Vocational education training and graduate employability in South Africa: an interlinkage in need of exploration

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Abstract: This paper provides a conceptual analysis of how vocational education training (VET) impacts on graduate employability in South Africa. The evolution of attitudes towards developing labour market structures has grown tremendously since 1994. Furthermore, the main focus in the workplace has shifted away from the primary sectors of agriculture and mining towards knowledge-based sectors. This paradigm shift has led to the adoption of demand driven policies by the government that have sought to stimulate employment through training and development. From the analysis two main distinct themes of VET and graduate employability are identified. The first theme highlights how the labour market shapes the different constructs of VET. The second theme identifies the essential graduate attributes that are deemed to be essential for enhancing graduate employability. Specific and concrete recommendations are proposed on how effectively implemented VET enhances graduate employability.

Keywords: vocational education training; VET; development; employability; skills; sustainability; South Africa; graduate; labour market; further education training; FET; student.


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1 Introduction

Vocational education training (VET) in South Africa has gone through a myriad of transformations (Allais, 2012). To highlight this, McGrath (2012) argues that “these changes have corresponded with a dramatic and rhetorical shift in the broader and economical context, away from a neoliberal notion of a regulatory state towards a developmental state”. As such, production has shifted towards a more skill and capital intensive orientation where pressure to become more technologically advanced has further increased the demand for highly skilled workers (Pauw et al., 2008). To enumerate this point further, countries with strong VET systems, remarkably Austria and Germany, have been relatively successful in maintaining stable employment rates among young people (OECD, 2015). As a result, the main focus in the workplace has shifted away from activities focusing on primary sectors of agriculture and mining towards the more knowledge-based secondary and tertiary sectors (Horn, 2006). This paradigm shift has led to the adoption of demand driven policies by governments that have sought to stimulate employment through training and development. Of particular importance to note is the fact that South African education system has been commended for being among the countries with the highest levels of investment in the world standing at 7% of the GDP and 20% of the total state expenditure in 2014 (Kaburise, 2015). In particular, Ramaphosa (2015) posits that the government aims at producing 24,000 competent artisans by 2020 as part of the National Infrastructure Plan. Thus, policies that have emerged from South Africa have paved the way for the adoption of VET policies by other countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (McGrath and Badroodien, 2006).

Despite these commendable policy developments, South Africa still faces challenges of graduate employability. For instance, learners are not adequately prepared for the modern world of work (Horn, 2006). Furthermore, Allais (2012) raises important questions on VET such as, what knowledge forms the foundation of VET. How is this knowledge produced, understood, and valued? What is the interlinkage between VET regulations and employability? Answers to these questions are important in order to explore on VET and employability research. The core argument that arises is that any new wave of VET research should emphasise the need to develop new theoretical, methodological and philosophical understanding (McGrath, 2011). As such, it is against this notion that this paper provides a conceptual analysis of the impact of VET on employability of graduates from public further education training (FET) colleges in South Africa. FET colleges are also known as technical vocational education training (TVET) colleges. The conceptual analysis is based on the literature from academic research, professional papers, regulations and policies.

The article has four main sections. In the first section, I will provide a conceptualisation of key terms and the historical context of VET. This is then followed by the methodology. I will then move on to discuss the key findings on the effect of VET on employability. Lastly, I will summarise my arguments and consider their implications in a concluding section. In this paper, VET and TVET are used interchangeably. The justification behind interchangeability of VET and TVET is supported by TVET Pedia (2015) suggestion that the concepts are almost identical in meaning thus; prominence of use depends on the location of the researcher.
2 Conceptualisation of key terms and historical context of VET

2.1 Vocational education training

Defining VET as a concept within the education system poses a number of difficulties (McGrath and Lugg, 2012; Eichhorst et al., 2015; Kaburise, 2015; Levina et al., 2015; TVET Pedia, 2015). It is worth noting at this stage that, general and academic education focuses on building analytical skills, knowledge and critical thinking, while VET develops craftsmanship, practical experiences and problem-solving skills. However, this distinction poses academic debate. This is mainly because critical thinking and analytical skills are also needed by a graduate from VET such as an artisan who must routinely make judgements in order to solve problems. Hence, societal and economic development is contingent upon the strength of VET as it imparts graduates with lifelong skills and labour market entry routes.

