessarily be able to move between the two fields.*

If this articulation is to be considered valid, we can safely claim that TVET lecturer development is a continual process that extends beyond the university classroom and college premises. We can safely argue that universities are far removed from the realities of these lecturers, and, as far as programmes such as the AdvDip TVT are concerned, a serious rethink is needed.

The AdvDip TVT in South Africa

The PPQLTVET provides for the integration of WIL into the professional qualifications for TVET lecturers. This policy defines WIL as encompassing both industry-based learning and classroom-based learning (DHET, 2013a). Within the AdvDip TVT, WIL must span at least eight weeks, including at least two weeks dedicated to industry-based learning. The policy stipulates that this component is compulsory while acknowledging implementation challenges (Chidi et al., 2024). Blom (2016) asserts that WIL is intended to enhance lecturers' understanding of industry practices and to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The policy assumes that TVET lecturers enrolling in programmes such as the AdvDip TVT already possess workplace experience; therefore, WIL serves primarily to refresh existing skills rather than to develop new ones (DHET, 2013a).

Involving lecturers in WIL is expected to yield positive outcomes, including improved curriculum analysis, better alignment with workplace practices, and the integration of workplace technologies and examples into teaching (Blom, 2016; Oosthuizen et al., 2022). Although the policy mandates WIL as a compulsory element of TVET lecturers' professional development, its implementation faces significant challenges. Chidi et al. (2024) identify funding constraints and limited access to industry placements as primary obstacles. Blom similarly notes that public TVET colleges in South Africa often lack adequate funding for extended or repeated industry placements. Furthermore, Blom argues that the brief duration of the mandated placement is insufficient to address the widespread lack of prior industry experience among South African TVET lecturers.

Regarding the insufficient industry placement for lecturers, we rely heavily on the Seitshiro (2025) report, which examined all institutions offering the AdvDip TVT programme. We use this report as an authoritative document because there is little research that covers all institutions, aside from this government report. This report helps us to generalise our claims about the position of faculties and schools of education that offer the AdvDip TVT. Based on our knowledge of the sector, our involvement in TVET lecturer development, and the report that supports our observations, we argue that faculties and schools of education lack well-established teaching practice offices and departments. Also, we argue that TVET had not previously been a focus for these faculties and schools

of education, so TVET placements are often not a priority—suggesting they were not ready for TVET-related dynamics, especially regarding industry partnerships.

Academisation of TVET Lecturers and Colleges

There are different ways in which TVET can be academised. In the People's Republic of China, academisation of vocational education is driven by the state's push to elevate vocational colleges into higher education institutions, reflecting the country's ambition to produce highly skilled workers for its fast-changing economy (Li et al., 2024). This process often prioritises mass enrolment and institutional upgrading, but critics argue it risks diluting the practical, hands-on strengths of vocational training. Unlike China, the Federal Republic of Germany has a long-established dual system that integrates workplace learning with classroom instruction, and its academisation has been shaped by European Union reforms such as the Bologna and Copenhagen processes, which emphasise the standardisation and comparability of qualifications (Li et al., 2024). Unlike China's expansionist model, Germany's academisation is more cautious, aiming to preserve the integrity of vocational pathways while enhancing their permeability with universities. However, Germany faces declining participation in vocational programmes due to demographic changes and growing preference for academic routes, which challenges the sustainability of its system (Li et al., 2024).

In the South African context, Majola et al. (2026) understand academisation as a reform strategy aimed at elevating vocational education by introducing more theoretical and disciplinary knowledge into its curricula. While this approach aims to address the low status of vocational pathways, they argue that it risks reinforcing the binary between vocational and academic knowledge rather than dismantling it. Academisation, in their view, often imposes abstract theory that is disconnected from the lived realities of working-class students, thereby alienating them from meaningful learning. They highlight that this drift towards academic forms of knowledge can reproduce marginalisation rather than empower learners (Majola et al., 2026). While the focus of Majola et al (2026) is on the content lecturers deliver in class in line with the standardised curriculum, our focus is on how lecturers are trained in more academic teaching rather than vocational training.

In this paper, we seek to problematise the location of initial teacher qualifications for TVET lecturers in faculties and schools of education in South African universities. In doing so, we do not intend to discredit the South African government's desire and effort to standardise TVET lecturer training and development. Rather, we acknowledge that the government put effort into this policy shift. We further acknowledge that the government took a seemingly positive step towards the professionalisation of TVET lecturers (Papier & Mawoyo, 2024). However, regardless of our sympathy towards the government and its policy, our view is that this policy and its implementation have had some notable negative consequences and will continue to do so for as long as it remains unchanged. In addition to the erosion of occupational and industry-based skills within public TVET colleges, the government has staffed these institutions with ill-prepared, academically trained lecturers (Wedekind et al., 2024). Not only is this a waste of expenditure, but it also points to negligence in both policy and practice.

Such negligence points to a misplaced priority of the government and a contradiction of purpose. On the one hand, the government claims to want to strengthen skills development, while, on the other hand, lecturers are trained mostly academically. Not only has the policy shift led to the exit of technicians and artisans, but it has also changed what counts as knowledge, competence, and professionalism. Privileging academic orientation over vocational expertise is a clear message that theoretical learning is a priority over skills (Russon & Wedekind, 2023). As South African TVET colleges phase in occupational programmes that require intensive industry placement, and lecturers with practical skills (Madambi, 2025), it is important to train and prepare existing lecturers for this new dawn because it takes an artisan to make an artisan.

The academic staff responsible for TVET lecturer development are typically drawn from the pool of conventional university lecturers, often former schoolteachers. Consequently, TVET lecturer professionalisation has been subsumed within schooling paradigms ill-suited to TVET.

> *While education faculties have a strongly developed practice of school-based WIL, no faculty has, to date, offered a formal programme including WIL that takes place in what the TVET policy framework calls "industry-based settings" . . . [therefore] . . . Identifying the nature and scope of WIL within industry settings is crucial for education faculties because they are the official providers of teacher education qualifications for public institutions of education and training. (van der Bijl & Taylor, 2018, p. 129)*

Faculties and schools of education struggle with WIL, both teaching practice and workplace-based learning (Seitshiro, 2025). In the schooling sector, teaching practice is well established, with schoolteachers serving as academic mentors. Public TVET colleges do not have a long history of teaching practice and associated academic mentoring. Also, the AdvDip TVT is mainly for part-time students; with some students already teaching, teaching practice is rarely standardised, if not impossible. It is typical for bachelor of education students to study full-time (or via distance learning in some cases) and they are usually not employed as teachers during their studies, so teaching practice is usually standardised. For universities that offer the AdvDip TVT, usually through online or block sessions, students are often working, making teaching practice difficult to arrange (Seitshiro, 2025).

Workplace-based learning in the AdvDip TVT programme is equally problematic. Typically, faculties and schools of education lack industry networks, logistical capacity, and human resources (such as placement officers) to facilitate industry placements for TVET lecturers (van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). As a result, those enrolled in programmes such as the AdvDip TVT are rarely placed in authentic industry settings. When placements are possible, they are usually superficial and poorly monitored (van der Bijl & Taylor, 2018). It is equally disappointing to note that the PPQLTVET provides only 10 days for workplace-based learning, during which lecturers are simply observers in industry (DHET, 2013a). This practice undermines tacit, embodied, and occupational knowledge (Gamble & Hewlett, 2022). Such practice, we argue, results in academised conceptions of TVET lecturers who are qualified on paper but incompetent in the world of work.

The erosion of occupational skills has serious implications for public TVET colleges. South Africa is moving strongly towards occupational qualifications offered under the QCTO. These occupational programmes are designed to be workplace-oriented, competency-based, and aligned with industry requirements and standards. The delivery of these occupational programmes requires lecturers with credible occupational experience (Akoobhai, 2024). While pedagogical competence is also important, it cannot take priority over industry expertise, at least in the context of occupational qualifications. Unfortunately, under the PPQLTVET and practice, public TVET colleges are increasingly staffed by lecturers trained primarily as teachers rather than as occupational practitioners suited to deliver occupational programmes (Seitshiro, 2025).

The available DHET (2017) 2015 survey data, together with 2014 figures, and the literature in general regarding TVET lecturer qualification profile in South Africa, show a frightening picture; out of 8,000 public TVET lecturers in our college system, about 10% of them are both academically and professionally qualified. A significant number of public TVET College lecturers are working without a professional teaching qualification. Put differently, the majority of teaching personnel are a mixture of people without an academic qualification or who hold a professional TVET teaching qualification (underqualified), academically and professionally qualified but for the schooling system, and others are reported to be undefined, meaning they elected not to indicate their level of qualification.