VET is frequently perceived as a solution for improving the opportunities of youths who lack the resources, skills or motivation to continue with higher education. Moreover, it has been argued that VET provides useful skills to prepare for youths’ entry into the labour force and improve their chances of a successful professional career. In particular, by aligning the initial education more closely to particular vocations and tasks demanded in the labour market, the problem of mismatch may be reduced. However, the relevance of VET varies significantly from country to country. Some VET institutions are widely characterised by poor quality staff and students; outdated curricula and equipment; lacking real engagement with practical work scenarios and incapable of supporting their graduates’ employability as a result (McGrath, 2011). Furthermore, countries differ in terms of their VET structures and underlying traditions, notably with respect to the relationship between school-based VET and company-based training (Deissinger, 2015).

In Malaysia, for instance the field of VET emphasises individual skills development through experiential learning where students reform their knowledge skills and attitudes through experience (Isman et al., 2015). Hence, despite these differences VET covers a wide range of occupation directed activities. These range from preparing individuals for initial entry into employment; additional training for those already employed; retraining of those who have been employed previously who may have lost their jobs, or who seek new careers (Gamble, 2004). Therefore, VET is an inclusive term referring to aspects of the educational process involving, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, attributes and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (Watts, 2009).

2.2 Employability

The process that occurs when a graduate enters the labour market to compete for employment has moved beyond the prerequisite of appropriate qualifications to a graduate who possesses the basic requisite skills and knowledge. This interaction with the labour market then translates into the argument raised by Chetty and Archer (2013).

“Either unemployment, underemployment (the demands of the work is lower than the graduate’s qualification), appropriate-level employment or over-employment (the graduate does not have the level of qualification usually required for this type of employment).”
As shown above, employability has the capacity and capability for graduates to elicit their knowledge and skills in a work environment through means of sustainable employment. This capability and capacity of gaining, maintaining and obtaining work is done by utilising a variety of competencies. Competencies refer to a combination of cognitive skills (technical knowledge, expertise and abilities) and behavioural characteristics (principles, attitudes and values and motives), which are a function of an individual’s personality (Rahmat et al., 2012; Bridgstock, 2009). If graduates with the right personal characteristics are recruited they will have the ability, for example, to communicate effectively. Although this may be true to a certain extent there is a strong correlation between an individual’s skills and qualifications on the one hand, and their earnings on the other (Horn, 2006). To enumerate this point further, without the requisite skills, graduates entering the labour market will experience the world of work as a web in which they enter a low-skilled, low-paid job, get laid off, enter another low-skilled job later, or remain unemployed. Governmental policies in South Africa have attempted to break through the vicious cycle of long-term unemployment by offering interventions to improve employability and job search activities. Despite the fact that research has generally found marginal positive effects on reemployment probabilities, researchers have questioned the added value of these reemployment interventions for the long-term unemployed (Koen et al., 2013). Taking into cognisance recognised and well-articulated VET qualifications play a pivotal role in supporting labour market efficiency by providing ‘effective signals’ about the knowledge and skills an individual has acquired, resultantly enhancing employability (Misko, 2015).

Thus, it can therefore be asserted that re-employment interventions can be helpful for enhancing long-term unemployed graduate’s employability to some extent. Taken together, employability relates to knowledge, attitudes and skills that a graduate possesses and the manner in which they utilise these assets when they are presented to potential employers (Holtzhausen, 2012; Fugate et al., 2004). Some of the important skills required by a graduate to enhance employability include discipline specific skills, analytical skills, problem solving skills, creative thinking skills. But, the role of skills goes well beyond participation in the labour market they also help individuals integrate into society (OECD, 2015).

Addressing graduate employability is not a task that higher education institutions in South Africa have embarked on alone, the task has involved co-ordinated efforts between diverse segments of government and society (Hancock et al., 2016). Efforts have been made to enhance the quality of university education, both to improve individual life chances, and also to contribute to the broader development of society, fostering innovation and strengthening citizenship and democracy (Taye, 2013). As such, universities have placed high priority in improving the quality of taught courses. Collaborative research by industry and universities alludes to the fact that experiences outside the classroom are pivotal in enhancing employability. To support this point, in a study conducted in the Western Cape on graduate employability, experiential learning in the community, volunteering as well as on-campus extra-curricular activities enhances employability (Hancock et al., 2016; Sorensen, 2016).
2.3 Historical context of VET and skills development in South Africa

VET and skills development have been discussed in depth by authors such as Allais (2012, 2011a), McGrath and Akoojee (2009), McGrath (2012), Akoojee and McGrath (2007), McGrath and Lugg (2012), McGrath and Badroodien (2006), Powell (2012), Arnold (2014) and DHET (2016), as such a brief overview is provided in this section. South Africa’s higher education system is administered by the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The sector is comprised of higher education institutions and FET colleges. Exploration of literature on VET and employability in South Africa reveals two main sequential events in the formation of the technical colleges and the transition to the FET sector. In the 1980s shrinking of the technical college sector was exacerbated by the socio-economic (world oil crisis and globalisation) pressures. As such, apprenticeships and training opportunities decreased as companies scaled down on training (Maharaswa, 2013). This rather shaped and transformed the apprenticeship system to focus on teaching of science subjects and maths in colleges.

In 1997, the Department of Labour introduced a national skills development strategy, to replace the old apartheid system. Sectoral Education Training Authorities (SETAS) were set up to replace the industry training boards. SETAS are stakeholder’s bodies with employers and the trade union representatives, they were set up through a levy grant system (Allais, 2012). The levy is an amount of money that employers have to pay to the South African Revenue Service (SARS) for skills development of employees. If employees undergo training, the employer can claim this amount back from the relevant SETA. As reinforcement to the skills development strategy and the holistic education policy a national qualifications framework (NQF) was developed and later amended. NQF were amended through stakeholders with the intention to replace all existing qualifications and make them broader, more substantial than old courses in the apprenticeship system. NQF refers to the system that records levels of learning achievements to ensure that the skills and knowledge that have been learnt are recognised nationally (DHET, 2016). This skills development strategy also exists in Europe and some African countries, with many countries establishing NQF more or less along the lines of learning outcomes in the line of validated competences, which should be obtainable irrespective of the context in which they were gained (Misko, 2015; Deissinger, 2015). However, there have been some challenges with regards to SETAs and NQFs, the alignment of education to the labour market need to be explored further as in some sectors this is yet to be achieved.

FET colleges formally known as technical colleges had historically been the sites of theoretical training for apprenticeships systems. Existing at the cross roads between compulsory education higher education and the world of work, South Africa public FET colleges were set up to respond to the skills needs of the South African economy. Additionally, they were also set up to respond to the social disparities of apartheid by providing disadvantaged communities with access to high quality education and training. The South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET) which consists of stakeholders from the private and public sector plays a role in supporting curriculum developments issues (Garraway et al., 2015). According to DHET (2016), there are 50 registered and accredited public FET in South Africa offering...
vocational, occupational and artisan training subsidised by the state for approximately R8 billion per year. Courses offered are regulated by external and independent quality assurances processes with a number South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) ISO 9001:2008 certified. Furthermore, more than 700,000 students are registered in rural and urban FET colleges.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research approach

A qualitative content analysis methodology was adopted for the study. Content analysis is defined as a systematic and replicable technique for compressing many words into fewer content based on categorical rules of coding (Lewis et al., 2007). In this research, a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed accredited South African journals, professional papers, regulations and policies was carried out using the South African Bibliographic Information Network (SABINET) and Google Scholar. This included published research articles from 1997 to 2016. A total of 55 articles were analysed. Each article was classified based on its abstract. In a first step, articles were classified as conceptual or empirical or regulatory. Within conceptual papers, each article could be classified as ‘theoretical’ (a new model and/or propositions about VET and employability), or as ‘research methods’ focusing on methodological developments. The abstracts were then subjected to a second blind analysis to check whether there was agreement on the classification. Ten articles were then left mainly due to the fact they did not address VET in the context of employability. Based on this approach, two main themes were developed. The first theme identified the different constructs of VET and how they are impacted by the labour market. The second theme identified the essential graduate attributes that are deemed to be essential for economic development and sustainable development.