This mismatch contributes to institutional under-preparedness regarding occupational qualifications in public TVET colleges. At one of the institutions that offer the AdvDip TVT, during the launch, the dean of the faculty of education emphasised the traditional focus on preparing schoolteachers (Moeng, 2018). According to Moeng (2018), the faculty had traditionally concentrated on teacher

education but has broadened its educational mandate by introducing a qualification for the TVET sector. This expansion reflects the university's commitment to strengthening post-school education and creating opportunities for adult learning. Moeng (2018) further emphasised that the TVET sector is expected to make a significant contribution to post-school education, particularly by stimulating economic growth and national development.

Given the dominance of school-based teaching programmes at universities and the newness of TVET teaching programmes, it is neither surprising nor unexpected that executive management in faculties and schools of education has a limited understanding of the complexities of TVET policy. It is expected that these managers will lack the knowledge, expertise, and experience to deal with industry and occupational programmes. It is not surprising that WIL for TVET lecturers who enrol in these faculties and schools of education is treated as a policy-compliance exercise rather than a meaningful, substantive pedagogical process (Oosthuizen et al., 2022; van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). Faculties and schools of education tend to emphasise dimensions that align with schooling and general academic norms, while weakening occupational engagement and industry immersion, which are central to vocational professionalism and pedagogy.

The consequences of this neglect are evident across the public TVET college sector. It is increasingly apparent that public TVET colleges tasked with delivering occupational programmes under the QCTO lack sufficient lecturers who can credibly operate in their respective occupational fields (Madambi, 2025). This inadequacy undermines teaching and learning, the confidence of students and graduates, employer trust, and the social legitimacy of public TVET college qualifications. This social legitimacy is central to the perceptions of UNESCO (2022) and the OECD (2023); TVET systems that do not maintain strong, healthy links to industry risk becoming disconnected from the realities of the world of work and eventually losing their economic development function. From the perspective of the QVL framework, this disconnection represents a fundamental distortion of QVL (Wedekind et al., 2025).

QVL Framework

The QVL framework offers a useful corrective to the prevailing academised conception of TVET lecturer professionalism in South Africa (Wedekind et al., 2025). This framework advances a multidimensional understanding of lecturer quality by emphasising that vocational lecturers must simultaneously embody pedagogical competence, disciplinary knowledge, occupational expertise, industry engagement, and a strong vocational identity (Wedekind et al., 2024, 2025). From the perspective of the QVL framework, current practice of housing TVET lecturer qualifications in faculties and schools of education at universities represents a distortion of vocational professionalism. The notion of vocational pedagogy is lost in favour of schooling paradigms. Thus, from the view of the QVL framework, it is important to change the conceptualisation of where, by whom, and for what purposes TVET lecturers are prepared (Wedekind et al., 2025). The QVL framework is new in the analysis of quality of vocational lecturers, stemming from research conducted in three public TVET colleges in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. As a result, reference to this framework is based not only on limited sources but also on development.

We have noted earlier in this paper that faculties and schools of education, due to their high academic requirements, struggle to attract industry experts, technicians, and artisans who are not academically oriented. Because they recruit academically inclined individuals, they struggle to place them in authentic industrial settings for meaningful workplace-based learning, thereby making occupational experience somewhat optional. From a QVL perspective, occupational expertise is neither optional nor supplementary to lecturer quality; it is a foundational requirement. Historically in South Africa, public TVET college lecturers entered the system as skilled artisans and practitioners who later acquired pedagogical competence (van der Bijl & Taylor, 2018). Currently, this sequence has been reversed, and lecturers are produced at university as academics first and vocational practitioners second, if at all. The QVL framework recommends a return to past practices in which occupational credibility, current industry competence, and vocational identity are prerequisites for lecturer status,

and pedagogical knowledge is added prior to appointment and continues throughout employment as a TVET lecturer (Wedekind et al., 2025).

For the QVL framework, recruitment, appointment, and progression criteria for TVET lecturers must explicitly prioritise industry experience alongside pedagogical knowledge and competence (Wedekind et al., 2025). This equal prioritisation will ensure that not only academic credentials are privileged, especially because public TVET colleges need more lecturers with industry knowledge, even if they teach theoretical subjects. The QVL framework points towards hybrid institutional models in which universities of technology, TVET colleges, industry partners, and sector skills bodies play equal roles in lecturer preparation and development. Faculties and schools of education should not exercise dominance over curriculum design and assessment in TVET lecturer qualifications.