3.2 Data quality and reporting

Due to the qualitative nature of the research approach, it was necessary to take into cognisance concerns regarding the reliability, validity and objectivity of the study. As such, a thematic analysis was conducted. Thematic analysis reduces data in order to categorise or group similar themes together (Collis and Hussey, 2013; Bryman and Bell, 2011). Before grouping themes together, it is essential to determine which are the major themes, unique themes and leftover themes. To improve the validity and reliability of the present study, databases were systematically reviewed and synthesised by using a pre-established widely acknowledged categorisation framework. The objectivity and trustworthiness of the data analysis process were maximised by involving another experienced researcher to cross check information that either contradicted or confirmed the themes.
4 Key issues emanating from research on VET and employability in South Africa

4.1 Overview and analysis

South African policy makers have followed a model applied in most developed countries which has favours a market based approach to education and training (Kruss et al., 2014). The market approach rests on a conception that choice of educational courses and employability are responsible for lack of jobs. This approach is supported by Powell (2012) who highlighted that some graduates regard VET as preparing them for unemployment or repetitive work tasks (Powell, 2012). As such, the FET College sector is in a process of being repositioned to contribute to the development of an effective skills base for advancing the South African economy. Emerging from a prolonged period of having been disconnected from training for the workplace, colleges have over the last decade undergone a significant transformation, including restructuring of regulatory frameworks (McGrath and Lugg, 2012). As illustrated in a study by Gewer (2010), many young people in South Africa face two key challenges they lack resources to support their post-school choices, and they lack access to resources to achieve optimal employability. In order to alleviate these challenges, the emergence of a new college system prompted the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to embark upon a range of studies of the process of transformation (Kruss et al., 2014). Given this development, it is possible that prospective labour force participants are not specialising in specific fields of study required by the labour market or that employers have concerns about the quality of formal education. Although this is true to a certain extent, the most obvious challenge in the South African labour force is the absence of work experience (Ramdass, 2009). For this reason the intention is for FET colleges to contribute to addressing unemployment and skills shortages in the South African labour market. Thus, support to the VET regulatory framework, labour market dynamics, economic institutions structural arrangements play a pivotal role in employability by facilitating the development of skills and knowledge.

Despite the fact that South Africa has made tremendous strides on FET reforms. Many of the problems lie outside the FET reform process. Education policy-making more generally has shown similar trends regarding such issues as transparent policy-making and weakness of economic analysis (McGrath, 2000). The importance of skills development in the post-colonial South African national development context is ever-present. South African public FET colleges, as technical and vocational skills development entities, therefore represent a crucial component of the success of education and training endeavours (Akoojee, 2008). Three main issues which emanate from the reform process are; geographical location, equal opportunities implementation and gender dynamics. Firstly, geographical location, some institutions are located far from centres of economic activity and discrepancies between program offerings and the demands of industry have been particularly targeted as issues requiring urgent redress (Maharaswa, 2013). Some of the colleges in particular are considered to be of poor quality, and the sector in general conformed to the low-status label especially for the public FETs. Secondly, equal opportunities have posed as a challenge for the reform process. Meyer (2014) conducted a research which covered recruitment and selection practices adopted by some FET colleges. The findings revealed that college heads preferred to select the best person for the job but, at the same time, they needed to meet equity targets. Thus, on
the one hand, whilst there was pressure for colleges to implement equal opportunities. On the other hand, there was equal pressure to select the best candidate. Part of the reason for this dilemma was attributed to the fact that some FET colleges were once white institutions and achieving equality targets has been an arduous task. Third, with regards to gender dynamics, in a research conducted by Selesho (2014) it was found out that there were some disparities in granting experiential learning opportunities to females by some employers. Most students indicated that the employers were hesitant to afford them the opportunity to participate in more male dominated professional experiential learning activities (Selesho, 2014). In addition, youth from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds face greater difficulties at school and beyond, and are overrepresented in the groups of low performers (OECD, 2015). Given these points, geographical location, equal opportunities implementation and gender dynamics reforms are important not only for enhancing teaching and learning, but also for enhancing access to meaningful employment for graduates.

A number of colleges offer blended learning through the incorporation of a variety of teaching methodologies such as workshops. Moreover, efforts have also been made for synergistic linkages with industry through partnerships for facilitating job shadowing in the workplace. Work-integrated-based learning components and practical applications allow for students to gain exposure to the work environment and to see certain skills in practice (Holtzhausen, 2012; Eichhorst et al., 2015; Kruss et al., 2014; Garraway et al., 2015). However, external and internal challenges on basic education system have placed a massive constraint on the South African education system and its capacity to produce the appropriate numbers of graduates with the requisite competencies to compete globally. Education and skills levels in South Africa remain very low, and various new Government initiatives have been created to attempt to kick-start skills training (Gewer, 2010). In order to address this challenge, the new curriculum at the FET institutions appears to introduce an even broader type of education that ensures inclusion into a modern knowledge society. To support this point, Powell (2012) research on FET colleges, found out that FET college students are without exception positive about their vocational programs. The students highlighted that VET was indeed contributing to developing their knowledge and skills. Similarly, in a research on learner ships and apprenticeships by Kruss et al. (2014) it was found out that 90% of those who completed their learnership reported that they experienced a smooth transition into stable employment in both the public and private sector. More recently, Garraway et al. (2015) found out that for practical assessments in the workshop, students must be competent before they are allowed to proceed to the next practical task. If they were found ‘not yet competent’, they would have to re-do the task until they have fully mastered the practical. The three empirical researches that have been discussed highlight the positive impact of VET. Thus, VET initiatives in South Africa are producing employable graduates or at least, equipping individuals to enter the workplace with the relevant skills and knowledge.

Learner ship implementation in South Africa has been complicated by the fact that it is an emerging field (Visser and Kruss, 2009; Kruss et al., 2014). Despite the legislative context, there is lack of understanding and consensus about the areas of implementation (Fester, 2006). In addition to rebuilding external quality perceptions, FET institutions also face internal quality and credibility challenges (Van der Bijl and Ebrahim, 2012). To evaluate the learning and labour-market outcomes of the young unemployed learners, a database from a survey conducted by the HSRC in South Africa from June to August
2007 was analysed. Out of 32,424 learners unemployed at registration, 88% were younger than 35 years of age (Visser and Kruss, 2009). Of these learners, the majority who constituted 86% had enrolled for a learnership qualification at a lower skills level to enhance their employability. However, recent developments reveal improvements with regards to learnerships. In a research by Stuart (2012), South African youths manage to successfully transition into employment or tertiary education and training once they have left the secondary schooling system. This reality is reflected in the findings that South Africa had 3.2 million 18–24-year-olds who were not in education, employment or training in 2010 this is more than double the 1.25 million 18–24 year olds who were enrolled at universities or FET colleges. It is alarming to note that, with the exception of the period between 1999 to 2002, the percentage of youths in employment has consistently been below 20% over the 1995–2011 period (Stuart, 2012). The data thus, reflects the challenges, improvements and developments on learnerships by graduates from FET in order to gain occupational and workplace related certifications and foster employability.

4.2 Discussion of findings

The creation of a new institutional landscape in South Africa has played a pivotal role in shaping VET and graduate employability at a strategic level. On the one hand, it has required the creation of new institutional identities through the development of new institutional missions, educational roles, academic qualifications and organisational practices contextualised to FET colleges. On the other hand, the complexity of the restructuring could not end simply with new identities for FET colleges. As a result, VET and graduate employability has been shaped by institutionalised inequities characterised by educational, financial, material and geographical advantage and disadvantage (Badat, 2010). Accordingly, two main themes emanate from the literature. Firstly, VET is shaped by labour market dynamics; how different qualifications are developed in South Africa. To explore on this point further, the government as a regulator of VET qualifications has played a pivotal role in ensuring that VET thrives. For instance, for the 2015/2016 financial year the government has allocated R2,205 billion for TVET colleges bursaries (DHET, 2016). Furthermore, efforts are being put in place by the government to institutionalise and pilot appropriate methods and systems for enhancing VET. This therefore clarifies assertions which have been raised by Allais (2012, 2011b, 2011a), Oketch (2007), Union (2007), McGrath and Lugg (2012), Servicesseta (2015), Akoojee (2008), Garraway et al. (2015) and Isman et al. (2015) that support to the VET regulatory framework, labour market dynamics, economic institutions structural arrangements plays a pivotal role in employability by facilitating the development of skills and knowledge.