Within the QVL framework, WIL is not a peripheral compliance requirement but a central mechanism through which vocational quality is produced and sustained. What must change is the current tokenistic approach to WIL in TVET lecturer qualifications, in which industry placements are short, optional, poorly supervised, or absent altogether (van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). WIL for TVET lecturers must be extended, compulsory, well-resourced, and occupationally meaningful, with placement in real industrial settings rather than simulated or school-like environments. Moreover, WIL should be understood as continuous rather than episodic, requiring lecturers to enter industry at regular intervals to maintain currency and credibility, an approach consistent with international vocational systems (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022).

The QVL framework places strong emphasis on vocational identity formation, arguing that QVLs must see themselves as members of both educational and occupational communities (Wedekind et al., 2024). What must change is the isolation of TVET lecturers within academically oriented programmes that serve their connection to industry. TVET lecturer education should actively cultivate communities of practice that include artisans, supervisors, employers, and workplace mentors, enabling lecturers to learn through participation rather than abstraction. This requires institutional support for mentoring, joint appointments between colleges and industry, and recognition of industry participation as legitimate academic work.

The disjuncture between lecturer capability and the requirements of QCTO occupational programmes represents one of the most pressing failures of the current system. QCTO programmes presuppose lecturers who can teach, assess, and mentor occupational competence in authentic workplace contexts. From a QVL standpoint, TVET colleges cannot be expected to deliver occupational programmes without occupationally credible lecturers. What ought to change is that lecturer development must be explicitly aligned with the occupational profiles, assessment requirements, and workplace logics of QCTO qualifications. This alignment demands closer collaboration among DHET, QCTO, industry, and TVET institutions to define lecturer roles, standards, and development pathways (Akoobhai, 2024).

The QVL framework challenges the dominance of credentialisation as the primary marker of quality. While formal qualifications remain important, they should function as enablers of vocational capability, not substitutes for it. What ought to change at the policy level is a shift away from compliance-driven professionalisation towards capability-driven development, in which lecturer quality is evidenced by occupational performance, student outcomes, industry trust, and vocational relevance rather than by the possession of qualifications alone (Gamble & Hewlett, 2022; Wedekind et al., 2025).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that the current trajectory of TVET lecturer education in South Africa has unintentionally eroded the vocational and occupational core of the public TVET colleges. While the PPQLTVET aimed to professionalise lecturers and improve quality, its implementation has privileged academic credentialing over occupational competence, thereby displacing skilled artisans

and practitioners who historically constituted the backbone of public TVET colleges. The result has been a gradual but profound shift in what counts as legitimate knowledge and professionalism in the sector, with damaging consequences for skills development, curriculum relevance, and employer confidence. Using the QVL framework, we have demonstrated that quality in TVET lecturing cannot be reduced to possession of academic qualifications alone. Instead, vocational lecturer quality is inherently multidimensional, requiring the integration of pedagogical competence, disciplinary understanding, sustained industry engagement, occupational credibility, and a strong vocational identity.

The dominance of faculties of education in TVET lecturer preparation has disrupted this balance. These faculties and schools of education at universities generally lack the institutional culture, industry networks, and experiential expertise necessary to develop vocational lecturers, thereby marginalising industry placements. The implications of this misalignment are especially acute in the context of the growing emphasis on QCTO occupational programmes. These programmes presuppose lecturers who can operate credibly within occupational fields, assess competence against industry standards, and induct students into real workplace practices. Yet many TVET colleges no longer have enough of such lecturers.

As we have argued in this paper, TVET colleges are therefore being asked to deliver occupational qualifications without the occupational capacity required to do so, a systemic contradiction that undermines the credibility and viability of the TVET project. What emerges from this analysis is a clear imperative for change. Reclaiming the vocational integrity of TVET requires a decisive shift away from an academically dominated model of lecturer preparation towards one grounded in occupational practice and industry engagement. This entails rethinking the institutional location of TVET lecturer education, re-establishing sustained and meaningful WIL, and redefining lecturer quality in terms of capability rather than credentials. Without such reforms, the continued academisation of TVET risks hollowing out the very skills base the system was created to develop, with long-term consequences for students, employers, and the broader economy.

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