The second theme identifies the essential graduate attributes that are deemed to be essential for economic development and sustainable development. To support this theme research conducted in Malaysia by Husain et al. (2010) revealed similar findings. The study found out that five elements of employability skills integrated by the teaching staff of agricultural vocational training institutions during the teaching process were; cooperation, team working, honesty, integrity, positive ethical behaviour and networking skills. Furthermore, younger employers tend to be more favourable to graduates’ employability skills (Husain et al., 2010), for instance in France and Germany almost all VET students work in occupations directly related to their field of study (OECD, 2015). Likewise, in South Africa skills are globally benchmarked and evaluated against
international standards (Servicesseta, 2015). This therefore clarifies key issues emanating from the literature by Watts (2009), Rahmat et al. (2012), Kraak (2004), Bridgstock (2009) and Pauw et al. (2008) who proposed the need to identify specific graduate skills which are essential in enhancing employability. Some of the important skills required by a graduate to enhance employability include discipline specific skills, analytical skills, problem solving skills, creative thinking skills. In order to enhance the essential graduate attributes, as part of lecturer development, a new web-based lecturer development program commenced in 2015 and will end in 2016. The program aims at providing information access to all lecturers nationally on curriculum updates and supplementary training in an accessible and cost effective manner (DHET, 2016). Effective training and assessment practices are the key components of a well-functioning VET system. They underpin the quality and integrity of knowledge and skills acquisition, the qualifications issued by awarding bodies or providers and the reputations of institutions. Key to their development is having in place comprehensive programs for the preparation and induction of trainers and assessors as well as requirements for continuing professional education. The establishment of trainer and assessor norms and behaviours that support the external validation of assessment tools, strategies, and practices and the moderation of results are also keys to effective provision and should be promoted (Misko, 2015).

Broadly speaking, an inter-linkage exists between VET and graduate employability. With this analysis in mind VET policy is located in broader economic and social policy and it overall impacts on labour market dynamics. Despite the challenges of conventional public VET in South Africa, such as low pass rates; poor labour market insertion a lot of progress has been made in VET transformation (McGrath, 2012). Thus, VET if effectively implemented has the potential to address issues of inequity; improve lifelong learning, poverty alleviation as depicted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** A framework for vet and employability
Figure 1 illustrates the inter-linkage between VET and employability. The framework is based on the notion that if VET is effectively implemented with favourable regulatory frameworks, commitment from stakeholders, and effective teaching and learning. Contingencies within the context of this framework refer to factors that may affect the development of skills. For instance, changes in the institutional policies may render some skills to be more important than others. VET and employability will then be characterised by an improvement in self-management skills, career development skills, general skills and occupational specific skills. Self-management skills focus on a graduate appraisal of themselves, such as emotional awareness, abilities and values; career development skills are important for self-development; occupational related skills are the technical skills one which will enable a graduate to perform effectively well in their job; generic skills are skills which are necessary for one to also perform at work, such as written and verbal communication. Consequentially, the overall outcomes are categorised into individual outcomes and economic outcomes. Micro (individual) outcomes will include knowledge and skills while macro (economic) outcomes include economic growth, poverty alleviation and unemployment levels. The outcomes are dependent on VET and employability contingencies. Thus, if VET and employability contingencies are adverse then the outcomes will be negative.

5 Conclusions

VET plays an important role in the mainstream economy of any country by contributing to economic development by providing a platform for skills and knowledge to be enhanced. Despite the challenges that are inherent within the adoption and implementation of VET, FET colleges in South Africa have played a pivotal role in providing training to young students, up-skilling and reskilling for adults. Given the structural changes in the economy, the high number of students registered in FET Colleges and the current skills shortages experienced by companies, repositioning of graduates’ employability is essential. Effective and appropriate vocational education cannot be implemented in isolation. It requires the co-operation and commitment of internal and external stakeholders, from the learner to governmental bodies. This article has provided important insights that are of interest to scholars, policy makers, and the various stakeholders on VET. However, this article is a conceptual analysis, future research can be undertaken to determine the extent to which these findings can be tested empirically.

6 Recommendations

Partnerships and linkages are important for improving teaching, learning and employability. Vocational education needs continual synergistic linkages among the various stakeholders such as curriculum developers, lecturers, employers in the public and private. A lot of work has been done by the HSRC in South Africa however, their work need to be continuously supported through research and practice by the stakeholders. Engagement with stakeholders plays a pivotal role in the development and implementation of quality systems and standards at both regulator and training provider levels (Misko, 2015; Jacobson, 2015). For instance, Germany’s unique system of dual
vocational training where state business and social partners work in close cooperation to continually improve VET has been very effective (Deissinger, 2015). Drawing from international best practice and research, the following are some of the key recommendations for successful vocational education:

6.1 Change management

Given the paradigm shift for FET colleges from provincial to national competence levels, it will be important to maintain a conducive environment for ensuring compliance with legislative and policy changes. This will provide a platform to develop and enhance employability skills. In this phase change management is very essential, as trainees adapt to a new teaching and learning environment. In developing regulatory frameworks and standards, it is also important to understand that highly prescriptive policies do not augment effective continuous improvement and innovation activities due to misinterpretation. On the one hand, if policies are too flexible, they adversely affect the quality of provision and the reputation of systems due to conformity. On the other hand if policies are too prescriptive, they may distract the attention of educators away from their primary functions of teaching and learning (Misko, 2015; Jacobson, 2015; OECD, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to consider the extent to which these policy changes will require a major transformation and overhaul, or whether changes can be accommodated within the existing practices, keeping in mind that significant change can take some time to be assimilated. As such, the key to a good change management process should focus on clear information about patterns and trends on regulatory changes with the aim of identifying and addressing any potential problems.

6.2 Institutional tailored interventions

A general approach for all FET colleges will not adequately improve efficiency and effectiveness of all FET colleges. Institutional assessment and tailored interventions for enhancing graduate employability should be taken into consideration due to the fact that some of the colleges are at different levels of development. At the training provider level, institutions with close linkages to employers and other industry stakeholders are able to more effectively implement strategies for the external validation of assessment strategies as well as for assessments and provide direction for training provision. Taking the previous points into cognisance, the development of a strong knowledge base, however, is dependent on the amount, type and accuracy of information that institutions have at their disposal (Misko, 2015). Thus, there is need for financial and non-financial resources to conduct accurate environmental scans and come up with practical and effective intervention strategies.

6.3 Student performance, articulation and success

There has been some progress with regards to student performance, articulation and success. However, there is need to ensure that evaluation of performance, articulation and success rates are continuously done so that learners provide important information regarding the transferability of knowledge and how they intend to use the knowledge to enhance their employability. This information should be readily available from a carefully designed and well maintained management information system in the DHET on
a quarterly basis. This will ensure effective transfer of skills which relevant and practical. In addition, it will also aid in ensuring the curriculum is relevant and limit the risk of creating dead end vocational training.

6.4 Ethics and governance

Ethics and governance are essential for ensuring that VET is effectively improved. Performance is improved when accountability is assured. As such, the various stakeholders in colleges should continuously evaluate graduate employability policies and procedures so as to ensure that there are free from bias and are applied in a transparent manner. The aim is to improve the provision of information to enable clients and consumers (including students and their parents, workers and employers) to make better choices on VET. Developing standards or objectives, however, is not just about the language used or the level of prescription required. It is also concerned with identifying what these standards should cover. Arriving at these decisions cannot be done in isolation, locally and internationally there is substantial evidence to show that broad consultation before implementation is critical (Misko, 2015). Regardless of the approach taken in regulatory practice or assessment of VET, the need for developing ethical standards and practices that are implemented fairly is of paramount importance.

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